THE PIRATES OF CZECHIA: THE CURSE OF PREFERENTIAL VOTE[1]

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Abstract
At the 2017 parliamentary elections in Czechia, the Czech Pirate Party was unprecedentedly successful compared to most Pirate Party in Europe. However, while the Pirate-led alliance PirSTAN won 15.62% of the votes in the 2021 Parliamentary Election, the number of Pirate MPs dropped from 22 to 4. The goal of this paper is therefore to explain this decline. We show that the pirates' failures were primarily due to the tactical and strategic failures of the pirates, who, although acting as a data-based party, were unable to assess the danger of an electoral alliance with STAN, whose local and regional reputation and tactics targeting preferences have managed to minimize the representation of pirates.

Keywords: *Czech Republic; Czech Pirate Party; Elections; Preferential Voting.*

INTRODUCTION

In the 2017 Czech Parliamentary Election, the Czech Pirate Party (Pirates) polled 10.79% of the votes and won 22 seats (11.0%) in the lower chamber of the Czech parliament (Chamber of Deputies) – an unprecedented success, in comparison to most of the European Pirate parties[4]. It was also with this status of the third strongest Czech party (which they defended in the 2019 European Parliament Election and the 2020 Czech Regional Election) that

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[4] With the exception of the Iceland's Pirates, who succeed in the parliamentary elections in 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2021, the Luxembourg's Pirates were the only ones represented in a national parliament. Other Pirate parties, which are a frequent subject of research (i.e. Swedish and German Pirates), have only gained a small representation in the European Parliament, or at the subnational levels of government.

the Pirates contested the 2021 Czech Parliamentary Election, for which they had formed the electoral alliance Pirates and Mayors and Independents (PirSTAN) with the Mayors and Independents (STAN).

STAN was formed as a nationwide party of no distinctive ideological profile associating mainly municipal and regional politicians prior to the 2010 Czech Parliamentary Election, in which (and in 2013 as well) it ran in an electoral alliance with the right-wing conservative TOP09, as a weaker partner to provide support in smaller municipalities, while TOP09 gained more support in larger cities traditionally voting right-wing parties. In the 2017 elections, STAN stood as an independent formation. The formation of the alliance with the Pirates in 2021 followed a similar logic as the previous alliance with TOP09. While Pirates are strong especially in larger cities, the STAN is stronger in smaller municipalities as it mainly comprises mayors of small municipalities (see Pink, Eibl, 2018; Maškarinec, 2020a; Pileček, 2021).

The result of the election, however, brought about a crushing slump in the representation of Pirates in the lower house of the Czech Parliament. Although the PirSTAN alliance came third with 15.62% of the votes (behind the winning ANO led by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and the SPOLU alliance[5], of the total of 37 seats (18.5%) won by the PirSTAN alliance, the Pirates secured only 4 seats, with the number of their representatives in the lower house being the lowest of all parties that have won seats in the lower house of the Czech parliament since 1996. Nevertheless, in fact, the formation of electoral alliances reflected the shape of the Czech electoral system (see Hanáček, 2022), especially the combination of D'Hondt method with, in some cases, smaller constituencies, which led to the under-representation of smaller parties (TOP09, KDU–ČSL, STAN), and, conversely, to a significant over-representation of ANO in the 2017 Election. The winning ANO won nearly 30% of the vote, gaining 39% of the seats, while STAN gained only 3% of the seats for 5.2% of the vote.

At the same time, both alliances were formed as a reaction to the dominance of ANO led by Andrej Babiš, with stable support in opinion polls around 30%, as well as a reaction to the Babiš government's failure to handle the pandemic situation (see Naxera, Stulík, 2021). However, after the formation of both alliances (SPOLU announced its formation in December 2020, PirSTAN in January 2021), the Czech Constitutional Court, in response

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[5] The SPOLU alliance was formed by two right-wing conservative parties: Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP09), together with the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU–ČSL).

to a complaint filed by a group of senators, annulled (on 3 February 2021) part of the Elections Act as unconstitutional (claimimg the electoral system disproportionate and favouring major parties) (see Williams, 2022) and the 2021 election was held according to a proportional system using the Imperiali quota (the first vote counting at the level of constituencies) and the Hagenbach-Bischoff quota with the largest remainder method (the second vote counting at the national level), with lower threshold established for alliances – a threshold of 5% for single parties, 8% for two-party alliances, and 11% for alliances of three or more parties; the form of electoral lists of candidates and preferential voting remained unaffected. To change the order using on a preferential vote (each voter can award up to 4 preferential votes), it was necessary to receive at least 5% of all votes for the given party or alliance within the constituency.

By analysing the preferential voting by PirSTAN alliance voters, the first aim of this article is to examine the causes of the sharp drop of the Pirates (compared to previous elections and pre-election polls) and their representation in the Chamber of Deputies. Regarding the above-mentioned, the central questions of our analysis are the following: *(1) Could the fall of the Pirates be expected considering the composition of the candidate lists? (2) Was the (un)success of the Pirates equal in the individual regions?* Furthermore, second aim of this paper is to point out possible problems caused by efforts to personalise voting in proportional electoral systems in the event of the formation of electoral alliances of ideologically, electorally and personally heterogeneous entities, such as Pirates and STAN[6]. This may be a relevant topic for scientists as well as the general public, not necessarily interested in Czech politics, as alliance list will be an important form of candidacy in the near future at least in other post-communist countries of East and Central Europe, where the opposition will try to remove the current hegemonic leaders and stop the process of democratic deconsolidation (cf. Stanley, 2019).

The paper is structured as follows. First, the discussion regarding preferential and strategic voting as well as coalition forming is briefly described. Second, the data used in our analysis and methodology are introduced. Third, based on the general knowledge of pirate politics, the

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[6] In contrast to the PirSTAN alliance, the SPOLU alliance was formed by ideological allies (mostly conservative in value), and despite a certain influence of preferential voting, which also took place within this alliance, won 34 of the 71 ODS seats as the strongest subject of the alliance. On the other hand, the 23 mandates for KDU-ČSL and 14 for TOP09 were gains that these parties alone would not be able to achieve on their own, given the fact that their support was on the verge of entering the Chamber of Deputies.

Czech example is introduced including the party's position within the party system. Fourth, preferential voting (especially regarding the coalitions) is discussed in the conditions of the last decades of Czech politics. Fifth, using the aggregated electoral data, the central part analyses the way of the Czech Pirate Party's failure. Sixth, the reasons for the Pirate's decline are discussed.

1 PREFERENTIAL VOTE AND STRATEGIC VOTING

This paper attempts to build on concepts developed by Gary W. Cox (1997) and David Farrell (2001). Departing from the premise that district magnitude is the most important variable of an electoral system, Farrell highlights the role of ballot structure. Ballot structure is key to actors' strategic options, Farrell argues, because it determines the type of choices offered to voters (individual candidates or party lists) and the range of choices they have, from categorical (picking a single candidate or party list) to ordinal (modifying list order or re-ranking candidates on a party list) (see Farrell, 2001, pp. 168–174).

At the same time, ballot structure (type and range of choice) comes with a number of possibilities and limitations affecting not only voters but also political parties and individual candidates, thus effectively shaping the election outcome and the ensuing political representation. Cox (1997) attempts to elaborate Duverger's mechanical and psychological effects for application at the level of actors. His underlying assumption here is that parties and voters realize the existence of both effects and, in their context, strive to coordinate their strategies towards maximum utility. While candidates and parties strive to be elected, voters try to avoid wasting their votes. The factors affecting both actors' strategic coordination include: (1) precision of the information available to them, (2) the fact of repeated elections, (3) voter turnout.

Here, the possible feedback from the extent of preferential voting to the intra-party dimension is of primary significance. In terms of Shugart's typology of preferential-list allocation methods (see Shugart, 2005, pp. 41–44), Czech Chamber of Deputies elections follow a flexible list, where allocation of candidates is governed by both the party-provided rank order and preference voting. What is more important, while electoral alliances are one of the most frequently used methods to coordinate entry into the electoral market, party elites do not know how voters at the polls will respond to alliance formation (see Gschwend, Hooghe, 2008). This is

important in our case as the Pirates–STAN electoral alliance composed of two ideologically disparate parties.

Furthermore, while there is a vast literature on government coalitions (Budge, Keman, 1990; Laver, Schofield, 1991; Strøm, Müller, 2003; Strøm, Bergman, 2006; Bergman, Ilonszki, Müller, 2019), much less is known about pre-electoral coalitions (Golder, 2006; Ibenskas, 2016). The importance of this issue is then based on the fact that pre-electoral alliances have been shown to exert considerable influence on government formation both directly, by constraining the set of viable coalition partners (Debus, 2009), as well as it has the effect on the allocation of portfolios (Carroll, Cox, 2007).

Some research also showed that various electoral systems could influence pre-electoral alliances. On the one hand, Shin (2019) found that pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form in plurality elections than in two-round runoff elections – as the threshold for first-round victory decreases in two-round runoff elections, and as the two potential coalition partners' ideological distance increases. On the other one, Bandyopadhyay, Chatterjee, and Sjöström (2011) showed that the equilibrium of pre-electoral coalitions is not necessarily made up of the most ideologically similar parties, and pre-electoral coalitions form under proportional representation as well as plurality rule. Finally, Ibenskas (2016) claimed that closed PR electoral systems and previous electoral cooperation reduce the costs related to sharing election candidacies and office positions.

Concerning the ideological compatibility of individual parties, Golder (2006) shows that pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form between ideologically compatible parties and their emergence is much more likely when the expected coalition size is large (but not too large) and the potential coalition partners are similar in size. Similarly, Ibenskas (2016), when analysing the formation of electoral alliances in new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe showed that pre-electoral coalitions are less likely between parties that stress the same issues but hold different positions on them and between established and genuinely new parties. Finally, pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form if the party system is ideologically polarized and the electoral rules are disproportional (Golder, 2006).

2 DATA AND METHODS

Given that no individual data is available to explain motivation of individual voters preferring the candidates of the STAN to candidates of Pirates, aggregated data is used here. These data (raw electoral results)

were obtained from the Czech Statistical Office's (CZSO) Election Server. For the same reason (non-existence of individual data), it is impossible to test the effect of the negative campaign before the 2021 elections which was concentrated especially on Pirates and their leader Ivan Bartoš, as well as the issue of different organizational structures of both parties (Pirates and STAN) and different use preferential votes by voters of both parties. These issues are, however, shortly discussed in the final part of the paper.

The presented paper is an interpretative case study, concentrating on a specific case of preferential votes in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections, with the aim to highlight selected phenomena and reveal deeper development tendencies. The paper is based on the principles of synchronic comparative analysis. More importantly, this research follows Dahl's (1971) idea that opportunities for contestation and participation (two of Dahl's dimensions of democratization) may considerably differ among a country's subnational units, thus that democracy may vary across territories (McMann, 2018; Schakel, Massetti, 2018). For that reason, the focus is on the analysis of the preferential vote in the Czech regions. Concentration on the subnational level offers also several advantages: (1) increasing the number of observations and thus mitigating the limitation of a small-N research design; (2) strengthening the capacity to accurately code cases and thus validate causal inferences; (3) better handling the spatially uneven nature of major political processes (Snyder, 2001).

As the main research aim of this paper is to analyse the support for the PirSTAN alliance and especially the question of how the preferential vote contributes to the fall of the Pirate Party, this paper first focuses on how the support for the alliance varies across the regions. Second, the focus is on the extent of the preferential vote in regions compared to the composition form of candidate lists, both by the number of candidates from both coalition parties and especially by the order of candidates of each party on the candidate list. Therefore, the paper focuses on how many preferential votes the individual parties received, how many candidates obtained a parliamentary mandate due to preferential votes, and whether, because of preferential votes, the candidates from the lower positions of the candidate list also succeeded, or only the highest-ranking STAN candidates jumped over the Pirates' candidates. Table 2, for an illustration, shows the number and share of Pirate and STAN candidates in the top six positions, i.e. realistically the number of candidates with average chance of gaining representation for this coalition, however, when calculating preferential votes in individual regions, the authors always work with the

number of preferential votes of all candidates on the PirSTAN coalition list in the given region.

3 CZECH PIRATES AND THEIR POSITION WITHIN THE PARTY SYSTEM

The success of Pirate parties, as seen in some European countries recently (cf. Otjes, 2020; Zulianello, 2018; Charvát, 2015), must be analysed in the context of changes in the European party systems and the emergence of new political parties, in many cases with strong anti-establishment and anti-corruption appeal (e.g. Engler, 2016; Brunnerová, 2019; Hynčica, 2019; Kosowska-Gąstoł, Sobolewska-Myślik, 2019; Vasiľková, Androvičová, 2019; Naxera, 2022). Similar changes have also gradually affected the Czech party system, starting with the 2010 election (cf. Hanley, 2012; Haughton, Deegan-Krause, 2015). Recent research carried out in the European countries shows that the distrust and disappointment with current politics are also the dominant motives to vote Pirates (Otjes, 2020)[7].

In this regard, the case of the Czech Pirates, whose electorate does not fit in the standard idea of "young leftists" (see Maškarinec, 2017), is really remarkable. In the 2017 election, the Pirates succeeded mainly in municipalities traditionally supporting the established Czech right-wing parties, more specifically areas with high development potential (especially the axis connecting the capital city of Prague with the regional capitals of western Bohemia, Pilsen, and north-eastern Bohemia, Liberec), in contrast to regions with structural economic problems, which were until the arrival of ANO the strongholds of left-wing parties and where the Pirates were significantly weaker (see Maškarinec, 2020b).

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[7] While Zulianello (2018) argued that pirate parties are "an almost ideal-typical manifestation of the niche party phenomenon" due to their "predominant focus on internet-related issues", and also other authors mentioned pirates as single-issues parties (Bílek, Lysek, Zbíral, 2021), or "cyber parties" (Hartleb, 2013), Otjes (2020, p. 42) emphasized that "the core positions that pirate parties have on copyright, privacy, and democratic reform can lead them to positions on other issues." With regard to the two most successful pirate parties, some issues must be mentioned. In the case of the Icelandic Pirates (as the only pirate party with long-term success), Harðarson and Önnudóttir (2018) concluded that their success was not due to the common pirate ideology, but especially due to their ability to use a great distrust in political parties and political institutions and very strong anti-establishment feelings connected to Iceland's financial and government collapse in the years after 2008. Similarly, in the case of the Czech Pirates, Brunclík (2010) mentioned that shortly after its establishment in 2009, the party included in its programme a number of issues beyond internet-related issues, or the so-called new socio-political cleavage of the information society (Demker, 2014), and it rejected being labelled as a monothematic political party.

While declaring opposition to the entire establishment before their first success in the first-order election in 2017, achieved about eight years after their establishment (see Šárovec, 2019), after the election, the Czech Pirates significantly changed their rhetoric, softened anti-establishment attitudes and, at least rhetorically, joined the current party system, which they opposed as a whole before the election (see Naxera, 2021). Positive integration into the party system manifested itself, for example, after the regional elections in 2020, after which the Pirates joined regional governments with parties across the political spectrum in 9 out of 13 Czech regions, while after the previous regional elections in 2016 they sat in only one regional government (see Šárovec, 2017; Kouba, Lysek 2021). The change in the party's rhetoric was also confirmed when they forged the PirSTAN electoral alliance and subsequently joined of Petr Fiala's centre-right (and dominantly conservative) cabinet, formed after the election to the lower house of the Czech parliament in 2021. Despite the internal party discussion on the need to reflect on their election debacle, 82.1% of the party's members voted in favour of joining the coalition government.

4 PREFERENTIAL VOTING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Analysing the preferential votes in the 2021 elections requires a short description of the development of using preferential votes in previous elections. In this case, three stages are differentiated, which correspond to institutional changes in the setting of the electoral system to the Chamber of Deputies. Whereas until the 2002 elections, voters could use 4 preferential votes and the threshold for candidates to move up on the candidate list was 10%, in the 2002 elections the number of preferential votes was reduced to 2, but at the same time, the threshold was reduced to 7%, so that from the 2010 elections the threshold was dropped to 5% and the number of preferential votes has returned to 4.

The development of institutional rules also partially corresponds to the success of the number of candidates who won their seats due to preferential votes (Table 1). On the other hand, the results of the 2002 and 2006 elections show that contextual differences also play a role, as shown by only half the success of the candidates who succeeded in 2006 compared to 2002.

The year 2002 is also interesting for this analysis, because it was the year 2002 in the Czech electoral history that was de facto the only one when a real coalition ran in the elections, specifically a Coalition formed by two smaller parties – the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's

Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Union of Liberty – Democratic Union (US-DEU). However, while Coalition received 31 seats, from this amount 22 gained the KDU-ČSL and only 9 the US-DEU. More importantly, while 9 candidates of the KDU-ČSL received their seats due to preferential votes, in case of the US-DEU such candidates were only 2 (see Morkes, 2008; Kudrna, 2010). Success of the KDU-ČSL candidates was interesting as in previous and also following elections voters of the party were not among those who have used preferential voting significantly (see Morkes, 2008, pp. 16–21) and one may hypothesize that this anomaly was due to ideological incongruence between Christian-democratic KDU-ČSL and liberal US-DEU when the voters of the KDU-ČSL did not want to allow the election of overly liberal MPs who would go against their traditional (conservative) values.

Table 1: *Number of "preferential" seats in elections to the Chamber of Deputies, 1996–2021*

1996	1998	2002	2006	2010	2013	2017	2021
0	2	12	6	47	29	28	36

Source: Czech Statistical Office.

Furthermore, while a decrease of the preferential threshold to 5% before the 2010 elections led to a dramatic increase in the number of MPs who succeeded through preferential votes, it did not have such dramatic inter-party impact. This was due in particular to the fact that none of the relevant parties ran in the elections in the coalition. The only possible "hidden" coalition was the joint candidacy of the TOP 09 and the STAN in the 2010 and 2013 elections. In reality, however, it was not a coalition, because the STAN candidates ran on the TOP 09 candidate list, and both entities did not conduct a significant campaign for their candidates, which can also be attributed to the junior position of STAN vis-à-vis TOP 09, which was led by experienced politicians (e.g. Karel Schwarzenberg and Miroslav Kalousek), with whom the STAN candidates could not compete.

5 ELECTORAL SUPPORT TO PIRSTAN 2021: ANALYSIS OF PREFERENTIAL VOTES

In view of the main research aim of this paper, which is to analyse the support to the PirSTAN alliance and the preferences for individual

candidates at the national as regional level, it is apparent that support to the alliance varied significantly across regions. The alliance managed to exceed the national average of votes obtained (15.62%) only in the capital city of Prague and the regions of Liberec and Central Bohemia, while Pirates and STAN achieved below-average gains especially in northern Moravia (Olomouc Region and Moravian-Silesian Region).

However, as the aim of this paper is to analyse the preferential vote and its contribution to the fall of Pirate Party, a focus needs to be paid on the extent of preferential vote in regions (Table 2). First, as regards the number of candidates, out of the total of 342 PirSTAN alliance candidates, the Pirates fielded slightly more than half the number (53.80%)[8], and with the exception of the Liberec Region (47.06%), the Pirate candidates took half or more positions in all regional electoral lists, with the maximum being almost two thirds (61.11%) in the capital city of Prague. However, it is much more interesting to look at the top candidates of the electoral lists, with composition (pursuant to the alliance agreement) reflecting the stronger position of the Pirates among the voters.[9] Share of Pirate candidates within first six candidates did not fall below half in any of the regions (or more precisely, in four regions the ratio of Pirates and STAN candidates was 50:50), in eight regions it reached two thirds (66.67%) and in two regions the share was even more than three quarters (83.33 %).

Since the starting position of the Pirates before the election was very good, the fact that the Pirates managed to win seats in only three regions (Prague, Central Bohemia, Ústí nad Labem Region) was even more disappointing considering the fact that four years earlier their candidates succeeded in all fourteen regions. The explanation can be found in the preferential votes for individual candidates.

The PirSTAN alliance received 1,206,824 preferential votes in total. However, if dividing preferential votes between candidates of Pirates and STAN, there is a significant disparity between the two parties. Although

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[8] The higher number of Pirate candidates reflected the different strength of the two parties. In the last pre-election survey at the end of September, the Pirates had the support of 10.6% of Czech voters, compared to 6% of voters who expressed support for STAN (STEM, 2021b).
[9] Pursuant to the alliance agreement, the Pirates were to hold 10 positions of lead candidates, STAN 4 remaining positions of lead candidates, with the order of other candidates being also determined by the alliance agreement. The alliance agreement also stipulated, for example, the amount of funds to be invested in the campaign by both entities (Pirates contributed two thirds of the campaign funds), the fact that Pirates will have twice as many ministers as STAN, given the expectation that Pirates have more voters and therefore gain more MPs, etc. (PirSTAN, 2021).

the Pirates had actually fielded the majority of candidates, in terms of preferential voting, their candidates completely failed. From a national perspective, STAN candidates received two-thirds of the preferential votes (66.66%) and a very similar situation prevailed in most regions. In none of the regions did the Pirates get more than half of the preferential votes (the maximum was 48.19% in Prague, and 43.84% in Ústí nad Labem Region, where Pirate leader Ivan Bartoš contested). On the other hand, in most other regions, STAN candidates received between 60–80% of preferential votes, and in two regions (Central Bohemia and Liberec), STAN candidates even received more than 80% of preferential votes. Thus, out of a total of 33 seats, STAN won 27 with the help of preferential votes. A total of 79 STAN candidates moved higher on the electoral list due to the preferential votes; in 27 cases it was enough to win a seat. In all these 27 cases, STAN got ahead of the Pirates' higher-ranking candidates.

Moreover, when looking at the seats obtained due to preferential voting, it is clear that in 12 regions the seats were won by the highest-ranking STAN candidates who jumped over the Pirates. Only in two regions did STAN lower- position candidates obtained a mandate by preferential voting – they were able to get ahead of the Pirates as well as their own fellow party candidates thanks to preferential votes. Even in this case, however, it is true that STAN won the mandates at the expense of the Pirates. In the case of STAN, this fact indicates an effective concentration of preferential votes not spread across the entire electoral list.

This trend is well illustrated with the case of Prague, where the Pirates' candidates won the largest share of preferential votes, with Prague being one of the places with the greatest support to the Pirates (Maškarinec, 2020b). In the 2017 election, the Pirates won 17.59%, while STAN only 5.05% of the votes. Despite this, in the 2021 election, STAN representatives won 4 of the 6 seats for the alliance in Prague. Out of the total number of 125,374 preferential votes for STAN, 81,518 (i.e. 65%) were concentrated in the first four candidates (a voter can give up to four preferential votes). In the case of the Pirates, who received only slightly fewer preferences, the leader received a total of 32,888 preferential votes, but then there is a significant drop and the votes are divided across all candidates. The Pirate candidate number two, who has also won a seat, already received fewer preferential votes than each of the four successful STAN candidates.

Table 2: *Results of PirSTAN alliance in the 2021 election, Chamber of Deputies*

Region	PirSTAN Votes (%)	Pirates Pref. votes (%)	PirSTAN Candidates	Pirates Candidates	Pirates Candidates (%)	PirSTAN Seats	Pirates Seats	Pirates Seats (%)	Pirates Number of candidates in the top six	Pirates Number of candidates in the top six
Praha	22.64	48.19	36	22	61.11	6	2	33.33	5	83.33
Central Bohemian	19.46	19.44	34	18	52.94	6	1	16.67	4	66.67
South Bohemian	13.50	32.78	22	12	54.55	2	0	0.00	4	66.67
Plzeň	13.88	32.81	20	11	55.00	2	0	0.00	4	66.67
Karlovy Vary	14.23	31.96	14	7	50.00	1	0	0.00	3	50.00
Ústí nad Labem	13.99	43.84	26	14	53.85	2	1	50.00	4	66.67
Liberec	21.37	18.63	17	8	47.06	2	0	0.00	3	50.00
Hradec Králové	15.13	26.76	20	11	55.00	2	0	0.00	4	66.67
Pardubice	14.09	37.87	19	10	52.63	2	0	0.00	4	66.67
Vysočina	13.51	27.96	20	10	50.00	1	0	0.00	3	50.00
South Moravian	14.19	34.74	33	18	54.55	4	0	0.00	4	66.67
Olomouc	12.35	34.23	23	12	52.17	2	0	0.00	4	66.67
Zlín	13.44	28.45	22	11	50.00	2	0	0.00	3	50.00
Moravian-Silesian	11.13	39.52	36	20	55.56	3	0	0.00	5	83.33
Czech Republic	15.62	33.34	342	184	53.80	37	4	10.81	54	64.29

Source: Czech Statistical Office; own calculation.

6 DISCUSSION

The finding introduced in this paper are based on the analysis of aggregated data and also confirm the first post-election surveys. These

indicate that almost two-thirds (61%) of PirSTAN alliance voters considered themselves to be Pirates voters (more or less in line with recent polls conducted separately, see above), but the proportion of preferential voting on both sides of the alliance was exactly the opposite, i.e. 29% to 58% in favour of STAN voters (STEM, 2021a).

Although before the election, the representatives of both groups undertook not to call on voters to circle the candidates of either of the parties, in practice this agreement was often violated by STAN. Moreover, while STAN benefited greatly from regionally well-known personalities on the electoral list, the Pirates lacked a stable and long-known regional and local representation even 12 years after their establishment. Finally, the Pirates were harmed by a strong disinformation campaign targeting the Pirates from different parts of the political spectrum, not least by Prime Minister Babiš's ruling ANO (paradoxically including politicians from some parties whom the Pirates joined in the coalition government) labelling the Pirates as "neo-Marxists", "those who welcome refugees", etc.

This requires mentioning the parallel with the above-mentioned 2002 elections. In 2002, rather conservative KDU-ČSL voters did not vote for too liberal (from their perspective) US-DEU candidates. In 2021, many STAN voters did not agree with the coalition with "too liberal" Pirates and thus did not vote for their candidates. On the contrary, the authors of this research identified a problem with finding this ideological reason for boycott of STAN candidates in case of the behaviour of Pirate voters due to the factually missing the ideological background of STAN.

However, a crucial key to understanding the decline of the Pirates as a result of the preferential votes is hidden in the previous election. In 2017, the Pirates received 546,393 votes, including a total of 222,393 preferential votes. In contrast, STAN received 262,157 votes and gained 150,734 preferential votes for its candidates. The ratio of votes for the electoral list and preferential votes altogether was 1:0.41 in the case of the Pirates and 1:0.57 in the case of STAN.

Although from the aggregated data, it is impossible to find out how large the number of voters used the opportunity to give preferential votes in 2017, it is quite apparent that STAN voters used preferential votes significantly more often than Pirate voters. However, the Pirates, who present themselves as a data-based party, seem to have ignored these patterns of behaviour of the voters of both groups in the previous elections. Here, a hypothesis could be risen that the leadership of the Pirates and their election staff had decided to "sacrifice" part of their seats in an effort to oust Prime Minister

Andrej Babiš's technocratic-populist ANO (see Maškarinec, Novotný, 2020; Stulík, Naxera, 2022) and not to draw attention to any alliance agreement violation by STAN that could reduce the gains of the PirSTAN alliance as a whole. Moreover, as a result of their join candidacy with the centrist and rather conservative STAN, when campaigning the Pirates abandoned a number of party platform priorities they had advocated in the past and this affected their candidates critically.

Finally, the Pirates, who succeeded in 2017 with their strong anti-establishment appeal, which weakened significantly during the election period (Naxera, 2021), eventually paid for an alliance with one of the establishment parties they sharply opposed several years ago. Perhaps paradoxically, the Pirates, who based their four-year opposition in the Chamber of Deputies on thorough and data-rich analyses (for example, when criticising the government and its unfounded steps during the pandemic), were defeated by an entity composed mostly of representatives of smaller municipalities, who, thanks to "common sense" and rich experience of local and regional level and government, proved politically, tactically and strategically much more mature than Pirates mostly lacking the experience of "local" politics, being grounded more in the national level of governance.

CONCLUSION

Going back to the main questions of analysis introduced here, this paper showed that (1) regarding the experiences from the 2017 elections, overall pre-election context, and composition of coalition and candidate lists, the decline of Pirates was rather expected than surprising; (2) the tendencies of preferential votes giving were similar in all the regions (with some understandable deviations in case of specific regions – i.e. Praha which is the centre of Pirates electoral support, and Ústí nad Labem region where the Pirates leader Bartoš ran).

Overall, albeit limited to a case study of one country, this analysis can also benefit comparative politics, not only in the field of election studies, but also in coalition theory, since highlights the dangers that the creation of pre-electoral alliances based on a union of ideologically heterogeneous entities can pose in the environment of proportional electoral systems with open lists, which, moreover, have a significantly different internal structure of the membership base and whose voters also approach the actual voting in elections in completely different ways.

As regards the future of the Czech Pirate Party, the fact that this party with a rather social-liberal ideological profile is joining a coalition government consisting of five parties (the broadest coalition formed after democratisation in 1990) also raises questions. This is because in this surplus coalition (the governing coalition has a total of 108 out of 200 seats in the lower house of the Czech Parliament), it is the Pirates whose 4 seats are not essential for the government majority in the Parliament. In addition, the conservative profile of the remaining governing coalition parties (ODS, STAN, KDU–ČSL, TOP09) will also make it very difficult to push the Pirate priorities through the House, and the next parliamentary election in 2025 may bring about the end of the Pirates in the Czech Republic.

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