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# Much Ado About Nothing: Intra-Party Democracy in Poland. Analysed from Party Statutes<sup>1</sup>

Beata Kosowska-Gąstoł,  
Katarzyna Sobolewska-Myślik<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The aim of the paper is to examine intra-party democracy (IPD) in Poland over time, assess whether it has increased or declined, and explore generational differences among parties. We analysed parties that entered parliament following the 2023 elections. Our study was based on content analysis of party statutes, employing the analytical framework developed by von dem Berge et al. (2013). We assumed that the level of IPD changed over time and that parties established within a mature political system would exhibit higher levels of IPD than those founded during the early stages of political transformation. We also hypothesised that newer parties would prove more inclined to involve their members in decision-making processes and to use plebiscitary intra-party democracy (PIPD). However, our findings revealed a more ambiguous picture than anticipated. No significant differences between the parties were identified. Assembly-based intra-party democracy (AIPD) seemed to be the standard in parties of all generations, with only a few exceptions where some form of PIPD was used as a complementary approach.

*Keywords: intra-party democracy; IPD; new parties; Polish parties; party generations*

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## 1. Introduction

Intra-party democracy (IPD) has become an increasingly important aspect of both politics and academic research in recent decades. Since their inception in the form of a mass model, modern political parties have been supposed to be internally democratic, although this principle has not always been fully followed in practice (Duverger, 1965). Until the 1960s intra-party democracy mainly took a representative form, then, in response to what was considered a crisis within political parties, some elements of direct democracy were introduced (Ignazi, 2020). These changes stimulated academic interest in IPD and renewed attention to a discussion dating back to Schattschneider (1942), who argued that democracy should operate between parties rather than within them. Although Schattschneider's idea is remembered, there is no risk in stating that it is not in the current mainstream of academic discussion of IPD. The issues discussed these days are rather the precise definition of IPD (Cross & Katz, 2013), how it is implemented in parties (Scarrow, Webb & Poguntke, 2017) and how to measure it (von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert & Tipei, 2013).

In this paper we describe the research in which we aimed to measure intra-party democracy and track any changes over time to find out whether it had increased or decreased and whether there were differences among different parties. The subjects of our research were the Polish parties that entered parliament following the 2023 elections. They were divided into three groups that corresponded to three generations<sup>1</sup> – the first had its roots in the communist period, the second developed during the transition and post-transition era and the third comprised parties that were founded after the new political and party systems were established. We wanted to discover whether there were differences in the level of IPD between different generations and whether they disappeared as the parties developed. We expected that the level of IPD would change over time as more regulations were introduced into law and into formal party documents and as their organisations developed. The rising level of IPD could also be considered compatible with trends connected with the introduction of direct democracy that have been observed in modern European democracies (Cross & Katz, 2013). Our hypotheses were as follows:

H1: *Intra-party democracy increased in Poland over time.*

H2: *Parties of the second and third generations showed a higher level of IPD than first-generation parties at their inception.*

H3: *Parties of the second and third generations developed direct democracy (plebiscitary intra-party democracy – PIPD), whereas first-generation parties mainly used assembly-based intra-party democracy (AIPD).*

We carried out content analysis of party statutes obtained from the registration authority, the District Court in Warsaw. For each party that had adopted more than one set of statutes, the first and last statutes to be issued were examined,

which would show any changes over time. The material for analysis consisted of 16 documents. We applied the IPD index developed by von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert and Tipei (2013) to these documents to measure the level of intraparty democracy. The index is based on two main criteria of IPD: inclusiveness and decentralisation, which are analysed in three areas: members' rights, organisational structures and the decision-making process. Although other IPD indices have been developed (e.g., Salgado, 2020; Rahat & Shapira, 2017; Scarrow et al., 2017; Poguntke et al., 2016), the von dem Berge et al. method suited our purposes, is universally applicable and had been tested by its authors on data from other CEE countries (Hungary, Slovakia and Romania) (von dem Berge & Obert, 2017).

As our research was conducted on formal party documents, it should be remembered that our results constitute the official image of the party referred to by Katz and Mair as a kind of 'official story', which may differ from the actuality referred to as the 'real story' (Katz & Mair, 1992, p. 3). This does not mean, however, that formal rules are not important; on the contrary, according to these researchers, if people fight for rules, that is sufficient reason to consider that they are important (Katz & Mair, 1992, p. 8). Rules set the framework for action and can often have a socialising effect on actors operating within institutions (March & Olsen, 1998). The rhetoric used in party statutes is an important indicator of changing attitudes to the relationships between leaders, members and party bodies (Kittilson & Scarrow, 2003). The practical aspect is also important – statutes are often the only available sources of data, especially if we want to analyse parties from the past. Party statutes are usually the main objects of study when analysing IPD (Katz & Mair, 1992; Norris, 2006). They can also be treated as a first step to further analyses, including empirical research.

Following this introduction, this article is divided into four parts. In Part 2, we examine various approaches to defining and variants of intra-party democracy by reference to the literature, in Part 3 we present the legal rules related to IPD in Poland, in Part 4 we describe our research methods and results and in Part 5 we discuss the results and present the conclusions of our study.

## **2. What does IPD really mean? A review of the literature**

For a long time, democracy within parties (IPD) was seen in light of the dominance of the mass model of internal party organisation. Duverger in his seminal work wrote that the model in which parties are based on branches, open to all and with leaders elected by the members, 'corresponds to the requirements of political democracy' in contrast to the model in which parties are based on an undemocratic caucus (Duverger, 1965, p. 26). The core idea of democracy within

this model was the control of the elites by the members (Scarrow et al., 2017, p. 137). This type of party organisation, and particularly its democratic dimension, is described in various ways: Ignazi (2020) uses the term ‘delegate democracy’ emphasising the multi-stage internal decision-making and representative character of party assemblies; while Webb, Scarrow and Poguntke (2017) write about the ‘subscriber democracy’ model based on local branches, annual or biennial congresses as the highest party organ, smaller executive committees, membership procedures and annual fees. In the term used by Ignazi (2020), democracy based on representative logic is clearly visible; in the term ‘subscriber democracy’ the representative logic is not so clearly expressed, but it is not excluded – congresses or other collective bodies of small parties do not have to be exclusively for delegates but can include all members.

This type of party organisation came to be challenged by the mid 20th century when a crisis emerged concerning failures in party functioning, shrinking membership and growing public distrust of parties. The remedy for the crisis that gained most favour was to open up participation in party procedures – mainly leadership and candidate selection – to grassroots members. Thus, the logic of representative democracy, characteristic of the mass model, was modified by inclusion of the logic of direct democracy. One of the best-known examples of such practice was the introduction of grassroots democracy by Green parties in the 1970s (Scarrow et al., 2017, p. 137; Ignazi, 2020, p. 11), a change widely referred to as the ‘democratisation’ of political parties (Bille, 2001). The diagnosis of the crisis also stimulated academic interest in IPD, including its definition and the question of whether the level of IPD could be measured, as is suggested by the term ‘democratisation’. Cross and Katz (2013, p. 2) point out that, considering the many different ways political parties are organised and operate, there can be no universal definition of IPD. They argue such a definition may include many distinct aspects such as participation, inclusiveness, centralisation, accountability and other elements also associated with the term democracy.

In the absence of one normative definition, approaches to defining IPD generally involve one or more of these aspects of democracy, with ‘inclusiveness’ the most popular (Scarrow et al., 2017; Ignazi, 2020; Bille, 2001; Bernardi et al., 2017; von dem Berge et al., 2013). For Ignazi (2020), inclusiveness is equivalent to direct democracy, but IPD also needs three other dimensions to be fully fledged: pluralism, deliberation and diffusion. Bille (2001) also insists on inclusiveness but argues decentralisation is important for IPD too as it allows more members to participate in the decision-making process.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, von dem Berge et al. (2013, p. 5) conceptualise IPD with two criteria: inclusiveness and decentralisation. On the other hand, Scarrow et al. emphasise inclusion (‘IPD equals inclusiveness’) (2017, p. 139), accepting decentralisation as an important but not a defining aspect of IPD. In their approach to IPD, these authors differentiate between two variants of IPD – assembly-based IPD (AIPD) and plebiscitary IPD (PIPD). Both may be more

or less inclusive but follow a different logic, with AIPD being a representative and PIPD a direct variant of democracy (Scarrow et al., 2017; Poguntke et al., 2016). In AIPD, the emphasis is put on discussion within party bodies, and decisions are taken by attendees at party meetings, who vote after debating propositions. PIPD means that party decisions are reached by party members casting votes (Poguntke et al., 2016, p. 671). Measuring the level of IPD, Scarrow et al. (2017) differentiate between these two variants. However, in practice, political parties often combine both methods of decision-making using direct democracy as complementary, so in our article they are treated as components of IPD.

### **3. The laws on intra-party democracy – is IPD ‘juridified’ in Poland?**

Intra-party democracy in Polish political parties is partly ‘juridified’ or imposed by legislation. The constitutionalisation of parties in 1997 brought political pluralism (Art. 11) and a ban on parties that use totalitarian methods or sanction racial or ethnic hatred, apply violence for the purpose of obtaining power or aim to keep their own structure or membership secret (Art. 13) (Constitution, 1997). However, these rules are mainly related to party activity in the political system. IPD is covered in the Party Law of 1997, of which Art. 8 states, ‘Political parties shape their structures and principles of operation in accordance with the principles of democracy, in particular by ensuring the openness of these structures, appointing party bodies through elections and adopting resolutions by a majority of votes’. This minimal definition of IPD is supplemented in Art. 9 where the required elements of a party’s statutes are listed. The statutes should include procedures for selecting and supplementing party bodies and for creating and disbanding territorial party units. Compliance with the principles of democracy forces the creation of three types of party body: decision-making (representing party members), executive and control (Chmaj, 2011, p. 28).

Previous legislation covering party registration (in force 1990–1997) was short-lived and did not intervene in internal party structures (Party Law, 1990). However, since 1997, when a new party law came into force, the legal requirements and their judicial interpretation by the registration authority (the District Court in Warsaw) have influenced the characteristics of party statutes to such an extent that they do not differ significantly from each other and, more importantly, have determined to some extent the level of intra-party democracy. For example, when the Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland (PO) was established in 2001, its founders proposed that only the parliamentary party, as the highest authority, was entitled to change the party statutes, adopt the party programme and select the leadership (Sobolewska-Myślik, Kosowska-Gąstoł & Borowiec, 2009,

p. 83). Even though party leaders were selected in this way in other countries, for example, in the UK (Pilet & Cross, 2014), the District Court rejected PO's request for registration, reasoning that the highest authority of the party should be the assembly of members or their representatives, whose powers include deciding on the most important matters for the existence of the party (Court Decision, 2002). The party was registered only when it changed its statutes in 2002. This case shows clearly that democracy in Polish parties is to some extent shaped by the registration body, which inevitably has its own view of how IPD should look.

Other issues that can be important for IPD are the gender quotas that were introduced to the Polish political system by the Electoral Code of 2011. In proportional elections, each electoral list must contain not less than 35% of candidates of each gender. This has had an impact on the number of women on party lists, but not necessarily in parliament, as electoral success depends on many other factors such as a candidate's position on the list (Marcinkiewicz, 2014; Flis, 2014). As the article is based on party statutes, we checked whether parties introduced these provisions into their statutory documents.

#### 4. Data and methods

In scope of our analysis were those parties that won seats in the Sejm (the lower and more influential chamber of the Polish parliament) at the 2023 parliamentary elections, either running alone or as part of a coalition. This definition covered three parties: Law and Justice (PiS), the New Left (NL) and Confederation Liberty and Independence (K WiN); and two coalitions: the Civic Coalition and the Third Way. The Civic Coalition included four parties: the Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland, the Modern Party, Initiative Poland and the Greens, while the Third Way consisted of two: Poland 2050 of Szymon Hołownia and the Polish People's Party (Election results, 2023). Formally, representatives of nine parties got into the Sejm. Though candidates of other parties ran from the PiS, NL and K WiN lists, these parties were not included in our analysis as they did not take part in the election under their own labels.

The parties included were divided into three generations that we supposed might differ in terms of their IPD. The first generation, deeply rooted in the communist period, was represented by the New Left<sup>3</sup> (NL) and the Polish People's Party (PSL). Both inherited their geographical organisation, and to some extent other resources, from parties that existed in the communist era and had many of the characteristics of mass parties. The second generation had its roots in the post-Solidarity movement of the 1990s. They tried to emulate the organisational solutions of post-communist parties (mostly a mass model), but without the necessary resources they were unable to do so. At the beginning of the

21st century, post-Solidarity forces ended up in two big parties, the Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS). Their foundation and evolution were influenced by the transition and post-transition era when the conditions necessary for the effective development of a mass party structure no longer existed (Kopeček & Svačinová, 2016, p. 135), so they used 'catch-all' and cartel-party strategies. The latter turned out to be a success. In the 2007 parliamentary election no new parties entered parliament – all seats were won by one of the four first- or second-generation parties. It has only been since the 2011 elections that new parties have been able to overcome the electoral threshold and win parliamentary seats.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the legal and political environment has been quite different, and so have the parties, all of which were classified as third generation (Confederation Liberty and Independence, Poland 2050 of Szymon Hołownia, the Modern Party, Initiative Poland and the Greens).

We used the IPD calculation method designed by von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert and Tipei (2013). Their conceptualisation of IPD includes two categories: inclusiveness and decentralisation. Inclusiveness refers to the group of party decision-makers. The scope of this group extends from a single leader or a small group of party elites to all members or even beyond, to party supporters who do not enjoy full party membership. Decentralisation is understood as the role the sub-national units play in the party decision-making process, particularly their independence from the influence of the centre (von dem Berge et al., 2013, p. 5). The authors distinguish three main categories in their IPD coding scheme – members' rights, organisational structure and the decision-making process. These are divided into sub-categories consisting of detailed elements of party structures or rules governing party functions (von dem Berge et al., 2013, p. 7). 'Members' rights' comprise general members' rights and the rights of minorities, such as women or young people. The sub-category 'organisational structure' includes central bodies (such as the congress, conflict-solving agencies, various forms of executive and the party leader) and their relationships with sub-national units. The 'decision-making process' includes two further categorisations: recruitment and programmatic issues. 'Recruitment' covers the selection of candidates for both public and intra-party offices at central and sub-national levels, including the role and independence of sub-national party units. 'Programmatic issues' concerns the role of party members and party bodies, both central and sub-national, in formulating the party programme.

Detailed elements were addressed by a set of 92 questions designed to assess the level of IPD according to the general conceptualisation – i.e., inclusiveness and decentralisation. For each question, there were three possible answers: Yes, No or Not Specified; and for each answer the values assigned were -1, 0 or +1, according to the operationalisation provided by the authors (von dem Berge et al., 2013, pp. 43–56). As they explain, the rationale behind this quantification is that all answers which have positive implications on IPD are attributed the value +1,

regardless whether the answer is *Yes*, *No*, or *Not Specified*, following the same logic all answers which have negative implications on IPD are attributed the value -1, regardless whether the answer is *Yes*, *No*, or *Not Specified*, 0 is allocated when no specific effects on IPD can be identified. The coding unit is a message (part of a sentence or phrase) found in a party statute, used to provide the answer to a given question. The IPD value for each party was calculated as an average from the partial values for three main sub-categories (members' rights, organisational structure, decision-making). The final IPD index ranges from -1 to 1 (von dem Berge et al., 2013, pp. 31–33).

It might be helpful to provide here a short explanation as to which statutory provisions are considered conducive to IPD, as a point of reference for the interpretation of the results of our analysis. This does not mean setting out the 92 questions included in the coding sheet; a brief review will suffice to get a general picture of solutions related to high and low IPD values.

In the category of members' rights, high IPD is connected particularly with access to information about party activities and the opportunity to express opinions diverging from the party majority. Participation in the process of decision-making is also important, though this is also included in other sub-categories (e.g., leadership election and formulating the party programme). For minority rights, which is a sub-category of members' rights, high IPD values come mainly from including minorities through a quota mechanism in the party bodies or candidate lists.

The measure of IPD in the category of organisational structure is mainly connected with the competencies and accountabilities of the individual party organs. Competencies are especially important in the case of party congresses and leaders. To score highly for IPD, the party congress should decide the party statutes and programme, and it should participate in elections for party offices and candidate lists, which is also included in the recruitment sub-category of the coding scheme. These competencies plus frequent meetings (every three years at least) are interpreted in terms of the inclusiveness aspect of IPD. The competencies of party leadership are framed differently – the less individual power the leader has, the higher the value of IPD, because it limits the autocratic character of power within the party. The most important aspect of collective executive organs for IPD is their accountability to party members or to congress, which also refers to the inclusive aspect of IPD. Within organisational structure, conflict-solving agencies should be independent and all party members and bodies should be equally subject to their rulings (von dem Berge et al., 2013, p. 9).

Inclusiveness and decentralisation play important roles in the category of decision-making, where recruitment, referring to the nomination and selection of candidates, constitutes the most detailed sub-category of the coding scheme. Recruitment is further divided into recruitment for national public offices and party offices. In both sub-categories, inclusiveness is measured by the role of party members in those procedures – closed primaries are the most inclusive

and party elites the most exclusive poles. Decentralisation is assessed according to the scheme proposed by Bille (2001), where, in the most decentralised variant sub-national units completely control the process of nomination and selection, and in the most centralised one complete control is exercised by national party bodies. Voting procedures, another sub-category of the decision-making process, is mostly concerned with the degree of decentralisation, so the autonomy of regional branches in electing candidates for sub-national public and party offices is quantified using Bille's (2001) ranking. The last sub-category in the decision-making process is programmatic issues, i.e., the question of who decides the contents of the party manifesto. For the IPD score, inclusiveness is again the most important element here, with all members being the most inclusive variant and party leader the most exclusive one.

The party statutes were coded by two researchers. Because of the small sample size (16 sets of party statutes), 25% of the sample, rather than the customary 10%, were considered to calculate intercoder reliability. Balancing small sample size, because of the large number of variables (92) the resulting intercoder reliability included 368 units of analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). The percentage agreement across all variables was 84% and was deemed sufficient to proceed with further coding.

## **5. Results. How much democracy is there and how has it changed?**

The first way we looked at the values of IPD obtained in our research was to rank them in order of magnitude. From this, it was obvious that Polish parties were more democratic than not. Recalling that the scale ranges from -1 (undemocratic) to +1 (democratic), the level of IPD in the parties in scope was between 0 and 0.5 with two exceptions - the Greens and the SdRP/NL parties - the scores of which exceeded 0.5. There were no meaningful differences between the generations. Surprisingly, the parties created just after the collapse of communism were not found to be less democratic than those founded in the transition period or in the democratic system established later. On the contrary, the post-communist parties (PSL and especially SdRP) were assessed to have a high level of IPD, while the newer parties were scored lower (e.g., Poland 2050 and Confederation) (Table 1).

**Table 1:**  
**Intra-party democracy scores**

Party	Statutes	Members' rights	Organisational structures	Decision-making	IPD (average)	
Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland/New Left	SdRP	1991	0.500	0.781	0.449	0.576 ↔
	NL	2019	0.334	0.183	0.200	0.239 ↓
Polish People's Party	PSL	1990	0.250	0.490	0.255	0.332 ↔
		2021	0.167	0.687	0.415	0.423 ↑
Law and Justice	PiS	2001	0.250	0.242	0.294	0.262 ↔
		2021	0.167	0.287	0.247	0.233 ↓
Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland	PO	2002	-0.084	0.097	0.142	0.052 ↔
		2021	0.334	0.275	0.364	0.324 ↑
Green Party	Greens	2004	0.584	0.586	0.367	0.512 ↔
		2022	0.750	0.586	0.329	0.555 ↑
Modern Party	.N	2015	0.083	0.557	0.254	0.298 ↔
		2021	0.167	0.653	0.171	0.330 ↑
Poland 2050	Poland 2050	2022	0.000	0.192	0.083	0.092 ↔
		2023	0.000	0.225	0.083	0.103 ↑
Initiative Poland	iPL	2019	0.167	0.557	0.337	0.353 ↔
Confederation	K WiN	2022	0.000	0.107	0.019	0.042 ↔

Source: the authors

When tracking changes in the level of IPD over time, it was not possible to identify clear patterns related to party generations. While the IPD of some first- and second-generation parties increased (PSL, PO), with others (SdRP, PiS) it declined over time. Third-generation parties scored higher on their more recent statutes than their earlier rule books. However, the versions of the statutes we assessed came very close together (only one year apart in the case of Poland 2050) and some parties were so new they had only one iteration, so it was impossible to assess their development over time. In all third-generation parties, with the exception of the Greens, the initial level of IPD was low (Table 1). To explore the reasons for this we looked into the results in more detail, tracking the changes in IPD values in each of the dimensions: members' rights, organisational structure and decision-making process (Tables 2–4). The first seems to be the weakest component at first, yet in time it goes down; the second is the strongest and, in many parties, it grows; the third is the most complex and at the same time the vaguest.

According to their statutes, members of Polish parties do not enjoy many rights, it is related also to rights of minorities in their rank-and-file members (Table 2). The paradox that party membership (Scarrow, 2015) has simultaneously become less and more important is not valid in the case of Poland (cf. Winclawska, Paczeński, Brodzińska-Mirowska & Jacuński, 2021, pp. 316–317): while the general trend in Europe seems to be that, although parties have fewer members, their individual political rights have increased, in Poland both the numbers and

rights of party members remain low (Sobolewska-Mysłik, Kosowska-Gąstoł & Borowiec, 2010). The Party Law (1997) obliges parties to include members' rights in their statutes, but they do this to the minimum extent, with limited influence on the decision-making process and without allowing their members to express divergent opinions within the party or in public. Most of the parties we looked at did not impose minority quotas on party bodies or in the party lists for public offices, even though the Electoral Code (2011) insists on this. The party that stood out from those we analysed was the Green Party that, in line with its programme, decided to give members substantial rights. In its first statutes of 2004, the Greens scored 0.584 for members' rights, while in the 2022 version this increased to 0.750. For minority rights the Green Party scored the maximum of 1 for its earlier statutes, in which not only were explicit minority quotas set for party bodies and party lists, but also representatives of minorities were included in the national executive. Although the minority rights score for the Green Party's later statutes reduced to 0.833 because this last provision was removed, this was still better than all other parties (Table 2).

**Table 2:**  
**Members' rights scores**

Party	Statutes	General members' rights	Minority rights	Members' rights (average)
SdRP	1991	1.000	0.000	0.500 ↔
NL	2019	0.167	0.500	0.334 ↓
PSL	1990	0.333	0.167	0.250 ↔
	2021	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↓
PiS	2001	0.500	0.000	0.250 ↔
	2021	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↓
PO	2002	0.000	-0.167	-0.084 ↔
	2021	0.667	0.000	0.334 ↑
Greens	2004	0.167	1.000	0.584 ↔
	2022	0.667	0.833	0.750 ↑
.N	2015	0.333	-0.167	0.083 ↔
	2021	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↑
Poland 2050	2022	0.167	-0.167	0.000 ↔
	2023	0.167	-0.167	0.000 ↔
iPL	2019	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↔
K WiN	2022	0.167	-0.167	0.000 ↔

Source: the authors

The organisational structure of Polish parties contributed to a high IPD score with the exception of PO in 2002 (0.097), as mentioned above, and K WiN in 2019 (0.107), due in part to its coalition character (Table 3). Due to legal rules and decisions by the registration body, Polish party structure is primarily based

on assembly-based IPD (AIPD), with congress playing the most significant role. A possible drawback of this arrangement in the current context is that congresses usually meet every four years, in tune with the parliamentary term but less often than the three-year cycle favoured by the von dem Berge et al. framework of our analysis and thus disadvantaging their IPD score. The infrequent meetings of congresses are due to the existence of councils, subordinate decision-making bodies that are active between congresses and partially exercise their competencies, but are not considered by the analytical framework to the further detriment of the parties' IPD score. All parties had conflict-solving agencies in the shape of party courts. They all also had branches at the sub-national level that were not completely autonomous but demonstrated a certain level of independence in shaping their own leadership and composing lists for sub-national public offices. Finally, we found great diversity in executive bodies and party leadership. While in some parties, in compliance with the von dem Berge et al. framework, two executive organs could be distinguished, others had either a national executive or an executive committee. Whether a party had one or two of these bodies, the level of IPD depended on their responsibilities and accountability. The executive was usually accountable to congress or another inclusive body; however, this relationship was not always made explicit in the party statutes, leading to a lower IPD score in our analysis. The competencies of party presidents were generally limited – they usually had no power to set up or close down sub-national party units, exclude a member from the party or its executive, block decisions of the executive or act against the provisions of the statutes. Their positions could be challenged through a limit to their term, and sometimes also through a vote of no confidence. All of these provisions had a positive influence on the party's IPD assessment.

In almost all parties with more than one edition of their statutes, the IPD score for organisational structure was higher on the second document. The exceptions were the Greens, where it stayed the same, and the New Left (SdRP/NL) where it decreased from an originally high level of 0.781. As shown in Table 3, the parties with the most democratic organisational structures, next to the Greens (0.586 both in 2004 and 2022), were the Modern Party (.N) (0.557 in 2015 and 0.653 in 2022), Initiative Poland (iPl) (0.557 in 2016) and the Polish People's Party (PSL) (0.490 in 1990 and 0.687 in 2021).

Table 3:  
Organisational structure scores

Party	Statutes	Party congress	Conflict solving agencies	National Executive	Executive Committee	Party president	Relationship between national and sub-national levels	Organisational structure (average)
SdRP	1991	0.600	0.750	1.000	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.781 ↔
NL	2019	0.000	0.500	-0.667	n/a	0.333	0.750	0.183 ↓
PSL	1990	0.200	0.500	n/a	0.667	0.333	0.750	0.490 ↔
	2021	0.600	0.750	n/a	1.000	0.333	0.750	0.687 ↑
PiS	2001	0.200	0.500	1.000	-0.667	-0.333	0.750	0.242 ↔
	2021	0.600	0.750	n/a	-0.667	0.000	0.750	0.287 ↑
PO	2002	0.400	0.500	n/a	-0.667	0.000	0.250	0.097 ↔
	2021	0.400	0.500	1.000	-0.667	-0.333	0.750	0.275 ↑
Greens	2004	0.600	0.500	0.667	0.667	0.333	0.750	0.586 ↔
	2022	0.600	0.500	0.667	0.667	0.333	0.750	0.586 ↔
.N	2015	0.200	0.500	n/a	1.000	0.333	0.750	0.557 ↔
	2021	0.600	0.750	n/a	1.000	0.167	0.750	0.653 ↑
Poland 2050	2022	0.400	0.500	-0.667	0.000	0.167	0.750	0.192 ↔
	2023	0.600	0.500	-0.667	0.000	0.167	0.750	0.225 ↑
iPL	2019	0.200	0.500	n/a	1.000	0.333	0.750	0.557 ↔
K WiN	2019	0.200	0.750	0.000	-0.667	n/a	0.250	0.107 ↔

Source: the authors

The analytical framework allots an IPD score for the decision-making process a party uses to determine recruitment and programmatic issues. The picture obtained of the process from party statutes was ambiguous – the IPD levels that emerged from our analysis were low, ranging from 0.019 for the Confederation (K WiN) in 2019 to 0.449 for SdRP in 1991 (Table 4, column 16). While in some parties IPD increased over time (PO, PSL), in others it declined (SdRP/NL, PiS, Greens, .N) or remained the same (Poland 2050), or there was no change of statutes so no trend can be ascertained (iPL, K WiN).

Decision-making on programmatic issues, except Poland 2050 and K WiN, emerged generally as more democratic than on recruitment for both national public and party offices. IPD, at 0.5, was highest in SdRP in 1991 and in the Modern Party in 2015, in both parties – members could participate, along with the party congresses, in creating party programmes (Table 4, Column 15).

The values of the index were low for candidate selection, in recruitment for both national public and party offices (Table 4, Columns 5 and 9 respectively). This is because the party statutes contained only general rules on the intra-party selection process as details were specified in internal regulations adopted before each election (Bichta, 2010, p. 172-173). The values were much higher for procedures (Column 13), especially when the role of sub-national branches in the selection of candidates for public offices at the sub-national level (Column 11) and their

own leadership (Column 12) were considered. The latter has been impressive in all parties since the beginning of the post-communist transformation, except for the Modern Party (.N) in 2015, where the role of sub-national party branches in deciding their leadership was poor (-0.5). This was largely because the party was created top-down and, since the regional and local branches were yet to be established, the national party office nominated its representatives to create territorial structures. When the party had covered the country with territorial organisational structures, central office entrusted them with the selection of sub-national leaders.

Table 4:  
Decision-making process scores

Party	Statute	Candidate nomination	Candidate selection - parliament	Candidate selection - president	Role of sub-national units	Recruitment for national public office (average)	Election of the National Executive	Election of the Executive Committee	Election of the party president	Recruitment for national party office (average)	Voting procedure	Role of sub-national units (public office)	Role of sub-national units (party office)	Procedures (average)	Recruitment (average)	Programmatic issues	Decision-making (average)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
						(1+2+3+4)				(6+7+8)				(10+11+12)	(5+9+13)		(14+15)
SdRP	1991	0.000	0.800	0.167	0.000	0.242	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.397	0.500	0.449 ↔
NL	2019	-0.333	0.200	0.667	-0.200	0.084	0.200	n/a	0.200	0.200	-0.750	1.000	1.000	0.417	0.233	0.167	0.200 ↓
PSL	1990	-0.500	0.000	0.167	0.000	-0.083	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.000	1.000	0.417	0.178	0.333	0.255 ↔
	2021	0.500	0.800	0.667	0.200	0.542	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.497	0.333	0.415 ↑
PiS	2001	0.167	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.184	0.000	-0.200	0.200	0.000	0.250	1.000	0.500	0.583	0.256	0.333	0.294 ↔
	2021	0.167	0.000	0.167	0.200	0.134	n/a	0.000	0.200	0.100	-0.750	1.000	0.500	0.250	0.161	0.333	0.247 ↓
PO	2002	0.167	0.400	0.167	0.000	0.184	n/a	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.250	0.000	0.250	0.167	0.117	0.167	0.142 ↔
	2021	0.167	0.400	0.167	0.200	0.234	0.200	0.000	0.400	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.395	0.333	0.364 ↑
Greens	2004	-0.167	0.800	0.167	0.200	0.250	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.400	0.333	0.367 ↔
	2022	0.333	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.225	0.200	-0.400	0.200	0.000	0.750	0.500	1.000	0.750	0.325	0.333	0.329 ↓
.N	2015	-0.333	0.000	0.167	-0.200	-0.092	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.000	-0.500	-0.083	0.008	0.500	0.254 ↔
	2021	-0.333	0.000	0.167	-0.200	-0.092	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.000	1.000	0.417	0.175	0.167	0.171 ↓
Poland	2022	0.167	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.184	0.000	-0.200	0.400	0.067	-0.750	0.500	1.000	0.250	0.167	0.000	0.083 ↔
	2023	0.167	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.184	0.000	-0.200	0.400	0.067	-0.750	0.500	1.000	0.250	0.167	0.000	0.083 ↔
iPL	2019	0.000	0.600	0.167	0.200	0.242	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.500	1.000	0.583	0.342	0.333	0.337 ↔
	2019	-0.333	0.000	0.000	-0.200	-0.133	-0.200	0.200	n/a	0.000	0.000	-0.250	1.000	0.250	0.039	0.000	0.019 ↔

Source: the authors

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

Although we found intra-party democracy (IPD) in Polish parties (to some extent determined by legislation), its level was not high, being close to the middle of the scale. As already mentioned, it was between 0 and 0.5 on a scale from -1 (undemocratic) to +1 (democratic), with two exceptions – the Greens and the SdRP/NL, which scored above 0.5. At the start of our research, we expected to find that IPD at the beginning of Poland's post-communist transformation would be underdeveloped but that it would increase both in the old parties of the first generation and, to a greater extent, in those second- and third-generation parties that entered parliament within an established political system. This assumption was informed by both the development of legislation on party structures and general trends in the growth of direct democracy in candidate selection, party leadership election and adopting party manifestos. Similar expectations related to the inclusiveness of Polish parties are found in the literature, e.g., in Radecki (2018) and Hartliński (2014).

The picture arising from our research is much less clear than expected. There is no discernible trend of increasing IPD over time. When we compare the first and last statutes of each party, we observe an increase in most (PSL, PO, Greens, the Modern Party, Poland 2050) and a decrease in two (SdRP/NL, PiS); Initiative Poland and the Confederation have published only one set of statutes, so comparisons over time cannot be made. In summary, our first hypothesis was only partially confirmed – while the level of IPD is increasing in most parties, it is decreasing in some, and this applies to parties from different generations. None of the second- and third-generation parties had a prominent level of IPD when they entered parliament for the first time, nor did they develop intra-party direct democracy or empower their rank-and-file members, so our second and third hypotheses were falsified. The only exception is the Green party that belongs to the third generation and was found to have one of the highest levels of IPD, including empowering their rank-and-file. Legal regulations have shaped the functions of party congresses, which make the most important decisions in parties, so that now representative democracy or assembly-based IPD (AIPD) seems to be the standard in parties of all generations. There are only a few exceptions of parties that use some form of complementary plebiscitary IPD (PIPD), PO and Poland 2050 among them.

Both mentioned parties include all party members in the process of selecting their party leaders. This solution was initially also used by SLD, then treated as optional and finally abandoned (NL). Putting leader selection in the hands of the rank-and-file makes the process more inclusive, but it does not mean that the leadership contest is more competitive; on the contrary, empirical research conducted by Jacuński, Brodzińska-Mirowska, Paczeński and Winclawska (2021) shows that competitiveness is greater when the leader is elected by con-

gress. For example, in PO, which holds primaries, the leadership election is not very competitive, while in parties that select their leaders during congresses (e.g., PSL, the Modern Party and SLD – except in 2012 when primaries were held), it is much more strongly contested. The Law and Justice party (PiS) seems to be an exception here; its chairman, Jarosław Kaczyński, has been the only candidate since 2003 and has been elected by congress almost unanimously on each occasion (Jacuński et al., 2021, pp. 133–144). However, according to research conducted by Hartliński (2021), candidate selection process in Poland is ‘more focused on legitimising candidates than actually choosing anyone’ (p. 172), more important is an informal process of party’s preliminary filtering and encouraging or discouraging potential candidates, a process controlled by party leaders that was considered harmful to intra-party democracy.

In 2011 gender quotas were mandated by law, following which political parties could register their lists only if they met the 35% quota rule. Several parties had pre-empted this rule in their statutes, for example, SdRP/SLD, and others, such as the Freedom Union (UW), the Labour Union (UP) and Social Democracy of Poland (SdPi) applied it though it was not included in their statutes (Gwiazda, 2025 forthcoming). Gender quotas are stipulated in the statutes of the Green Party (2022). The statutes of the other analysed parties do not contain rules on gender representation in the candidate selection process, even though they are included in the Electoral Code of 2011. It is perhaps the case that most parties see the law itself as sufficient in this matter; to repeat the rule in statutes would be superfluous.

The highest levels of IPD we measured were in the left-wing SdRP in 1991 and in the Green Party both in 2004 and 2022. The far-right Confederation (K WiN) returned the lowest level of IPD, surely because of the coalition character of this party. It was created as a confederation that brought together several parties which decided to run from the common list in the EP and then the 2019 parliamentary elections (Michalczyk-Wlizło, 2023; Kosowska-Gąstoł & Sobolewska-Myślik, 2023).<sup>5</sup> The composition of the coalition changed over time; in 2019 it was formally registered as a party, but still constitutes a kind of umbrella organisation. For this reason, its structures differ from those of other parties; for example, there is not one leader, but a council of leaders. Many decisions (e.g., candidate selection) require agreement between the member parties (their leaders), so cannot be transferred to rank-and-file members or sub-national structures. This affects the level of inclusiveness and therefore the Confederation’s IPD score as measured by our analytical framework.

Because of changes occurring in the distribution of power within political parties, the issue of IPD seems to be of growing importance (Kaczorowska, 2021), so further in-depth analyses are needed. Firstly, the issues addressed by von dem Berge et al. analytical framework should be complemented by several others – for example, in Polish parties there are decision-making bodies (usually called

councils) that meet between party congresses (cf. Borowiec, Sobolewska-Myślik & Kosowska-Gąstoł, 2016, p. 320) which should be included. They play a quite different role from the national executives distinguished in the analytical framework. Secondly, in assessing IPD, issue scores could be weighted to recognise that some are more important than others. In the analytical framework used, members' rights, organisational structures and decision-making process are calculated as equal despite the fact that each of these dimensions is scored as the average of a different number of sub-category scores. Thirdly, formal analysis based on party statutes should be combined with data from empirical research (e.g., interviews with party politicians, press information). Statutory regulations are sometimes very general, especially regarding the selection of candidates. Parties often have their own pre-selection standards even if there are no formal rules, or make ad hoc decisions on selection at each election – e.g., they may use closed primaries to select a candidate for presidential elections, even though their statutes do not mandate this (PO, Confederation). Finally, taking into account that in our analysis leftist parties (SdRP, Greens) scored the highest levels of IPD and the far-right scored lowest (Confederation), it is worth considering whether IPD is correlated with party ideology. This requires research on more parties, spatially more widely positioned – for example, on the basis of data from CHES or MARPOR – so is a candidate for further academic study.

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## Endnote:

- 1 For the concept of the three generations of parties see the example of the Czech parties by Kopeček and Svačinová (2016, pp. 134–135).
- 2 However, according to Hazan and Rahat (2010, p. 59) decentralisation does not always mean the inclusion of more members into the decision-making process as the selectorate at the national level can be more inclusive (e.g., all citizens or party members) than at the local level (e.g., local leader or elites).
- 3 The Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP) was created in 1990. Since 1991 it has been a part of the broader coalition the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) which in 1999 transformed into a single party under the same name. In 2021 it merged with a smaller centre-left party the Spring by Robert Biedroń and since then has been known as the New Left (NL). All three labels are treated as the same entity, therefore the New Left is classified as a first-generation grouping. It can be confusing as the party has been through a lot of mergers, splits, transformations and both structural and personnel changes, however, we consider that we are dealing with the same party. During an online expert survey we conducted in 2022 as part of a research project on new parties in Poland, 60 out of 62 experts responded that they perceived the New Left as the continuation of SLD (two did not know; none perceived the party as new), and 46 out of 62 perceived SLD as the continuation of SdRP (two as the continuation of PZPR, five as new, eight did not answer). Our research carried out on party structures, programmes, party elites and candidates also confirmed a meaningful level of continuity between the analysed entities.
- 4 There are many definitions of new parties; some scholars emphasise new origin (Krouwel & Lucardi, 2008), new political leadership or personnel (Sikk, 2005) or competing on new issues (Lucardi, 2000; Zons 2015), others competing in elections for the first time (Hug, 2001; Tavits, 2006, 2008). In this article the latter definition has been adopted.
- 5 The party was composed of the Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic - Liberty and Hope (KORWIN), the National Movement, the Confederation of the Polish Crown and a few smaller groups: the Union of Christian Families (ZChR), the National League (LN) and the Drivers' Party.

# What Can Czech and Slovak Social Democratic Parties Expect From Progressive Rebranding?

## A Demand-Side Perspective Through the Clustering of WVS/EVS Respondents

Nevio Moreschi<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In recent years, the left of the political spectrum in the Czech and Slovak party systems has undergone significant changes. The main anti-establishment party in Czechia, ANO, has shifted its economic programme to incorporate more interventionist policies, while the main social-democratic party in Slovakia, Smer-SD, has progressively adopted more conservative social positions. These trends have coincided with a decline in voter support for the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and Smer-SD in Slovakia, seemingly supporting the dealignment theory generally used to explain the decline of centre-left parties in Western Europe.

Building on these premises, this article explores the first two layers of Mair's conceptualisation of a political cleavage (social groups and their defining values) to assess the potential gains or losses that social democratic parties in the two countries might experience if they rebranded to emphasise left-liberal stances. This strategy has been observed to have benefited other social democratic parties in Western and Central Europe. By clustering value survey respondents along left-wing and progressive social values and by analysing these clusters' members using logistic regression, the study suggests that while shifting to the left may attract new socio-demographic groups, adopting liberal left values might, for both parties, be electorally harmful in the short term.

*Keywords: cleavage theory; centre-left crisis; party rebranding; party dealignment*

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## 1. Introduction

While what constitutes the political left and right might be country-dependent (Aspelund, Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2013; Jahn, 2023), a decline in votes for parties traditionally associated with the social democratic party family has become a general trend in Europe (Horn, 2021; Polacko, 2022). As early as 2017, Manwaring and Kennedy, described the bleak electoral situation of these parties in their book, *Why the Left Loses: The Decline of the Centre-Left in Comparative Perspective*.

Between 2007 and 2017, most centre-left parties in Western Europe experienced their worst electoral defeat since the Second World War. That was the fate of the French Socialist Party (PS) in 2007, the German SPD in 2009, the Swedish Social-Democratic Party in 2010, the Dutch Worker's Party (PvdA) in 2017 and the British Labour Party in the same year. In Greece, the once-dominant PASOK almost disappeared after the 2015 Greek elections. The Italian Democratic Party (PD) and the Spanish PSOE seemed to fare better than the rest, though Manwaring and Kennedy (2017) noted that throughout the 2010s, some of the PD's and PSOE's traditional voters switched to new populist<sup>1</sup> alternatives: the Five Star Movement and Podemos, respectively.

In the period between the publication of '*Why the Left Loses*' and the writing of this article, some of the parties mentioned above have seen their fortunes deteriorate even further. For example, the French Socialist Party polled below 2% in the 2022 presidential election (Durovic, 2022) and the SPD in Germany recorded its worst electoral performance since reunification in the most recent European elections (Nicholson, 2024).

Several theories have been proposed to explain the phenomenon. Some theorists take a supply-side perspective, pointing to the emergence of new populist right-wing parties that, despite situating themselves on the opposite side of the political spectrum, have targeted part of the social-democrat historical voter base more effectively (Halikiopoulou, 2018; 2019) or have identified in social democratic parties the culprit of their own downfall, explicitly mentioning their shift towards the centre of the political arena as a potential explanation of their recent electoral defeats (Horn, 2021; Merz, 2022; Mudde, 2016; Polacko, 2022).

Suppose this second interpretation involving a dealignment between voter preferences and party policies is correct. If so, it is not surprising that some established centre-left parties have embarked on a process of rebranding following their poor electoral performance. As I will show, this process has, in many instances, involved re-adopting more interventionist macroeconomic policies in their manifestos while at the same time integrating peripheral values such as environmentalism or social liberalism.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, the Spanish PSOE moved progressively to the left under the leadership of Pedro Sanchez, and now the threat posed by Podemos seems to have been mostly diffused (Oleart, 2023). Similarly, since its most recent primary, the

Italian Democratic Party has adopted a more left-wing and environmentally friendly platform (Bordandini et al., 2024; Minaldi, 2023). In France, where the leadership role of the left camp fell to Melenchon, the more moderate left Socialist Party (PS) recovered some of its voters after strengthening its links with other progressive forces such as the Communist Party, the Greens and Melenchon's radical left France Unbound (Fieschi, 2024). Even after the snap elections in 2024, the PS maintained its alliance with the Green-Left coalition rather than helping Macron establish a centrist pole with the Republicans, a move that could be evidence of commitment to a more left-wing re-orientation. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the PvdA returned to prominence after allying with the even more socially progressive GroenLinks party (Lehmann et al., 2024; Otjes & De Jonge, 2024).

Outside Western Europe, in Poland and Lithuania the main centre-left parties attempt to move towards greater values liberalisation and more left-leaning economic policies. After defeat in the 2016 parliamentary elections, the cadres of the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP) used the primary to direct the party towards new policy platforms and attract younger and more progressive voters. However, this rebranding was unsuccessful and led to a split within the party (Gudžinskas, 2020). There was a more positive outcome for a similar party in Poland. After a decade of political irrelevance for social democratic parties, in 2018 the new socially progressive Spring shifted the balance of the Polish party system to the left. The more institutionalised Democratic Left Alliance then opted for an alliance with this new actor, a cooperation that led, in 2019, to the formation of the relatively successful New Left (Rydliński, 2023).

Not all the centre-left parties that successfully avoided decline renewed their commitment to left-wing politics or liberalised their views. For instance, despite a reduction in votes compared to the previous general election, the British Labour Party successfully formed a government in 2024 after considerably moderating its platform (Acemoglu, 2024). Moreover, not all social democratic parties lost votes while moving to the centre. For example, the Swedish Social Democratic Party experienced an electoral downfall after shifting its manifesto to the left, economically, and towards more progressive values, socially (Lehmann et al., 2024). Finally, these correlations do not necessarily indicate a causal relationship.

Despite these exceptions and fair criticism, dealignment as a general explanation for a universal phenomenon still enjoys broad support from scholars. As I make clear in the next section, observers have already adopted this interpretation to explain instances of centre-left crisis in both Western and Central-Eastern Europe (CEE). I aim to contribute to this body of research by providing a more up-to-date analysis of the connection between voter demands and party supply in CEE, examining in particular the situation of the left in Czechia and Slovakia. The subjects of study are the two countries' major social democratic parties, ČSSD in Czechia and SMER-sociálna demokracia (Smer-SD) and Hlas-SD in Slovakia. After examining whether their electoral and ideological trajectories have followed

the general trends of their party family, I consider whether rebranding the parties with more left-wing and liberal policy positions would find favour with their core electorate. In other words, my objective was to address these research questions:

**RQ 1:** Do the socio-cultural features of Czechia suggest that adopting more liberal social values and more left-wing policies would benefit the ČSSD?

**RQ2:** Do the socio-cultural features of Slovakia justify an even more radical shift towards left-wing and progressive values by Hlas-SD?

**RQ3:** Do the socio-cultural features of Czechia suggest that adopting more liberal social values and more left-wing policies would benefit Smer-SD?

To answer these questions, the paper is divided into five sections. Section 2 comprises a literature review, in which I summarise current research findings on the decline of centre-left parties in Central and Eastern Europe and, following some of the recommendations made by fellow scholars, propose cleavage theory as a framework for examining the two case studies. In section 3, the main dimensions of the study are conceptualised, and their operationalisation is illustrated.

Section 4 is divided into five subsections and covers the three-layered conceptualisation of a political cleavage. The subsections 4.2 and 4.3 deal with the value level of a political cleavage by clustering data collected by the World Values Survey. Samples from the two countries were divided according to their left-wing values, liberalism, and attitudes towards migrants and foreigners. 4.4 instead covers the polities' main socio-demographics and professions to see whether there might be a correlation between attitudes towards the previously observed values and belonging to certain social categories. Finally, in subsection 4.5 the political parties are brought into the picture. The relationship between socio-demographics and partisan support is analysed, thus closing the circle and showing how party rebranding could affect those social groups making up the parties' support base.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In her 2024 book *When Left Moves Right: The Decline of the Left and the Rise of the Populist Right in Postcommunist Europe* Maria Snegovaya brings the Central and Eastern European context into the fold of the aforementioned general theory of dealignment. On one side she argues that anti-incumbent sentiment, corruption and the post-communist legacy might all have contributed to some of the defeats of left-wing parties in the region. Nonetheless, a regional focus on left-wing party policies and class voting show how a dealignment between social democratic

parties and their traditional voters took place. When the issue of immigration became acute, populist nationalist parties exploited this disaffection, a pattern also seen in the West.

Skrzypek and Bíró-Nagy (2023), in *The Social Democratic Parties in the Visegrád Countries*, find that a critical element behind the downfall of social-democratic parties was when they embraced the Third-Way ideology, blurring the demarcation lines between left and right.

The work of Snegoyava halted in the mid-2010s. In contrast, Zvada (2023) and Šarađín and Eichler (2023) cover the most recent national elections in Czechia and Slovakia and go so far as to predict potential paths to a brighter future for the centre-left. Zvada recommends that the centre-left parties in Slovakia embrace left-liberal values. Šarađín and Eichler suggest that the ČSSD ally with other minor parties representing the various strands of the left, a strategy that proved quite successful for Spring in Poland. These recommendations were made based on the empirical outcomes observed elsewhere; in this paper, I take a more theoretical approach.

As Cotta et al. (2008) argue, political demand and supply can be considered two sides of the same coin. Parties can influence people's demand by increasing the saliency of specific issues through discourse or by revisiting old demands (Mols & Yetten, 2020). This argument is supported by findings from recent experimental studies (Grewenig et al., 2020; Slothus, 2015). Some theoretical propositions on political parties have been developed with a specific focus on the interaction between the two sides. The explanation for new party entry for instance considers both dimensions.

One of the core tenets of this argument is that the growing divergence between voters and party platforms widens the entry space for new parties (Hug, 2001; Tavits, 2006; Van De Wardt & Otjes, 2022; Zons, 2015). Tavits (2006) posits that political actors would be willing to establish a new party when the benefits of doing so outweighed the costs. This may occur when support for existing parties is not yet crystallised or when the power wielded by MPs is significantly high. This political opportunity structure suggests that greater mismatch between demand and supply makes party entry more likely. It is argued that, in reforming its platform, a party might be motivated and constrained by factors similar to those influencing party entry, such as a disjunction between demand and supply. Works in the literature identify political parties as vote-maximising actors (although for different goals) with the agency to implement internal reforms coherently and rationally (Harmel & Janda, 1994), which agrees with the depiction of political parties by the entry theory.

It is acknowledged in the literature that established parties face constraints, such as the conservative nature of institutions, which might raise the cost of internal reform higher than those paid by younger instead of new parties (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Panebianco, 1988). However, endogenous shock, such as electoral loss, can rouse a party from its homeostatic tendencies (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Velden et al., 2018).

Matthias Avina (2023) has developed a framework to explain why parties might change and to categorise these changes schematically. According to his conceptualisation, party rebranding can be either policy-related, the type of rebranding I refer to in this paper, or feature-related. In the former, the party changes its position on specific issues (left-right, liberal-conservative, pro-EU-Euro-sceptic) or their saliency in its rhetoric.

While Avina (2023) finds that policy rebranding has neither a positive nor negative electoral effect when considered in a vacuum, bringing attention to the demand side might provide some extra information on the electoral impact of party rebranding.

Cleavage theory, a demand-side theory, posits that changing policy platforms can prompt voters to forsake a party if it no longer serves to reify their identities (Avina, 2023). The assumption is that political parties, as rational actors and vote maximisers, are more likely to rebrand if the number of voters they would gain is greater than the number who would abandon them. It should be noted, however, that this is not an iron-clad law. If it were, the phenomenon of dealignment would invariably yield positive outcomes, yet the experience of Western social democratic parties suggests that this is not always the case. Other factors, such as normative and political pressure from international actors, for instance, the EU or international financial institutions, also play a role in policy switches by parties (Snegovaya, 2024; Stokes, 2021). However, for the purpose of identifying hypothetical potential electoral developments, these external pressures are not considered, and priority is given instead to voters and their value preferences. Mair's interpretation of Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) theory of political cleavages will guide my analysis of potential social democratic supporters (Zuckerman, 1992). Bartolini and Mair's understanding was developed with a strict definition of what a cleavage entails. In short, it requires the cleavage to have a tripartite structure, in which a social group (second layer) is characterised by specific values (first layer) and beliefs that help in the process of in-group identification. Such a social group must then develop or support a political organisation (third layer), usually a party, to take these values to the political sphere and translate them into policies. It is not proposed that every group-party channel is a synonym for cleavage nor that party alignment at the two other levels is same as electoral success. However, I chose this theoretical framework for its conceptual clarity and the importance it reserves for the societal and value spheres, making it a perfect heuristic tool for examining politics from a demand-side perspective.

To sum up, political parties tend to be conservative institutions. However, the social-democratic parties that are the subject of this research have experienced an effective exogenous push to escape this homeostasis: electoral loss. As vote-maximising and, to a certain degree, rational actors, these parties now have an opportunity for policy rebranding.

### 3. Methodology and Operationalisation of Dimensions

The literature yields no consensus on a definition of the political ‘left’, though several works show how ‘left’ and ‘right’ are interpreted differently in different countries, suggesting that comparative research having these dimensions as an important subject cannot rely solely on a self-positioning proxy (Bauer et al., 2017; Noël et al., 2021; Zuell & Scholz, 2019). As the current paper involves comparison between Czechia and Slovakia, I determined to use a universalistic definition rather than a country-based one.

What substantial meaning of the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ should inform such a definition?<sup>3</sup> In political philosophy, there have been several proposals for the ultimate criterion on which this traditional dichotomy should be built: religiosity, social progressivism, individualism, authoritarianism and others. (Rosas & Ferreira, 2013).<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this research, I have used the minimal definition proposed by Bobbio (1996), which Jahn (2010; 2023) defines as the ‘ideological core’ of the left. According to Bobbio, a left-wing framing of reality recognises the existence of societal and natural inequalities in our polities. For those on the left, these inequalities cannot be explained entirely by individual responsibilities or actions, and it is a moral imperative to address them through collective action.<sup>5</sup>

The best way to tackle these inequalities varies significantly between left-wing discourses, and this is where adjacent and peripheral values come into play (Jahn, 2023). Some of the most recurrent peripheral left values are state intervention, welfare provision, environmentalism and workers’ internationalism. In this frame, the traditional economic dyad state intervention-market economy as a proxy for left-right, traditionally employed in social science research, can be accepted as a primary, although contingent, expression of the substantive ideological core.

Table 1:  
Universalistic conceptualisation of ‘Left Values’

<b>Left-wing</b> (Bobbio, 1996; Wallerstein, 2004; Keman, 2013; Jahn, 2010; 2023)	The state as a positive force to address societal inequalities
	Inequalities in society can and should be addressed
	Individual actions do not fully explain societal inequalities
	Inequalities exist nationally between social groups and globally between states

Source: The author

Moving from concept to operationalisation, I used data from the World Values Survey and European Values Study to operationalise the attitudes of Czech and Slovak respondents to the core ideology of the left and some of its most established peripheral values. The choice of items was partially dictated by their presence across waves (2018-2022) and the two countries.

Jahn's (2010; 2023) operationalisation of Bobbio's minimal definition is based on items dealing with people's and parties' attitudes to a command economy, nationalisation, and state regulation of the market. The logical conclusion reached by Jahn, that Bobbio's conceptualisation links the left to the endorsement of a command economy, remains open to debate. However, to consider this interpretation and the state's relevance in the social democratic tradition, one item related to economic nationalisation was included: item Q107, which deals specifically with the preference for public companies over private businesses. An extra item that captures the self-positioning on the left-right political axis was added to control the possibility that respondents might subscribe to some sort of welfare chauvinism.

**Table 2A:**  
**Operationalisation of the 'Left Values' dimension**

Dimension	Constituent elements	Item
<b>Left-wing values</b> (minimal definition) (Bobbio, 1996; Keman 2013; Jahn, 2010; 2023)	Economic nationalisation	Q107: The number of private businesses should be increased vs the number of public companies
	Inequalities in society can and should be addressed	Q241: Higher taxes to subsidise the poor are an integral part of democracy Q106: Incomes in the country should be made less equal as an incentive
Left-wing values (personal definition)		Q240: Self-positioning on the left-right political spectrum

Source: The author

The items were all recoded on a three-point scale, where the highest score (2) was labelled 'Left-wing', the intermediate (1) 'Centre', and the lowest (0) 'Right-wing'.

**Table 2B:**  
**Operationalisation of the 'Left Values' Concept**

Dimension	Constituent elements	Items	Recoded scores
Left-wing values	The state is a positive force for addressing societal inequalities	Q107	Right-wing: 1-4 → 0 Centre: 5-6 → 1 Left-wing: 7-10 → 2
	Inequalities in society can and should be addressed	Q241 Q106	Right-wing: 7-10 → 0 Centre: 5-6 → 1 Left-wing: 1-4 → 2
		Q240	Right-wing: 7-10 → 0 Centre: 5-6 → 1 Left-wing: 1-4 → 2

Source: The author

A clustering analysis was then conducted to divide the respondents according to their scores on these four items. The Elbow method was used to determine the best way to divide the survey respondents into clusters. Two-step clustering was conducted after the final number of clusters was input according to the Elbow results. Discretion was used insofar as the resulting clustering defected regarding ratio size or Silhouette values. For instance, if the quality of clustering was below the standard threshold of  $X > 3$  ratio size or the  $X < 0.5$  Silhouette score, the final number of clusters was increased or decreased by 1 to fit those criteria properly.

The same process was then used for multiculturalism and liberal values. The WVS has been used quite successfully several times to operationalise the Liberal-Authoritarian scale as conceptualised by Adorno. However, in the present work, liberal values are not interpreted as the respondents' attitudes towards authority or liberal democracy. Instead, I refer to liberal values as progressive attitudes on issues such as abortion and homosexuality. This reductionist idea of making liberalism coincide with more tolerant attitudes to individual self-expression and moral choices appears quite frequently in the literature of public opinion studies (Adamczyk, 2013; Eueker & Froese, 2019; Zhang & Brym, 2019; Studlar & Burns, 2015). Some studies also include items that relate to environmental attitudes and multicultural attitudes within a broader cultural dimension alongside liberal progressive values (Ford & Jennings, 2020; Hooghe et al., 2002; Kenny & Langsæther, 2023). However, given the impact that discourse on immigration has on the politics of the two countries under study and the lack of items capturing environmental attitudes across waves, I decided to engage multiculturalism as a separate construct and to drop environmentalism.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 3:**  
**Operationalisation of the 'Liberal Values' concept**

Dimension	Item*	Recoded scores
Liberal values	Q182: Is homosexuality always justifiable? Q184: Is abortion always justifiable? Q185: Is divorce always justifiable? Q186: Is casual sex always justifiable?	Conservative: 1-4 Neutral: 5-6 Liberal: 7-10
* 1 Never justifiable - 10 Always justifiable		

Source: The author

The items used to construct the concept of 'Multiculturalism' were chosen according to their appearance in other public opinion research on multiculturalism or xenophobia (Ariely, 2012; Joshanloo, 2024; Shin & Dovidio, 2017; Tausch, 2016). Furthermore, this item selection covers all the survey questions about immigrants or foreigners. The only exception is an item stating that, in times of job scarcity, precedence should be given to job seekers of the country's main

nationality. Since virtually all the respondents from the two countries agree with the above statement, it would have been impossible to construct a cluster of more than a few people with exclusively multicultural views.

The reader should remember that even respondents grouped within the Multicultural cluster are still likely to hold discriminatory views regarding access to the job market.

**Table 4:**  
**Operationalisation of the 'Multiculturalism' concept**

Dimension	Items	Recoded scores
Multicultural values	G052: Evaluate the impact of immigrants on the development of your country *	1-2: Illiberal 3: Missing value 4-5: Multicultural
	A124: Uncomfortable having as neighbours: immigrants**	1: Illiberal 0: Multicultural
	G007: Trust: people of another nationality***	1-2: Illiberal 3-4: Multicultural
*1 Very Negative - 5 Very Positive **1 Yes - 0 No ***1 No Trust - 4 Lot of Trust		

Source: The author

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 An Introduction to the Czech and Slovak Party Systems

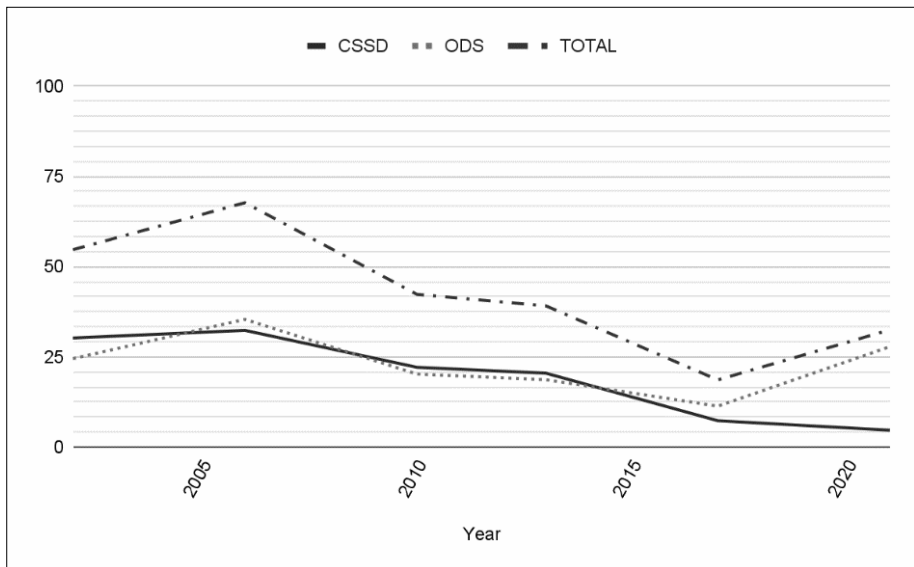
The Czech party system was formed around the traditional left-right economic cleavage (Gethin, Toledano & Pickety, 2020) and was, until the early 2010s, one of the most stable in the CEE region. Until then, centre-right and centre-left parties would attract, on average, more than 80% of the votes, with around half usually equally divided between the social-democratic ČSSD and the conservative ODS (Figure 1).

The first cracks in this political configuration appeared at the 2010 elections (Hanley, 2011). The right-wing fragmented because of the emergence of a new conservative party, TOP 09. At the same time, the populist Public Affairs emerged and won 44 seats in its first general election. The crisis of the party system was exacerbated in 2012 by the arrival of ANO 2011, an anti-establishment populist party that went on to come second in the 2013 elections, partly thanks to a cor-

ruption scandal involving top ODS figures (Havlík, 2014). In those elections, the centre-left ČSSD still got most votes, but in the worst result for a winning party since 1990 (Havlík, 2014). The following decade was characterised by further ČSSD decline.

Traditional left-wing parties have not been able to re-establish themselves. After the 2021 elections, neither ČSSD nor the successor to the communist party, KSČM, passed the threshold and so were left with no seats in the national parliament.

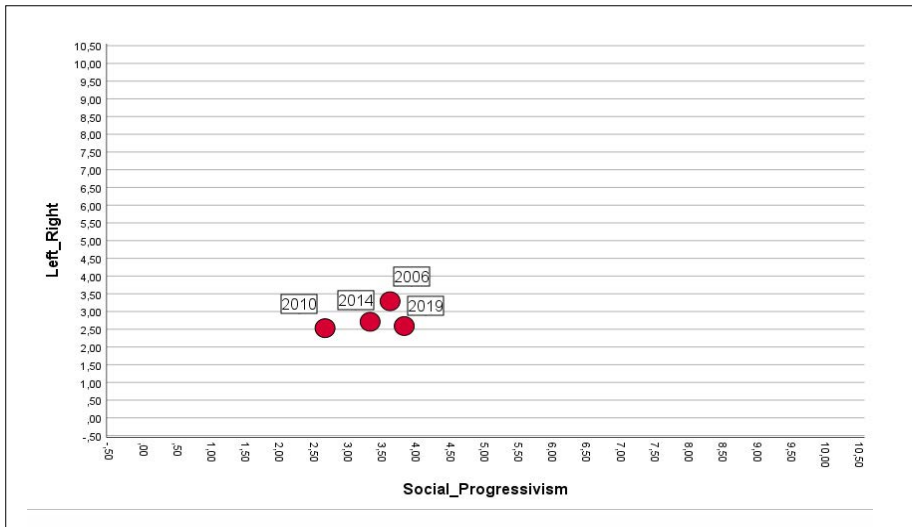
**Figure 1:**  
**Share of votes of the main centre-left and centre-right parties in Czechia**



Source: IFES Election Guide

Figure 1 shows that ČSSD followed the trend of progressive electoral decline of social democratic parties that occurred across Europe after the 2008 financial crisis. But is there any evidence that this decline was caused by the party gravitating too much towards the centre of the political spectrum? Figure 2 shows movement on the left-right economic and conservatism-progressivism axes by ČSSD over the years, as recorded by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey.

Figure 2:  
 ČSSD diachronic shift on left-right and conservatism-progressivism axes



Source: Chapel Hill Survey, 2002-2019

In Figure 2, higher values on the X and Y axes indicate more conservative and pro-free market positions, respectively. ČSSD does not seem to have abandoned its left-wing socio-economic platform, despite a shift between 2006 and 2010 towards more liberal economic positions. Such a shift was not very pronounced, and the situation stabilised soon after. Since the main hypothesised explanation does not apply to Czechia, the causes of the decline in electoral support for ČSSD must be sought elsewhere. The rise of ANO 2011 and its programmatic movement towards the economic left (Hájek et al., 2017; Lysek et al., 2021; Saxonberg & Heinisch, 2024) and the conflicting attitudes around EU integration as a critical issue cross-cutting the left-right economic divide (Buben & Kouba, 2023; Havlík & Voda, 2018; Kovář, 2023;) are both factors used to explain the downfall of ČSSD. Moreover, the most recent elections saw a growing political division based on attitudes towards ANO's leader, Andrej Babiš, with the currently governing coalition united by a general anti-Babiš sentiment rather than around shared ideology (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022; Buben & Kouba, 2023).

In this context of new salient issue, a commitment to its original social democratic ideals may not be enough to keep ČSSD relevant. Perhaps a rebranding incorporating new peripheral values like multiculturalism, social progressivism and environmentalism could still be decisive.

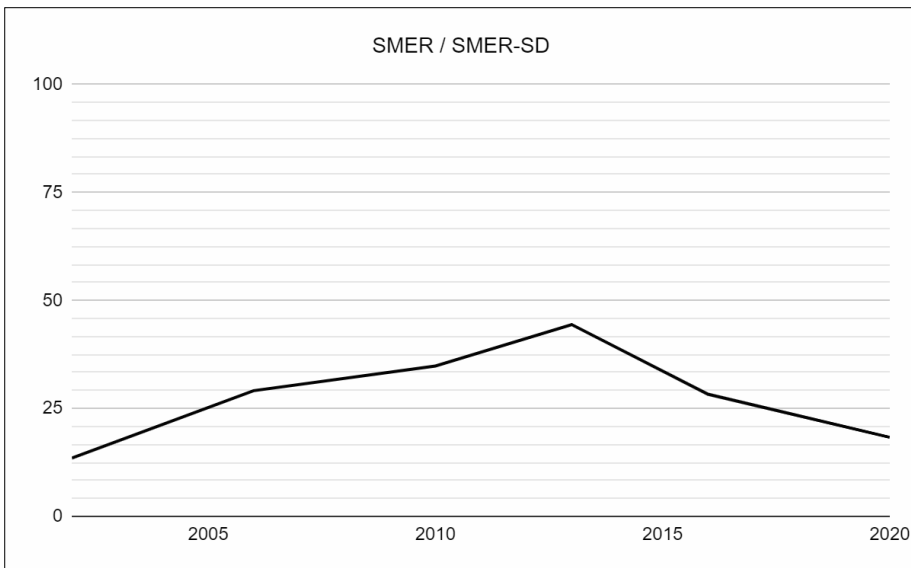
As is true of many other social-democratic parties in Europe, ČSSD includes a small faction pushing for party renewal towards those issues (Šaradín & Eichler, 2023). The analysis that follows will shed some light on whether a victory of

the liberal-left faction within the ČSSD might make the party more successful electorally.

In Slovakia, the party system has never achieved stability comparable with that in neighbouring Czechia and the situation remains complex.

While Robert Fico and his party, Smer-SD, have occupied a hegemonic role on the left of the political spectrum for most of the country's contemporary history, centre-right conservative parties have mostly failed to institutionalise. The KDH Christian-democrats have perhaps been the most successful example of party institutionalisation. Thanks to an established social base, they are one of the most enduring parties in the Slovak political scene (Rybář & Spáč, 2020). However, unlike the Czech ODS, KDH has never managed to attract more than 20% of voters, sharing the ideological camp with more ephemeral entrepreneurial parties and celebrity-based electoral vehicles.

**Figure 3:**  
**Share of votes of the main centre-left party in Slovakia**

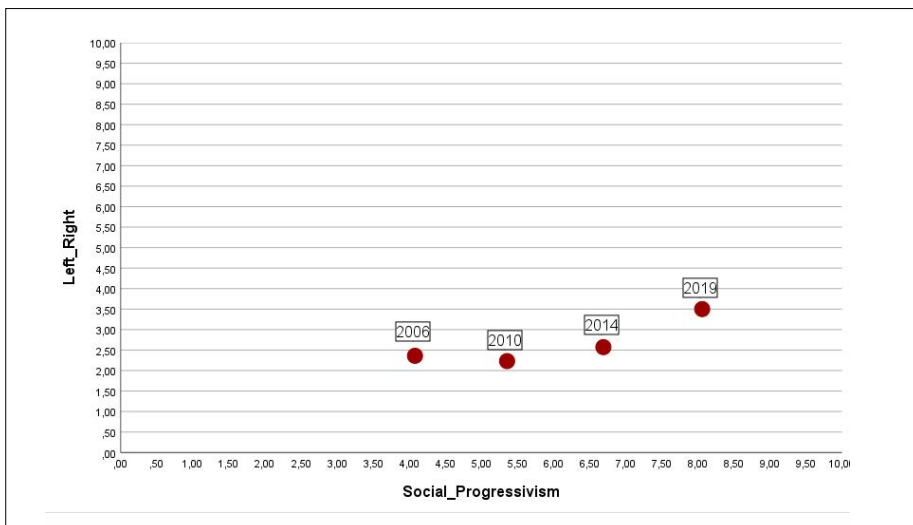


Source: IFES Election Guide

The party systems of the two countries do have some similarities. For instance, Smer-SD's electoral misfortunes began around the same time as the ČSSD collapse in the early 2010s. Coincidentally, those were also the years in which the party moved towards more conservative and right-wing social and economic positions (Figure 4). The Chapel Hill Survey and the literature both explain that shift to the centre as the same as the one that characterised the other centre-left parties in Europe. Authors have noted that, for the 2016 election, Smer-SD cam-

paingning predominantly, if not exclusively, on a nationalistic and anti-refugee platform (Stojarová, 2016; Walter, 2019). This led its traditional social base to vote for parties that had always had anti-immigration as their main priority (Stojarová, 2016; Walter, 2019). The corruption scandals linked to the party leader, Fico, were instead identified as more idiosyncratic causes of the decline in Smer-SD's popularity between 2016 and 2019. In turn, Smer-SD's misfortune boosted the performance of entrepreneurial parties running on anti-corruption platforms (Haughton et al., 2022; Marušiak, 2017; Zvada, 2023). The interplay between all these factors eventually led to Smer-SD being ousted from government in 2020.

**Figure 4:**  
**Smer-SD diachronic shift on left-right and conservatism-progressivism axes**



Source: Chapel Hill Survey, 2002-2019

As in the majority of Western countries, the shift towards a more economically centrist position and the increased saliency of the immigration issue in the party's manifesto gave space for a new party to emerge, Hlas-SD, which also claimed to represent social democracy. However, Hlas-SD never embraced the environmentalist and socially progressive values characterising other rebranded social-democratic parties in Western and Eastern Europe (Zvada, 2023). Instead, it opted to differentiate itself from Smer-SD mainly by providing a more institutional and technocratic leadership style, in contrast to Fico's increasingly populist and radical approach (Učeň, 2023). This study provides evidence as to whether this choice could have been an electoral liability.

## 4.2 First Layer in Slovakia: Liberal Values, Multiculturalism and Left-Wing Attitudes

As is standard procedure when examining the validity of theoretical concepts, a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted to test whether a latent 'left-wing' variable, based on Bobbio's minimal definition, could be identified in respondents' answers in surveys on the four items: Welfare (Q241), Public (Q107), Equality (Q106) and Self-Identification (Q240).

In the 2018 wave of surveys conducted in Slovakia, the models did not produce acceptable values according to the chi-square test of model fit (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) or RMSEA (Rutkowski & Svetina, 2017). A better fit was produced by the model of 2022. However, in neither wave did the items composing the model load the latent variable with scores higher than the generally accepted threshold of 0.4 (Kim et al., 2016).<sup>7</sup>

Similar results characterised the items chosen to construct the latent variable of multiculturalism. While the model fit perfectly in 2018 and 2022, the factor loading was below the threshold. Only liberalism passed both the model fits (although with RMSEA in 2022 it was slightly above the very conservative threshold of 0.05) and single factor loading.

The weak CFA results indicate that scoring highly on the proxy items does not necessarily imply correspondence with the theoretical concept of 'left-wing' and 'multiculturalism'. Nonetheless, clustering was still conducted. It was still possible that grouping respondents based on their attitudes on the selected dimensions would still lead to significantly different and generally homogenous groups.

Some clusters resulting from the two-step clustering procedures were re-named. For instance, the cluster comprising only respondents exhibiting 'left-wing' as the majoritarian response on the four items was labelled 'Left'. The same procedure was applied for 'Multicultural' and 'Liberal'. However, in some of the clusters, a minority of their components still expressed 'Centre' or 'Right-wing' tendencies on some of the items, explaining the difference in homogeneity levels reported in Tables 5, 6, and 7. When no cluster was characterised by most respondents having the highest scores on all items, then the analysis was dropped for that concept (Liberal values / Multiculturalism / Left-wing attitudes). For instance, the 'Multicultural' cluster in Slovakia in 2018 was not operationalised since people with purely multicultural attitudes were minorities in at least one of the items of each cluster.

**Table 5:**  
**Cluster size and composition in Slovakia**

Country	Slovakia 2018			Slovakia 2022		
	Left	Liberal	Multicult.	Left	Liberal	Multicult.
Cluster						
Size %	14.40%	24.40%	x	13.80%	25.80%	10.30%
Size N.	206	350	x	166	310	124
Homogen.	71.70%	78.30%	x	81.10%	81.10%	85.20%
Weighted	10.32%	19.10%	x	11.19%	20.92%	8.77%

Source: The author

As shown in Table 5, respondents grouped within the Left cluster were a minority of the total surveyed population, with roughly only 1 out of 10 respondents. Its size remained stable from 2018 to 2022, showing no significant value shift in Left attitudes. The number of people in the Liberal cluster, roughly double those in the Left, also remained unchanged between waves.

The following step involved observing how much overlap there was between the clusters. Each respondent was labelled '1' on a dummy variable 'D. Left' if they belonged to the 'Left' cluster and '0' if they belonged to any other cluster. The same was done for the other two models. The 'D. Left' and 'D. Liberal' variables were then aggregated, and respondents scoring '2' were grouped into a new variable called 'Left-Liberals'. The final number of people in this latter group was just a few dozen, composing between 2.5% and 3.5% of the original sample. This showed that committed left-wing individuals characterised by a progressive outlook on social values barely existed in the country. The number of respondents belonging to the 'Left-Multicultural' cluster was even lower.

**Table 6:**  
**Overlap cluster size in Slovakia**

Country	Slovakia 2018		Slovakia 2022	
	Left-Lib	Left-Multi	Left-Lib	Left-Multi
Cluster				
Size %	4.50%	x	3.20%	0.80%
Size N.	64	x	38	10
Homogen.	75.00 %	x	81.10%	83.15%
Weighted	3.37%	x	2.59%	0.66%

Source: The author

Subsequently, a more lax and thus broader definition of liberal individuals was considered, labelling as a Liberal cluster all those that did not show a majority of respondents expressing illiberal attitudes in either of the four items rather than considering only those in which the majority of respondents expressed liberal attitudes. The results show that of the 14.4% of respondents in the Left cluster in 2018, 3.2% expressed mixed views on social values, and 4.5% had progressive views. The remaining half had some conservative views on abortion, homosexuality, divorce or sexual freedom, or on more than one of these issues. The situation did not change in 2022, with half of Left-clustered respondents being characterised by conservative views.

**Table 7:**  
**Overlap-cluster size in Slovakia**

Country	Slovakia 2018		Slovakia 2022	
	Left-Broad Lib	Left-Broad Multi	Left-Broad Lib	Left-Broad Multi
Cluster				
Size %	7.70%	x	6.30%	3.10%
Size N.	110	x	75	37
Homogen.	69.94%	x	74.20%	92.60%
Weighted	5.39%	x	4.67%	2.87%
Overlap with Moderate	3.20%	x	3.10%	2.03%
Overlap with Liberal	4.50%	x	3.20%	0.80%

Source: The author

For a final assessment on whether people in the Liberal, Left, or Multicultural clusters were significantly likely also to overlap, a Chi-Square test was performed between the models' nominal clusters. None of the results was statistically significant, thus underlining the fact that being among the most socially progressive does not necessarily translate to being among the most accepting of foreigners or those with the most left-wing views.

### 4.3 First Layer in Czechia: Liber-al Values, Multiculturalism and Left-Wing Attitudes

The outcomes of the CFAs on the Czech values surveys were similar to those obtained for Slovakia; in other words, they were too weak to pass the conventional threshold. So, the conclusion we can draw from the CFAs are the same as those inferred for Slovakia.

The 'Left' clusters of 2018 and 2022 were smaller relative to the total sample sizes and generally less homogenous than their Slovak counterpart. On the other hand, the 'Liberal' and 'Multicultural' ones were considerably larger. As in Slovakia, cluster size was not significantly transformed in the four-year interval between the two surveys.

Table 8:  
Cluster side and composition in Czechia

Country	Czechia 2018			Czechia 2022		
Clusters	Left	Liberal	Multicult.	Left	Liberal	Multicult.
Size %	9.50%	35.50%	19.70%	10.60%	34.10%	25.90%
Size N.	167	544	273	127	409	311
Homogen.	67.30%	82.70%	87.00%	65.95%	94.00%	68.11%
Weighted	6.39%	29.30%	17.13%	6.90%	32.05%	17.64%

Country	Czechia 2018		Czechia 2022	
Clusters	Left-Lib	Left-Multi	Left-Lib	Left-Multi
Size %	1.00%	2.30%	2.90%	2.80 %
Size N.	19	42	35	33
Homogen.	75.00 %	68.50%	80.00 %	67.00 %
Weighted	0.75%	1.60%	2.32%	2.22%

Source: The author

Probably due to the size of the 'Left' cluster, the groups originating from the intersection between the 'Left' and 'Liberal' and between the 'Left' and 'Multicultural' clusters were extremely small, representing lower percentages of the total population than even the Slovak ones (Table 7).

The analysis of the intersection between the 'Left' cluster and the other two, considering their broader dimensions, shows that even in Czechia, most of the 'Left' cluster members are within the 'Non-Liberal' clusters. Therefore, individuals with left-wing attitudes are less likely to be grouped in the 'Broad Multi' or 'Broad Liberal' clusters.

Table 9:  
Overlap-cluster size in Czechia<sup>a</sup>

Country	Czechia 2018		Czechia 2022	
	Left-Broad Lib	Left-Broad Multi <sup>a</sup>	Left-Broad Lib	Left-Broad Multi
Cluster				
Size %	2.80%	2.30%	5.00%	4.80%
Size N.	53	42	60	58
Homogen.	76.69%	68.50%	82.75%	84.08%
Weighted	2.15%	1.60%	4.12%	4.03%
Overlap with Moderate	1.70%	2.30%	2.10%	2.80%
Overlap with Liberal	1.00%	2.30%	2.90%	2.00%

Source: The author

#### 4.4 Second layer: The Socio-Demographic Base

Analysis of the 'Value' dimension showed how, in both Czechia and Slovakia, people with left-wing tendencies were in the minority and were less likely to have progressive views on social values. This suggests that political parties that embrace more left-wing and progressive policies might not find fertile ground in either country. Suppose, however, that there were an overlap between the first and second layers of a political cleavage. In this case, its adoption by a political party may be more accessible, thus reducing the costs associated with party renewal.

Binary logistic regressions were used to test the linkage of the two dimensions, values and social groups.<sup>10</sup> The dependent variable used was whether or not the respondent belonged to the 'Left', 'Liberal', 'Multicultural', 'Left-broad-liberal' or 'Left-broad-multicultural' cluster, while the main socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were used as independent variables, as listed in Table 10.

Table 10:  
Socio-demographic independent variables

WVS/EVS item	Dimension	Label	Scale (recoded)
X003R	Age cohort	Age recoded (sic intervals)	No recoding
Q288R/ X047E	Income	Income level (recoded in deciles)	No recoding
Q289/F025 + Q173/F034	Religion	Religious denomination (Dummy atheist/Catholic) + religious person	0: Atheist 1: Non-religious 2: Religious + no denomination 3: Catholic + non religious 4: Catholic + religious
Q275/ X025A_01	Education	Highest education level [ISCED 2011]	No recoding
H_URBRURAL	Rural	Urban-rural	No recoding
Q250/ E235	Abstract Dem Sup	How important is having a democratic political system	No recoding

Source: The author

Another series of logistic regressions had the respondent's profession as the independent variable.<sup>11 12</sup> For some years, most literature embraced the idea that contemporary social heterogeneity had blurred the association between class and party affiliation. However, some studies indicate that this was probably a country-dependent phenomenon, which could have had more to do with parties' platforms than the blurring of class lines (Evans & Tilley, 2012; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014). Moreover, the emergence of populist radical right parties has shown that a class perspective on party politics can still provide some valuable insight (Kurer, 2020; Oesch, 2008; Simon & Steve, 2016). My goal was to test whether belonging to the working class in Czechia or Slovakia is still associated with a higher likelihood of supporting either ČSSD or Smer-SD. Previous attempts have found little support for this thesis in Czechia (Havlík & Voda, 2018), but found the existence of labour-based preference for Smer-SD in Slovakia in the early 2010s (Spáč, 2012).

Table 11:  
Professional group independent variables

Category	Profession	WVS (Rec. Dummy) Q281	EVS item (Rec. Dummy) X035
Manager	Bank manager, government official, union leader etc.	2→1 Other→0	03-10→1 Other→0
Professional / technician	Professor, lab technician, artist etc.	1→1 Other→0	20-39→1 Other→0
Urban worker / service	Secretary, office manager, salesperson, store clerk etc.	3/4/5→1 Other→0	40-59→1 Other→0
Trades worker	Electrician, metalworker etc.	6/7→1 Other→0	70-89→1 Other→0
Unskilled	Cleaner, factory worker, porter etc.	8/9→1 Other→0	90-99→1 Other→0

Source: The author

Table 12:  
Value-clusters Slovakia

Items	Left	Liberal	Multi	Left-Lib	Left-Multi
Age 2018	0.299***	-0.188***	x	0.080	0.073
Age 2022	0.061	-0.153	-0.233*	-0.008	0.199
Income 2018	0.049	0.016	x	-0.009*	-0.179
Income 2022	-0.291***	-0.098	-0.127	-0.284***	-0.062
Religion 2018	0.246*	-0.377***	x	0.335	0.520
Religion 2022	0	-0.386***	-0.053	0.040	0.196
Education 2018	0.006	0.273*	x	0.133	0.357
Education 2022	-0.156	0.040	0.051	-0.119	-0.164
Rural 2018	x	x	x	x	x
Rural 2022	-0.293	-0.039	-0.308	-0.183	0.263
Dem. 2018	0.092	0.022	x	0.198*	0.294
Dem. 2022	0.002	0.058	0.257***	X	x <sup>13</sup>

\* p<0.50 \*\* p<0.10 \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: The author

There is no constant significant predictor across the two survey waves for the Czech 'Left' cluster (Table 12). In 2018, older respondents were more likely to be present within the cluster, while in 2022, income appears to be a more robust

and more significant indicator, with lower income being positively associated with in-group clustering.

If we cluster the respondents based on their attitude to social values, religion negatively and significantly correlates with membership in the 'Liberal' cluster in both 2018 and 2022. The last significant variable is income, which is negatively correlated with inclusion in the 'Left-Liberal (Broad)' cluster; this suggests that lower-income individuals are more likely to share non-conservative values and still maintain an egalitarian view of the state and democracy. A respondent's profession, as categorised in the present study, is also not correlated with specific cluster membership (Table 13). The only exception was unskilled workers in the 2022 World Values Survey, who were significantly less likely to be within the 'Liberal' cluster.

**Table 13:**  
**Profession clusters Slovakia**

Item	Left	Liberal	Multi	Left-Lib	Left-Multi <sup>14</sup>
Manager 2018	0.499	0.220	X	-0.302	1.526
Manager 2022	0.118	-0.511	0.134	0.201	X
Professional 2018	0.322	0.176	X	0.395	1.121
Professional 2022	0.021	-0.031	-0.146	0.492	X
Service 2018	0.291	0.071	X	0.582	1.344
Service 2022	0.121	-0.449	-0.513	0.403	X
Trade 2018	0.448	-0.306	X	0.410	1.147
Trade 2022	0.426	-0.552	-0.607	0.732	X
Unskilled 2018	-0.166	-0.524	X	-0.002	0.288
Unskilled 2022	0.385	-1.119***	-1.043	1.208	X
* p<0.50 ** p<0.10 *** p<0.01					

Source: The author

Table 14:  
Values-clusters Czechia 2018<sup>15</sup>

Item	Left	Liberal	Multi	Left-Lib	Left-Multi
Age 2018	0.255***	-0.327***	X	0.071	0.017
Age 2022	-0.019	-0.177***	-0.151***	-0.015	-0.041
Income 2018	-0.066	-0.011	X	-0.062	0.010
Income 2022	-0.237***	-0.053	-0.002	-0.275***	-0.344***
Religion 2018	-0.016	-0.228***	X	-0.232	0.231
Religion 2022	0.217***	-0.254***	0.123	0.087	0.150
Education 2018	-0.209*	0.128*	X	-0.190	-0.217
Education 2022	-0.178*	0.098*	0.001	-0.052	-0.002
Rural 2018	X	X	X	X	-0.010
Rural 2022	-0.174	-0.247	-0.596***	0.056	-0.452
Dem 2018	-0.002	-0.004	X	-0.025	-0.010
Dem 2022	-0.052	0.127***	0.054	X	X

\* p<0.50 \*\* p<0.10 \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: The author

Many similarities can be found between Czechia's results (Table 14) and the outcomes of regressions conducted on the Slovak sample. In the Slovak data, age was the main predictor of inclusion in the 'Left' cluster in 2018, but was replaced by income in 2022. Belonging to a religious denomination (Catholic) significantly correlated with being in the 'Left' cluster. Religion was instead negatively correlated with the 'Liberal' cluster in both 2018 and 2022, mirroring the results for Czechia. Although age was also negatively correlated with inclusion in the 'Multicultural' cluster, the third logistic model's most significant result was the 'Rural' variable, which, was negatively and significantly correlated with inclusion. Quantitative studies conducted in other countries have also shown that urban dwellers exhibit, on average, a more multicultural mindset (Huijsmans et al., 2021; Schoene, 2019); my research shows that Czechia can be included in this widespread trend. As in Slovakia, income negatively correlates with inclusion in the 'Left-Liberal (Broad)' cluster, but only in 2022.

In Czechia, both trades/factory and unskilled workers were more likely to hold illiberal views, but unlike in Slovakia, this relationship holds for 2018 but not in 2022 (Table 15). As far as the other professions are concerned, there does not seem to be any significant link between occupation and cluster values.

Table 15:  
**Profession clusters Czechia 2018**

Item	Left	Liberal	Multi	Left-Lib	Left-Multi
Manager 2018	0.238	-0.837	X	1.406	0.802
Manager 2022	-1.092	0.26	-0.401	0.658	-0.163
Professional 2018	-0.004	-0.441	X	0.413	0.211
Professional 2022	-0.576	0.346	-0.376	0.397	-0.345
Service 2018	0.097	-0.258	X	1.169	0.767
Service 2022	-0.141	-0.034	-0.474	0.483	0.115
Trade 2018	0.447	-0.778***	X	1.361	1.020
Trade 2022	0.627	-0.286	-0.653	1.631	0.616
Unskilled 2018	0.412	-1.035***	X	0.511	0.811
Unskilled 2022	1.195*	-0.411	-0.442	2.079	1.072

\* p<0.50 \*\* p<0.10 \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: The author

## 4.5 Third layer: The Political/Organisational Dimension

The socio-economic groups associated with the clusters in the previous section are now confronted with those associated with preferences for the social democratic parties under observation (ČSSD, Smer-SD, Hlas-SD), and in the Czech case also alongside those of ČSSD main competitors (ANO 2011 and Pirates). The comparison was made to assess whether a party's rebranding to encompass liberal or left-wing principles could have a negative impact on its existing support. To this end, a new series of binomial logistic regressions was carried out.

Table 16:  
Results Czechia 2018 and 2022

Item	ANO 2018	ANO 2022	ČSSD 2018	ČSSD 2022	KSČM 2018	Pirates 2022 <sup>16</sup>
Age	0.240***	0.280	0.363***	0.330	0.384***	-0.641***
Income	0.023	0.001	0.067	-0.105	-0.065	0.031
Religion	-0.040	-0.032	-0.131	-0.022	-0.249***	-0.106
Education	-0.208***	-0.013	0.025	-0.014	-0.39*	-0.077
Rural	X	0.095	X	-0.083	X	0.388
Dem	-0.019	-0.052	-0.024	-0.084	-0.154***	0.163*
* p<0.50 ** p<0.10 *** p<0.01						

Source: The author

Age was a variable significantly correlated with being a supporter of ANO 2011, KSČM and ČSSD. This indicates that the three parties compete for the same age group despite their different ideological profiles (centre, left, centre-left). As seen in the previous section, age is negatively correlated with the 'Liberal' cluster, showing that if ČSSD were to adopt progressive values in its messaging it might harm its electability in the short term. However, promoting egalitarian policies might gain the support of people in the lower-income deciles without antagonising the party's existing social base. Thus, taking a more radical-left position might be a less costly strategy.

Education was negatively associated with the 'Left' cluster. Still, the loss of formally more educated people should not impact the existing power base of the party nor favour one of its main competitors, ANO 2011, since highly educated voters tend not to support the populist party either (Table 16).

Table 17:  
Results Czechia 2018 and 2022

Item	ANO 2018	ANO 2022	ČSSD 2018	ČSSD 2022	KSČM 2018	Pirates 2022
Manager	0.101	1.897***	0.422	0.693	-0.011	-1.261
Professional	0.409	1.472*	0.632	0.734	-0.118	-1.092
Service	0.560*	1.856***	0.604	1.283	-0.090	-0.775
Trade	0.571*	2.081***	0.552	1.467	0.554	-1.306***
Unskilled	0.303	1.516*	0.868*	1.579	0.631	-1.101*
* p<0.50 ** p<0.10 *** p<0.01						

Source: The author

Unlike with clusters, profession was generally correlated with support for a particular party (Table 17). However, it is harder to draw conclusions about class support from the results of logistic regressions. Voting for ANO 2011 in 2018 was significantly associated with working in trade or service. This finding aligns with Heinisch and Saxonberg (2021), who employed the same methodology to explore the link between professions, values and populist support in Czechia in the results of the 2016 elections. The researchers included an extra category, 'Self Employed', which was also found to be correlated, showing even more heterogeneous support for the populist-centrist party. The logistic regression results for 2022 indicate that in that year ANO 2011 drew support from respondents of all job types, while there was not a specific category of reference for ČSSD, which lost the correlation with unskilled workers it enjoyed in 2018.

**Table 18:**  
**Results Slovakia 2018 and 2022**

Item	Smer-SD 2018	Smer-SD 2022	Hlas-SD 2022
Age	0.399***	0.368***	0.237***
Income	0.082	-0.015	0.114
Religion	0.185	0.221	-0.050
Education	-0.311***	-0.061	-0.077
Rural	X	0.311	0.381
Dem	0.063	-0.022	0.006

\* p<0.50 \*\* p<0.10 \*\*\* p<0.01

Source: The author.

As in the case of ČSSD in Czechia, in Slovakia, supporters of the two parties under observation tended to be older (Table 18). Older cohorts are associated with more conservative-illiberal views (Table 12). A more ideological emphasis on left-wing values might gain the support of Catholics and low-income households. Still, even in this case, embracing progressive values would inevitably lose the support of these new potential sources of voters on top of those elderly people who are now part of the electoral base of the two parties.

Table 19:  
Results Slovakia 2018 and 2022

Item	Smer-SD 2018	Smer-SD 2022	Hlas-SD 2022
Manager	-0.164	2.067	1.171
Professional	0.293	1.637	1.230
Service	0.552*	1.615	1.567*
Trade	0.921***	1.832	1.715*
Unskilled	0.612	2.465*	1.099
* p<0.50 ** p<0.10 *** p<0.01			

Source: The author

## 5. Conclusion

My study began by examining whether the decline of centre-left parties in Czechia and Slovakia could be linked to a dealignment between these parties and their traditional voter base caused by their adoption of a more centrist view. This argument has been used to explain other instances of party decline, especially in Western Europe. From my results, the decline of Smer-SD appears to align with this theory; however, the fall of ČSSD in Czechia must be explained by different factors.

The research questions of my study were about whether Hlas-SD, Smer-SD, and ČSSD could benefit electorally from a rebranding that embrace more left-wing, and liberal stances. After all, such a strategy seemed to have worked for other European social-democratic parties (such as Levice, PSOE, FS, PVDA, and PD). I looked for an answer to these questions by focusing on the demand side for such a rebranding. Clusters of respondents from the World Values Survey were estimated, identifying those with positive attitudes to left-wing, multicultural, and progressive values. The first challenge for a Czech or Slovak party seeking to engage these groups of voters is their small size, with only about 10-15% of respondents in either country holding left-wing views. Additionally, the clusters do not overlap: for instance, in Czechia, although 25% of respondents support liberal and multicultural values, people holding left-wing views are usually found in the remaining 75% of the sample.

Analysing the social groups currently supporting centre-left parties and their value orientations, neither national context shows a significant link with any specific social class. Limited support comes from trades and service workers for Hlas-SD and unskilled workers for Smer-SD in Slovakia. Similarly, socio-demographic factors do not seem to play a significant role in support for ČSSD,

while Hlas-SD and Smer-SD appear more favoured by older voters in Slovakia. Although, at first glance, this might seem problematic for ČSSD, it also means that rebranding would be less costly since it would not alienate its voter base, as the party does not have a clearly defined one.

The findings suggest that ČSSD is at a crossroads: moving further left could attract religious and low-income voters. At the same time, a shift toward liberal social values would likely alienate religious and elderly voters but appeal to younger, educated people. A mix of both strategies could attract lower-income voters but fail to mobilise other demographic groups. In Slovakia, the potential for left-progressive rebranding is even more limited. Moving left could attract lower-income voters, but a shift toward liberal values would alienate religious and elderly voters, which constitute the core of their current base. As a result, adopting progressive values could alienate existing voters without evident gains.

Overall, it would appear that rebranding towards the left might benefit these social-democratic parties. Still, a progressive shift might be unnecessary or damaging, thus validating only a more restrictive interpretation of what a rebranding should entail. In other words, I found evidence to support the argument that re-alignment might be a valid strategy for struggling centre-left parties. Still, the benefits of progressive rebranding are context dependent.

However, this does not necessarily mean that Slovakia is destined to be served politically by only socially conservative left-wing parties or liberal third-way alternatives. First, demand-side studies cannot determine outcomes alone; political parties can also influence public opinion and preferences on the demand side (Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2020). Second, endogenous events can change the salience of issues and even affect societal values, and one such event might make a left-liberal shift more appealing to vote-maximising politicians (Akaliyski et al., 2024; Borghetto & Russo, 2018; Sipma & Berning, 2021; Traber et al., 2017).

Finally, there is a difference between the national decline of the left and how the left has been conceptualised in this study. It's possible that the clustering did not capture many people who identify as left-wing despite not prioritising economic redistribution or opposing private enterprises. This group might overlap more with the liberal cluster than has been observed here. In other words, a party campaigning on liberal values while emphasising what in the countries are generally perceived as left policies could still succeed. However, how 'left-wing' that party or those policies would then be is a matter of debate.

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## Endnote:

- 1 Throughout this work "Populism" is used in its ideational definition (à la Mudde) rather than as a discursive articulation (à la Laclau).
- 2 The following sections present further insights into the concepts of 'social liberalism' and 'socially progressive values'. For the sake of clarity, these terms are presented in a simplified manner, aligned with a set of values, including pro-choice stances on abortion, the expansion of LGBT rights, sexual freedom, and divorce.
- 3 Some would rather treat Left and Right as 'flexible categories which mean roughly whatever a certain set of key actors or a statistically significant sample of a given population says that they mean' (White, 2011). While the jury is still out about which of the two scholarly traditions

is right, identifying the core essence of the dyad; would provide a more solid benchmark for the comparative goal of the present research.

- 4 For a summary of the different tenets proposed.
- 5 This idea of the 'Left' being associated with 'rectification' is further supported by the philosophical explorations of Lukes (2003) and Hirschman (1991) on the subject.
- 6 Exploratory factor analysis would also show that multicultural and environmental items do not load the same latent dimension as the items used here to capture liberal attitudes, further corroborating the choice of observing them as separate dimensions.
- 7 EFA and MSA tests were also conducted, confirming the negative results of the CFA.
- 8 Just as with Slovakia, Chi-square analysis showed that no correlations were found between different cluster members.
- 9 'Multicultural Cluster' and 'Broad Multicultural' are fully overlapping in 2018.
- 10 While OLS is also used for similar purposes, in works with similar research subjects, the two methods should provide very similar results (Pohlman & Leitner, 2003).
- 11 The idea of also adding students and the unemployed to the list had to be abandoned given the high collinearity between these two categories, and between students and urban/service workers.
- 12 While this model only takes into consideration the profession, future research could further refine this approach by combining profession with employment stability (long-term vs short-term contract, full vs part-time employment etc.), a research endeavour which has proved quite fruitful in the Southern European context (Corbetta & Colloca, 2013). Another direction in which this analysis could be led is subdividing the profession by sector of employment (Knutsen, 2005; Tepe, 2012).
- 13 Following the rule of 1 in 10, one variable was dropped to avoid overfitting the model.
- 14 Model overfitted in 2022: not enough observation within the intersectional cluster.
- 15 Everything was tested for collinearity.
- 16 Šaradín and Eichler argue that the more liberal part of the ČSSD traditional electorate shifted their support to the Pirate Party in the period 2018-2021.

# Populism and Discontent: A Spatial Analysis of the 2023 Czech Presidential Election<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

While populism has kept the attention of scholars for years, only a handful of elections have presented as clear-cut a distinction between populism and anti-populism as the face-off between Andrej Babiš and Petr Pavel in the 2023 Czech presidential elections. To investigate the factors behind the electoral support for the populist candidate Babiš, we first discuss populist and anti-populist approaches and connect them to the emerging literature on the geography of discontent. Then, we analyse census data at the municipality level using two regression models: the ordinary least squares and spatial error methods. The spatial error regression variant is helpful when analysing aggregate data as it evaluates the spatial clustering of residuals. Overall, we conclude that Babiš was most successful in regions marked by socio-economic deprivation and social capital deficiencies. Consequently, based on the overarching theoretical framework and empirical findings, we suggest several implications that could help mitigate political discontent in the future.

Keywords: Czechia; populism; anti-populism;  
geography of discontent; spatial analysis

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## 1. Introduction

Populism has become a familiar feature of Europe's electoral processes, with populist parties firmly established in the politics of many countries (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Bergman, 2019). Recent elections, such as the presidential run-offs in Austria and France, show how populism can influence majoritarian elections, even in systems designed to reduce radicalism and extremes by including two rounds of voting (see Gavenda & Umit, 2016; Startin, 2022). Consequently, the rise of populism has prompted an anti-populist response aimed at defending representative liberal democracy and traditional mediated politics (Moffitt, 2018; Hamdaoui, 2022; Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022).

Although the interplay between the rise of populism and its spatial dimensions has recently become the subject of debate (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2020; Pike et al., 2023), the strategies employed in direct electoral contests between populism and anti-populism are still sparsely studied, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (Suchánek & Hasman, 2024). We took for analysis the example of the previously successful populist Andrej Babiš and his unsuccessful showing in the 2023 Czech presidential election to illustrate the clash between populism and anti-populism and gain insights into the reasons for the persistence and fall of populism.

While much has been said and written about the electoral success of Babiš's party, ANO (e.g., Maškarinec, 2019; Voda & Havlík, 2021) and the resulting democratic backsliding (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018), to our knowledge, only the work of Bláha (2023) has yet covered Babiš's presidential run in 2023. Given the current lack of studies and the perceived importance of presidential elections in Czechia, with the war in Ukraine being a key topic of discussion between the two candidates, this study is important to many. We explore the relationships between the socio-economic, demographic and geographical attributes of the electorate and support for Babiš at the municipality level. This approach allows us to investigate how a populist candidate could be challenged through anti-populist strategies and how specific factors, in particular the spatial dimension, affected the result. Analysing and reporting on this latter relationship and thus contributing to the emerging literature on the geography of discontent and populism versus anti-populism cleavage was the main goal of the study.

In the following sections, we first examine the context of Babiš in Czech elections. Next, we explore connections between the populist and anti-populist cleavage and its potential spatial dimension, relating this to the geography of discontent. The 2023 Czech presidential election involved an unconventional application of an anti-populist strategy, distinct from the traditional political mainstream. This unusual perspective provides new insights into this type of electoral contest.

## 2. The populist and anti-populist clash in Czechia

Andrej Babiš has been the focus of both media and scholarly attention for over a decade, as he first entered Czech politics in 2013 with his ‘fresh-looking’ party ANO 2011 (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens; *ano* means ‘yes’ in Czech). Assessing the positions of ANO and Babiš on an imagined political compass is somewhat tricky, as both have undergone numerous changes and ideological shifts in a short period of time (Cirhan & Kopecký, 2020). While Babiš has repeatedly stated his intention to run ANO the same way he manages his commercial empire, i.e., on the business-firm party model (Just & Charvát, 2016), ANO can perhaps best be described as a technocratic or centrist populist party (see Havlík & Voda, 2018; Bušítková & Guasti, 2019; Bendl et al., 2020). Babiš’s strategies have changed over time between right-wing and left-wing, as have his tactics to maximise votes from different parts of the electorate. Thus, here the term ‘populism’ refers to ideological fuzziness and a call to prioritise the defence of the people against elites over traditional economic conflict. The rise of populism – especially in Central and Eastern Europe, though a similar phenomenon is to be found in the West – is linked with the failure of traditional left-wing politics (Snegovaya, 2024). A constant feature of Babiš’s speeches is to attack elites; for him, they are represented by corrupt ‘traditional’ politicians (Bušítková & Guasti, 2019), a ‘cartel’ of post-communist mainstream politicians and the media (Dębiec, 2023) or powers within the structures of the European Union (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022). As set out in this conceptual framework, the type of populism represented by Babiš and his ANO party has gained an essential position in Czech politics, characterized by its evolving stance over time (Zulianello & Larsen, 2021).

Babiš first entered the cabinet after a successful national election in 2013 and this generated an early anti-populist response (see, e.g., Cirhan & Kopecký, 2020). The first reaction opposed each of the typical characteristics of populism by defending liberal democracy and ‘traditional politics’ (Kim, 2020), and rejecting chaotic governance which promised rash solutions (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022). Between 2013 and 2021, these opposing parties considered that the threat of populism came from Andrej Babiš and his allies: Tomio Okamura the leader of the radical populist right SPD, and Miloš Zeman the pro-Russian president. After a series of protests against Babiš and Zeman, the pressure for anti-populist collaboration increased and resulted in two party alliances which set about defeating populism, particularly as represented by Babiš: first was Spolu (‘Together’), comprising the right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the conservative TOP 09 and the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL), and second was PirStan (‘Pirates and Mayors’), an amalgam of the Pirate Party and the regionalist Mayors and Independents (STAN). Gradually, as the campaign leading up to the parliamentary elections unfolded (mainly with personal attacks on Babiš), the confrontation be-

tween ANO and its allies and the two new coalitions came down to a clash between populist and anti-populist approaches, fulfilling perceptions of this cleavage as discursive (Stavrakakis, 2018) or performative (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022) and emphasising the departure from the traditional characterisation of politics as a struggle between left and right. This trend corresponded with shifts in the structure of cleavage in the CEE region – for example, the diminishing relevance of the left-right scale (e.g., Snegovaya, 2024), and, at the same time, mirrors the latest dynamics in European politics, where populist rhetoric against elites is growing (e.g., Hartikainen, 2021; Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022). In Czechia, these shifts are observable in the continuing reconfiguration of the party system, initially based on strong left-wing and right-wing parties, but now transformed into new shapes.

In 2021, Babiš failed to repeat the decisive victories he had achieved in previous elections. Winning only 27.12% of the vote forced him to leave his prime ministerial position to the SPOLU coalition. At the same election, traditional left-wing parties were pushed out of the Chamber of Deputies (e.g., Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022), as crucial parts of the left-wing agenda had been assumed by populists. After the election decline, Babiš transformed ANO into a strong opposition party that would heavily criticise the new government coalition. The conditions for this opposition were provided by a series of crises that hit the country – the Russian attack on Ukraine, economic and energy crises and a rash of protests (Michal & Guasti, 2023). Babiš repeatedly stated that he was unhappy being in opposition, and it was generally expected that he would use the opportunity as a springboard for a return to power (*‘Než být v opozici’*, 2021).

## 2.1 Andrej Babiš and the 2023 Czech presidential elections

The direct presidential election in 2023 came when Babiš had spent more than a year in opposition. During the campaign for the election, in which nine candidates participated, the political legacy of Miloš Zeman, considered a pro-Russian populist (e.g., Kopeček, 2022) became the main topic. Petr Pavel, a former NATO general and the eventual winner, notably cited Babiš, the embodiment of populism, as his foremost motivation to run, calling Babiš’s candidacy ‘a threat to the Czech Republic due to the populism he personifies’ (*‘Konec dohadům’*, 2022). Pavel styled himself as the defender of liberal democratic rules; his campaign rallying cry, ‘order and peace’, showed the contrast with the populist approach to governance, which he portrayed as chaotic and unstable. For instance, Pavel repeatedly called out Babiš for his chaotic management of the Covid-19 pandemic, which contradicted his claim to be a politician with experience (*‘Konec dohadům’*, 2022). Pavel’s slogan was an attempt to leverage his own attributes (as is common in personality voting) and underscore stability. Through the politicisation of

the careers of Zeman and Babiš, Pavel's fight against populism became the most significant element of the campaign, overshadowing other cleavages. While right-wing economist candidate Danuše Nerudová did raise economic policy issues, the absence of any left-wing candidates and the under-representation of left-wing politicians participating in the campaign generally pushed the left-right conflict to the background. Campaigning from opposition, Babiš presented himself as the defender of under-represented voter segments, recruiting mainly from the left wing but also from the radical right extra-parliamentary current (Michal & Guasti, 2023) that superseded the traditional cleavage and emphasised the newly emerged one. In the first round, Petr Pavel gained 35.4% of the vote, closely trailed by Andrej Babiš with 34.9%, thus propelling these two candidates into a run-off. Most of the seven defeated candidates called on their voters to support Petr Pavel, even providing financial aid and volunteers, and participating in Pavel's rallies. The ruling coalition parties also supported Pavel, an independent 'citizen candidate'. Conversely, the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, including populist and anti-system protest social movements, supported Babiš. Ultimately, Petr Pavel defeated Andrej Babiš by a large margin of 58.3% to 41.7%.

Although the run-off signified a clash between populism and anti-populism, certain nuances emerged that current conceptualisations might not have fully anticipated. Babiš, taking a populist stance, was nominated by a political party and structured his campaign on the experience he had gained in previous government roles. He portrayed himself as an opposition figure, emphasising his ability to find effective solutions. In contrast, Pavel's approach involved embodying the role of an anti-populist fighter. He ran as a citizen candidate detached from political parties' nomination and his political support included a broad scope of parties: from ruling actors to extra-parliamentary Social Democrats, whereas anti-populism is strongly associated with the defence of traditional politics (Wolff, 2023). It should be noted that non-partisan candidates have historically had greater success in Czech presidential elections (Kopeček 2010; 2022), which might shed light on the strategic choices made by both candidates as they sought to maximise their support.

### **3. Populism, anti-populism and the geography of discontent**

#### **3.1 Populism and anti-populism**

Populism, a political approach that divides society into a pure people and a corrupt elite (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Abts & Rummens, 2007), puts itself in the role of the real defender of the people's interests. On behalf of 'the people', populist actors

attack contemporary political representatives (Urbinati, 2014), portraying them as an embodiment of arrogance (Curini, 2020) or even evil (Eberl et al., 2023), and call to replace them by the rule of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). The populist strategy for sharing power involves joining the electoral process and targeting the current establishment (Gherghina & Soare, 2021; Hartikainen, 2021), underscoring the value of direct democracy (Caramani, 2017) and unmoderated communication with their supporters (Weyland, 2001).

Populist election campaigns portray the people as homogeneous and united (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019) and prioritise communication about 'low policies' (Ostiguy, 2017) that are widely attractive to the masses. Populist appeal occasionally draws from local history (Mouffe, 2018; Bušítková & Guasti, 2019), but underlying commonalities can also be discerned, explaining why populism has become a global zeitgeist (Mudde, 2004). Based on the history of a particular region, populism takes on diverse forms shaped by unique economic and social experiences. In Central and Eastern Europe, a radical right variant has become established, mirroring trends in Western Europe (e.g., Hanley & Vachudova, 2018). The unique post-Communist experiences of the region have given rise to technocratic (Bušítková & Guasti, 2019) and valence (Albertazzi & Zulianello, 2021) strands of populism that reflect in their policies local characteristics such as corruption and a lack of transparency. Generally, the triumph of populism is linked to discontent (Urso et al., 2023) and a sense of under-representation (Koch et al., 2023), stemming from people's perception that their interests are not adequately addressed in the 'distant' political sphere (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Fiedler et al., 2021). As such, these emotions often resonate in elections in marginalised peripheries.

Peripheral challenges wield distinct political ramifications in populist voting across regions. For instance, the asymmetrically strong electoral support for Germany's radical right populist party AfD in the eastern part of the country can be assigned to the character of the transformation that took place there in the 1990s (Arzheimer, 2009). In Italy, the ascent of the Italian League can be attributed to the enduring political sway of the North/South divide (Albertazzi & Zulianello, 2021), while in the United Kingdom, the popularity of nationalist parties is grounded in regional aspirations to independence (Masseti, 2018). Recent political developments indicate a steady increase in the influence of parties like AfD, Salvini's Lega, RN in France, and UK nationalist parties on the national stage. Yet, despite the comprehensive exploration of local, societal and economic characteristics, uncertainties persist around certain aspects and their precise impact. For instance, the political implications of the distribution of immigrants across different localities, as evidenced by the populists' electoral gains, show an incoherent picture. While a correlation between immigrant numbers and populist success has been found in Austria (Essletzbichler et al., 2021), in Germany no parallel has been detected (Hansen & Olsen, 2019). Consequently, what may be

an apparent connection between *peripheral* voting and populist success warrants reconsideration in different contexts.

As opposition to populism emerged, a political reaction took shape around a collection of more or less coherent strategies and forms that characterised populism as dangerous, yet was otherwise seen as an idea without a clear ideology (Moffitt, 2018). While the spatial dynamics of anti-populism have not received the same level of scrutiny as populism, as it develops, its operational strategies are gradually becoming more evident. Initially, the core was recruited from civil society grassroots appeals (Hamdaoui, 2022; Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022), mirroring the populist approach by entering the political realm. Further political activities depend mainly on the nature of electoral systems. In proportional elections in multiparty systems, mainstream political parties often need to downplay their ideological disparities and form coalitions to combat populism, as seen in Czechia and Hungary (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022; Scheppele, 2022). This process may involve establishing new political parties ('Minář: Chceme znovu zbláznit společnost', 2020) or absorbing anti-populist candidates into existing parties (Caruso & De Blasio, 2021). The trend leans towards campaigns targeted at populist parties or their leaders, as exemplified in Hungary against Viktor Orbán (Scheppele, 2022), or generally as efforts to safeguard liberal democracy from the threat of populism (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022).

Following the traditional terminology suggested by Lipset & Rokkan (1967), which describes the requisites of political stability and integration, the dualist logic between populism and anti-populism generates a new cleavage (see Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2019; Kitzberger, 2023). One electoral process that potentially sets the stage for a direct clash between the two poles of this cleavage is the two-round majority system, where the presence of a favoured populist candidate makes the cleavage significant in the first round and the run-off phase can trigger a showdown between populist and anti-populist candidates. It can be argued that the dynamics of the run-off battle introduce novel imperatives for them. This type of election system is automatically polarised and necessitates the pursuit of maximum votes, constructing electoral coalitions of voters based on various voting groups or localities that traditionally align with the opposing political demand. An example of such a populist-anti-populist battle was the clash between Jacques Chirac and Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002 in France. Although Le Pen's bid for president fell short at 17.79% in the run-off due to an extensive mobilisation for democracy and against political extremism (Cole, 2002), this election shows the importance of provoking the spatial and regional affiliations of populist and anti-populist voters.

These aspects provide critical insights for our research. Before we formulate our hypotheses as the foundation for the empirical model, in the following section we elaborate on the spatial aspects of populist voting.

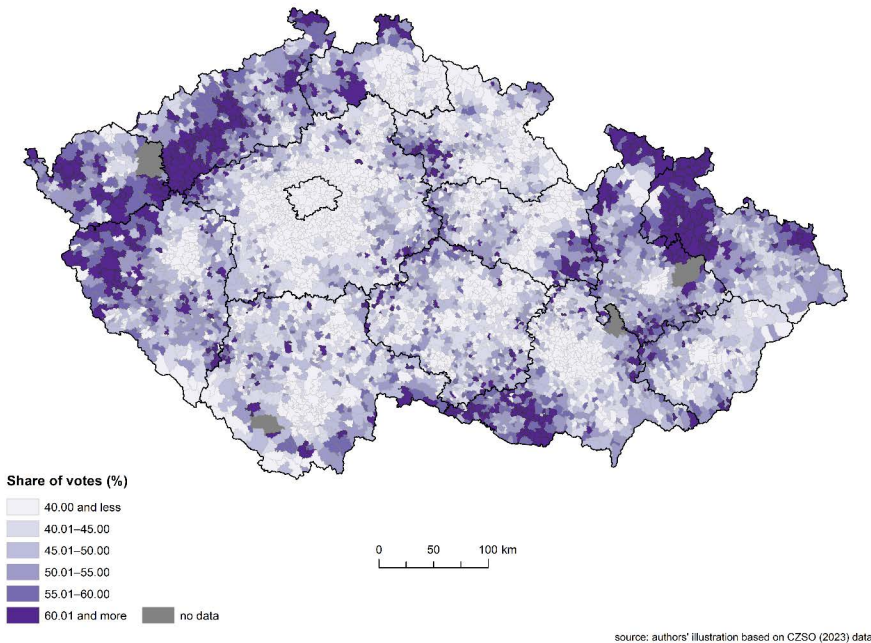
### 3.2 Populism and the geography of discontent

Elections are inherently tied to the places in which they are held (Agnew, 1987); electoral support for populist candidates often shows significant geographical heterogeneity (e.g., Agnew & Shin, 2017; Maškarinec, 2019). Therefore, analysing connections between census data and electoral outcomes by region has been essential in investigating voter behaviour (e.g., Bernard et al., 2014; Lysek & Macků, 2022). Having characterised Babiš as a populist candidate, we connect the spatial aspects of his support to the geography of discontent which has been repeatedly identified as playing a key role in the rise of populism in areas with socio-economic difficulties (Dijkstra et al., 2020; Koeppen et al., 2021; Bourdin & Torre, 2023; Urso et al., 2023).

The 'geography of discontent' refers to people's feelings of unhappiness living in places associated with socio-economic stagnation, lack of opportunities and high levels of inequality (Dijkstra et al., 2020, p. 744). It is not concerned only with conditions of 'relational' *peripherality*, but also with the spatial concentration of political responses to voters feeling 'left out' (Urso et al., 2023). Many scholars have recently argued that such feelings of discontent and political resentment (a sort of simmering anger based on a perception of not getting their fair share in an unfair system; see Cramer 2016) stemming from regional inequalities lead to a rise in anti-establishment and populist sentiment (e.g., Cerqua et al., 2022; MacKinnon et al., 2022; Pike et al., 2023). Rodríguez-Pose (2018) stresses the importance of the territorial dimension by describing the rise of populism as the 'revenge of places that do not matter'; in this sense, the leaning of relatively socio-economically deprived regions towards populism can be viewed as an act of revolt against their perceived unfavourable status, realised through the ballot box.

While populist parties have been successful at capturing the votes of people who feel hostile towards the mainstream political parties, the establishment and institutions (Broz et al., 2021), political discontent is not limited to populist responses. Disaffected voters may turn to radical right-wing parties (Arzheimer & Bernemann, 2023; Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2023) or be discouraged from voting altogether (Bourdin & Tai, 2023; Kevický & Suchánek, 2023). In Czechia, traditionally left-wing parties have also found success in the economic and geographic periphery (Voda & Pink, 2015; Lysek & Macků, 2022). We set out to study the geographical and contextual characteristics of places to account for spatially concentrated discontent and examine both its roots and consequences (see Koeppen et al., 2021). In this report, we use the term 'discontent' mainly in its 'relative' and contextual sense; we assess peripherality and any connection to the rise of populism by analysing the main socio-economic, demographic and geographical attributes of electoral areas.

**Figure 1:**  
**Electoral support for Andrej Babiš in the 2023 Czech presidential election (second round)**



Source: the authors

Figure 1 shows that voting for Babiš in his bid to become president in 2023 was spatially heterogeneous. The highest levels of support were primarily in peripheral regions, many of which can be referred to as the 'left behind' places of Czechia. Populist, far-right and communist candidates have been successful in the past in many of these constituencies (Lysek & Macků, 2022; Bláha, 2023; Suchánek & Hasman, 2023). The presidential election result is not surprising, given the populist nature of ANO and Babiš, whose electoral appeal is not built on the conventional left-right axis but rather on capturing the interest of people experiencing forms of political discontent (see Hanley & Vachudova, 2018; Bušítková & Guasti, 2019). Along the same lines, Lysek and Macků (2022, p. 271) argue that an electoral shift between traditionally leftist parties and contemporary populist parties might be occurring.

Generally, the regions that voted in the greatest numbers for Babiš were the former Sudetenland (west Bohemia and parts of south and north Moravia), sections of Silesia and the border areas between central Bohemia and the Hradec Králové, Pardubice and Vysočina regions. In contrast, socio-economically prosperous cities, such as Prague, Brno and Pilsen, and their surrounding constituencies gave most support to the anti-populist candidate, Petr Pavel. This voting pattern is generally

in line with the results of presidential elections in 2013 and 2018 (see Maškarinec, 2013; Šedo et al., 2018, respectively). Given the characteristics of places that rallied behind Zeman in previous presidential elections (he proved more popular in regions with lower rates of tertiary education and higher unemployment; see Maškarinec, 2013), it is logical to assume the existence of a long-term accumulation of discontent in certain regions. Our theoretic expectation is that the observed voting patterns in 2023 at least partially reflect the geography of discontent in Czechia.

When identifying spatial patterns, it is important to comprehend the underlying causes of any disparities. Based on previous research and considering the geographical spread of electoral support for Babiš, in the next section we set out the theoretical expectations to be tested by our empirical model. This approach aims to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons behind Babiš's defeat in the populist versus anti-populist contest.

#### 4. Data, operationalisation and methods

The inputs for our analysis were 2021 census (CZSO, 2021a) and unemployment data (MoLSA, 2021), and the results of the 2021 parliamentary (CZSO, 2021b) and the 2023 presidential elections (CZSO, 2023). Our analysis was at the municipality level, allowing for a very detailed view. Although there was a two-year gap between the census and the presidential election, the census data are highly accurate and most of the variables included in the model are not susceptible to sudden change. However, given the nature of aggregated census data, we took account of the ecological fallacy problem (Robinson, 1950) to avoid making extensive individual-level deductions based on them. To examine the share of votes for Babiš in the second round, we calibrated a model with the variables set out in Table 1.<sup>1</sup>

The proportion of people with tertiary education (Tertiary education) is a widely studied factor in political science, as areas with higher levels of education tend to shun populism (Gordon, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2020). Accordingly, we anticipated that Babiš would be shown to have had less support in municipalities with a higher proportion of individuals with tertiary education. Another variable commonly used to indicate socio-economic conditions is unemployment (Unemployment). Long-term and structural unemployment<sup>2</sup> have previously been associated with the rise of populist parties and discontent among voters (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; van Leeuwen & Vega, 2021). Accordingly, we expected a positive relationship between unemployment and support for Babiš.

To account for two possibly mutually relevant factors, we included the share of people who lived in the municipality in which they were born (Municipal natives) and the share of immigrants. Both of these factors were also used in

a study analysing the 2013 presidential elections (Maškarinec, 2013). The effect of a higher proportion of municipal natives on voting was difficult to predict. While it may indicate a satisfactory living environment in terms of social stability and community cohesion, it might also indicate that people are constrained from relocating and that the population is suffering mobility stagnation (see Wirth et al., 2016; Korčák & Netrdová, 2022). The share of immigrants was categorised into two groups (Immigrants EU and Immigrants non-EU) based on their country of origin. This was to test whether there was a relationship between the two groups, especially as migration has recently become a politically salient topic in Czechia and anti-immigrant attitudes have been mainstreamed (Wondreys, 2021). The majority of EU immigrants were Slovak, whereas non-EU immigrants were predominantly Ukrainian, Vietnamese or from Russian minority groups. While international immigrants are commonly attracted to core areas and gateway cities where they are more likely to find socio-economic prosperity (such as Prague and surrounding regions, as observed by Janská, Čermák & Wright, 2014), immigration rates in a particular area may also significantly impact the nativist and populist behaviour of voters living there as predicted by group-threat theory (Otto & Steinhardt, 2014; Dustmann et al., 2019). Given the nuanced nature of these variables, we kept an open mind about any impact we might find of the share of municipal natives and immigrants on support for Babiš.

Several studies demonstrate the impact of age on electoral behaviour (e.g., Maškarinec, 2017; Gordon, 2018). We investigated the relationship between voting for Babiš and having a greater proportion of people in the oldest age group (Age 65+), a group more inclined towards populism than younger voters (Hobolt, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Dvořák and Zouhar (2022) identified a correlation between ageing districts and support for ANO and we expected this relationship would also hold at the municipal level for Babiš.

Religiosity, which in the Czech context we operationalised as the share of Roman Catholics (Catholics), can have varying effects on electoral outcomes (Arzheimer & Carter, 2009). Previous research in Czechia has identified both a positive effect of the Catholic share on voting for the Christian Democrats (Bernard et al., 2014) and a negative effect of religiosity on support for the populist radical right (Suchánek & Hasman, 2024). While anticipating a clear relationship between the share of Catholics in predominantly atheist Czechia and voting for Babiš for president is not easy, given the likelihood of potential Christian Democrat voters (i.e., SPOLU voters) leaning towards Pavel in the election, we expected a negative relationship between the share of Catholics and support for Babiš. Moreover, religion also plays an important role in civil society and can serve as a partial indicator of social capital levels (see Putnam, 2000).

Finally, we incorporated the electoral turnout of the last major general election (Voter turnout (parliament)) into our model. Abstention from voting is related to a number of factors, as demonstrated by several studies (e.g., Linek,

2015; Kevický & Suchánek, 2023). Electoral turnout is often associated with social capital and the overall level of civic society as it demonstrates the extent of public interest and engagement in matters of common concern (Šimon, 2015, p. 143). Therefore, we set out to explore the hypothetical relationship between the contextual characteristic of previous voting disenchantment and subsequent support for populist actors. Considering previous findings that low voter turnout was connected with discontent and overall political disengagement (Pike et al., 2023), and that populist politicians were known to maximise their vote by mobilising dissatisfied non-voters (Agnew & Shin, 2017), we predicted a positive relationship between low voter turnout and support for Babiš (cf. Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2021).

**Table 1:**  
**Dependent and independent variables in the models**

Variable (municipality level)	Description	Year
Babiš vote (dependent variable)	Share of votes for Andrej Babiš in the Czech 2023 presidential election (second round)	2023
Municipal natives	Share of people who live in the municipality in which they were born	2021
Immigrants (EU)	Share of non-Czech residents from the EU	2021
Immigrants (non-EU)	Share of non-Czech residents from outside the EU	2021
Age (65+)	Share of people above the age of 65	2021
Tertiary education	Share of people with a tertiary degree	2021
Catholics	Share of people declaring to be Roman Catholics	2021
Unemployment	Share of unemployed people	2018–2021
Voter turnout (parliament)	Share of voter turnout in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections	2021

Source: the authors

First, we used the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model, which is a conventional global regression modelling technique commonly employed across various fields of study that generally offers a solid foundation for examining the mutual effects of the covariates under investigation. Our aggregated data (i.e., geographical units) included spatial attributes so, after calibrating the OLS model, we assessed the possibility of spatial clustering in the model's residuals.

Next, we evaluated the residuals' spatial clustering by determining their global Moran's I value (from -1 to +1), which showed the extent of spatial autocorrelation, with positive values indicating positive autocorrelation (Anselin, 1995) and suggesting that either low or high values (of residuals) were clustered in space. If this was indeed the case, it indicates that the OLS model may not adequately fit the input data, and other regression models should be considered.

Initially, we intended to employ either the spatial lag model (SLM) or the spatial error model (SEM) based on the results of the diagnostics for spatial dependence tests. Following the guidance of Luc Anselin (2005), we calibrated a SEM model, which gave a substantially better fit than the OLS model. Anselin (2005) and Matthews (2006) provide further detail on the spatial dependence tests presented in Table 2.

The formula for the spatial error model is as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta X + \mu; \mu = \lambda W\mu + \varepsilon$$

Where  $Y$  is the dependent variable,  $\alpha$  is the intercept and  $\beta X$  represents the coefficients of the independent variables. The term  $\mu$  refers to the spatial autocorrelation error, which has two components. Firstly,  $\lambda$  represents the autoregressive coefficient of the spatial error term, capturing the average error of the neighbouring units based on the selected spatial weights matrix ( $W\mu$ ) and reflecting the spatial dependence in the model. Secondly,  $\varepsilon$  represents the error term that accounts for the variation unexplained by the independent variables, analogous to the OLS residuals. The term  $\lambda$  is included in the regression output as a new coefficient. Put more simply, if the value of the  $\lambda$  regression coefficient is positive and statistically significant, it suggests the presence of missing data in the model. This indicates that there might be some process that either remains unmeasured in the model (not captured by the independent variables) or is potentially unmeasurable using aggregated data.

## 5. Results

We initially conducted an OLS regression to explore the relationships between support for Babiš and the selected variables (Table 2). In this model, multicollinearity was not a concern, as indicated by a low multicollinearity condition number of 3.09.<sup>3</sup> Despite the larger number of units included in the analysis and their vast fragmentation, the adjusted R-square value of 0.442 is high (cf. Voda & Pink, 2015; Suchánek & Hasman, 2024).

Starting with the most influential covariates, we can identify the dominant role of Tertiary education (-0.398), Voter turnout (parliament) in 2021 (-0.274) and Unemployment (0.138) in support for Babiš. Therefore, a higher proportion of tertiary-educated individuals and a higher voter turnout in previous elections in Czech municipalities are associated with less support for Babiš. On the contrary, higher levels of unemployment are linked to more support for Babiš. These results on the dynamic between the geography of discontent and populism are as theoretically expected (see Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Koeppen et al., 2021).

We found weaker effects for the share of non-EU immigrants (-0.077) and of an elderly population (0.050). These findings suggest that Babiš had some success in locations with lower levels of immigration – although only when migrants had a non-EU background – and in locations with more people aged 65 and above. While the inclination of the elderly towards populist voting is well documented (Hobolt, 2016), the effect of immigration on voting behaviour is more complex as both the intergroup contact (Allport, 1954) and group-threat theories (Quillian, 1995) potentially come into play (Green et al., 2016). We cautiously conclude that, overall, our data indicate support for the contact hypothesis in a contextual sense, although the regression coefficient is small, and further verification using individual-level data is necessary. Besides, the effect is not confirmed for immigrants from within the EU. The remaining variables (Immigrants (EU), Municipal natives and Catholics) have negligible coefficients, suggesting that the OLS model assumes no substantial relationship between these variables and support for Babiš.

Table 2:

**Relationship between voting for Babiš and independent variables according to the ordinary least squares (OLS) and spatial error (SEM) regression models.**

Independent variable	OLS	SEM
	Std. coefficient	Std. coefficient
Intercept	<0.000 (0.001)	-0.005 (0.047)
Municipal natives	-0.016 (0.012)	-0.002 (0.011)
Immigrants (EU)	-0.020 (0.010)	0.018 (0.001)
Immigrants (non-EU)	-0.077 (0.010)	-0.016 (0.009)
Age (65+)	0.050 (0.010)	0.049 (0.009)
Tertiary education	-0.398 (0.012)	-0.375 (0.012)
Catholics	-0.009 (0.012)	-0.110 (0.015)
Unemployment	0.138 (0.010)	0.063 (0.011)
Voter turnout (parliament)	-0.274 (0.012)	-0.153 (0.011)
Spatial error parameter ( $\lambda$ )	-	0.831 (0.015)
N	6,246	6,246
Log likelihood	-7,027.8	-6,073.4
AICc	14,073.7	12,165.6
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> / Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.442	0.609
Multicollinearity condition number	2.38	-
Global Moran's I (residuals)	0.270	-0.020

Note: standard errors in parenthesis; spatial weights matrix = 10 km. Statistical significance of regression coefficients is not reported due to the use of census data.

Source: the authors

As we were working with geographical units, it was essential to examine the possibility of spatial clustering in the residuals of the OLS model (as discussed in the previous section). We conducted several diagnostic tests for spatial dependence, and all of these confirmed the presence of significant spatial clustering in our data. We can conclude that the OLS model is generally inadequate for our analysis. Following the guidelines provided by Anselin (2005), we ran a spatial error model (SEM), which produced a much better fit than the OLS model, as indicated by higher values of log likelihood and lower values of AICc.<sup>4</sup> The Moran's I value of -0.020 suggests no systematic spatial clustering of residuals, which contrasts with the previous model's Moran's I value of 0.270.

Likewise, the regression coefficients in the SEM can be interpreted as marginal effects, but now there is an additional spatial error parameter ( $\lambda$ ) included in the table. While most relationships remain somewhat consistent in their nature, there are also some intriguing differences in the resulting coefficients. Tertiary education (-0.375) continues to be by far the most influential predictor of Babiš's support, while the strength of the effects of voter turnout (-0.153) and unemployment (0.063) diminishes slightly. While the coefficient for the 65+ age group remains largely unchanged, the potential effect of Immigration (non-EU) is no longer supported by the SEM. The relationships between Babiš's outcomes and immigrants from the EU and municipal natives remain unimportant in both models. However, the effect of Catholics (increasing its strength from -0.009 to -0.110) becomes fairly relevant. Given the use of aggregate data in regression analyses, it is difficult to pinpoint the specific cause of this substantial increase in the coefficient for the share of Catholics. Nevertheless, we can assume that this is caused by Christian Democrat strongholds giving their support to Pavel instead of Babiš.

Lastly, the  $\lambda$  variable shows a high and positive (and significant) value of 0.831, indicating an association between the error term and neighbouring observations. This suggests that in our models, despite the relatively high reported R-square value, there may be a key variable that has been omitted or other crucial processes occurring that influence the electoral support for Babiš.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

The main contribution of this article is threefold. Firstly, we categorise Andrej Babiš and his unsuccessful run in the 2023 presidential election in light of the emerging populist versus anti-populist debate (Moffitt, 2018; Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022). This helps us understand the election and anticipate essential factors and mechanisms behind the support for Babiš as a populist presidential candidate, as well as his defeat. More generally, our research adds to the conceptual understanding of the anti-populist political landscape. Despite the assumption that an anti-populist

candidate typically emerges from and defends mainstream traditional politics, in this case an independent candidate detached from the current establishment proved to be a strategically effective alternative in countering populist opponents.

Secondly, considering the accumulation of electoral support for populist candidates in certain places and under specific circumstances, we further conceptualise our research by considering the geography of discontent (e.g., Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2020; Pike et al., 2023). Identifying crucial factors influencing voting behaviour in Czech municipalities in the 2023 presidential election. Considering our results, we conclude that tertiary education, unemployment, and previous voter turnout had most influence on Babiš's electoral support. Based on these results and the spatial distribution of electoral outcomes, we posit that regions that demonstrated a substantial preference for Babiš were primarily characterised by relatively deficient social and economic conditions.

Thirdly, we have shown the value of the spatial error model, which provided a better fit than the ordinary least squares model and indicates that the share of Catholics in municipalities also played a significant role in determining Babiš's share of the vote. While it is difficult to determine the cause of this distinction between the two regression models, the resulting relationship (along with the relevance of voter turnout) seems to confirm the potential role of social capital in voters turning away from populism (cf. Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2021). Given the geographical patterns of electoral outcomes and previous research on Czech politics (e.g., Šimon, 2015; Lysek & Macků, 2022), many of these characteristics can arguably be attributed to the historical legacy of Sudetenland and the neoliberal economic transition that began in the 1990s. Moreover, SEM indicates that potential missing data or information also influences the electoral support for Babiš. While we cannot determine the cause of this significant positive clustering beyond the covariates analysed in our model, we suggest that the unexplained spatial variance may be attributed at least partially to people's discontent in peripheral areas of Czechia.

The shortcomings of our research are typical of empirical studies relying on extensive quantitative analyses of aggregated data (see Fotheringham & Rogerson, 2008). As a result, it is not possible to confirm or reject conclusively whether the individuals experiencing the assumed discontent are the ones who voted for Babiš in the 2023 election, as this would lead to issues of ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950). To address this matter, and further investigate the causal determinants and latent mechanisms behind the support for Babiš, additional individual-level data and/or qualitative research would be required; the data needed for this are, however, lacking. Another limitation stems from the absence of analysis of previous presidential elections (but see Maškarinec, 2013; Hejtmánek & Pink, 2014; Šedo et al., 2018). While patterns of voting for Miloš Zeman may prove to be important in the case of Babiš, a rigorous comparative analysis between these elections would require additional research, preferably also including individual-level data. Moreover, while our findings reflect certain specific aspects of

previously observed patterns in support of radical parties (both right and left), an in-depth assessment extends beyond the scope of our study. This limitation, among others, could serve as a starting point for further research.

Despite these drawbacks, our study offers numerous implications for both future research and for policymakers. By identifying the factors that play a key role in the populist versus anti-populist political clash, policymakers and proponents of the liberal democracy model should focus on addressing these factors, particularly in areas where Babiš was most successful. Accordingly, and in light of recent studies assessing the contemporary effects of long-term, geographically uneven development, we emphasise the need to mitigate regional inequalities. Core regions that accumulate wealth and benefit from high levels of tertiary education, social capital, and low unemployment should take a more proactive role in assisting the peripheries and marginalised areas, which often experience forms of discontent (e.g., by amplifying education and training, catalysing innovation and bolstering the quality of governance; Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2024, p. 30). Policy implementations and their assessment should transcend the limited conventional thinking primarily focused on economic growth to alleviate people's discontent and political resentment (see MacKinnon et al., 2022). We advocate a more nuanced and class-sensitive approach, as addressing inequalities among both people and their social environments appears to play a crucial role in countering populist ideologies.

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#### Appendix 1:

#### Relationship between voting for Babiš and Pavel and independent variables. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model.

Independent variable	Babiš (1 <sup>st</sup> round)	Pavel (1 <sup>st</sup> round)
	Std. coefficient	Std. coefficient
Municipal natives		
Immigrants (EU)	-0.026	-0.065
Immigrants (non-EU)	-0.030	0.049
	-0.048	0.086
Age (65+)	0.078	0.020
Tertiary education	-0.366	0.436
Catholics	-0.048	-0.198
Unemployment	0.143	-0.100
Voter turnout (parliament)	-0.277	0.162
N	6,246	6,246
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.421	0.463

Note: statistical significance of regression coefficients is not reported due to the use of census data.  
Source: the authors

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## Endnote:

- 1 Due to the limited scope and focus on the second round of elections, where the regression results for Andrej Babiš are mirrored for Petr Pavel, we have chosen to include the regression model for the first round in the appendix only. For more details, please refer to the table in Appendix 1.
- 2 To control for potential short-term fluctuations in unemployment due to the detailed level, we instead use three-year averages for each municipality.
- 3 According to Anselin (1995), we should be alarmed if the multi-collinearity condition number is above 30. Moreover, all variables reported VIF values below 2.
- 4 The SEM pseudo-R-square value is different from the OLS adjusted R-square value and should not be compared directly with it.

# Jonathan Haidt: The Anxious Generation

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Jonathan Haidt, one of today's most influential public intellectuals, has published a new book, *The Anxious Generation*, a thought-provoking work examining the negative impact of digital technologies, especially smartphones and social media, on children's mental health. Haidt originally intended to write a book on the harmful effects of social media on democracy. This subject would have been closer to the theme of his most prized work so far, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, which primarily explores political psychology, or his widely-cited academic article, 'The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment', which helped shape the discipline of political philosophy. However, the planned first chapter on mental health eventually expanded into an entire book.

In *The Anxious Generation*, Haidt argues that the online environments in which 46% of teenagers are nearly constantly engaged (Vogels, 2022), with

an average screen time of 8 hours and 39 minutes per day (Common Sense, 2022), are a major cause of the significant decline in their mental health. He presents data linking the rise of these digital technologies to notable increases in depression and anxiety, as well as other issues, including self-reported mental illnesses, self-harm and suicide among children, particularly girls. Haidt proposes that steps should be taken to reduce the use of digital technologies by minors, and suggests that the lack of an adequate response to this issue has largely been due to powerful lobbying by the companies behind the digital platforms – a scenario reminiscent of the tactics employed in the past by the tobacco and gambling industries, which also promoted addictive products.

Despite its impact, Haidt's work has faced criticism from some scholars who argue that he selectively omits studies that do not support his narrative, employs insufficiently sophisticated statistical methods, overlooks some positive

effects of digital technologies and disregards alternative explanations for children's declining mental health. Overall, these critics argue that Haidt exaggerates the negative impact of digital technologies, smartphones and social networks on young people's mental wellbeing (Lebedikova et al., 2024; Odgers, 2024).

Interestingly, these criticisms of Haidt's book bring to my mind the negative reviews faced by recent Nobel laureates in economics, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. Their influential book *Why Nations Fail* explores why some countries are economically prosperous while others are not, attributing much to 'inclusive political institutions' but giving minimal attention to the roles of geography, culture and other factors. Likewise, Haidt's book can be seen as an intellectual appraisal of specific aspects of the digital world's impact on children, often making considerable simplifications and not addressing the topic in full scope.

However, in this political science review, I wish to focus on an aspect of Haidt's book that has been neither contested nor criticised by other scholars: the failure of states to effectively enforce online age restrictions for children. Social networks, for example, do not verify that a user creating an account meets the minimum age requirement of 13, and similar gaps exist in age verification for accessing adult internet content.

Greater protection of children online is one objective of the European Commission's Digital Services Act, introduced under Ursula von der Leyen's first presidency. It is worth noting that dig-

ital regulation was the second-highest priority for the European Commission during its 2019-2024 term, though it has often been overshadowed in public debate by the Green Deal. Nevertheless, EU digital legislation is gradually coming into effect, and it is, in my view, likely to become increasingly prominent in public discussion in the near future.

Digital policy and digital rights have recently gained more traction within the political discourse. This is a good reason to read Haidt's book, which contains numerous recommendations for change and potential regulatory measures. Yet, the implementation of such legislative changes remains a fundamentally political decision. It appears that society's formerly optimistic attitude towards technology is shifting. For example, France has banned smartphones in all schools for children under 15 (Willsher, 2024). In the Czech Republic, the media have covered the case of Vsetín, a town attempting to restrict smartphone use in primary schools ('V šesti vsetínských základních školách', 2024), and the list goes on.

Haidt's widely read book, which has topped the *New York Times* bestseller list for several weeks, can thus also be seen as a critique of unrestrained techno-optimism. The popularity of this book reflects, to a large extent, evolving societal views on this issue, which may soon result in significant policy implications in this vitally important area.

Václav Šmatera

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