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# Explanation of spatial differentiation of electoral results in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic



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## ABSTRACT

This article explains the basis for electoral support for political parties in the Czech and Slovak Republics in the post-1993 period. The database consists of results from Parliamentary elections (in the Czech context, elections to the Chamber of Deputies) and of data obtained from censuses carried out by statistical agencies. The theory of conflict lines developed by Stein Rokkan and Seymour M. Lipset was chosen as the theoretical basis. The key analytical tool employed is linear regression. The explanation provided evaluates the dependence of political party electoral support (as defined by seats won in elections) upon socioeconomic variables contained in the theory. Analysis of the results shows that the support parties receive in elections depends significantly upon social characteristics. An especially clear explanation is generated for the support given to Christian and ethnic parties. For protest parties, the impact of the constituent social and economic structure is only marginal.

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## 1. Introduction

After 1993, when the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic peacefully divided their common state, each country followed its own course in democratizing the political regime and consolidating it. Regular elections to legislative bodies became an integral part of the process. Votes are won in these elections by political parties popular with constituents. But the constituents are distributed unevenly over the geographic area in question. Papers have been published which focus on the regional differentiation of election support, paying particular attention to the varying levels of homogeneity in the constituent bases of political parties active in these countries. A lesser number of articles have focused on potential differences in the amount of electoral support received at various locations. The aim of the present text is to determine the sources and reasons for this regional variability in electoral support.

The geographical scope and timeframe for the analysis extends from 1993, when the disintegration of the common state took place, until 2010, when parliamentary elections took place in both countries in a roughly comparable period (see below for further explanation). The focus will thus be on elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (PSP ČR) and to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR) between 1994 and 2010. The parties included in the analysis were chosen because they fulfilled a criterion of having achieved repeated representation in the elected bodies of the individual countries. With that in mind, the election support for ODS, ČSSD, KSČM and KDU-ČSL on the Czech side of the border and HZDS, SDK, SDKÚ, KDH, SMK, SDĽ, SMER and SNS (for full party names in Czech or Slovak and English as well as party family affiliation see Appendix) on the Slovak side will be explored to see what it is conditioned upon.

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The remainder of this text is structured as follows; the first section provides the theoretical basis for the research and reviews relevant literature in order to identify the possible causes of the differences in electoral support. Following sections offer a discussion on how to measure the factors influencing geographical differences in electoral results, present a series of hypothesis explored in the article and the methods used in the paper. This is followed by the actual analysis and discussion of results.

## 2. Theoretical basis

To carry out the analysis itself, it must be determined which societal characteristics are to be seen as impacting regional differences in the electoral support for individual parties. A suitable starting point seems to be the cleavage theory of Stein Rokkan (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), used for this purpose in a number of studies (Archer, 1988; Passchier and Van der Wusten, 1990; O'Loughlin and Parker, 1990; Honey and Barnett, 1990; Eagles, 1990; Johnston, 1990; Zarycki, 1999, 2002; Zarycki and Nowak, 2000). Many authors, however, have reservations about the theory. These primarily centre around the uniqueness of the time and local context for which it was created, as well as its purpose (Bornischer, 2009; Evans and Whitefield, 2000). The theory is capable of explaining the origin of the Western European party system in the late 19th and early 20th centuries almost perfectly. But the explanation it provides for differences in the composition of current party constituents in Central and Eastern Europe is seen as being weaker. It is also clear that the tightly closed constituent groups susceptible to a simple description do not exist in the real world. (Vlachová and Řeháková, 2007: 137–145; Lyons and Linek, 2007: 154–168). But the key points of the theory may be useful even today, as indicated by efforts to add additional cleavages to the original theory. Application of it will allow its informational value to be tested in the context of the Central European region over the period of the past almost 20 years, using empirical analysis to either support or contest the contentions of the authors indicated above.

Two processes are key for the origin of cleavages. The national revolution refers to the process of building nation-states, one which gives rise to an antagonism with territorial and cultural overtones. The cleavage between the centre and the periphery is activated by the conflict between the culture of the central group creating the nation on the one hand, and building resistance from peripheral groups differing in ethnicity, language or religion. In addition, religious cleavage arises out of the conflict between the centralising and mobilising national state and the historically privileged position of the church (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967: 101).

The industrial revolution prompted a cleavage between town and countryside. This may also be considered a sector cleavage, one which has divided the primary and secondary since the late 19th century due to the overlapping interests of agriculture and industry. But in the contemporary context, agricultural activity is not particularly significant even in rural areas. In both countries studied, there is no purely agricultural party. Given the specific processes of economic transformation, Communist parties that represent nostalgic workers at vanishing agricultural cooperatives may be considered rural parties. The Christian-Democratic parties may also partially represent the countryside, especially because of the more frequent distribution of inhabitants declaring their affiliation with Catholicism in rural areas. In contrast, city-based parties include those based upon economic cleavage, regardless whether they are parties forwarding the interests of the owners or of the workers. In the present article this role will be played in the Czech party system by ODS and ČSSD, and in Slovakia by SDKÚ. The situation involving SDĽ and SMER is complicated and because no Communist party is in place, no clear assumption may be made about the impact a particular settlement may have on the results of these parties (Table 1).

## 3. Factors influencing geographic differences in electoral results

Before the analysis itself is performed, individual variables will be presented along with justification for their selection. They consist primarily of indicators that identify segments designated by cleavages. The election results analysed come from elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic between 1996 and 2010 and elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic between 1994 and 2010. The elections in 2010 were so far the last regular elections in both countries and this year may very well signify the end of a specific era. The following elections (2012 in Slovakia, 2013 in the Czech Republic) were early elections that changed the party systems and were, among other things, marked by a significant rise of new populist parties. This paper therefore analyses a period during which both countries had a clearly profiled

**Table 1**  
Classification of the parties selected in the cleavage system.

Owners	ODS,	SDK, SDKÚ
Workers	ČSSD, KSČM	SDĽ, SMER
City	ODS, ČSSD	SDKÚ, SMER
Rural area	KSČM, KDU-ČSL	KDH
Church	KDU-ČSL	KDH, SDKÚ
Country	KSČM, ČSSD	SDĽ, SMER
Centre		SNS, HZDS, SMER
Periphery		SMK

**Source:** Authors' table.

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