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LOCAL ELECTIONS WITHOUT COMPETITION, PLURALITY AND PARTIES? CASE STUDIES OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND BRANDENBURG

Abstract. At a time of pervasive changes in political communication, political values, leadership, and institutionalization of political actors, the need to verify more accurately how local politics in small municipalities work emerges. Both regarding the actual role of these political systems and the character of representation and participation. This article explores the mechanisms of representation and participation in the case of the Czech Republic, exhibiting the most fragmented municipal structure in Europe, and the

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German federal state of Brandenburg, which, owing to demographic problems, encounters problems with effectively consolidating its municipal structure. In accordance with our assumptions, the specificity of representation and participation becomes primarily evident in the most deviant local political systems, void of competition, plurality, or political parties.

Keywords: Municipalities, elections, pluralism, political systems, local candidate lists

Introduction

Although many social science theories assume the plurality and competitiveness of democratic political systems, the non-political and pragmatic character of local politics is not entirely new in the political or public debate. Especially in German literature, the “non-political, practical character” of local politics (*Sachpolitik*) has dominated the scientific debate since the nineteenth century.⁵ However, since the 1990s, some Czech and German authors have drawn more attention to the consensual nature of politics in smaller municipalities.⁶ There are at least two key reasons for political scientists to reconsider this phenomenon.

⁵ Hellmut Wollmann and Roland Roth, *Kommunalpolitik: Politisches Handeln in den Gemeinden* [Local Politics: Political Action in the Municipalities] (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-10504-6>; Hiltrud Nassmacher and Karl-Heinz Nassmacher, *Kommunalpolitik in Deutschland* [Local Politics in Germany] (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1999).

⁶ Petr Jüptner, “Komunální koalice a politické modely,” [Communal Coalitions and Political models], *Politologická revue. Czech Political Science Review* 10, no. 2 (2004): 81-101; Dan Ryšavý, “Komunální je komunální a velká je velká! K hypotéze politizace lokálních politických elit,” [Communal Is Communal and Big Is Big! On the Hypothesis of the Politicization of Local Political Elites], *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 42, no. 5 (2006): 953-970; Lars Holtkamp, *Kommunale Konkordanz- und Konkurrenzdemokratie – Parteien und Bürgermeister in der repräsentativen Demokratie* [Municipal concordance and competition democracy – parties and mayors in representative democracy] (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90811-3>; Stanislav Balík, *Okresy na severu. Komunální politika v okresech Šumperk a Jeseník v letech 1989-2006* [Districts in the North. Communal Policy in the Districts of Šumperk and Jeseník in the Years 1989-2006] (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2009); Michael Školník, Milan Haman, and Jan Čopík, “Do Free Food and Beverages Bring People to the Political Meeting? The Survey Experiment of Attendance-Buying,” *Political Studies Review* 20, no. 4 (2022): 691-701, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299211047333>; Stefan Bischof and Andreas Decker, “Out of Balance? Understanding Resident-Municipality Relations in Rural Peripheries Through Ascriptions of Responsibility,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 97 (2023): 281-289, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.12.013>.

Firstly, scientific research and public discourse are mostly focused on politics in larger municipalities, which differ fundamentally from the original “small” local politics. Additionally, much attention has been directed toward issues like local development and public service provision in larger municipalities. This means that the persistent struggles faced by many European municipalities to secure the basic functions of their local government are often overlooked.⁷

The second, more significant reason is the shift in the context of politics as such. We are living in an era of pervasive and complex policy changes that are driven by a variety of reasons. We observe changes in political participation and communication, largely fueled by the rise of the internet, social networks, and the challenges posed by new or populist political parties to traditional party systems.⁸

Additionally, we observe an increasing complexity of political agendas, accompanied by the strengthening of their technocratic and professional nature, the shift in values, and a rise in individualism.⁹ One might even argue that politics is gradually fading away in its traditional form, which is a narrative that is becoming increasingly common in political science.¹⁰

The existence and functioning of non-pluralistic political systems thus represent not only the characteristics of small municipalities, which now seem almost historical, but also an outcome of contemporary trends in local governance. As municipalities strive to provide efficient and

⁷ Jakub Hornek and Petr Jüptner, “Endangered Municipalities? Case Study of Three Small and Critically Indebted Czech Municipalities,” *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* 13, no. 1 (2020): 35-59, <https://doi.org/10.2478/nispa-2020-0002>; Lenka Hellebrandová, “The Evaluation of Local Governance Effectiveness in the Selected Cities of Czechia,” *AUC Geographica* 56, no. 1 (2021): 18-30, <https://doi.org/10.14712/23361980.2020.21>.

⁸ Vlastimil Havlík and Petr Voda, “Cleavages, Protest or Voting for Hope? The Rise of Centrist Populist Parties in the Czech Republic,” *Swiss Political Science Review* 24, no. 2 (2018): 161-186, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12299>; Shelley Boulianne, “Twenty Years of Digital Media Effects on Civic and Political Participation,” *Communication Research* 47, no. 7 (2020): 947-966, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218808186>; Richard M. Perloff, *The Dynamics of Political Communication: Media and Politics in a Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429298851>.

⁹ Emilija Tudzarovska, “The rise of Technocratic Politics in the EU: The Legacies of Neoliberalism,” *Comparative European Politics* 25, no. 2 (2025): 588-609, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-025-00413-y>.

¹⁰ Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (London: Verso Books, 2023); Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy after the Crises* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

professional public services, the question arises: Is traditional party pluralism still a value to be upheld? In this sense, non-pluralistic political systems may be a precursor to the future of local governance, not just locally, but on a broader scale.

This article aims to explore the occurrence, structure and contextual drivers of non-pluralistic local political systems in two distinct cases represented by the Czech Republic, and the federal state of Brandenburg. It seeks to identify their prevalence, structural patterns, and to compare underlying institutional and socio-cultural factors shaping their existence. The selection of these two cases allows for the comparison of municipalities embedded in different administrative and historical contexts, including the post-socialist legacy of the Czech Republic, and the federal framework of Germany. Although the goal does not lie in a broad generalization, this approach offers insights that are relevant for understanding local governance in other Central European or structurally similar settings.

The Context of the Problem and Theoretical Assumptions

The size of the municipality is a fundamental variable when examining the relevance of non-pluralistic political systems.¹¹ Small municipalities tend to have limited resources and responsibilities, and their administration often exhibits a technical and pragmatic character.¹² There is little to no

¹¹ Michael Keating, "Size, Efficiency and Democracy: Consolidation, Fragmentation and Public Choice," in *Theories of Urban Politics*, eds. David Judge, Gerry Stoker, and Hubert Wollmann (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 117-134; Marion Reiser and Everhard Holtmann, *Farewell to the Party Model? Independent Local Lists in East and West European Countries* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008); Pawel Swianiewicz, *Consolidation or Fragmentation? The Size of Local Governments in Central and Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2002); Dan Ryšavý and Josef Bernard, "Velikost obcí – klíčová kontextuální proměnná," [Municipality Size - A Key Contextual Variable], in *Zastupitelé českých měst a obcí v evropské perspektivě*, [Representatives of Czech Cities and Municipalities in a European Perspective], eds. Dan Ryšavý and Petr Šaradín (Prague: SLON, 2011), 22-40.

¹² Ilona Kruntorádová, *Problematické aspekty financování měst a obcí České republiky* [Problematic aspects of financing cities and municipalities in the Czech Republic] (Prague: Karolinum, 2015); Jakub Hornek, *Politické dopady zadlužování malých obcí v České republice: Případová studie*

room for political visions, or even alternative solutions to local problems. Together with the importance of personal relationships, this contributes to a consensual political culture. Restricted resources then generally contribute to the “unattractiveness” of a political system for its actors, as there are only a few resources to distribute, and only a limited number of paid positions in local authorities. Demographic challenges, which represent a major issue for local governments in a number of small Spanish, Swiss, Italian, or German municipalities, can also contribute to the small number of candidates.¹³ This creates an imaginary triangle of consensual political culture, the lack of prospective candidates, and unattractiveness for the traditional political parties, all linked to the characteristics of small municipalities, thus reinforcing the non-pluralistic nature of local political systems.

Contextually, non-plurality may also be related to anti-partisanship and anti-party attitudes, especially regarding the lack of interest in (party) politics, though this phenomenon is still somewhat limited to smaller municipalities. Anti-party attitudes tend to be more intense in post-communist countries, which have experienced a transformation from the system of a single hegemonic party to the system of democratic local self-government at the local level.¹⁴

Karlovarského kraje 2010-2014 [Political Impacts of Indebtedness of Small Municipalities in the Czech Republic: A Case Study of the Karlovy Vary Region 2010-2014] (Prague: SLON, 2016).

¹³ Ana Nieto Masot, Gema Cardenas Alonso, and Angela Engelmo Moriche, “Spatial Analysis of the Rural-Urban Structure of the Spanish Municipalities,” *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information* 9, no. 4 (2020): 213, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijgi9040213>; Barbara Caselli, Paolo Ventura, and Michele Zazzi, “Performance-Based Spatial Monitoring: An Interpretative Model for Long-Term Shrinking Medium-Small Italian Towns,” *Sustainable Cities and Society* 53 (2020): 101924, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2019.101924>; Cecilia Reynaud, Sara Miccoli, Federico Benassi, Alessia Naccarato, and Luca Salvati, “Unravelling a Demographic ‘Mosaic’: Spatial Patterns and Contextual Factors of Depopulation in Italian Municipalities, 1981-2011,” *Ecological Indicators* 115 (2020): 106356, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2020.106356>.

¹⁴ Historically unique was the transition in East Germany, where this process consisted of a deep-going institution transfer of a complete political-administrative system (“blueprint approach”) from West to East Germany, accompanied by an elite and financial transfer. Lukáš Valeš, *Zrod demokratických politických systémů okresů Klatovy, Domažlice a Tachov a jejich vývoj v 90. letech 20. století* [The birth of democratic political systems in the districts of Klatovy, Domažlice and Tachov and their development in the 1990s] (Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2007); Stanislav Balík, Petr Gongala, and Kamil Gregor, *Dvacet let komunálních voleb v ČR*

Despite the renewal of pluralistic party systems, new parties have failed to gain a substantial membership base or to build up the institutional background in smaller municipalities, and, above all, their rather low membership base is gradually declining.¹⁵ Due to this weakness of political parties, independent (non-partisan) local lists have become important or even dominant actors in local politics.¹⁶ Their lack of ties to higher political levels may deepen anti-party political culture, either by resistance to large projects of, for instance, transport infrastructure or a forced amalgamation of municipalities, or directly by distancing themselves from politics at the national level and its rules. These non-partisan lists often perceive themselves as “protectors of a factual, harmonious political style,” distinct from the pluralistic political competition familiar at other levels.¹⁷

Independent local lists (sometimes called “local nonpartisan candidates’ lists” or, according to the election laws, “voters’ lists”) are candidate lists nominated by local voters’ associations rather than political parties. This phenomenon appears across democratic European countries under vastly different legal frameworks and political-cultural traditions.¹⁸

[Twenty years of municipal elections in the Czech Republic] (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury a Masarykova univerzita, 2015).

¹⁵ Jüptner, “Komunální koalice a politické modely;” Petr Jüptner, “Local Lists in the Czech Republic,” in *Farewell to the Party Model? Independent Local Lists in East and West European Countries*, eds. Marion Reiser and Everhard Holtmann (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2008), 21-37, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90923-3_3.

¹⁶ Stanislav Balík, *Komunální politika: obce, aktéři a cíle místní politiky* [Municipal Policy: Municipalities, Actors and Objectives of Local Policy] (Prague: Grada Publishing, 2009); Petr Voda, Petra Vodová, Andrea Smolková, and Stanislav Balík, “Local and More Local: Impact of Size and Organization Type of Settlement Units on Candidacy,” *Political Geography* 59 (2017): 24-35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.02.010>.

¹⁷ Stefan Göhlert, Everhard Holtmann, Adrienne Krappidel, and Marion Reiser, “Independent Local Lists in East and West Germany,” in *Farewell to the Party Model? Independent Local Lists in East and West European Countries*, eds. Marion Reiser and Everhard Holtmann (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2008), 127-148, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90923-3_8.

¹⁸ Marion Reiser and Everhard Holtmann, eds., *Farewell to the Party Model? Independent Local Lists in East and West European Countries* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90923-3>.

According to Holtmann, a

“typical non-partisan local list is focused, and limited, to a single local jurisdiction, dealing primarily with problems and tasks of its municipality or county.”¹⁹

This term covers thousands of heterogeneous actors differing in organization, foundation reasons, longevity, legal status, programming, social profiles, and relations to political parties and communities.²⁰ Despite documented cases of misuse of independent local lists by political parties, they gain increasing influence in local elections in many European countries.²¹ Unfortunately, comprehensive European comparative studies on this subject are still lacking.²²

In recent years, the theoretical question of the character of the independent local lists has become the focus of political science research.²³ Are they still acting like political parties or more like non-parties? By standard definitions, the objectives of independent local lists are not significantly different from those of political parties

Jürgen Winkler defines political parties as a “groups of like-minded persons who participate in political will formation in different organizational forms and strive to occupy political positions and to achieve their goals in a community.”²⁴

¹⁹ Everhard Holtmann, “Die Anderen – Parteifreie Akteure in der lokalen Risikogesellschaft,” [The Others – Non-partisan Actors in the Local Risk Society] in *Aufbruch der entscherten Gesellschaft*, [The Rise of a De-insured Society], ed. Kristine Khachatryan (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 2012), 11.

²⁰ Göhlert, Holtmann, Krappidel, Reiser, “Independent Local Lists in East and West Germany,” 128.

²¹ Pavel Maškarinec and Daniel Klimovský, “Independent Candidates in the Local Elections of 2014 in the Czech Republic and Slovakia: Analysis of Determinants of Their Successfulness,” *Lex Localis – Journal of Self-Government* 14, no. 4 (2016): 853, <https://doi.org/10.4335/14.4.853-871> (2016).

²² Reiser and Holtmann, *Farewell to the Party Model?*; Jacob Aars and Hans-Erik Ringkjøb, “Party Politicisation Reversed? Non-Partisan Alternatives in Norwegian Local Politics,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 28, no. 2 (2005): 161-181, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0080-6757.2005.00126.x>.

²³ Martin Morlok, *Politik an den Parteien vorbei: Freie Wähler und kommunale Wählergemeinschaften als Alternative* [Politics Bypassing the Parties: Free Voters and Municipal Voting Associations as an Alternative] (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Company KG, 2011).

²⁴ Jürgen R. Winkler, “Parteien und Parteiensysteme,” [Parties and party systems], in *Vergleichende Regierungslehre: Eine Einführung*, [Comparative Government: An Introduction], ed. Hans-Joachim Lauth (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2010), 215-236, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92357-4_9.

Hans-Joachim Lauth, Marianne Kneuer and Gert Pickel identify the core task of political parties as “mediation between political elites and citizens and the pursuit of political offices.”²⁵ From a political science perspective, local lists fulfil the functions that are attributed to the parties both at the municipal level and at the national level.²⁶ However, local lists typically vehemently dispute this characterization in their self-presentations.

Two main approaches to the role of local lists emerge in existing literature. Firstly, in many local systems, where local lists are competing with political parties, they contribute to a pluralistic political competition. They may be successful by using “latent or articulated sentiments of social protest into protest parties’ operation on the local ground.”²⁷ Empirical findings from North Rhine-Westphalia show that the triumph of local lists may fragment local councils, though empirical evidence on destabilization remains scarce.²⁸ Secondly, when political parties are absent from the local political scene, like in the small municipalities with fewer than 1,000 voters, the local lists act like a substitute for political parties or “like harvesters” in “defrosted party systems.”²⁹ In these municipalities, the local lists stabilize local democracy’s functioning or,

²⁵ Hans-Joachim Lauth, Marianne Kneuer, and Gert Pickel, *Handbuch Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* [Handbook of Comparative Politics] (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-02338-6>.

²⁶ Ulrich von Alemann, Philipp Erbenraut, and Jens Walther, *Das Parteiensystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [The Party System of the Federal Republic of Germany] (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-21159-2>.

²⁷ Holtkamp, *Kommunale Konkordanz- und Konkurrenzdemokratie*, 12.

²⁸ This phenomenon has intensified in Germany by the popular lifting of the blocking clauses for local elections in the last decades. One example is North Rhine-Westphalia, where in 1999 this clause had been annulled by a court decision. As a result, many municipalities in this German federal state, particularly in the big and mid-size cities “significantly impaired or disturbed the functioning of city’s councils.” This is why the Landtag re-introduced a 2.5% restraint clause in June 2016. Jörg Bogumil, David H. Gehne, Benjamin Garske, Marc Seuberlich, and Jonas Hafner, *Auswirkungen der Aufhebung der kommunalen Sperrklausel auf das kommunalpolitische Entscheidungssystem in Nordrhein-Westfalen* [Impact of the Abolition of the Municipal Threshold on the Municipal Political Decision-making System in North Rhine-Westphalia] (Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Regionalforschung ZEFIR, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2015).

²⁹ Holtkamp, *Kommunale Konkordanz- und Konkurrenzdemokratie*, 13.

as Holtmann puts it, “realign floating votes under democratic norms and rules.”³⁰ Nonetheless, it is problematic for pluralistic local elections when a local list runs unopposed.

According to Holtkamp, influence on the strength of local voters’ associations is, above all, the right to vote, the degree of organization of the parties, and the municipal size. In the Czech Republic, independent local politics in small municipalities, regularly winning up to two-thirds of all local council seats.³¹ In Germany, these lists have a significantly stronger position in the East than in the West.

According to Stefan Göhlert, Everhard Holtmann, Adrienne Krappidel, and Marion Reiser, they appear in 80% of East German municipalities (versus 70% in the West) and gain 46% of local election votes (compared to 30% in the West). Surveys show they secure between 39% (Saxony) and 53% (Thuringia) of votes in East German municipal elections.³² Therefore, it can be assumed that the combination of the relevance of these actors and their roles or attitudes outlined above can contribute to the phenomenon of non-plurality of local systems.³³

The consensual and non-competitive character of local politics has been addressed, for example in Germany or the Czech Republic, by several authors.³⁴ Václav Bubeníček’s study of small Czech municipalities identifies a so-called *apolitical-demarchist* model, where non-plurality

³⁰ Holtkamp, *Kommunale Konkordanz- und Konkurrenzdemokratie*, 13.

³¹ Balík, *Komunální politika*; Stanislav Balík and Lukáš Hájek, *Komunální volby v roce 2018* [Municipal elections in 2018] (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2020).

³² Göhlert, Holtmann, Krappidel, Reiser, “Independent Local Lists in East and West Germany”.

³³ This is so even though independent local lists cannot escape the logic of collective action in elected councils. They can flexibly adopt the modes and mechanism of party politics, without labelling themselves as parties. Holtkamp derives from the increasing strength of the voters’ associations in Germany a trend towards the concordance democracy in mid-sized and small cities. Holtkamp, *Kommunale Konkordanz- und Konkurrenzdemokratie*: 289.

³⁴ Gerhard Banner, “Kommunalverfassungen und Selbstverwaltungsleistung,” [Municipal Constitutions and Self-Government Performance] in *Stadtdirektor oder Bürgermeister: Beiträge zu einer aktuellen Kontroverse* [City Manager or Mayor: Contributions to a Current Controversy], eds. Dieter Schimanke (Basel: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften Wiesbaden, 1989), 37-61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-94962-2>; Jörg Bogumil and Hubert Heinelt, *Bürgermeister in Deutschland: Politikwissenschaftliche Studien zu direkt gewählten Bürgermeistern* [Mayors in Germany: Political Science Studies on Directly Elected Mayors] (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-85142-0>.

arises from candidate nomination cooperation.³⁵ In this model, residents care about the municipality, and the seats of the council members are generally perceived as imperative in view of the will of the entire local community. Municipal elections are then perceived as “the necessary evil” that needs to be endured in order to preserve the autonomy of the municipality.³⁶ Candidate recruitment is managed by the mayor, outgoing council, or municipal poll, and the number of nominees typically matches the number of seats.

Bubeníček’s second non-plurality model, the non-participative model, attributes a low number of candidates to a lack of interest, rivalry, and candidate shortages. Municipalities with financial problems often have fewer candidates than seats, and uncontested elections are not uncommon. Cases where local elections may not be held at all due to the lack of candidates are not exceptional.³⁷

From the point of view of the presented study, the apolitical-demarchist model is an interesting case, in which the non-plurality relates to a specific political culture. Although based on Czech data, this model may apply to other European municipalities facing demographic challenges, where candidate nomination is less about natural plurality and more about mechanisms managed by council members or the community.

Recently, Karel Kouba and Jakub Lysek have published an article in which they point out that uncontested elections are an increasingly common phenomenon in the Czech Republic. In the last elections, we could observe them in 28% of municipalities.³⁸ The authors examined the factors associated with this type of election, especially the decreased voter turnout related to it. They conclude that the mechanism behind this phenomenon needs to be further investigated. The present paper contributes to this by focusing on a smaller sample more in detail and by comparing the Czech case to the Brandenburg case.

³⁵ Jaroslav Čmejrek, Václav Bubeníček, and Jan Čopík, *Demokracie v lokálním politickém prostoru* [Democracy in the Local Political Space] (Prague: Grada Publishing, 2010).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Karel Kouba and Jakub Lysek, “The Return of Silent Elections: Democracy, Uncontested Elections and Citizen Participation in Czechia,” *Democratization* 30, no. 8 (2023): 1543, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2246148>.

Research Design and Methodology

The article examines the relevance of non-pluralistic political systems through a comparative analysis of two cases: the German federal state of Brandenburg and the Czech Republic. It also explores the specific nature of political actors within these systems. The specific research questions are as follows: (1) What is the share of non-pluralistic local political systems in the two cases? In what types of municipalities are they typically found in? (2) What are the characteristics of political actors in non-pluralistic local political systems, and how do they differ from those in pluralistic ones?

Due to the complexity and broad and dynamic context of the issue, this article aims to build on existing research, to focus on the chosen municipalities and regions in more detail, and to extend the groundwork for further investigation.³⁹ This article does not aspire to quantitatively examine the development of the problem of non-pluralist elections over time, as Kouba and Lysek have done. Instead, it seeks to explore the issue on a smaller sample size and to broaden the understanding of the issue. Thus, due to data availability problems, an older data sample was used. It can be assumed that this does not significantly affect the underlying principles and structural features of the phenomenon. Although further research may provide more insights into this area, as the local dynamics may have evolved.

Methodologically, this study applies a comparative case study design, focusing on Brandenburg and the Czech Republic. The contextual foundation uses legislative definition and data on the municipal structures of both countries. Its focal point is to collect and analyze data from municipal elections in both countries. A sample of the countries was determined by a deliberate choice; in both countries, weak municipalities prevailed or still prevail, which is, in the case of the Czech Republic, mainly due to the fragmented municipal structure. These municipalities often operate in a mode oriented towards maintenance, focusing on basic service provision without the means for strategic investment or broader policymaking.⁴⁰

³⁹ Kouba and Lysek, "The Return of Silent Elections," 1527-1551; Pavel Maškarinec, "Mapping the Territorial Distribution of Voter Turnout in Czech Local Elections (1994-2018): Spatial Dimensions of Electoral Participation," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 55, no. 3 (2022): 163-180, <https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2022.1706946>.

⁴⁰ Jakub Hornek, "Komunální politika v malých bohatých obcích v České republice: politické souboje o zastupitelská křesla či všestranná kooperace ve prospěch obcí?" [Municipal Politics in

In the case of Brandenburg, municipalities are further weakened by persistent demographic challenges, including population decline and ageing. Also, owing to the era of communism, political parties in either country did not build a sturdy base in the municipalities, and we can encounter anti-party attitudes.

However, it is important to note a key structural difference between the two cases: following German reunification in 1990, Brandenburg was able to integrate into the existing party system of the Federal Republic. It benefited from institutional continuity and an established framework of political competition. This integration was further facilitated by the transfer of West German political élites into East German regions, especially Berlin and surrounding areas, which helped stabilize party structures.⁴¹ In contrast, the Czech Republic went through a full systemic transformation from a one-party communist regime to democratic local self-government.

Given these structural and historical conditions, it can be assumed that both Brandenburg and the Czech Republic are suitable cases to test the relevance and persistence of non-pluralistic local political systems. As part of the case study, it was necessary to craft a uniform methodology that would accurately define the surveyed samples of municipalities in both countries, accurately determine non-pluralistic political systems, and classify their political actors into comparable categories. The specific methodological procedures were set out as follows.

The sample consists of 850 municipalities, 413 from Brandenburg (the full set of existing municipalities), and 437 Czech municipalities. The Czech municipalities were selected from five counties (Karviná, Most, Praha-východ, Tábor, Žďár nad Sázavou) using the most different systems design, reflecting on diversity in socio-economic characteristics and municipal structures.⁴² The Czech sample includes the municipalities of the counties

Small, Wealthy Municipalities in the Czech Republic: Political Battles for Representative Seats or All-round Cooperation for the Benefit of Municipalities?], *Scientia et Societas* 13 (2017): 115-143.

⁴¹ Alina Sorgner and Michael Wyrwich, "The Question of Legacies: Socialist Elites in Post-Socialist Transformations – East Germany's Elites from a Comparative Perspective (1990-2020)," in *Roadblocks to the Socialist Modernization Path and Transition*, eds. Alina Sorgner and Michael Wyrwich (Cham: Springer, 2023), 255-270, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37050-2_9.

⁴² *Praha-východ* can be translated to English as *Prague-East*. In this article, we work with the term *Praha-východ*. However, when referring to *Praha* as the capital city, we use the English term *Prague*.

of Karviná (16), Most (27), Praha-východ (110), Tábor (110), and Žďár nad Sázavou (174).⁴³ This distribution of cases allows for focusing on the issue also across territorial units with different socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

This study focuses exclusively on identifying non-pluralistic local political systems and their main political actors. Due to the smaller size of the Czech municipalities, a higher share of non-pluralistic systems is expected in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, in the case of Brandenburg, the plurality of the elections of mayors is examined, which, unlike in the Czech Republic, is done through direct voting.

A local political system is considered non-pluralistic if the number of candidates corresponds to a maximum of 134% of allocated seats in the case of municipal council elections and 100% in the case of the elections of mayors. The threshold for the municipal council elections was thus set because, in some cases, there may be more candidates than seats in a single nominee list, or in some identified non-pluralistic systems there is an excessive number of nominated candidates to secure substitute candidates in case one of the seats becomes vacant during the electoral term.⁴⁴

While this definition provides a clear and consistent threshold for identifying non-pluralistic systems across both cases, alternative approaches could be considered. For instance, the degree of electoral pluralism may also be assessed using the total or effective number of lists, such as the measurement proposed by Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera.⁴⁵

⁴³ Although in the Czech case we are only examining a sample, the collection of data is very demanding because the Czech Statistical Office does not create the setups according to the chosen criteria. Therefore, the data about each municipality must be collected separately from its electoral results published by the statistical office.

⁴⁴ In the Czech system, in municipalities where seven or fewer members of the municipal council are to be elected, the electoral candidate list may include no more than the number of candidates equal to the number of members elected to the municipal council concerned, increased by one-third.

⁴⁵ Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera, "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 12, no. 1 (1979): 3-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001041407901200101>. However, applying such indices would require detailed and systematically coded data, which are not uniformly available for the municipalities included in our dataset. Therefore, for the purposes of this comparative case study, we opted for a simpler yet robust indicator clearly capturing the absence of electoral competition.

Political actors were divided into three categories. The first category consists of independent candidates, either as local lists (associations) or individuals not affiliated with any political party or receiving party support. The second category consists of political parties, excluding marginal political parties as well as parties that do not seek power within the entire political system. In particular, the parties in this category must correspond to the definition of a political party, formulated by LaPalombara and Weiner, who set several characteristics of political parties: (1) having continuity in the organization beyond its present leaders; (2) evident organization at the local level with structured relationship between local and national levels, (3) determination at both local and national level to win and exercise power; (4) aim of seeking popular support at elections.⁴⁶

Following this definition, an additional condition was applied: parties must have nominated candidate lists at both regional and national levels, and to have been represented in at least one chamber of the national parliament during one of the previous three parliamentary terms. The third category consists of other actors, who may include various hybrid forms of candidacy allowed by electoral legislation, or marginal political parties and entities that are only formally political parties. Although this category may appear redundant, it can have important informative value on the specificity of political actors in non-pluralistic systems. Secondly, its existence is justified by the unclear local party system, especially in the Czech Republic.

Case Studies: The Czech Republic and the Federal State of Brandenburg

The Czech municipal structure ranks among the most fragmented ones in Europe, together with Slovakia and France.⁴⁷ The number of municipalities has oscillated for decades around 6,250. Roughly one-quarter of them have fewer than 200 inhabitants, and more than half even fewer than 500. At the same time, only one-fifth of municipalities have more than 1,000 inhabitants.

⁴⁶ Myron Weiner and Joseph LaPalombara, *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

⁴⁷ Balík, *Komunální politika*.

In addition to high fragmentation, the structure of Czech municipalities is also characterized by a high degree of asymmetry. While most municipalities are very small, over half of the population lives in cities with more than 10,000 residents. Only 17% of Czechs live in municipalities with up to 1,000 inhabitants.⁴⁸

To preserve variation in local context, five Czech counties were selected to represent the diverse spectrum of municipal structures. Within the sample, there are counties with a more consolidated (Most, Karviná), moderate (Tábor, Praha-východ), as well as very fragmented municipal structure (Žďár nad Sázavou). Some of those counties are territorially smaller and have a higher population and population density (Most, Karviná, partly Praha-východ), while Praha-východ also features lower unemployment and a younger population compared to the other counties.

In the case of the Czech Republic, plurality can be assessed only based on the elections to municipal councils, as mayors are elected indirectly by the council despite multiple reform attempts.⁴⁹ Executive power rests in municipal boards, bodies also elected by councils among their members. Once elected, mayors and their deputies automatically become members of municipal boards.⁵⁰

Czech legislation distinguishes entities in municipal elections according to whether a registered political party forms their part. These are political parties, their coalitions, and possibly the association of a political party and independent candidates. If not, as is the case with independent candidates and associations of independent candidates, these entities must obtain a relatively high number of electoral signatures to secure their electoral nomination.

⁴⁸ Michal Illner, "The Voluntary Union of Municipalities: Voluntary Bottom-Up Territorial Consolidation in Czech Republic?," in *Territorial Consolidation Reforms in Europe*, ed. Pawel Swianiewicz (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2010); Čmejrek, Bubeníček, and Čopík, *Demokracie v lokálním politickém prostoru*.

⁴⁹ Petr Jüptner, "Debating Directly Elected Mayors in the Czech Republic: Political Games and Missing Expertise?," in *Directly Elected Mayors in Urban Governance: Impact and Practice*, ed. David Sweeting (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.46692/9781447327042.012>.

⁵⁰ Ilona Kruntorádová and Petr Jüptner, *Local Government in the Czech Republic* (Paris: L'Institut du Monde et du Développement, 2015).

Especially because of the signatures necessary for the candidacy of independent candidates, a huge number of entities in the Czech Republic formally assume the form of registered parties, even though this does not correspond to the functional definition of a political party.⁵¹ These actors, mostly local-level initiatives, are classified as “others” in this article.

The analysis of Czech municipalities is based on the 2014 municipal elections. Voter turnout in this type of election had declined from 73.2% in the first democratic local elections in November 1990⁵² and 62.3 % in November 1994 to less than 50 % in all later elections.⁵³ In the selected sample, turnout averaged 44.7%, ranging from 31.2% in Karviná to 55.9% in Žďár nad Sázavou. Interestingly, in municipalities with non-pluralistic systems, the average voter turnout was significantly higher in four out of five counties of the Czech sample (54.8%).⁵⁴ Only in Praha-východ was the difference marginal, likely due to its proximity to the capital and a highly mobile, younger population. Overall, Czech voters do not appear to view non-pluralist elections negatively; on the contrary, participation rates suggest a degree of acceptance or normalization of these systems.

In Brandenburg, both the 2014 municipal council elections and the elections of full-time mayors held between 2008 and 2017 were analyzed. The sample includes the 413 municipalities in Brandenburg, divided into two groups based on administrative capacities.⁵⁵ In 144 municipalities, they still have their own administration under the control of the directly elected full-time mayor (*amtsfreie Gemeinde*). The other 269 municipalities belong to one of the 52 “associations of municipalities” in which the administration is concentrated under the head of the association (*amtsangehörige Gemeinde*). The mayors of these municipalities are volunteers.

Regardless of the municipal territorial reform of 2003, the size of the 413 municipalities in Brandenburg is still very heterogeneous: 23 of them have fewer than 500 inhabitants, 203 between 500 and 2,000 inhabitants, and 187 more inhabitants.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Jüptner, “Local Lists in the Czech Republic,” 21-37.

⁵² Those elections were held while Czechoslovakia was still a single country.

⁵³ In detail: 46.7% in November 1998, 45.5% in November 2002, 46.4% in October 2006, 48.5% in October 2010, and 44.5% in October 2014.

⁵⁴ The general variance is between 43.6% (Most county) and 63.8% (Tábor county).

⁵⁵ The four county free cities were excluded.

⁵⁶ Thus, these municipalities have only one constituency, which has consequences in non-pluralistic elections. Without the four county-free cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants.

Proposals for municipal council elections may be submitted according to the federal state law on local elections by (political) parties, political associations, electoral groups, or individual candidates.⁵⁷ Political parties, political associations, and electoral groups can present joint candidate lists. Lists must gather between three and thirty support signatures depending on population size.⁵⁸ This regulation also applies to individual applicants.

A review of municipal election results in Brandenburg since 1990 (Table 1) shows a sharp decline in the number of council seats after the 2003 reform. Since then, the proportion of political parties in the seats in the municipal councils has been the same; the number of seats for the independent lists has been slightly protracted, and that of the individual candidates has slightly declined.

Both case studies show the high relevance of studying non-pluralistic local political systems. Based on the fragmented municipal structure in the Czech Republic, a higher number of non-pluralistic local systems was expected there. In Brandenburg, with a general amalgamation reform at the municipal level in 2003, a limited occurrence of those systems was expected. While these expectations were generally confirmed, the actual prevalence of non-pluralistic systems was surprisingly high. In the Czech Republic, a non-pluralistic local political system was found in 145 out of 437 municipalities (33.2%). In Brandenburg, such systems were found in 68 of 413 municipalities (16.5%).

The most significant explanatory factor appears to be municipal size. This corresponds with the findings of Kouba and Lysek, who found only five municipalities in the entire Czech Republic with a population of over 3,250 in which uncontested elections were held during their

⁵⁷ They must fulfill requirements set out by the German party law (*Parteiengesetz* 1967). Their status differs only slightly from that of political parties. The differences in status are also irrelevant to the investigations in this paper. Voter groups, or electoral groups, electoral associations, and citizens' associations are (mostly local) associations, which participate in local elections without claiming the status of a political party. Nevertheless, they can be regarded as "local parties." To be better comparable with the Czech case, we will call them "independent local lists" from now on. Individual candidates can only run with their name on the ballot without referencing any party, political association, or electoral group.

⁵⁸ Supporting signatures are not required if parties, political associations, or electoral groups are already represented in the municipal or county council.

study period.⁵⁹ Broader literature also highlights population size as a key variable in explaining levels of political competition.⁶⁰

To clarify the observed patterns, the municipalities of the selected samples were split into four categories according to their size (Table 2). The smaller the municipality, the higher the probability of a non-pluralistic system. This trend becomes particularly clear below the threshold of 2,000 inhabitants. The first category of municipalities, with less than 200 inhabitants, exists only in the Czech Republic and features most non-pluralistic systems. In the remaining three categories, the share of such systems is surprisingly comparable. In the municipalities between 201 and 2,000 inhabitants, the share of non-pluralistic systems in Brandenburg is even slightly higher than in the Czech case. The largest Brandenburg municipality with a non-pluralistic local system is Niederer Fläming with 3,160 inhabitants.

Although population size remains the primary explanatory variable for the occurrence of non-pluralist systems, other contextual factors may also play a role. In the Czech case, county-specific characteristics appear to have only a limited effect. For example, Karviná was the only county in the sample with no non-pluralistic systems at all. The only exception was the county Praha-východ, where non-pluralistic systems in categories C and D occur more frequently than in other counties.⁶¹ One possible explanation lies in the suburban character of this county. Many residents of the municipalities around Prague engage professionally (possibly even politically) in Prague and use their municipalities only as residential bases.

In Brandenburg, however, spatial affiliation appears more decisive. Non-pluralistic systems are completely absent in the surrounding area of the German capital Berlin, only in the peripheral regions.

From the perspective of political actors, non-pluralist municipal councils tend to differ from pluralist ones primarily in the stronger position of independent local lists and weaker presence of political parties (Table 3). In both countries, non-pluralist systems show similar actor compositions, with independent lists playing a slightly more dominant

⁵⁹ Kouba and Lysek, "The Return of Silent Elections," 1527-1551.

⁶⁰ Dan Ryšavý and Josef Bernard, "Size and Local Democracy: The Case of Czech Municipal Representatives," *Local Government Studies* 39, no. 6 (2013): 833-852, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2012.675329>; Voda, Vodová, Smolková, Balík, "Local and More Local," 24-35.

⁶¹ C – Municipalities between 501-2,000 inhabitants; D – Municipalities with more than 2,000 inhabitants.

role in the Czech case. However, in the pluralistic local systems, the structure of representation diverges more noticeably. In Brandenburg, political parties dominate the local councils with 55.2% of the seats, whereas in the Czech case, the independent local lists prevail with 63.6% of the seats. This suggests that the party system in Brandenburg is comparatively more institutionalized and plays a stronger role, especially in medium-sized and larger municipalities.

Surprisingly, the voter turnout in the non-pluralistic local systems tends to be higher than in the pluralistic ones. In Brandenburg, it reached 54.2% compared to 47.2% overall, which is a difference of 7 percentage points. In the Czech sample, turnout in non-pluralist municipalities was 54.8% compared to 48.1% (difference of 6.7 percentage points). These findings challenge the notion that lack of electoral competition necessarily leads to lower participation.

The category “other actors” in the Czech sample largely comprised local parties formed to avoid collecting the signatures required for the candidacy. Their share is slightly higher in pluralist municipalities (3.8%) than in non-pluralistic ones (1.2%). It can be assumed that these “local parties” are more common in larger cities, where establishing a formal party can be procedurally easier than meeting the conditions for running an independent list. In Brandenburg, “other actors” play only a marginal role in both system types.

Differences within Czech counties seem to be driven primarily by municipal size. If actors in the non-pluralistic systems differ in some of the counties, this is reflected to a certain extent in pluralistic systems as well. For instance, in Praha-východ, independent lists hold a dominant 93.1% share of council seats. In contrast, in Most and Žďár nad Sázavou, local parties (“other actors”) only exist in pluralistic systems.

To deepen the analysis, non-pluralist elections of the full-time mayors in the *amtsfreien* municipalities of Brandenburg were also examined.⁶² As previously mentioned, in the Czech Republic, mayors are not directly elected. The findings indicate that non-pluralist mayoral elections can occur even in municipalities with populations as high as 16,237. Of the 199 mayoral elections held in Brandenburg since 2008, twenty-three of them were uncontested (Table 4). This is almost 14%.

⁶² Municipalities with their own administration under the control of the directly elected full-time mayor.

Notably, the proportion of such elections has declined over time, particularly after 2014. In the last fifty-five elections of mayors since 2014, it was only 5%. This sample comprises nine elected individual candidates, eight elected representatives of political parties, two elected representatives of independent lists, and one elected representative of a list linked between a political party and an independent list. This variation suggests that local political dynamics are highly specific and context dependent. No case was identified in which both the mayor and the municipal council were elected without competition.

A link can be observed between non-pluralist mayoral elections, and the effects of the 2003 municipal reform or voluntary mergers that occurred at various points in time. In nine cases, the mayor was elected in a newly established municipality, which had been merged with different former independent municipalities. In at least three other cases, multiple former municipalities were incorporated into a single existing one. Under these circumstances, the formation of a local pluralist system of the political decision process tends to be delayed. These specific conditions obviously offer windows of opportunity for strong and influential individual personalities (with or without commitment to a political party) to dominate the political process.

Non-pluralist mayoral elections appear to be primarily a temporary phenomenon. Following the conclusion of eight-year terms for mayors elected in 2008/2009, new elections in six of the eight cases were contested by multiple candidates. Only in two cases (Falkenberg, Großräschen) the non-pluralistic elections were repeated.

In addition to the institutional and demographic explanations discussed above, the phenomenon of uncontested mayoral elections may also be influenced by the incumbency effect. Incumbents enjoy a structural advantage in direct mayoral elections and may deter strong challengers from entering the race.⁶³ This so-called “scare-off effect”

⁶³ Lars Holtkamp und Benjamin Garske, “Der Einfluss von Amtsinhaberkandidaturen und des parteipolitischen Hintergrundes auf die Direktwahl des (Ober-)Bürgermeisters – Eine vergleichende Analyse bundesdeutscher (Ober-)Bürgermeisterwahlen,” [The Influence of Incumbent Candidates and Party Political Background on the Direct Election of the Mayor – A Comparative Analysis of German Mayoral Elections], in *Neue Koalitionen – alte Probleme* [New coalitions – old problems], eds. Björn Egner und Detlef Sack (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2020), 37–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28452-7_3; Markus Klein und Yvonne Lüdecke, “Ent-Parteipolisierung und faktischer Konkurrenzausschluss

contributes to the occurrence of non-pluralist outcomes even in municipalities where electoral competition might otherwise be expected.

Conclusion

The analysis has demonstrated that non-pluralist political systems are by no means exceptional, particularly in small municipalities in both the Czech Republic and Brandenburg. In fact, a sample of Czech municipalities even shows that the combination of very small size and associated political culture can be a common or even predominant model of local government. Regarding municipal councils, the presence of non-pluralist systems is, with few exceptions, confined to municipalities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants and is closely tied to municipality size. This means that the smaller the municipality, the more likely the absence of political competition. This corresponds with the findings of Kouba and Lysek, who found only five municipalities in the entire Czech Republic with a population over 3,250 in which uncontested elections occurred during their study period.⁶⁴

In the Czech case, the prevalence of non-pluralist systems in smaller municipalities may reflect the cultural patterns of small communities. In contrast, in the generally larger municipalities of Brandenburg, demographic challenges may also contribute to the occurrence of such systems.

Regional patterns provide further nuance. While the above-average share of non-pluralist systems was observed in municipalities surrounding Prague, pluralist systems dominate Brandenburg's Berlin-adjacent municipalities. This contrast may be attributed to demographic characteristics and the differing social capital of the two metropolitan areas. However, spatial characteristics such as proximity to the capital are not treated as independent explanatory variables in this article. Their potential relevance is discussed illustratively, and any explanatory value should be interpreted as hypothetical rather than empirically verified.

bei Bürgermeister – und Landratswahlen," [De-party Politicization and De Facto Exclusion of Competition in Mayoral and District Council Elections], *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 28, no. 2 (2018): 125-146, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41358-018-0134-3>.

⁶⁴ Kouba and Lysek, "The Return of Silent Elections," 1527-1551.

The spatial differences, particularly the tendency for non-pluralist systems to occur more frequently in peripheral regions, deserve further attention. Future research could benefit from the inclusion of additional explanatory variables such as population density, age structure or commuting patterns. A larger dataset of cases and spatial data would allow for more robust testing of the interaction between demographic change and political competition at the local level of the political systems. Another option would be to account for horizontal and vertical simultaneous elections, which are known to increase voter turnout.⁶⁵

Although the Czech Republic and Brandenburg significantly differ in their party system and legislation defining political actors, both countries show similar patterns in the composition of non-pluralist systems. In both cases, independent local lists play a dominant role, whereas traditional political parties are notably weaker. While the diversity of the actors of Czech non-pluralistic systems is manifested almost exclusively by the dominance of the independents, Brandenburg shows a stronger position of political associations. Moreover, both countries record a higher incidence of individual candidates in non-pluralist settings, again reflecting the underlying role of municipal size as a mediating variable.

An analysis of the structure and context of non-pluralistic systems can be more complex in Brandenburg. Municipal reforms have produced a variety of local government structures, which complicates the comparison of political systems. Further complications lie in non-pluralistic elections of mayors, which represent a partially different phenomenon, for which the population size of municipalities appears to be a less restrictive factor. In the Czech Republic, by contrast, the analysis is challenging because of the extremely high number of municipalities and the limited availability of detailed electoral data.

Any further European comparison of non-pluralist systems will require a harmonized methodological framework capable of accounting for cross-country differences in electoral legislation, including the rules that govern both the electoral system and political actors.

⁶⁵ Arjan H. Schakel and Régis Dandoy, "Electoral Cycles and Turnout in Multilevel Electoral Systems," *West European Politics* 37, no. 3 (2014): 605-623, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.895526>.

If non-pluralist systems are viewed as a distinct political culture or as a particular form of local democracy, the relatively high voter turnout in non-pluralist municipalities suggests that they are broadly accepted by the electorate. In the Czech Republic, the broad support of this model of local democracy is also evidenced by participation in the polls used to select candidates for elections. Different actors of non-pluralistic systems can, by their anti-partisanship or individualized concept of politics, strengthen a specific political culture or a non-pluralistic model of democracy; on the other hand, their existence and relevance are again determined by small municipalities.

Annexes

Table 1

Results of Municipal Council Elections in Brandenburg since 1990

Date	Voter turnout	Seats for				Others**
		Total no.	Political parties	Individual applicants	Independent local lists	
25.05. 2014	47.2%	5,880 ¹ (100%)	3,001 (51.7%)	383 (6.6%)	2,382 (40.8%)	114 (1.0%)
28.09. 2008	49.7%	6,359 (100%)	3,347 (52.7%)	433 (6.8%)	2,428 (38.2%)	151 (2.4%)
26.10. 2003	46.9%	6,295 (100%)	3,357 (53.3%)	443 (7.0%)	2,351 (37.0%)	144 (1.8%)
27.09. 1998	78.1% ²	13,550 (100%)	5,200 (38.7%)	3,102 (22.9%)	5,076 (37.5%)	132 (1.0%)
05.12. 1993	60.4%	14,664 (100%)	6,103 (41.6%)	3,973 (27.1%)	4,462 (30.4%)	126 (0.8%)

Source: author's own elaboration using official data from the state election manager Brandenburg (Landeswahlleiter).

Table 2

Non-Pluralistic Local Political Systems according to the Number of Inhabitants

Municipalities	Czech Republic (N = 437)	Brandenburg (N = 68 of 413)
(A) With less than 200 inhabitants	70 of 134 = 52.2%	N/A ³
(B) With between 201 and 500 inhabitants	44 of 128 = 34.4%	9 of 24 = 37.5%
(C) With between 501 and 2,000 inhabitants	29 of 121 = 24.0%	55 of 201 = 27.4%
(D) With more than 2,000 inhabitants	2 of 54 = 3,7%	4 of 193 = 2.1%

Source: author's own elaboration using official data from the state election manager Brandenburg (Landeswahlleiter).

¹ Thirty-six seats are not occupied because individual candidates get more votes than for one seat. Others include seats for joint lists, political associations and "others" in the statistic.

² Voter turnout was extremely high because of the combination with the election for the German Bundestag.

³ This category does not exist in Brandenburg; the municipality with the fewest number of inhabitants in Brandenburg is Kleßen-Görne, with 339 inhabitants.

Table 3

Allocation of Seats in Pluralistic and Non-Pluralistic Local Systems (2014 elections)

Sample	Czech Republic	Brandenburg	Czech Republic	Brandenburg
Seats in municipal councils	<i>Pluralistic Local Systems</i>		<i>Non-Pluralistic Local Systems</i>	
By political parties	32.6%	55.2%	12.5%	16.9%
By independent local lists ¹	63.6%	43.3%	86.3%	82.2%
By others	3.8%	1.5%	1.2%	0.9%

Source: author's own elaboration using official data from the state election manager Brandenburg (Landeswahlleiter).

Table 4

Non-pluralistic constellation in the elections of mayors (2008-2016)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Mayor elections	14	35	22	37	6	6	10	14	20	35	199
Thereof non-pluralistic elections	4	3	3	4	1	2	2	1	1	2	23
% mayor elections	29	9	14	11	17	33	20	7	5	6	12

Source: author's own elaboration using official data from the state election manager Brandenburg (Landeswahlleiter).

¹ Including individual candidates.