

The System of Appointment of Local Political Bodies as a Factor of Social Development

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Abstract: This study is devoted to the field of representation of social and political interests of the residents of selected municipalities. Political representatives who have a key influence on decision-making within the sub-national political levels are generally, considered those that are the most important from the viewpoint of endogenous factors in terms of local or regional development. In this context, the issue for the appointment of local political bodies appears important. A major factor in the staffing of political councils is the form of the electoral system; the normative anchoring of the municipal electoral system in the Czech Republic which is the basis of this conference contribution is usually perceived as problematic in terms of its real consequences. Using the case of the municipalities of the administrative district of the City Trhove Sviny, the purpose is to assess to what extent the representation appointed on the basis of applied preferential votes is the result of voter interest and how the voting behaviour of citizens of municipalities is distorted by the electoral system.

Key words: Electoral system, municipal board, municipal elections, electoral behavior, preferential vote, Trhove Sviny

INTRODUCTION

The endogenous factors that tend to be mentioned in connection with the development of regions include the activities of the representatives of local politics (and rightfully so). Local governments of municipalities in Czech Republic are based mainly on the decisions of local representative bodies. In this context, it is clear that electing representatives is one of the important aspects of local government not only in terms of representation of political interests but also in terms of local development.

The electoral system which is used in the Czech Republic in the election of municipal councils allows voters (as the only electoral system in the Czech Republic) a relatively variable selection of preferred candidates. During an election, the degree of openness of candidates gives voters the possibility to give preference to candidates from different political parties running for representative seats up to the maximum number of seats that are distributed in the constituency. Due to the structure of the entire electoral system, through which votes are transformed into the elected council of the given municipality, the question is whether voters can fundamentally affect the staffing of the local political body.

The issue of voting behaviour is a frequent preoccupation of social sciences and in countries with a long democratic tradition, it is subject that has been sufficiently explored. In Czech society, attention is also paid to the nature of value attitudes. Despite the relatively short period, since 1990 that is associated with the organization of free elections, the applicability of certain interpretative models of voting behaviour was demonstrated in the Czech Republic. When electing a political body at the parliamentary level, e.g., a relationship was demonstrated between social structure and voting behaviour (Vlachova and Rehakova, 2007). The existence of long-term emotional bonds of voters to political parties was demonstrated in the Czech environment (Vlachova, 2003). The differences in voting behaviour in an inter-regional comparison were also investigated. These researches of electoral geographers demonstrated the heterogeneity of voting behaviour from the perspective of various regions of the Czech Republic. However, attention was also devoted to the impact of the electoral system on voting behaviour (Lebeda, 2007).

However, there are relatively few works devoted to the communal electoral system and its effect in transforming the interests of voters and their voting behaviour into elected councils. In the past, Outly focused on the normative development of the municipal

electoral system; Lebeda (2007) focused on the specificity and in particular on the problematic nature of the electoral system. The municipal electoral system is relatively complex mechanism. Its complexity is the limit which to some extent prevents the understanding of its effects. The system does give the impression of openness to electing individuals (in relation to the possible variability of granting preferential votes as mentioned above) in reality, however, the position of candidates on the list of the political party is important and often decisive. In Czech municipalities it is quite common that elected candidates are people who by far did not receive the largest number of preferential votes. On the contrary, the most preferred candidates from the lower levels of party documents often do not acquire a mandate of municipal representatives. In addition, according to Lebeda (2007) this controversial nature of the system is not well known by voters: they can vote in good faith for candidates who will not be elected but their voices will contribute to acquiring mandates for their party colleagues high on the list of candidates.

However, the municipal electoral system has distorting effects in particular provided that the electorate does not know its nature and in fact cross-votes by preferential votes during an electoral act (Cross-voting means the method of personalized voting, i.e., the selection of specific candidates) within the proportional electoral system). Yet, this is not the only way of expressing electoral interests by voters. In addition to selecting different candidates in more candidate lists, voters may also choose to select one party candidate list which will then receive all of the votes from the voter (If the candidate list is not full, the parties receive from voters the amount of votes corresponding to the number of candidates seeking a mandate from such a party candidate list). The third offered election method is the combination of the previous alternatives, i.e., the support of more candidates from different electoral entities and thus using the remaining votes (up to the number of mandates distributed within the constituency) for the election of the selected party. However, no matter which of the three offered techniques the voter chooses, it is always true that votes for candidates are primarily votes for the running election party. Mandates acquired by a party are allocated to candidates sequentially according to their order on the list. A change to the order of candidates on the candidate list can only occur provided that a candidate (some candidates) receive votes amounting to at least 110% of the votes compared to the average votes per one candidate on the list. A voter who knows the normative system settings of the election of

municipal councils and its reductive effects will likely displace from his/her voting behaviour candidates who are seeking a mandate from unelectable places on the candidate list (a place that is unelectable means the position of a candidate on the list that would not lead to the acquisition of a representative mandate if the mandates were only assigned according to the order of the candidate on the list) on which (adversely) candidates that the voter does not want in the council are seeking mandates from electable places. There is also the possibility that all of the votes of the voter support one running entity, i.e., one whose candidates that the voter deems appropriate representatives of his/her political interests are seeking mandates from electable places. Even if the form of the electoral system is an important factor in the electoral behaviour of voters in local elections, it is clear that the electoral system distorts the electoral preferences of each voter.

With regard to the research of voting behaviour of the electorate in elections within the municipal councils, its critical limit is a lack of data on the basis of which it would be possible to assess the voting behaviour. The data that are available from the Czech Statistical Office only give an overview of the results of the elections in individual municipalities and of the distribution of preferential votes for individual candidates seeking to attain a representative post. Therefore in the study of voting behaviour and the effects of the municipal electoral system an analysis of preferential votes is one of the few opportunities that are offered. Given the freedom of voting that voters have in terms of the use of preferential votes, the results of such analyses only lead to indicative conclusions; it is not clear from the polling data whether the number of preferential votes for individual candidates comes from "direct" support of voters or from votes for the entire electoral list.

Balik (2009) worked with preferential votes for candidates in an effort to try to interpret the development of municipal party systems. He cites in this context a method that is called the method of electable seats. It is aimed that candidates who have received a municipal representative mandate from an unelectable place on the list (so-called preferential representatives). Balik (2009) devotes his attention to the municipalities within the Sumperk District during elections between 1996 and 2006. The conclusion was a finding about the stability of the share of preferential representatives in two-thirds of the surveyed municipalities (stability was given by electing approximately one candidate from the non-electable place of the list), regardless of their party affiliation.

Balik (2012) also used a similar approach in his analytical work focused on the results of the elections to local councils in 2010 in the municipalities of the Chrudim and Sumperk Districts and statutory cities. It turned out that voting behaviour in terms of the use of preferential votes toward individual parties does not differ much in rural districts (comparison of Chrudim and Sumperk Districts). However in the case of statutory cities, voting behaviour differs somewhat with regard to ESSD candidates. A long-term comparison then provided findings about the continuous growth in the use of preferential votes in the municipalities of the Sumperk District.

Preferential votes for the candidates and the positions of the candidates on the list were a staple by Jakub Seda. He dealt with the results of the municipal elections in 2002 and 2006 in eight cities of the Czech Republic. In terms of preferential votes the candidates were assessed according to their position on the list and achieving 110% of votes compared to the average votes per candidate of the list. Electoral support was measured not only by this normative criterion but also provided that this limit would not be legislatively set and the only criterion would be a number of preferential votes. The research has demonstrated the stabilizing effects of preferential votes on the staffing of local councils.

Another research focused on preferential voting as a factor of stability of the local political environment is aimed on the possible differences in the voting behaviour of voters in municipal elections based on an analysis of data from surveys and standardized interviews as well as polling data.

The thesis concludes that the support of entire lists of the running political entities is the most common method used in municipal election techniques. The use of statistical methods has shown the same conclusion in the case of municipalities of the district of Louny and cities with the number of voters of >10,000 in the Usti region, regardless of the size of the surveyed municipalities (although the use of preferential votes is higher in small municipalities). Municipality size is also an important factor in terms of the relationship between the number of candidates in the municipality and the form of used technique of choice. For larger municipalities the election decision is usually associated with the lists of the political parties of the nationally relevant nature. For smaller municipalities the nature the running entity does not have a significant influence on the form of voting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the study is to judge the usability of the data on preferential votes for candidates seeking mandates in municipality elections in the Czech Republic

while studying the voting behaviour of the electorate. The starting point of the research is the critical attitude toward the specificity of the municipal electoral system which manifests itself in the transformation of the electorate's votes into the form of the elected local body. In this context, the electoral system is criticized, especially due to its results that do not reflect the interests of the electorate. The thesis was created on the basis of the data on elections into local governments in 2006 and 2010, acquired thanks to the Czech statistical office (available at www.volby.cz). The data has been subject to an analysis using a simple statistical method (variation coefficient) and mutual comparison.

The exclusive set that we are working with consists of the municipalities of administration district Trhove Sviny a municipality with authorized town office. The administration district of Trhove Sviny is located in the South Bohemian region, district of Eeske Budejovice. There are sixteen municipalities in this administration district. The size category of municipalities is represented from 158 residents up to nearly 5000 residents. Three municipalities have the status of a city. The selection of the administration district Trhove Sviny was intentional; small municipalities with only independent candidates are represented here as well as municipalities, where we can see a non-comprehensive spectrum of parliamentary parties and municipalities where almost all parliamentary parties are represented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analytical part: If we take as the basis the aforementioned Lebeda's assumption that most voters do not know the consequences of the results of the municipal electoral system, it is possible to consider that they prefer candidates from individual lists, imagining that their support will enhance the hope for their election according to the weight of the given vote. However, this applies only when the electorate actually uses preferential votes in the election act. As well, it is possible to believe that within their voting behaviour the majority of the electorate tends to give its voting support to one election entity. This can not be questioned even by arguing that the social environment in which the voter is situated is close by and therefore, the voter knows the local candidate (in particular in the case of small municipalities). Of course, it is not possible to directly ascertain from the overview of preferential votes for individual candidates available to the Czech Statistical Office whose obligation is to publicize the added-up voting results what the ratio of use of preferential votes in municipal elections is. It is not possible to see from the total number of preferential

votes for individual candidates what the ratio of votes directly granted by voters as preferential is and how many votes the candidates gain as members of the candidate list from the voters who decided to mark the entire candidate list of a political party. However, it is possible to get an indirect picture of the prevailing technique of voting. It is apparent that with the considerable dispersion of the above preferential votes for candidates compared to the average value of votes per candidate on the party lists, the electorate actually does use preferential votes. In the opposite case (small ratio of the dispersion of preferential votes), it applies that the majority of the electorate tends to support the entire party lists. Thereby, it is also possible to indirectly ascertain how essentially the voters' interest differ from the viewpoint of the candidates running in the election compared to the actual personnel staffing of the municipal council. If voters support the entire party lists they do not judge very much what the representation of the party they voted for will be in the

municipal council. For such voters, the normatively set effects of the electoral system are not a serious problem. In the case of prevailing preferential voting, however, the municipal electoral system may act, up to a considerable degree, against the interests of voters. If a voter prefers a candidate from the list from which he/she would never vote for candidates positioned in electable places, the electoral system may even act from the voter's viewpoint, counter-productively. The vote for the candidate the voter selected is most probably a vote for the candidate from an electable place.

With regard to the election that took place in 2010 in the municipalities of the administration District Trhove Sviny a municipality with the authorized town office, it is possible to judge the ratio of use of preferential votes on the basis of a calculation of variation coefficient of preferential votes for individual candidates and parties. Table 1 shows their value for individual municipalities and running entities.

Table 1: Variation coefficient election to the local councils in 2010

	Parameters								
Towns	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Borovany	TOP 09	KDU-CSL	KNaZ	ODS	CSSD	SDS	CSNS		
	1	6	0	2	5	1	2		
	0.29	0.2	0.4	0.24	0.24	0.44	0.47		
Cizkrajice	NK	SZ							
	5	4							
	0.36	0.47							
Horní Stropnice	CSSD	KSCM	KDU-CSL	ODS	TOP 09				
	2	8	1	1	3				
	0.36	0.13	0.38	0.21	0.16				
Hranice	NKH								
	5								
	0.28								
Jilovice	KSCM	SNKJ1	SPV						
	3	7	5						
	0.41	0.18	0.3						
Kamenka	NK	NK1	N1	SNK					
	2	1	2	2					
	0.29	0.75	0.53	0.33					
Locenice	SNK	SNKL	SNKLN	SNKN	1SNKLN				
	2	3	0	1	3				
	0.28	0.38	0.86	0.35	0.23				
Mladosovice	SNKM								
	7								
	0.32								
Nové Hradky	KDU-CSL	TOP09	ODS	SNK	OPZM	KSCM	CSSD		
	0	1	1	1	9	1	2		
	0.39	0.33	0.24	0.36	0.1	0.25	0.26		
Olešnice	POSO	SDHO	SNKOBL	SSCR					
	7	1	7	0					
	0.18	0.51	0.11	0.34					
Ostrovský Újezd	Vize 2014								
	7								
	0.33								
Petrkov	SNKP								
	7								
	0.19								
Slavce	SNK								
	15								
	0.06								

Table 1: Continue

Towns	Parameters								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Svaty Jan Nad Malsi	ODS 3 0.35	SNKJSCh 6 0.16							
Trhove Sviny	CSSD 1 0.21	KSCM 2 0.24	KDU-CSL 0.25	ODS 5 0.2	SNKSZ 7 0.11	SNK2010 3 0.3	SNK ED 2 0.18	TOP 09 1 0.35	VPN 1 0.33
Zar	NZZ 3 0.3	SAHO 4 0.19							

Own calculation on the basis of election data of the Czech Statistical Office

The values of variation coefficients up to the value of 0.2 show a low ratio of dispersion of preferential votes for individual candidates compared to the average value of votes per one candidate on the list. In the municipalities of the administration District Trhove Sviny, 56 political entities with more candidates in the list sought votes. A low value of the variation coefficient (up to 0.2, inclusive) was ascertained in fourteen candidate lists. In the majority of these cases, the value of the variation coefficient comes close to 0.2. Therefore, it is obvious that these election entities also gained support on the basis of preferential votes for some of their candidates. At the same time, it is also probable that these election parties gained the majority of votes on the basis of the support to the entire party list. However, with all other election entities the value of the variation coefficient reaches the ratio >0.2 . With a value that is slightly higher, it usually appears that the number of preferential votes for the most successful candidate is usually more than double compared to the least successful candidate of the same list. Therefore, it is evident that in <1 half cases, the voting support for such a party arises on the basis of the voting for the entire party candidate list. In addition, it is possible to assume that there are more voters supporting the party list via preferential votes to individual candidates as they usually give only a few preferential votes to the party itself (but not nearly all of the votes they have available). With the values of variation coefficients >0.3 , it is not possible to doubt that a larger number of this party's votes were cross-voted and the smaller number voted for the party list as a whole. Therefore if we look at the voting support to individual election entities it appears that the selection of individual candidates, rather prevails in their voting support compared to the voting for the entire party lists.

However, there is still the question of what the values of variation coefficients are in relation to the distribution of voting support. It applies to all of the municipalities of the exclusive set that the party with the highest voting support also has the least dispersed amounts of preferential votes compared to the average. When judging

the number of voters using preferential vote and voters supporting the entire party lists, it is necessary to take into account not only the number of political parties running in the municipality but also the ratio of votes for the most successful party compared to other party candidate lists. In the case of municipalities with a higher number of parties which we can take as a plurality political environment (at least from the voter's viewpoint), it mostly shows that the parties with the highest voter support usually reach low variation coefficients. In the exclusive set of municipalities, it is possible to identify seven municipalities where at least four party lists seek voting support. Of that in five cases it appears that together the two strongest parties gained >1 half of mandates. Out of the ten strongest parties of these five municipalities (always the two strongest ones of each municipality) the value of the variation coefficient is relatively low for eight of them (up to 0.2 inclusive). This leads us to believe that that in these cases voters tend to support the entire party lists in the election or that at least preferential voting is not a significantly prevailing phenomenon in the entire electorate. In the case of the two remaining municipalities with at least four lists of candidates where the distribution of the voting support is more even, the value of variation coefficients reaches a higher ratio. In these cases (Kamenna, Locenice), it is possible to conclude that the local council is much more the consequence of the preferential voting behaviour. In relation to the aforementioned, however, it is not clear what role the applied electoral system plays here. It is possible to believe that the will of the electorate is not essentially deformed. With one exception, the candidates with the highest number of preferential votes received their mandates. In one case a candidate whose number of votes was lower by one vote compared to the unsuccessful candidate, gained the mandate. In the case of candidates who received their mandates from the electable place in the list, it is not possible to believe that that their support would have arisen mainly on the basis of the support to the entire party. These candidates usually received a significantly higher number of

votes. In addition, this involves the parties where the least successful candidates received a very low number of votes and the assumption that preferential voting prevails compared to the voting to the entire lists is based on this. In the case of the municipalities of the administration District Trhove Sviny with more political entities running in the election, it is possible to believe on the basis of an analysis that the consequences of the impact of the electoral system are not essentially different from the political interests of local voters. In the case of municipalities with the prevailing support for the entire party lists, the voters rather watch the representation of parties in the local political bodies. Of course, the distribution of mandates among parties is also affected by other components of the system, especially by the quorum and the applied voting method. However, it applies that the disproportionality of the system is not essential and the distribution of mandates among parties approximately corresponds to the ratio of votes for individual entities.

When looking at municipalities with a lower number of election entities (two or three), we can see that the values of the variation coefficients are usually higher. Out of the total number of nine political parties in four municipalities of the exclusive set, the value of the variation coefficient reaches 0.2 and lower in three lists. In all of the three cases it is the local winning party. Therefore, it applies that even in the case of smaller municipalities with a smaller offer of candidates, the voters when supporting the locally relevant entities mostly tend to support the entire lists or it is not possible to claim that the share of preferential votes would be decisive for the appointment of local governments. In the case of municipalities of the given category is also appears that for the locally smaller parties with an apparent predominance of votes received on the basis of personal preferences, the electoral system most probably does not act at an essential variance with the voters' interests. Only one candidate of such parties could be found who received his mandate despite the fact that he gained a lower number of preferential votes than another unsuccessful candidate of the list.

The municipalities where only one election entity seeks votes are a rather specific example of the local party system. In the exclusive set of municipalities, it is possible to identify such a case five times. In two cases the value of the variation coefficient reaches a value <0.2 (in one case even the very low value of 0.06). In the three remaining cases the value of the variation coefficient moves close to 0.3. However, a question emerges with regard to how to interpret the number of votes for candidates and their dispersion in the case of

municipalities with one candidate list. It is obvious that the differences in the number of preferential votes arise only when some voter does not use all of the available votes for his voting. Assuming this, it is also possible to think that the failure to use votes is an expression of the voter's attitude to some candidates. From the viewpoint of appointing local government, however, this only makes sense if there are more candidates from one list running for the mandate than the number of mandates distributed in the local election or if another independent candidate runs in the municipality and thus the analysis of the dispersion of votes can not concern this candidate. The aforementioned three municipalities of the exclusive set meet these conditions. Based on the analysis of preferential votes of five municipalities of the exclusive set with one running entity with more candidates, it applies that the voters are usually aware whether, it really is a political battle for the local representative mandates or if the result is given in advance. Even provided that only one candidate list is running in the election, it is not possible to claim that the electoral system would act at a total variance with the voters' interests, although in the political environment of the municipality, it may generate a candidate into the local government who has only a low support of local voters to the detriment of another (usually one) unsuccessful candidate. The municipality of Ostrovsky ujezd represents such an example. The apparently unpopular leader allocated received 19 preferential votes that were sufficient for the third granted mandate in sequence. The sole unsuccessful candidate from the last place in the list received 55 preferential votes.

All of the three municipality categories defined according to the number of more election parties running with more candidates in the list show on the basis of an analysis of preferential votes that the majority of voters tend rather to support the entire list which applies more to the locally relevant parties. The parties that were less successful in the election gain support, rather on the basis of preferential voting. However in these cases, it is also not possible to claim that the electoral system would essentially act against the voters' interests.

CONCLUSION

With respect to its design and in particular, the requirement to achieve 110% votes compared to the average number of votes per candidate from the list to move the candidate from a non-electable place to the electable one, the system is really specific. Although, it gives the voters the possibility to express their personal preferences, even with as many votes as there are

mandates distributed in the constituency, a question emerges whether the applied municipal electoral system does or does not give the voters some space to express their voting interests. The analysis of preferential votes to election parties in the municipalities of the administration District Trhove Sviny a municipality with an official town office, it appears that the displacement and deformation effects of the electoral system are not as significant as we could first expect. In the cases of both the municipalities with a richly structured party system or with only two or three entities, the prevailing voting support to party lists against the selection of individual candidates across various party lists is apparently normal. This is mainly given by the concentrated, "en bloc" support to the locally relevant parties. In view of the fact that voters using this voting technique in their voting behaviour primarily consider parties more important than candidates, they subsequently again judge the elected local government mainly according to the representation of election parties and their relative sizes. In the case of parties with a lower voter support the distribution of preferential votes is important for the composition of the council which is also given by the higher ratio of preferential voting for candidates of these election entities. It seldom happens that a candidate from such list who gained a high number of preferential votes would not get into the council (within the comparison inside the list). In the case of municipalities where only one political entity is running, the number of candidates in the list is decisive for the prevailing method of voting. With regard to the overall low number of candidates, however, the understandable election result is that the election body cannot be different than the offer of candidates.

It is possible to generalize the results of the investigation only cautiously. To reach conclusions of a

general nature it would certainly be necessary to repeat the investigation in more municipalities of the Czech Republic. However, it shows that the reflection on preferential votes in the context of interpretation of the electorate's voting behaviour in municipal election makes sense.

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