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## THE CRISIS OF THE LEFT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, A PARTY-ELITE PERSPECTIVE (KSČM AND SOCDEM)<sup>3</sup>

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**Abstract.** For approximately two decades, the Czech Republic has stood out as an outlier in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), being the only country where a largely unreformed communist successor party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), has consistently enjoyed stable and significant electoral support. Simultaneously, a robust social-democratic left with no direct ties to the former communist party played a major role in Czech politics. The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), originally founded in 1878, having been the largest or second-largest party in the country for over a decade. However, in the broader European context of left-wing decline and the rise of anti-establishment populist challengers, both parties have experienced sharp electoral downturns. In the 2021 elections, KSČM lost its parliamentary representation, a fate shared by ČSSD, now renamed Sociální Demokracie (SOCDEM), which faces an even deeper crisis. These setbacks occurred alongside the rise of new populist forces such as ANO and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), which have drawn support from traditional centre-left constituencies. Despite these challenges,

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<sup>3</sup> Tomáš Cirhan wrote this article within the framework of the NPO “Systemic Risk Institute” number LX22NPO5101, funded by European Union – Next Generation EU (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, NPO: EXCELES).

both parties remain politically active, with KSČM experiencing a modest revival under a more nationalist-conservative orientation. In light of this context, this paper has two primary aims. First, it traces the electoral decline of KSČM and SOCDEM over the past decade by analyzing election results and party positioning. Second, it explores how party elites interpret the crisis and identify potential sources of resilience. Methodologically, the study combines quantitative data with qualitative interviews and party document analysis. Overall, it contributes to understanding the crisis and transformation of the Czech left within the recent political landscape, as well as its implications for the broader crisis of the left in Eastern Europe.

**Keywords:** party politics, social democracy, radical left, Eastern Europe, elites

## Introduction<sup>4</sup>

The decline of traditional left-wing parties has been a notable feature of contemporary European politics. This trend has been particularly pronounced in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where it often began earlier than in the West. While not unique to any single country, one of the political landscapes where this phenomenon is especially visible today is the Czech party system, despite being a latecomer compared to other countries in the region.

In the Czech Republic, the crisis of the left has been particularly severe, with both the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, KSČM) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (*Česká strana sociálně demokratická*, ČSSD, now *Sociální Demokracie*, SOCDEM) experiencing significant electoral setbacks. The crisis of the social-democratic left is particularly striking when compared to the party's historical electoral success and its pivotal role in Czech politics. Once relevant players in Czech politics, these parties have struggled to maintain relevance in a rapidly shifting political landscape, characterised by the rise of populist and anti-establishment challengers such as ANO and Freedom and Direct Democracy (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, SPD). This paper seeks to contextualise the decline of the Czech left by focusing on the perspectives of party elites, who play a crucial role in shaping party strategies, ideological positioning, and responses to political challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> This article has utilized ChatGPT for proofreading and enhancing the fluency of the English language. All substantive content, arguments, and analyses remain the sole work of the authors, with AI assistance limited to linguistic refinement and clarity improvements.

This study contributes to the increasingly important debate on the crisis of the left, which can be observed in many countries across Europe and beyond. Existing studies have explored this phenomenon – mostly looking at the mainstream left – from the perspectives of electoral behaviour shifts,<sup>5</sup> party positions and dealignment, and changing societal values, often employing large-scale social surveys and quantitative methods.<sup>6</sup> Recently, studies tried linking it to the emergence of new populist challengers and the adaptation and moderation strategies pursued by centre-left parties in the CEE region.<sup>7</sup>

However, empirical studies incorporating the perspectives of political elites from within these left-wing parties remain relatively scarce. This perspective is largely absent in contemporary political science literature examining the decline of the left in the region.

This paper seeks to address this gap by providing a unique insight into the crisis of left-wing politics from those directly involved in the process – i.e. from the political elites of left-wing parties themselves. In our view, such a direct perspective is evidence of some value, especially since their individual experience is largely missing in the research that deals with this topic.

Our findings thus offer a comprehensive understanding of the crisis from the party elite's perspective, employing primarily qualitative methods of analysis. The study involves two cases: KSČM and ČSSD/SOCDEM. In addition to semi-structured interviews with elites from both parties, this paper draws upon a range of other primary data, including electoral data, public speeches, press releases, and media statements. By

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<sup>5</sup> James L. Newell, *The Crisis of Social Democracy: Why Is the Mainstream Left in Europe Struggling, Electorally?*, in *European Integration and the Crisis of Social Democracy* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 37-58. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08822-3\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08822-3_3); Vincenzo Emanuele, "Lost in Translation? Class Cleavage Roots and Left Electoral Mobilization in Western Europe," *Perspectives on Politics*, 3 (2021), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000943>.

<sup>6</sup> Jouke Huijzer, "The Politics and Metapolitics of Left-Wing Decline and Revival," *Frontiers in Political Science*, 4 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.872771>.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Snegovaya, "How ex-Communist left parties reformed and lost." *West European Politics* 45, no. 4 (2022), 716-743; Maria Snegovaya, *When Left Moves Right: The Decline of the Left and the Rise of the Populist Right in Postcommunist Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, this research provides a multi-dimensional perspective on the decline of the Czech left. While qualitative interviews offer first-hand insights into party strategies and internal perceptions, quantitative analysis contextualises these developments within broader electoral and ideological trends. This mixed-methods approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of both structural and agency-driven factors contributing to the decline of left-wing parties in the Czech Republic.

The study explores the reasons behind the decline of KSČM and SocDem from the perspective of party elites, addressing the following main research question: *What are the key reasons behind the decline of KSČM and SocDem from the perspective of party elites?* In addition to this central research question, we also address the following secondary questions:

- (a) *What factors are preventing or hindering a potential resurgence of these parties?*
- (b) *Furthermore, in the context of this crisis, what factors are perceived as sources of resilience?*

The working assumption underpinning this research is that shifts in party positioning, electoral trends, and elite strategies have played a critical role in the decline of KSČM and SocDem and continue to pose challenges to their resurgence.

The paper is structured as follows: a brief initial section outlining existing scholarly research on the left in CEE, theoretical perspectives on party resilience, and previous studies on KSČM and socdem. The methodological section details the mixed-method approach, explaining the qualitative component (elite interviews) and the quantitative component (electoral data, party positioning datasets such as CHES and the Manifesto Project). The central section of the paper maps the crisis of the Czech left, providing historical context, an analysis of electoral results, and party positioning. This section also compares KSČM and SocDem with key competitors. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of interview data, highlighting the perspectives of the party elites on the internal and external factors contributing to their decline, supplemented by secondary literature and other data. Finally, the discussion and

conclusion summarize the findings, assess the broader implications, and suggest potential directions for future research.

By offering a party-elite perspective on the decline of the Czech left, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the structural and strategic dilemmas facing traditional left-wing parties in post-communist Europe. It also sheds light on current trends and potential survival strategies.

### Brief Overview of the Existing Literature

The left in Central and Eastern Europe has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention, particularly in the post-communist transition period. Early works analyzed the regeneration of communist successor parties and their adaptation strategies within the evolving post-communist party systems.<sup>8</sup> Further studies dedicated to the left in CEE also appeared in later comparative works.<sup>9</sup> More recently, a new trend in literature has emerged, focusing on the crisis of the left in CEE.<sup>10</sup>

In the Czech context, the history and developments of the KSČM and tge ČSSD have been extensively studied and analyzed in the literature, often as part of comparative studies. Among others, Kopeček offers an assessment of party development of Czech social democrats, while Polášek et al. analyzed party organizational structures, situating KSČM and ČSSD between mass and cartel party models, or assess the ideological continuity

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldová, Radosław Markowski, and Gábor Tóka, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Anna M. Grzymala-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past: The Regeneration of Communist Parties in East Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); András Bozóki and John T. Ishiyama, *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003063629>.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Michel De Waele and Sorina Soare, "The Central and Eastern European Left: A Political Family under Construction," in *What's Left of the Left: Democrats and Social Democrats in Challenging Times*, eds. James E. Cronin, George W. Ross, and James Shoch (New York: Duke University Press, 2011)

<sup>10</sup> Snegovaya, "How ex-Communist left parties reformed and lost."; Snegovaya, *When Left Moves Right: The Decline of the Left and the Rise of the Populist Right in Postcommunist Europe*.

and transformation within KSČM.<sup>11</sup> Bankov also examined the organizational stagnation of KSČM, emphasizing structural challenges that have hindered its ability to adapt to modern political realities in more recent times.<sup>12</sup> Šaradín and Eichler provided one of the most recent comprehensive overview of the Czech Social Democrats (ČSSD/SOCDEM), yet research on KSČM's contemporary struggles remains sparse.<sup>13</sup> Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain in the literature, particularly concerning the internal decision-making processes of the Czech left. Studies employing party elite interviews as a methodological approach have been relatively limited, leaving a gap in understanding how leadership strategies and internal party dynamics have shaped the resilience or decline of KSČM and ČSSD. Further research utilizing elite interviews could provide valuable insights into the strategic responses of these parties to their ongoing crisis.

## Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research to examine the crisis of the left in the Czech Republic. The primary emphasis is on qualitative research, particularly semi-structured interviews with key party figures from the SocDem and the KSČM. In addition, the study incorporates a limited quantitative

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<sup>11</sup> Lubomír Kopeček, "Comparison of Left Parties in Central Europe: Some Causes of Different Successfulness," in Lubomír Kopeček (ed.) *Trajectories of the Left* (Brno: International Institute of Political Science [ISPO], 2005). Michal Polášek, Vilém Novotný, Michel Perottino, et al., *Mezi masovou a kartelovou stranou: Možnosti teorie při výkladu vývoje ČSSD a KSČM v letech 2000-2010* [Between the Mass and Cartel Parties: Theoretical Possibilities in Interpreting the Development of the ČSSD and the KSČM in 2000-2010] (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2012). Michel Perottino, "Le parti communiste tcheque entre continuité et rupture," [The Czech Communist Party between Continuity and Rupture] in *Les partis de la gauche anticapitaliste en Europe*, eds. Jean-Michel De Waele and Daniel-Louis Seiler (Paris: Economica, Collection « Politiques comparées », 2012), 262-273.

<sup>12</sup> Petar Bankov, "Czech Stalemate? The Role of Party Organization for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia since 2010," *European Review* 28, no. 5 (2020): 826-841, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798720000265>.

<sup>13</sup> Pavel Šaradín, Patrik Eichler, "The State of Social Democracy in the Czech Republic" in *The Social Democratic Parties in the Visegrád Countries*, Ania Skrzypek, and András Bíró-Nagy, eds., (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 53-88.

analysis of electoral data and party positions using established datasets such as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and the Manifesto Project.

To gain an in-depth understanding of party strategies, ideological shifts, and internal challenges, we conducted eight semi-structured interviews with key actors from both SocDem and KSČM. The sample includes five SocDem current and former party officials and three KSČM-affiliated respondents, divided between the local and national levels (see Appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown of interviews). Given the relatively small dataset, thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for interpreting the interview data. Thematic analysis, which is inherently qualitative and interpretive,<sup>14</sup> is particularly suited for identifying recurring themes and patterns across interview transcripts.<sup>15</sup>

We coded the transcript materials using MAXQDA software, employing a deductive approach to develop our codes, drawing on existing theoretical frameworks and concepts. Additionally, inductive coding was incorporated to capture emergent themes arising from the data. This dual approach ensured a comprehensive analysis, balancing pre-existing theoretical insights with novel findings from respondents. To mitigate potential biases inherent in qualitative interviews, we triangulated our findings with other sources, including party documents, electoral data, and secondary literature where possible.

The quantitative dimension of this study utilises electoral and party positioning data to contextualise the decline of the Czech left within broader political trends. Data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) provide insights into the ideological positioning of parties along the economic left-right and GAL-TAN (green/alternative/libertarian *vs.* traditional/authoritarian/nationalist) dimensions.<sup>16</sup> CHES offers expert-coded assessments

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<sup>14</sup> Kathryin Roulston, *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd; 2010), 297.

<sup>15</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 147.

<sup>16</sup> Seth Jolly, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova, "Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019," *Electoral Studies* 75 (2022): 102420, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102420>. Jan Rovny, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Vachudova, "25 Years of Political Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 1999-2024," working paper, Datasets on party positions across

of party positions across multiple election cycles, enabling a longitudinal analysis of ideological shifts.

Additionally, the Manifesto Project Database was used to analyse party programmes and policy emphases over time.<sup>17</sup> This dataset allows for an examination of issue salience, comparing the results to what has emerged in the interviews, and if and how SocDem and KSČM have adjusted their programmatic focus in response to political and electoral pressures. Unfortunately, the Manifesto project data available for Czech parties only cover elections between 1992 and 2017, thus missing the most recent general election of 2021, while CHES data only covers elections after 2002. Due to our focus on recent years and the crisis, we opted to rely on data from the latter, only looking at data from MP for the 1992-2002 period for cross reference and framing. This approach allows us to assess whether ideological repositioning or programmatic shifts might correlate with declining voter support for the traditional left.

## Mapping the Crisis

In this section, we illustrate the specific context in which the crisis of the Czech Left developed, briefly looking at the Czech party system and at the specific profiles and evolutions of both ČSSD and KSČM from the democratic transition to nowadays.

## The Czech Party System

The evolution of the Czech party system was characterised by rapid stabilisation in the 1990s, followed by a period of relative stability that

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Europe, Chapel Hill Expert Survey, accessed March 15, 2025, <https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe>. Milada Vachudova. "25 Years of Political Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 1999-2024," working paper.

<sup>17</sup> Pola Lehmann, Simon Franzmann, Denise Al-Gaddooa, Tobias Burst, Christoph Ivanusch, Sven Regel, Felicia Riethmüller, Andrea Volkens, Bernhard Weßels, Lisa Zehnter, "The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRC/CMP/MARPOR)," Version 2024a. (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) / Göttingen: Institut für Demokratieforschung (IfDem), 2024), <https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpd.2024a>.



lasted until the late 2000s. During this time, the system featured a clear demarcation between left and right, with the establishment of a strong social democratic party alongside an anti-system communist party dominating the left of the political spectrum.

During this period of stability, executive power alternated between two major parties: the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the ČSSD. Their competition was ideologically driven, with the ODS advocating neoliberal economic policies and the ČSSD promoting a social welfare approach.<sup>18</sup> Alongside these dominant parties, smaller parliamentary actors such as the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) maintained a presence, while centrist parties often proved short-lived. Indeed, economic policy conflicts were the most salient issues in Czech politics, with only a minor segment of the electorate representing Catholic voters, which explains the persistence of the Christian democratic KDU-ČSL.<sup>19</sup>

However, in more recent years, this equilibrium has progressively eroded, driven by the rise of new parties. This shift began with the 2010 elections and reached its peak between 2017 and 2021, significantly reshaping the Czech political landscape. The 2010 general election marked the beginning of a prolonged period of transformation, leading to the gradual fragmentation and destabilisation of the Czech party system.<sup>20</sup> The 2013 elections further reshaped the system with the success of new populist parties, notably ANO 2011, founded by Andrej Babiš, and Dawn of Direct Democracy (ÚSVIT). This trend continued in 2017, with the emergence of three new parties: the Freedom and Direct Democracy

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<sup>18</sup> Sean Hanley, "Re-stating Party Development in Central and Eastern Europe?," *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 44, no. 6 (2008), 1155-1176.

<sup>19</sup> Fernando Casal Bértoa, "Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited: A Sociological Explanation of Party System Institutionalization in East Central Europe," *Party Politics* 20, no. 1 (2014), 16-36; Vlastimil Havlík and Petr Voda, "The Rise of New Political Parties and Re-Alignment of Party Politics in the Czech Republic," *Acta Politologica* 8, no. 2 (2016): 119-144; Sten Berglund, and Jan Ake Dellenbrant, eds., *The New Democracies in Eastern Europe: Party Systems and Political Cleavages* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> Tomáš Cirhan and Petr Kopecký, "Fragmentation and Anti-Establishment Politics: Czech Party System in the 2020s," in *Political Parties and the Crisis of Democracy*, Wilhelm Hofmeister and Thomas Poguntke, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

(SPD), Mayors and Independents (STAN), and the Czech Pirate Party. By this time, the traditional two-party competition between ODS and ČSSD had been replaced by a fragmented political arena, dominated by ANO as the major party alongside multiple smaller parties, a scenario that repeated in 2021. This period was also marked by a gradual crisis of the left, ultimately leading to its exclusion from parliamentary representation in 2021 – the first time this had occurred since the establishment of the Czech Republic.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Czech Social Democracy (ČSSD) and the Communists (KSČM)**

Looking back at the historical development of the left within the Czech party system, the early years of the post-communist transition saw an initial shift in voter preferences towards the left. This dynamic was a consequence of political and economic reforms, which came at a high social cost in the heavily industrialised Czech Republic. While both left-wing parties increased their votes, this trend primarily benefitted the ČSSD, while the KSČM remained excluded from any governing coalition due to its anti-systemic nature.

Indeed, the unreformed character of the communist successor party is a distinctive feature of the Czech Republic within the broader CEE region. Unlike many neighbouring countries, the Czech left was primarily represented by a non-communist-successor party, the ČSSD. Despite this, the overall stability of the party – which persisted until 2017 – and the KSČM's ability to achieve significant electoral successes (notably in 2002 and 2010) represent a Czech anomaly with no direct parallel in the region. Meanwhile, the ČSSD was one of the two largest political parties in the Czech Republic between 1996 and 2017. It won four lower house elections and participated in government for 15 of the 28 years from the establishment of the independent Czech Republic in 1993 until its exclusion from parliament in 2021. This makes the crisis of the social-democratic left particularly striking.

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<sup>21</sup> Vlastimil Havlík and Jakub Lysek, "The Czech 2021 General Election and Its Impact on the Party System," *Politologický časopis / Czech Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 3 (2022): 225-238.

## The ČSSD

The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD, currently SOCDEM) is the oldest party still in existence on the Czech political stage, tracing its origins to the late 19th century. Originally founded in 1878, it is also one of the oldest socialist parties in Europe. The party was a major political player during the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) but was disbanded during the German occupation and only briefly reformed after the liberation (1945–1948), before being forced by Soviet authorities to merge with the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ). For decades, the ČSSD continued limited activities in exile and was finally reestablished in 1990 following the Velvet Revolution. Initially, the party only achieved limited success, but under the leadership of Miloš Zeman,<sup>22</sup> it secured an electoral breakthrough in the mid-1990s. Several other social democratic political formations failed to gain traction and either disappeared or failed to achieve meaningful influence in the Czech political landscape.<sup>23</sup>

The success of ČSSD in the 1990s can be attributed to widespread dissatisfaction with the consequences of the rapid transition to a market economy and privatization. By 1996, the party had become the second most-voted, trailing only slightly behind the ODS. In the early 1998 elections, the ČSSD emerged victorious with nearly one-third of the votes. This led to the formation of a minority government for the first time since the First Republic, thanks to a 'tolerance pact' with ODS. The social democratic government continued the privatization process while pursuing European integration and NATO membership, the latter achieved in 1999. The party underwent a major leadership change ahead of the 2002 elections, with Zeman replaced by Vladimír Špidla. After the elections, ČSSD remained in power by forming a coalition with minor liberal and centrist parties, focusing on a pro-European integration program. Despite the country's successful accession to the European Union in 2004, this period was marked by declining voter support and growing internal tensions, leading to another

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed list of all ČSSD/SocDem party leaders, see table 2 in the appendix.

<sup>23</sup> Pavel Šaradín, Patrik Eichler, "The State of Social Democracy in the Czech Republic," in *The Social Democratic Parties in the Visegrád Countries. Predicaments and Prospects for Progressivism*, eds. Ania Skrzypek, András Bíró-Nagy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30792-8>.

leadership change: Jiří Paroubek become prime minister and party leader. This helped the party regain popular support, but despite winning the 2006 elections, the ČSSD was ultimately forced into the opposition by a coalition formed by the ODS, the KDU-ČSL, and the Greens.<sup>24</sup>

In the following years, the party was plagued by internal divisions, particularly between the Zeman faction – which ultimately left to form its own political movement – and the party leadership. From 2010 onward, the ČSSD fell victim to rising anti-establishment sentiment and found itself in the opposition once again. However, the party managed to return to power after the 2013 elections, emerging as the most-voted party, albeit with only around 20% of the votes. ČSSD formed a coalition with Andrej Babiš's ANO 2011 and the centrist KDU-ČSL forming a fragile and tense alliance led by Bohuslav Sobotka.

From this point on, the ČSSD entered a period of steady decline. Besides persistent internal struggles, the party faced open challenges from Babiš, who gained popularity at its expense. This led to bitter intra-coalition conflicts and yet another leadership change. The 2017 elections marked the party's first major electoral collapse, losing almost two-thirds of its votes, dropping to just 7.1%, with most of its support shifting to ANO. Nonetheless, in 2018, the new party leader agreed to enter a coalition government with ANO, by far the largest party, relying on external support from the Communists. This move was highly controversial and further exacerbated intra-party conflicts, while the ČSSD's decline in public support continued.

In terms of organization and resources, the ČSSD was historically one of the wealthiest political parties in the Czech Republic, benefiting from substantial public funding linked to its electoral success. This financial stability was further reinforced by the party's extensive property holdings across the country. Since its inception, the ČSSD maintained a highly pluralistic internal structure with a strong national and local organisation, resembling a classic mass party and later evolving into a catch-all party,<sup>25</sup> at

<sup>24</sup> Šaradín, Eichler, "The State of Social Democracy in the Czech Republic."

<sup>25</sup> Martin Polášek, 'ČSSD v perspektivě stranicko-organizační' [The ČSSD from the Perspective of Party Organization], in *Mezi masovou a kartelovou stranou. Možnosti teorie při výkladu vývoje ČSSD a KSČM v letech 2000–2010* [Between the Mass and Cartel Party. Theoretical Possibilities in Explaining the Development of ČSSD and KSČM from 2000 to 2010], ed. Martin Polášek, Vilém Novotný, and Michel Perottino (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2012), 70–109.

least until the 2010s. While its membership never reached the pre-World War II levels of a true mass party, it remained relatively large compared to other Czech parties, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, it experienced a decline alongside its electoral losses. Consequently, several structural changes have been introduced in recent years.<sup>26</sup>

By the 2021 elections, the ČSSD had failed to surpass the 5% electoral threshold, losing parliamentary representation for the first time since 1992. This electoral debacle triggered an internal crisis, leading to clashes, further leadership changes, and eventually a rebranding to Social Democracy (*Sociální demokracie*, SOCDEM) in 2023. However, these efforts failed to reverse the party's decline, as reflected in its poor performance in the 2024 European elections and subsequent regional elections. Furthermore, the party suffered the departure of several former officials and prominent figures, deepening its ongoing crisis.

## The KSČM

Contrary to developments in Hungary and Poland, the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ) was wholly unprepared for the transition to democracy when it lost power in the autumn of 1989. By the time an extraordinary congress was convened, the transition was already a reality. In a feeble attempt at reform, the party sought to change its leadership, democratise its structure, and federalise its Czech and Slovak branches. As part of this process, the Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) was established on 31 March 1990 as the Czech federal branch of KSČ (the same year, ČSSD was re-established after 40 years).

At KSČM's first congress in November 1990, Jiří Svoboda, a reformist left-wing intellectual, was elected chairman over more conservative candidates. Faced with internal conflicts between reformists and orthodox communists, Svoboda attempted to pursue a third, evolutionary path, gradually transforming KSČM into an acceptable left-wing party, adapting its ideology, and potentially changing its name. However, many reform-oriented members left the party, and in 1992, party members (predominantly conservative communists) overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to change the party's

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<sup>26</sup> Šaradín, Eichler, "The State of Social Democracy in the Czech Republic."

name in an internal referendum. In the June 1992 elections, KSČM, running in a coalition with smaller left-wing formations and figures, secured 14% of the vote, making it the second-largest party, once again ahead of ČSSD. Between 1992 and 1993, internal conflicts between reformists and conservatives persisted, ultimately leading to the adoption of neo-communism as a compromise ideology. However, this shift also resulted in Svoboda's resignation.

From an organisational perspective, KSČM retained its mass membership and party structure.<sup>27</sup> Despite formally accepting democracy and a free-market economy while rejecting a return to socialism, in an effort to be recognised as a "legitimate" party, the KSČM maintained an anti-establishment character, making it an unviable coalition partner for democratic parties. Additionally, KSČM upheld a strong anti-imperialist stance, opposing the Czech Republic's accession to NATO and the European Union.

In the 1996 and 1998 elections, KSČM secured between 10% and 11% of the vote. ČSSD firmly refused to collaborate with KSČM, opting instead for a minority government in 1998 and later forming a coalition with centre-right parties after the 2002 elections. The 2002 elections marked KSČM's strongest electoral performance, with the party securing 18.5% of the vote. However, following this unexpected success, KSČM became the target of an anti-communist campaign, which led to the banning of its youth organisation and likely contributed to a decline in electoral support, from 18% in 2002 to 12% in 2006. Nevertheless, during the mid-2000s, KSČM underwent ideological and programmatic shifts, that distanced it from its past and aligned it with a Eurocommunist profile.

Although KSČM never replicated its 2002 success, it maintained stable electoral results, particularly in the 2012 regional elections, where it secured 20% of the vote. This success allowed KSČM to join governing coalitions in several regional assemblies alongside ČSSD. However, despite appearing as an increasingly viable governing partner, KSČM retained a radical left, anti-systemic character, preventing further political integration.

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<sup>27</sup> Michel Perottino and Martin Polášek, "KSČM v perspektivě stranickoorganizační [KSČM in the Perspective of Party Organization]", in *Mezi masovou a kartelovou stranou. Možnosti teorie při výkladu vývoje ČSSD a KSČM v letech 2000-2010*, [Between Mass and Cartel Party: Theoretical Possibilities in Explaining the Development of ČSSD and KSČM in the Years 2000-2010], eds. Martin Polášek, Vilém Novotný, Michel Perottino et al. [Between Mass and Cartel Party: Theoretical Possibilities in Explaining the Development of ČSSD and KSČM in the Years 2000-2010] (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2012), 110-128.

The 2013 elections marked KSČM's last significant success. The party secured over 14% of the vote, making it the third most-voted party. However, from this point onwards, KSČM and ČSSD both entered a period of steady decline.

After 2013, anti-communist rhetoric subsided, particularly in the relationship between ČSSD and KSČM, as governing coalitions had already been established in ten regions after the 2012 regional elections. However, in the 2017 elections, KSČM saw a sharp decline in support, though it slightly outperformed ČSSD for the first time since 1992 (7.8% *vs.* 7.3%).

A major turning point for KSČM occurred in 2018, when it provided parliamentary support to the Andrej Babiš-led coalition. It was the first time that the KSČM formally supported a Czech government. This decision sparked public protests, and in April 2021, KSČM withdrew its support. However, this did not improve the party's electoral standing, and in the October 2021 general election, KSČM suffered its worst-ever electoral defeat, failing to meet the parliamentary threshold and losing all parliamentary representation. Following this electoral disaster, party leader Vojtěch Filip resigned, and MEP Kateřina Konečná was elected as his successor, becoming the youngest leader in the party's history.

Under Konečná's leadership, KSČM reinforced its image as a Eurosceptic, populist radical-left party, while increasingly shifting towards conservative and nationalist positions, particularly in its criticism of the European Union, migration, and LGBT policies. This ideological transformation culminated in the creation of the *Stačilo!* ("Enough!") coalition. Ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections, KSČM formed an alliance with smaller nationalist-conservative parties,<sup>28</sup> marking a further departure from its left-wing roots. Simultaneously, with the onset of the war in Ukraine, KSČM adopted a strong pro-Russian stance, further shaping its new ideological trajectory.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, the debate over the party's ideological identity persists, with critics such as Jiří Dolejš opposing the Czech communist transformation towards a nationalist-populist party, considering the conservative left an oxymoron.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The *Stačilo!* coalition that ran for the 2024 European Parliament elections included the KSČM, the United Democrats – Association of Independents, and the Czech National Social Party.

<sup>29</sup> Formally, the coalition was registered as an individual party in October 2024 in order to avoid the 11% electoral threshold reserved for multi-party coalitions.

<sup>30</sup> Jiří Dolejš, "The Conservative Left – An Oxymoron?," *Transform! Europe*, 2023, <https://transform-network.net/blog/analysis/the-conservative-left-an-oxymoron/> (accessed 2 April 2024).

## Electoral Results and Party Positions

Having provided a broad introduction to our cases, outlining their evolution since the Velvet Revolution, we now turn our attention to a brief analysis of electoral support and party positioning over the past two decades. The decision to focus on the period from the early 2000s to 2024 is partly driven by data availability, and partly by our interest in the crisis affecting these two parties – a more recent phenomenon that is best captured by concentrating on this timeframe.

### Electoral Decline Over the Years

By examining the electoral performance of both ČSSD and KSČM, we can clearly trace the extent and progression of their crises (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). For the ČSSD, the decline began during the 2010-2013 elections, a period when all of the mainstream Czech parties, including the ODS, faced significant setbacks. However, the decline of the ČSSD accelerated sharply following the 2013 elections.

In contrast, 2013 marked the second-best electoral result for the KSČM, securing 14.9% of the vote. However, by the 2017 elections, its support had nearly halved to 7.7%, placing it only slightly ahead of ČSSD at 7.3% of the votes. The lowest point for both parties came in the 2021 national elections, with ČSSD receiving 4.7% and KSČM a record-low 3.6%.

The 2024 European Parliament elections – though not directly comparable to national elections – further confirmed the social democrats' ongoing crisis. The party managed only 1.9% of the vote and failed to secure any seats, performing even worse than in 1990, when it obtained 3.2%. In contrast, the Stačilo! coalition, which includes KSČM, secured 9.6%, signalling a revival of support for the national-populist left.

While national electoral data highlights the broader decline of ČSSD and KSČM, national electoral results alone do not fully illustrate the complexity of these trends, as significant territorial variations in electoral support have shaped local alliances in regional elections. Notably, unlike in other countries, the Czech left has never had a stronghold in the capital. Prague has consistently recorded below-average results for both



ČSSD and KSČM, a trend particularly evident for KSČM, which has had its worst electoral results in the Capital District for over two decades.

This pattern aligns with the performance of the two major challenger parties, ANO 2011 and SPD, which rose to prominence in parallel with the decline of the traditional left. Interestingly, both parties also struggle in Prague, reinforcing the capital's distinct political landscape.

When breaking down the 2021 election results, the strongest support for ČSSD and KSČM was found in the Vysočina and South Bohemia regions (a similar trend also was registered in 2017). Notably, many regions where these two parties still achieve above-average results are also those where ANO and SPD perform best, particularly in comparison with KSČM.

A comparative analysis of national and regional electoral data for KSČM and ČSSD, alongside SPD and ANO, highlights the decline of the traditional left in the Czech Republic and how this shift coincided with the rise of radical right populist parties (RRPP) and the emergence of new populist movements, which have also appealed to centre-left voters. Notably, ANO, initially positioned as a technocratic populist party, successfully attracted disillusioned left-leaning voters before shifting towards the right in recent years. A comparison of regional voting patterns further illustrates the erosion of traditional left-wing support, particularly in areas where populist parties have gained traction, and where they seem to compete for the same voters.

### **Party Positions – Shifts in Ideological and Policy Stances**

By examining the evolution of party positions – including general left-right alignment (*lrgen*), economic left-right stance (*lrecon*), and GAL-TAN positioning – based on data from the Chapel Hill expert surveys (see Figure 3 in the Appendix), ČSSD appears as a centre-left party with generally moderate positions on the GAL-TAN axis. This reflects an internal divide between progressive and traditional values. On the other hand, the KSČM can be classified as a radical left party both in terms of its general positioning and economic stances, but characterised by holding traditional, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) views.

Across the roughly two decades covered, only modest changes can be observed in these general ideological positions. However, the ČSSD has exhibited a slight shift further left in recent years, while both parties briefly moved towards more libertarian positions between 2010 and 2013, before reverting to their previous ideological orientations by the most recent elections.

Given the limited variation in broad ideological shifts, a more detailed examination of specific policy themes within the economic left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions could be more informative. In particular, we analysed party positions on: public spending vs. tax reduction (*spendvntax*); support for economic redistribution (*redistribution*); civil liberties *vs.* law and order (*civlib\_laworder*); stance on immigration policy (*immigrate\_policy*); attitudes towards multiculturalism (*multiculturalism*); commitment to environmental sustainability (*environment*); position on Russia (*eu\_russia*).<sup>31</sup> Additionally, we assess internal party dissent on three key issues: divisions over European integration (*eu\_dissent*); disagreements on libertarian *vs.* traditional values (*galtan\_dissent*); intra-party divisions on immigration policy (*immigrate\_dissent*).

All corresponding values are reported in Table 4 in the Appendix. These variables were selected to ensure maximum consistency over time, as other potentially relevant indicators were not always included in previous rounds of the expert surveys. The main findings from the data reveal a moderate shift in ČSSD towards a less pro-European stance and a more favourable position on Russia. While this shift could be expected to reinforce the party's TAN orientation, it coincides with an overall decline in ČSSD's TAN score. At the same time, ČSSD has increasingly supported economic redistribution, reflecting a leftward economic shift. By contrast, KSČM has undergone a more pronounced shift towards TAN positions since 2019, marked by greater opposition to European integration and immigration, an increased preference for law and order over civil liberties, and a stronger pro-Russian stance. In economic

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<sup>31</sup> The variable *eu\_russia* was only covered in the most recent surveys (2024). For the 2019 edition they measured the salience of Russian interference, using a different variable (*russian\_interference*). In this research we recoded *russian\_interference* to make it comparable to *eu\_russia* in the 2024 edition of CHES.

terms, however, KSČM has remained largely stable. Both parties, despite maintaining a pro-public spending stance, have moved closer to one another by adopting slightly more fiscally prudent positions, shifting marginally towards a preference for tax reductions over increased public spending.

An analysis of internal dissent within ČSSD reveals that the party was deeply divided over GAL-TAN issues in 2019, though these divisions appear less pronounced in 2024. In contrast, KSČM has been consistently evaluated as a highly unified party across all measured themes.

At first glance, these shifts in party positions appear to have played only a limited role in explaining the parties' electoral decline. However, given the inherent limitations of expert survey data, a more in-depth qualitative analysis, incorporating elite interviews, is necessary to assess the subtleties of these shifts and to determine whether policy adjustments (or the lack thereof) contributed to the crises affecting ČSSD and KSČM.

### **Empirical Analysis: The Reasons for Crisis and Resilience**

In this part of our paper, we discuss the outcomes of the analysis of the party elite interviews data. These interviews were conducted before the 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections, so the most recent events are not fully reflected in these insights. To complement the analysis of interview data with more up to date sources, several types of secondary data like speeches, press releases, and media interviews are added to cover these recent events. For more clarity, the following discussion is divided thematically, with each section focusing on a specific factor related to the decline of the left, as mentioned in the interviews with party elites.

### **Anti-Left Narratives in a Neoliberal-Dominated Political Landscape**

The first key factor contributing to the crisis of the Czech left is the set of values embedded in Czech society. These values have distanced voters and placed left-wing parties at a long-term disadvantage compared to their ideological competitors. Respondents identified several factors responsible

for this phenomenon, including historically *“strong anti-left narratives”* (KSČM 3) and *“neoliberal dominance in public and media debates”* (SOCDEM 3).

One respondent observed that *“there is a significant cultural dominance of the right in Czechia; the left lost the debate over whether poverty has structural causes or is solely the failure of individuals. Czech society places strong emphasis on meritocracy”* (SOCDEM 3). This dominance is attributed to the failure to establish influential left-leaning institutions, as another respondent stated: *“cultural, media, and activist groups supporting the left exist, but their visibility and influence are limited”* (SOCDEM 1). The issue is further compounded by the role of capital in shaping public discourse, as another respondent noted: *“this right-wing cultural hegemony distinguishes post-communist countries, particularly Czechia, from Western states, where a more balanced dialogue exists between left- and right-wing policies. Political institutions that lack support from private capital remain weak, while capital can always organise and fund its own propaganda and representatives”* (SOCDEM 3).

Some respondents attributed this situation to the systematic exclusion of left-wing topics from public discourse. As one stated, *“left-wing politics is not considered part of Czechia’s democratic values due to strong neoliberal, anti-communist, and anti-left narratives that affect all left-wing actors. There is an abnormally strong inclination towards corporatism”* (SOCDEM 1). Others highlighted the persistence of anti-communist narratives, even decades after the Velvet Revolution, arguing that *“strong anti-communist sentiment still prevails in Czech society, even against party members born shortly before the revolution”* (KSČM 2).

Some respondents further linked the Czech left’s struggle to the rise of individualism, with one noting: *“there is little emphasis on collective identity. Only about ten percent of Czechs are members of labour unions, which are negatively portrayed in the media – just like many left-wing topics”* (KSČM 3). However, other interviewees argued that the electorate did not necessarily oppose left-wing policies, but rather distrusted left-wing parties. As one put it: *“many Czech voters hold left-wing values – supporting the welfare state, human rights, and emancipation – but they do not associate these values with left-wing parties strongly enough to vote for them. Alternatively, they simply do not trust them”* (KSČM 1).

## A Fragmented Czech Left: The Long-Term Failure to Cooperate

A second frequently mentioned theme in respondents' accounts was the fragmentation of the Czech left and its inability to unify and collaborate. Due to historical divisions and personal animosities, some left-wing actors have sought alliances with nationalist conservative groups rather than with more ideologically compatible left-wing partners.

From the perspective of KSČM elites, one respondent observed: *"fragmentation has persisted for a long time and affects both Czech left-wing parties. There is no common vision, so it ultimately depends on individuals, who remain divided"* (KSČM 3). Another was even more critical, stating: *"the left is crumbling, unable to unify, and under pressure to survive. Instead of consolidating, KSČM is engaging in new initiatives like Stačilo, which are inconsistent with its identity and ideological DNA. The 'conservative left' is an oxymoron and a dead end for the Czech left"* (KSČM 1).

Other respondents pointed to deep-seated historical divisions, arguing that: *"the tensions between the SOCDEM and the KSČM are not new but have historical roots that persist today. Some older members of KSČM hold an aversion to SOCDEM, and vice versa. Anti-communist propaganda has also contributed to negative perceptions of KSČM within SOCDEM. Meanwhile, the right managed to form coalitions because they recognised that they would not stand a chance separately. On the left, we remain resistant to such arrangements, not only competing for voters but also poaching each other's candidates – leading to a situation where neither of us gets elected. If we formed common candidate lists, representatives from both parties would benefit"* (KSČM 2).

Despite these challenges, respondents acknowledged that unification was essential for survival, yet personal rivalries and the competition for candidate positions prevented progress. One respondent explained: *"self-preservation should push us to unite, but it does not happen due to personal animosities, individual ambitions, and the difficulty of negotiations. Everyone is playing their own game. The desire to be on candidate lists takes precedence over the willingness to form left-wing coalitions"* (KSČM 1). This suggests that ego-driven decision-making may be obstructing coalition building.

Longstanding rivalries between SOCDEM and KSČM, were also noted: *"the main problem for the Czech left is that we compete instead of cooperating. Rivalry between SOCDEM and KSČM has existed for decades. At the municipal and regional levels, we have good relationships, and even proposed a common*

*Senate candidate, but such initiatives never made it past the SOCDEM leadership, particularly its regional committees. Katka (Konečná) was open to cooperation, but SOCDEM blocked it. As a result, neither party was elected. In other countries, even ideologically diverse left-wing entities – liberal and conservative – managed to cooperate, but in Czechia, we would rather destroy ourselves” (KSČM 2). Historically, the prospects for a left-wing government coalition – let alone an electoral alliance – have been minimal. One respondent explained: “it was difficult for SOCDEM to adopt a clear ideological strategy. Both left-wing parties were caught between centre-left and liberal perspectives, which alienated some voters. The only time the left had a parliamentary majority was under Špidla’s leadership of SOCDEM, and he refused to collaborate with Grebeníček and KSČM. Since then, things have only declined” (KSČM 1). Perhaps paradoxically, SOCDEM elites’ perspectives on fragmentation differed significantly from those of KSČM. Most SOCDEM interviewees did not mention KSČM at all, attempting to avoid the topic entirely. This omission is striking given that KSČM elites spoke extensively about SOCDEM, their potential alliance, and historical grievances. Only one SOCDEM respondent explicitly considered collaboration with KSČM, noting: “it is not feasible to create a broad left-wing coalition in Czechia, as it happened in Poland, because key actors – SOCDEM and KSČM – could not decide whether to pursue a progressive or conservative strategy. SOCDEM could collaborate with some leftist parties, such as Budoucnost, but Levice was too radical and extremely pro-Palestinian, which alienated some SOCDEM elites” (SOCDEM 2). This response suggests a reluctance within SOCDEM to seek new alliances at that time.*

While SOCDEM respondents frequently mentioned fragmentation (SOCDEM 1, 2, 4), they primarily discussed internal factionalism within SOCDEM itself, rather than the broader lack of cooperation between left-wing parties. This focus on internal divisions will be examined further in the next subsection.

## **Organisational Issues and Factionalism**

The internal factionalism within SOCDEM, widely publicised in Czech media, has been characterised by the longstanding competition between

its liberal and conservative wings. According to respondents, this internal struggle significantly contributed to the party's decline. One respondent stated that the party's internal crisis was rooted in prolonged internal conflicts, leading to an image problem: *"SOCDEM did not have the authority to execute the necessary legislative reforms and carry out its policies. When the public sees the party is divided and arguing internally, they do not trust it to be capable of delivering results for the voters and therefore do not support it in elections"* (SOCDEM 4). The severity of these internal divisions was further emphasised by another respondent: *"The divisions that existed for a long time in SOCDEM were fundamentally influencing the party's fall"* (SOCDEM 3).

Respondents also noted that SOCDEM's inability to present a united front exacerbated its crisis. The competition between the liberal and conservative wings not only delayed decisive action but also resulted in conflicting interpretations of the crisis and its solutions. One respondent described this as: *"The constant divide between these two ideological groups within SOCDEM generates vastly different perspectives on the causes of the crisis and, in turn, different possible solutions. The inability to form one unified vision of how to react to the crisis and how to resolve it prolongs and complicates taking any stance. To make matters worse, these two groups of internal ideological opponents were not only constantly competing for dominance and control of SOCDEM but were also actively undermining each other's positions, often controlling different branches in certain areas and refusing to cooperate"* (SOCDEM 2).

Beyond organisational cohesion, this internal conflict influenced the ideological identity of SOCDEM, making it increasingly incoherent to voters. One respondent highlighted that the party struggled to maintain a consistent public image: *"SOCDEM struggled with presenting a unified image that would be suitable to both voters in smaller towns and villages, who are more conservative, and the more liberal electorate in bigger cities"* (SOCDEM 2). This ambiguity became particularly evident when the party was compelled to take a stance on major issues, particularly in international politics, where consensus was lacking. One respondent provided an insider perspective: *"Many tried to support SOCDEM, particularly the labour unions, but they failed to see how divided the party was internally. To see this, it is not enough to attend the party congress; one would have to join local and regional meetings to understand how deep the divisions run. Major issues such as the rights of gender and sexual minorities, the Green Deal, or the*

*war in Ukraine are all sources of division, making consensus very difficult, if not impossible, to reach. As a result, SOCDEM in its last term in the Chamber of Deputies was an ambiguous party, and nobody could be certain of its position on many topics" (SOCDEM 2).*

Similarly, KSČM respondents identified international politics as a major source of division, though not necessarily within the party itself but rather within the broader left-wing spectrum, thereby hindering potential alliances. One respondent stated: *"The war in Ukraine is a major cleavage factor on the left, splitting left-wing voters. Nobody wants to embrace Putin, but the most that can be mentioned is peace. The relationship with NATO is complicated for the left" (KSČM 1).* Given that left-leaning voters are divided on these matters, left-wing parties have struggled to adopt clear positions without risking the alienation of segments of their electorate.

KSČM's organisational issues, unlike SOCDEM's, were not primarily driven by factionalism but rather by demographic challenges and an inability to attract new voters. One respondent acknowledged: *"KSČM has notorious problems attracting new party members to compensate for our ageing membership. They are not necessarily dying, but many are in care homes or no longer politically active" (KSČM 2).* Another respondent reinforced this view, highlighting that the party is perceived as belonging to the older generation and that *"the young wing of KSČM is not communicating well with the rest of the party; they are too orthodox" (KSČM 3).* Others suggested that KSČM's historical baggage further complicates its efforts to modernise: *"KSČM is often seen as conservative, negatively connected to the past. We are one of the few successor parties that did not change our name, which can be damaging. There were several parties that split from us in the 1990s, but they were unsuccessful. Our name remained because Czechs are conservative and stick to their roots, especially the older generation. We do not like change and do not trust new things. I am just afraid this might mean our end once the older generation is gone" (KSČM 2).*

In addition to demographic challenges, financial difficulties have significantly impacted KSČM's organisational structure. The party, once a mass organisation, has been forced to cut back on its regional apparatus, which was once a key strength. One respondent noted: *"In the past, the party had standard employees in the regions responsible for running operations. Nowadays, it is just one person per regional capital doing all the*



*work – setting the political agenda, organising events, preparing campaigns, overseeing candidate lists, and maintaining communication with members – all voluntarily, in their own free time” (KSČM 2).*

SOCDEM also faced severe financial difficulties, which directly influenced its leadership changes. One respondent explained that these financial struggles led to the election of Michal Šmarda as party leader between 2021 and 2024: *“Šmarda was elected to consolidate the party organisation, save the party’s finances, and ensure the continued functioning of the party apparatus. This was a crucial phase for SOCDEM, and he managed to achieve this goal. However, he is not the type of leader who can attract the masses of voters. Theoretically, this could be Jana Maláčová” (SOCDEM 2).*

Related to the state of the party organisation, several SOCDEM respondents highlighted that many of the party’s members and elites remain stuck in the past, attempting to apply outdated campaign strategies that were successful in the late 1990s and early 2000s but are no longer effective today. As one respondent noted: *“A significant part of the membership and elites nostalgically remembers campaign techniques that used to work, attempting to push these strategies in the current political reality” (SOCDEM 2, 4).* A similar challenge was identified in KSČM, where respondents described the party’s ageing leadership and its failure to develop younger cadres capable of running for office and attracting voters. One respondent acknowledged: *“Over the years, SOCDEM was unable to generate cadre structures of elites who would now be young enough and capable of running for office and generating votes” (SOCDEM 3).* A comparable observation was made regarding KSČM: *“The party is ageing quickly, fails to attract new younger members, and has lost the ability to generate experts and elites who could serve as candidates and help win back voters” (KSČM 1, 2).*

### **The Role of New Anti-Establishment Challengers Attracting Formerly Left-Leaning Electorates**

A final frequent theme in the interviews was the rise of electorally successful anti-establishment populist parties, particularly ANO, and their impact on the decline of SOCDEM and KSČM. Many respondents suggested that forming coalition governments with ANO between 2014 and 2021 was a

major strategic error, ultimately jeopardising both parties' survival in Czech politics. One interviewee argued that *"coalitions with ANO significantly damaged SOCDEM. For the first one and a half years, we had to pressure ANO into left-wing solutions and policies, but then Andrej Babiš realised that there was electoral space to be taken with such a strategy. We effectively created the political content for ANO"* (SOCDEM 3). Another respondent observed that *"all the positively perceived changes were considered and presented as successes of ANO, while SOCDEM failed to claim ownership of them"* (SOCDEM 2).

A more critical view was expressed by another interviewee, who argued that *"left-wing voters were effectively kidnapped by Babiš and his ANO. During the first coalition between SOCDEM, ANO, and KDU-ČSL, Babiš frequently opposed increased spending on pensions and social reforms. However, when we and KDU-ČSL outvoted ANO on these matters, Babiš presented the new legislation to the media as his own idea and took credit for it. His team was highly skilled at identifying key issues that could attract our voters. Babiš excelled at portraying all positive developments as his own achievements, while blaming SOCDEM for any negative outcomes"* (SOCDEM 4).

The rise of anti-establishment challengers was also linked to a fundamental shift in party competition, transitioning from a traditionally ideological framework to a more interest-driven dynamic. This transformation has already been explored in Czech political research.<sup>32</sup> As one respondent noted, *"Babiš's success altered the nature of party competition from left versus right to establishment versus anti-establishment"* (SOCDEM 4). Several interviewees suggested that political communication lost substantive content, shifting from debates on economic transformation, EU integration, or NATO membership – issues largely settled by 2010 – towards emotion-driven populism. According to one interviewee, *"around 2010, politics started losing its content, as marketing experts changed the rules of the game from factual debate to populism. The new arena was a marketing-engineered emotional clash that continues to this day. Right-wing parties adapted better to this shift, whereas welfare-state reforms were too complex to simplify into short emotional messages. The left-wing parties, constrained by inertia, failed to adjust. This is largely due to the exhaustion of their political elites – there are hardly any left"* (KSČM 1).

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<sup>32</sup> Cirhan and Kopecký, "Fragmentation and Anti-Establishment Politics: The Czech Party System in the 2020s."

This struggle to adapt was compounded by limited financial resources. One interviewee commented that *“the problem is that we have a complex party programme on one hand and potential voters on the other, who simply do not care about it—it does not resonate with them. Right-wing parties also lack substantive programmes that appeal to voters, but they have the financial resources to invest in PR and attract support. Left-wing parties lack the funding to do so”* (KSČM 3). Furthermore, some respondents perceived a broader lack of a unifying vision on the left. As one put it, *“there are no longer clear common goals for the left. Whether it is green politics or social solidarity, Babiš can offer more. The left suffers from a deficit of real vision, which is why voters gravitate towards figures like Babiš – his message is clearer”* (KSČM 3). Without a cohesive ideological vision, left-wing parties struggle to reclaim their electorate, especially against competitors with greater financial and media influence.

Another recurring theme in the interviews was the perceived ineffectiveness of party programmes in communicating with voters. One respondent stated that *“the party wastes enormous time and effort on thirty- to forty-page-long manifestos that nobody reads apart from internal party committees. In contrast, Babiš and ANO rely on a single slogan and four key messages, which can be adjusted flexibly based on social survey data”* (SOCDEM 2). This issue was raised repeatedly, with some interviewees arguing that SOCDEM was *“obsessed with lengthy party manifestos and programmes that neither voters nor potential target groups read”* (SOCDEM 1). Similar concerns were expressed regarding KSČM (KSČM 1).

Despite these challenges, some interviewees identified a potential way forward, pointing to the role of leadership and digital engagement. One respondent viewed Konečná's leadership as a positive development, arguing that *“Konečná connects with voters, is highly active on YouTube and social media, and appeals to both middle-aged and older voters”* (KSČM 3). This suggests that while traditional left-wing parties face significant structural and strategic disadvantages, their future prospects may depend on their ability to modernise political communication and engage with voters more effectively in the digital era.

## Recent Developments

Several significant political developments have taken place since the interviews for this study were conducted. Most notably, the Stačilo coalition achieved considerable electoral success in the aftermath of the 2024 European Parliament elections, securing 9.56% of the vote and winning two seats. In contrast, SOCDEM continued its decline, receiving only 1.86% of the vote and failing to secure any seats. For KSČM, these elections boosted its involvement in the Stačilo project. For SocDem, however, the further loss of support deepened its crisis. Consequently, KSČM decided to run as part of the Stačilo coalition in the 2025 parliamentary elections, while SOCDEM underwent a leadership change and a strategic shift in response to the electoral setback.

At the October 2024 party congress, Jana Maláčová replaced Michal Šmarda, who did not seek reelection. Maláčová received 66% of the delegate vote, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with the party's previous leadership.<sup>33</sup> However, her election sparked internal divisions, leading to the departure of several prominent figures from SOCDEM's liberal wing, including former foreign minister Tomáš Petříček and former education minister Petra Buzková.<sup>34</sup>

After assuming leadership, Maláčová initiated statutory changes to centralize decision-making and launched an effort to secure the return of SOCDEM to the Chamber of Deputies. Her strategy focused primarily on socio-economic issues, including stagnant wages, rising energy and food prices, and the housing crisis, while placing less emphasis on foreign policy. This approach was motivated by her ambition to form a broad left-wing electoral coalition, inspired by the French left-wing alliance. The envisioned coalition was to include KSČM, along with Budoucnost, Levice (the Left), and Strana Zelených (the Green Party).

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<sup>33</sup> Radek Bartoníček, (2024) *Maláčová zvolena předsedkyní ČSSD. Stranu chce vrátit mezi elitu* [Maláčová elected chair of ČSSD. She wants to return the party to the elite], *Aktuálně.cz*, accessed 2 April 2024, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/socdem-sjezd-malacova-zvole-ni/r~22004dfe830911efa065ac1f6b220ee8/>.

<sup>34</sup> Jan Menšík, (2024) *Petra Buzková odchází ze SocDem* [Petra Buzková leaves the Social Democrats], *Novinky.cz*, accessed 2 April 2024, <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-petra-buzkova-odchazi-ze-socdem-40492020>.

However, consensus on foreign policy issues, particularly regarding the war in Ukraine and NATO membership, proved elusive, especially between SOCDEM and KSČM. As a result, negotiations focused on domestic socio-economic issues, where there was more agreement.

SOCDEM prioritized these pre-election negotiations, but despite its willingness to make concessions, the talks ultimately collapsed. First, KSČM unilaterally decided to join the newly established Stačilo movement ahead of the parliamentary elections without consulting SOCDEM. Second, although KSČM formally remained in talks with SOCDEM, in reality, Stačilo increasingly positioned itself not as a left-wing coalition but as an anti-establishment, nationalist, and radical right movement.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, in February 2025, SOCDEM officially ended negotiations, leaving the party with little time to formulate a new electoral strategy.<sup>36</sup> KSČM's decision to mislead SOCDEM into negotiations while pursuing an alliance with radical right populists sparked internal criticism, leading to the formal expulsion of key figures, including Jiří Dolejš.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, Konečná further distanced herself and her party from European radical left movements by declining to join The Left group in the European Parliament.

With the collapse of the left-wing coalition talks, SOCDEM sought alternative alliances, engaging in negotiations with Přísaha (Oath) and the Green Party.<sup>38</sup> Speculation also arose regarding SOCDEM's possible

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<sup>35</sup> Šárka Fenyková (2025) 'Stačilo není levicová alternativa. Je populistické, nadávat na vládu nestačí' [Stačilo is not a left-wing alternative. It is populist, and complaining about the government is not enough], *iRozhlas.cz*, accessed 2 April 2024, [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/stacilo-neni-levicova-alternativa-je-populisticke-nadavat-na-vladu-nestaci\\_2502122113\\_adn](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/stacilo-neni-levicova-alternativa-je-populisticke-nadavat-na-vladu-nestaci_2502122113_adn).

<sup>36</sup> Štěpánka Pavlína Borská and Josef Kopecký, (2025) "Stačilo se chystá ke kandidatuře do sněmovny, spolupracuje se socdem" [Stačilo plans to run for the Chamber of Deputies, cooperating with the Social Democrats], *iDNES.cz*, accessed 2 April 2024, [https://www.idnes.cz/volby/kandidatura-snemovni-volby-stacilo-socdem.A250210\\_101220\\_domaci\\_bors.es.cz](https://www.idnes.cz/volby/kandidatura-snemovni-volby-stacilo-socdem.A250210_101220_domaci_bors.es.cz).

<sup>37</sup> Vojtěch Petrů (2025) "Jiří Dolejš: Stačilo není levicové uskupení, slouží jako výtah nacionalistům" [Jiří Dolejš: Stačilo is not a leftist group, it serves as an elevator for nationalists], *Deník Referendum*, accessed 2 April 2024, <https://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/237177-jiri-dolejs-stacilo-neni-levicove-uskupeni-slouzi-jako-vytah-nacionalistum>.

<sup>38</sup> Martina Machová, and Karolina Brodničková, (2025) 'Šlachta pohořel s motoristy a hledá nové spojence. Oslovil Maláčovou i Okamuru' [Šlachta failed with motorists and is looking for new allies. He approached Maláčová and Okamura], *Novinky.cz*, accessed 08 April 2024,

collaboration with ANO<sup>39</sup>, which resulted in further exits from the party.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, SOCDEM launched its election campaign, prioritising housing affordability with slogans such as “Housing is our militarization,” a response to the government's increased military spending in light of recent international security concerns.<sup>41</sup>

As the 2025 general elections approach, SOCDEM has increasingly adopted a leftist economic agenda, though its feasibility remains questionable in terms of fiscal sustainability.<sup>42</sup> Despite its campaign efforts, the party's prospects remain highly uncertain, with opinion polls consistently placing its support at around 3%, well below the 5% threshold required for parliamentary representation.<sup>43</sup> By contrast, Stačilo! is polling at approximately 6%, far below KSČM's historical levels before 2013, but still enough to enter Parliament – albeit with a significantly different political platform.

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<https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-slachta-pohorel-s-motoristy-a-hleda-nove-spojence-oslovil-malacovou-i-okamuru-40504861>.

<sup>39</sup> Lucie Stuchlíková and Václav Dolejší (2025) “SocDem pošilháva po místech na kandidátkách ANO” [Social Democrats are eyeing spots on ANO candidate lists], *Seznam Zprávy*, accessed 08 April 2024, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/volby-do-poslanecke-snemovny-socdem-posilhava-po-mistech-na-kandidatkach-ano-270803>.

<sup>40</sup> Karolina Brodničková (2025) “Maláčová a Zaorálek tajně jednají o kandidatuře za ANO, nářkl spolustraníky Rouček” [Maláčová and Zaorálek secretly negotiate running for ANO, Rouček accused party colleagues], *Novinky.cz*, accessed 08 April 2024, <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/volby-do-poslanecke-snemovny-malacova-a-zaoralek-tajne-jednaji-o-kandidature-za-ano-narkl-spolustraniky-roucek-40516365>.

<sup>41</sup> Marek Pausz (2025) “Bydlení je naše zbrojení, hlásá SOCDEM. Z plakátu s garsonkou se neubráníte, namítl Rakušan” [Housing is our weapon, declares SOCDEM. You can't defend yourself with a studio flat, Rakušan objects], *CNN Prima News*, accessed 08 April 2024, <https://cnn.iprima.cz/bydleni-je-nase-zbrojeni-hlasa-socdem-z-plakatu-s-garsonkou-se-neubranite-namitl-rakusan-466476>.

<sup>42</sup> Petr Honzejek (2025) “Deset tisíc do každé rodiny na taneční a Ježíšek pro důchodce. Nápady Jany Maláčové jsou šílené, ale v jedné věci dávají smysl” [Ten thousand for every family for dance classes and Santa Claus for pensioners. Jana Maláčová's ideas are crazy, but they make sense in one way], *Hospodářské noviny*, accessed: 08 April 2024, <https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-67674350-deset-tisic-do-kazde-rodiny-na-tanecni-a-jezisek-pro-duchodce-napady-jany-malacove-jsou-silene-ale-v-jedne-veci-davaji-smysl>.

<sup>43</sup> See for instance Politico polls of polls for the Czech Republic, accessed 08 April 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/czech-republic/>.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of the interviews revealed three dominant themes: the persistence of anti-left narratives within the Czech neoliberal-dominated political landscape, the fragmentation of the left due to long-term failures in cooperation, and internal organisational and factional issues. While interviewees acknowledged these challenges, they often struggled to articulate clear solutions to address the root causes of the left's decline.

These problems have been exacerbated by the rise of anti-establishment parties such as ANO and SPD, which have successfully attracted formerly left-leaning electorates. By examining the timeline of this crisis, a critical factor in the decline of both SOCDEM and KSČM appears to have been their cooperation with ANO 2011. The first major collapse was linked to SOCDEM's decision to form a coalition with ANO between 2013 and 2017, while the second decline followed when both parties supported the Babiš government (2018–2021). During this period, ANO (and, up to a point, SPD) strategically targeted leftist populist voters, significantly eroding the electoral bases of both SOCDEM and KSČM.<sup>44</sup> However, while interviewees frequently mentioned ANO and SPD's role in stealing traditional socialist and communist voters, they did not necessarily perceive this as the primary cause of the left's broader crisis.

SOCDEM has been criticized for lacking vision and a distinct identity in recent years, increasingly overshadowed by ANO and other populist parties. Some scholars argued that the party's shift towards a more populist left-wing approach alienated moderate traditional voters. It is also noteworthy that interviewees perceived the party as lacking a clear vision and identity in recent times, including major policy and identity issues.

An interesting highlight has been the different opinions among the two parties related to the divisions within the left and its inability to collaborate, even more so in light of the latest attempts made by the new SOCDEM leadership to find willing coalition partners for the upcoming elections.

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<sup>44</sup> Pavel Maškarinec, "The Rise of New Populist Political Parties in Czech Parliamentary Elections between 2010 and 2017: The Geography of Party Replacement," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 60, no. 5 (September 3, 2019): 511–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2019.1691928>. Tomáš Cirhan. *Party organization and electoral success of new anti-establishment parties*. (Milton Park: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023).

The research also highlights the severe organisational challenges faced by both SOCDEM and KSČM, although their core issues differ. KSČM has historically maintained a more stable leadership than SOCDEM. While SOCDEM's decline has been exacerbated by internal factionalism, ideological incoherence and ineffective campaigning, KSČM has primarily struggled with demographic shifts, financial difficulties, and outdated political strategies. The ageing membership and voter base of KSČM, a trend documented in existing literature,<sup>45</sup> presents a broader organisational challenge for the party, complicating its ability to adapt to contemporary political dynamics. In parallel, SOCDEM is now facing financial challenges, too. The lack of financial and media resources has been pointed out as a major problem when facing much more resourceful challengers.

The findings on party positions and internal dissent align with previous scholarly work on SOCDEM, as well as data from expert surveys. However, what is particularly noteworthy is the transformation within KSČM, where its ongoing strategic realignment and commitment to the Stačilo alliance are generating internal rifts. While this shift appears to be yielding short-term electoral gains, it has also alienated segments of the party's older communist members and its liberal faction, potentially undermining the party's territorial organisation. Nonetheless, there is a conscious effort by the current leadership, particularly under Konečná, to adopt a new style of party communication and organisation centred around her personal leadership, which could be described as a form of personalisation. The evolving strategic repositioning of KSČM provides a particularly compelling perspective on the party's shifting role within Czech politics.

More broadly, our findings would, in part, challenge theories that attribute the rise of new populist radical right parties in Central and Eastern Europe to the excessive moderation of centre-left or communist successor parties.<sup>46</sup> At least within the specific context of the Czech Republic, recent developments suggest that new populist parties have

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<sup>45</sup> Lukáš Linek, "When will Czech Communist Party voters die out? An examination of the age structure of the KSCM electorate," *Politologický časopis [Czech Journal of Political Science]* 15, no. 4 (2008): 318-337.

<sup>46</sup> Snegovaya, *When Left Moves Right: The Decline of the Left and the Rise of the Populist Right in Postcommunist Europe*.



successfully capitalised on the crisis affecting both the mainstream centre-left left (ČSSD/SOCDEM), which is by all accounts not a communist successor, and the still unreformed communist populist left (KSČM). Furthermore, the results of Stačilo seem to suggest that there is some space for a nationalist, conservative populist left within the Czech Party system.

## Conclusions

This study has explored the crisis of KSČM and SOCDEM, looking for key factors behind their decline, elements of resilience, and the obstacles preventing a resurgence. The synthesis of qualitative interview data provides a comprehensive picture of the challenges and resilience dynamics shaping the Czech left. Overall, the findings from expert surveys and interviews largely align, although many more insights emerge from the qualitative interviews, highlighting internal party struggles and the impact of external political challengers, aspects that quantitative data alone cannot fully capture. Indeed, an analysis limited to just examining party positions would have provided limited answers to the core research questions.

Despite the many shortcomings and challenges identified, which are both structural, contingent, and ideological, the findings suggest that KSČM, under Konečná's leadership and its affiliation with the Stačilo alliance, may have found a path towards resilience. This has been achieved through a strategic shift towards national-conservative values and a more personalised leadership model. However, this transformation is not without risks, as it has alienated certain segments of the party's traditional support base and created internal tensions.

In contrast, SOCDEM appears to be in a more precarious position, struggling with ideological drift and internal fragmentation, accompanied by a haemorrhage of members among the party's elite. The party has shown no signs of revival in recent elections, including the 2024 European Parliament elections, where it suffered losses despite maintaining some minimal regional influence. With the 2025 general elections approaching, SOCDEM stands at a critical juncture, with no clear path for revitalisation.

For future research, cross-referencing these findings with voter behaviour data would offer a more holistic understanding of the demand-side dynamics affecting these parties. Additionally, expanding the interview sample to include a broader geographic and organisational representation would enhance the robustness of the analysis. A more extensive sample would also allow us to focus on an assessment of the (dis)alignment between the quantitative variables contributing to the left's crisis and the perceptions of party elites. The outcome of the 2025 elections will provide further insights into whether KSČM's transformation strategy proves sustainable, and if SOCDEM can find a viable path forward, or if it will fall victim to its persistent crisis.

## Appendix

Table 1

List of Respondents

Identifier	Name	M/Y	Duration (min.)	Position within the party
SOCDEM 1	Patrik Eichler	04/24	79	Masaryk democratic academy (SOCDEM thinktank) manager
SOCDEM 2	Lukáš Henzl	04/24	64	Local party leader in Prague 3 (2018-2022)
SOCDEM 3	Vladimír Špidla	03/24	80	Party leader (2001-2004)
SOCDEM 4	Martin Hyský	04/24	43	Regional party leader in Vysočina region (2021-now)
SOCDEM 5	Tomáš Petříček	04/24	57	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (2018-2021)
KSČM 1	Jiří Dolejš	04/24	75	Deputy party leader (1999-2009; 2012-2018)
KSČM 2	Helena Vrzalová	04/24	64	Regional party leader in Vysočina region (2023-2024); member of central party committee (2015-2019)
KSČM 3	Jiří Málek	04/24	76	Former member of KSČ, insider with Czech left circles and KSČM

Table 2

### Party Leadership

Party Leaders	
ČSSD/SocDem	KSČM
Miloš Zeman (28 February 1993 – April 2001)	Jiří Machalík (31 March – 13 October 1990)
Vladimír Špidla (April 2001 – 26 July 2004)	Jiří Svoboda (13 October 1990 – 25 June 1993)
Stanislav Gross (26 July 2004 – 26 April 2005)	Miroslav Grebeníček (25 June 1993 – 1 October 2005)
Bohuslav Sobotka (2005-2006; acting)	Vojtěch Filip (1 October 2005 – 9 October 2021)
Jiří Paroubek (2006-2010)	Kateřina Konečná (23 October 2021 – present)
Bohuslav Sobotka (2011-2017)	
Milan Chovanec (2017-2018; acting)	
Jan Hamáček (2018-2021)	
Roman Onderka (2021; acting)	
Michal Šmarda (2021-2024)	
Jana Maláčová (since 2024)	

Table 3

Party Positions

party	year	lrgen	lrecon	galtan	galtan_dissent	eu_position	eu_dissent	spendvtax	redistribution	civlib_laworder	immigrate_policy	eu_russia
ČSSD	2002	3.33	3.00	4.69		6.44	2.41					
ČSSD	2006	3.43	3.29	4.86		5.88	3.00	2.71	3.50	5.20	5.25	
ČSSD	2010	2.89	2.53	3.58		6.16	1.72	2.29	2.31	5.47	5.80	
ČSSD	2014	3.14	2.71	4.43		6.07	2.92	2.64	2.85	4.83	4.33	
ČSSD	2019	2.74	2.59	4.92	6.45	5.74	4.23	2.22	2.44	5.44	7.19	5.9
SOCDEM	2024	2.77	2.39	4.78	4.79	5.07	3.63	3.12	2.09	5.11	5.94	6.10
KSČM	2002	0.91	0.86	7.82		2.72	3.40					
KSČM	2006	0.86	1.00	7.67		2.50	2.00	0.50	0.50	6.75	5.00	
KSČM	2010	1.11	0.58	5.67		2.53	2.06	1.00	0.63	7.25	7.00	
KSČM	2014	1.07	1.00	6.57		2.73	3.23	1.09	0.85	7.00	6.67	
KSČM	2019	1.15	1.04	8.07	2.50	2.37	2.54	1.37	1.38	8.63	8.96	6.5
KSČM	2024	1.08	0.76	8.00	1.19	1.48	1.14	2.94	1.50	8.68	9.33	9.17

Table 4

## Electoral Results by Region 2002-2021

Region	2021				2017				2013			
	ČSSD	KSČM	ANO	SPD	ČSSD	KSČM	ANO	SPD	ČSSD	KSČM	ANO	USVIT
Central Bohemia	4.6	3.5	24.9	7.8	6.63	7.21	28.66	9	18.44	14.41	20.07	6.32
Hradec Králové	4.9	3.4	27	9.1	6.5	7.1	31.77	10.05	18.57	14.08	20.28	8.08
Karlovy Vary	3.8	3.4	33.1	12.8	6.98	8.15	35.42	12.47	21.34	16.72	21.32	8.33
Liberec	3.5	3	26.9	11	5.65	6.69	29.83	10.95	16.89	14.38	21.59	7.97
Moravia-Silesia	5.4	4	33.7	12.8	8.83	8.69	35.42	13.87	26.38	17.53	18.07	7.78
Olomouc	4.5	4	29.8	12.2	7.44	8.78	31.39	13.54	22.22	17.03	19.61	8.86
Pardubice	5.1	3.8	26.8	9.4	7.47	7.74	30.81	10.14	20.53	14.62	19.82	6.85
Píseň	5	4.1	29	10	7.97	8.65	30.98	10.56	21.65	15.75	18.52	5.57
Prague	4	2.1	17.5	4.6	5.57	4.6	20.35	5.81	14.09	8.52	16.46	3.19
South Bohemia	5.5	4.5	26.7	9	7.3	9.32	28.86	9.85	20.73	16.45	16.97	7.07
South Moravia	4.4	3.7	25.4	9.4	8.44	8.04	27.4	11.65	22.94	14.35	17.34	6.49
Ústí nad Labem	3.2	3.9	35.6	11.9	6.61	9.89	37.35	12.39	20.77	20.33	21.29	7.64
Vysočina	6.7	4.7	26.7	8.9	9.37	9.44	28.63	9.6	23.01	16.86	15.89	6.84
Zlín	4.9	3.3	27	11.4	6.94	7.01	28.76	12.9	19.39	12.9	18.31	10.17
Czech Republic	4.7	3.6	27.1	9.6	7.27	7.76	29.64	10.64	20.45	14.91	18.65	6.88
Region	2010				2006				2002			
	ČSSD	KSČM	SPOZ		ČSSD	KSČM			ČSSD	KSČM		
Central Bohemia	20.52	11	3.68		30.74	12.89			31.53	18.67		
Hradec Králové	19.87	10.65	3.74		30.14	11.52			27.78	16.05		
Karlovy Vary	23.29	13.07	3.43		31.73	14.82			29.31	21.97		
Liberec	19.4	10.32	3.91		29.31	11.51			27.05	17.17		
Moravia-Silesia	29.13	12.61	4.5		40.54	13.96			36.13	21.05		
Olomouc	24.47	13.18	4.49		35.44	14.68			31.92	21.02		
Pardubice	21.95	11.21	5.23		32.95	12.39			29.45	17.39		
Píseň	22.01	12.51	4.14		31.69	14.03			30.34	19.61		
Prague	15.17	6.53	3.11		23.29	7.9			25.85	11.1		
South Bohemia	20.55	12.22	4.12		30.47	13.36			30.33	18.25		
South Moravia	23.35	11.65	4.22		32.95	13.74			29.9	19.75		
Ústí nad Labem	24.93	13.64	5.42		35.46	16.05			29.18	25.08		
Vysočina	23.43	13.41	6.08		35.35	14.66			31.97	19.69		
Zlín	21.93	10.04	5.85		33.28	11.25			29.06	16.64		
Czech Republic	22.08	11.27	4.33		32.32	12.81			30.2	18.51		

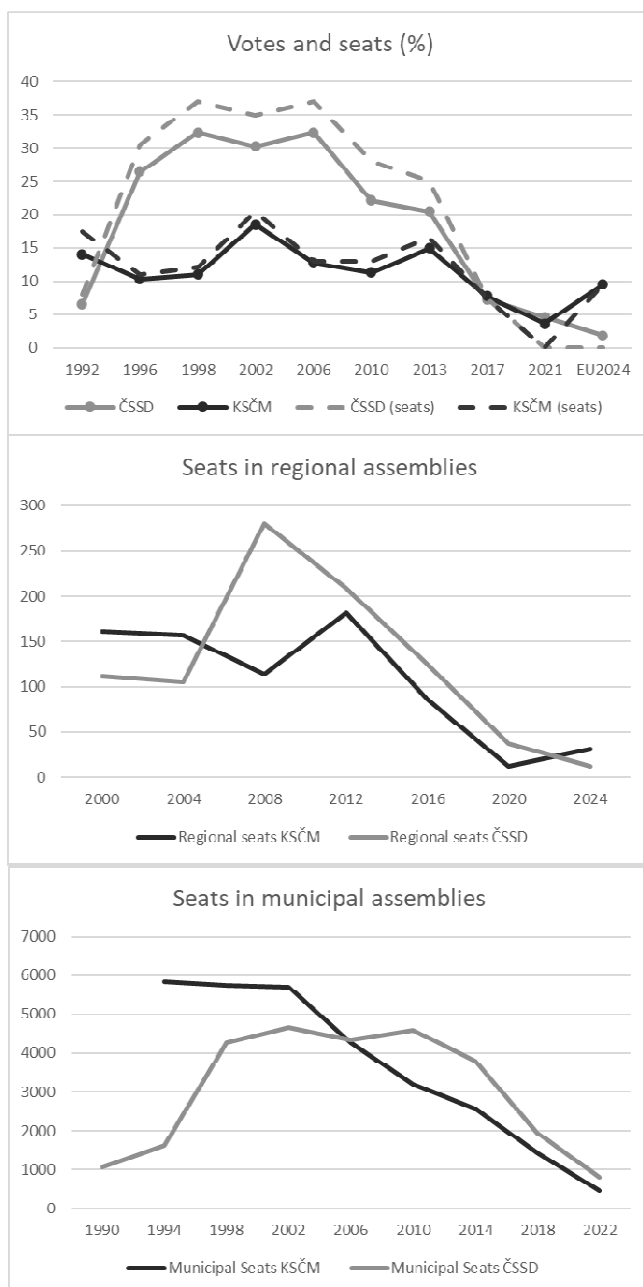


Figure 1. Votes and seats % for KSMC and ČSSD/SOCDEM 1992-2024  
 (Source: Own elaboration – The results for *Stacilo!* are shown in the 2024 European and Regional Elections, as they are for the KSČM)

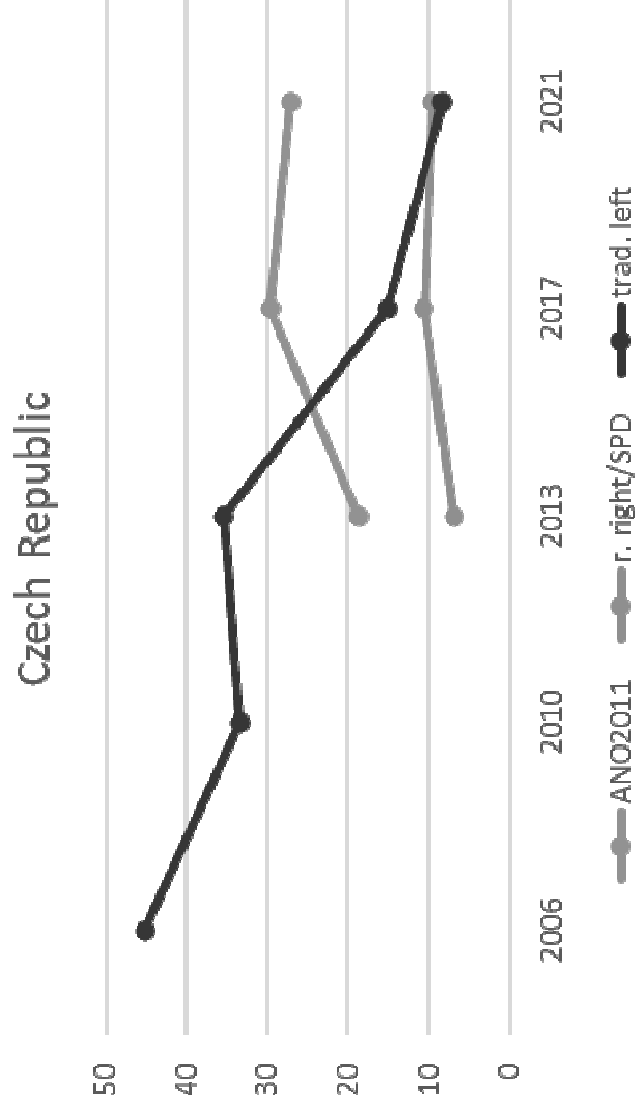


Figure 2. Cumulative vote share of the traditional left (ČSSD and KSČM) versus populist rivals  
(Source: Own elaboration)



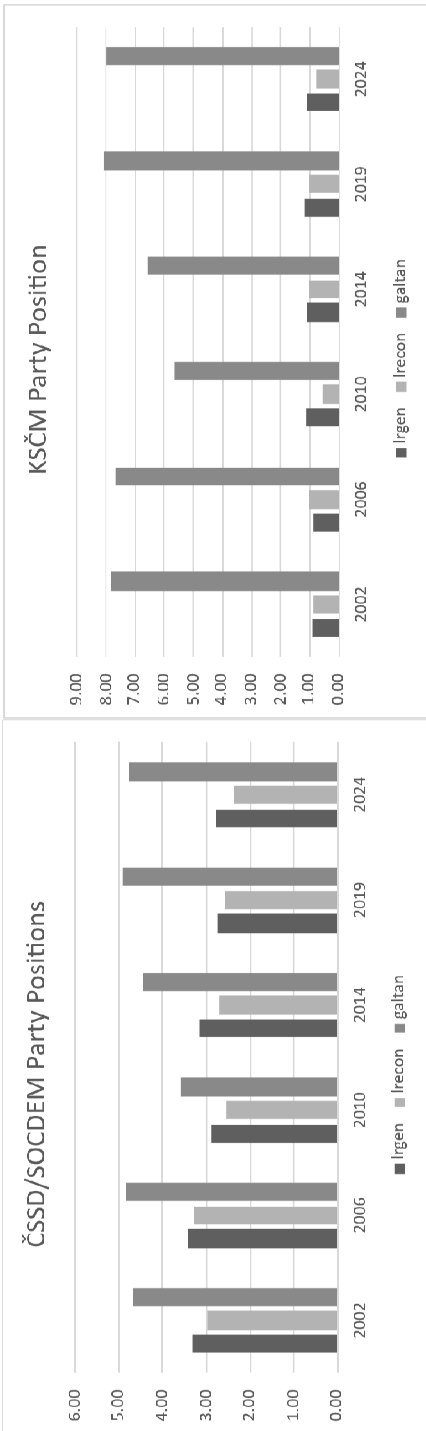


Figure 3. CHES data - ideological positions over time (GAL-TAN and Economic Left-right)  
(Source: Own elaboration based on CHES data)