

The parliamentary election in the Czech Republic, May 2010

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The May 28 – 29, 2010 Czech parliamentary elections resulted in a dramatic upheaval to what had been a relatively stable political landscape. The Christian Democratic Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Green Party failed to reach the 5% electoral threshold while two new parties, TOP 09 and Public Affairs, burst onto the scene with surprising strength. The two pillars of the party system, the Civic Democrats (ODS) and the Social Democrats (ČSSD), lost substantial support. Only the Communist Party (KSČM) maintained its standing by winning 26 of 200 seats.

The major shake-up broke the pattern of bare majority or minority governments. Czech voters gave the center-right parties a solid majority, making the coalition formation process easier than in the past. The new government of the ODS, TOP 09 and Public Affairs is led by ODS leader Petr Nečas. President Václav Klaus appointed the government on July 13 and it won the parliamentary vote of confidence on August 10, 2010.

1. Background

The June 2006 parliamentary elections resulted in a minority coalition of the ODS, KDU-ČSL, and the Greens, led by ODS Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek (for details on the 2006 election, see [Plecitá-Vlachová and Stegmaier, 2008](#)). This tenuous coalition survived four votes of no-confidence, but narrowly lost the fifth no-confidence vote in March 2009 with 101 of the 200 members in parliament voting against the government. While other important political events took place between 2006 and March 2009 – most notably the 2008 Presidential Election where Klaus won his second term in the 3rd round of the second election and the ČSSD victory in all 13 regional elections in October 2008² – we focus here on the events that precipitated the dramatic 2010 election results.

At the start of 2009, the party system and support levels remained similar to the 2002 and 2006 election results with the ČSSD and ODS receiving the strongest backing in

the polls – 36% and 31.5% respectively. The Communists (16%), Greens (7%), and the KDU-ČSL (5%) were the only other parties generating enough support to surpass the 5% electoral threshold.³

After the governing coalition failed to win parliamentary support in the March 2009 vote, a caretaker government of experts, led by Jan Fischer, who had been serving as the President of the Czech Statistical Office, governed with support from the ODS and ČSSD. The two parties agreed to hold early parliamentary elections instead of waiting until the end of the regular 4-year term (June 2010). After both the Chamber and the Senate passed a constitutional amendment for early elections, the President announced October 9–10, 2009 as the election date.

As the parties began their campaign preparations during summer, changes in the party system were underway. Miroslav Kalousek, former Minister of Finance in the Topolánek government, left the KDU-ČSL and established the center-right party TOP 09 and the popular Karel Schwarzenberg, Topolánek's Foreign Minister, became the party's leader. The party quickly became a viable political contender.

Public Affairs (VV) also made its move to become a national party with an anti-corruption platform. The party was established in 2001 as a municipal party in Prague and by 2006 it had expanded across the country to become the second strongest party in municipal-level government. The selection of Radek John, former journalist for TV NOVA, as the party's leader in June 2009, marked the beginning of the change from a local to national party. In the run-up to the expected October 2009 elections, the party polled only around 1%; it wasn't until February 2010, that support crossed the 5% threshold.

The October 2009 election campaign was underway and election authorities had already spent 122 million crowns⁴, when the Czech Constitutional Court agreed to hear an MP's challenge to the early election. Just a month before the election, the court ruled the early election unconstitutional, arguing that the one-time amendment shortening the Chamber's term was a breach of the constitution's core. The only way early elections could be held would be to amend the constitution to create a permanent mechanism for early

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² For an overview of the regional election results, see: <http://www.volby.cz/pls/kz2008/kz62?xjazyk=EN&xdatum=20081017>

³ CVVM March 2009 report, see graph 2: http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100882s_pv90318.pdf

⁴ www.radio.cz/en/news/119921

elections. The two chambers quickly passed an amendment that allowed the Chamber to dissolve itself with support from three-fifths of the MPs. PM Fischer and President Klaus signed the amendment which went into effect on September 14. Just before the vote in the Chamber on its dissolution which would have allowed the early elections to take place in November, the ČSSD announced that it no longer supported early elections. Thus, the elections would be postponed until the end of the 4-year term.

2. Electoral campaign

After a year in power, the caretaker government continued to receive high marks from the Czech public. In April, PM Fischer's approval rating stood at 73% compared, for example, to Topolánek's rating of 40% in February 2009, before the fall of his government.⁵ But, Fischer was not a politician and had decided not to run for office. Therefore, voters could not reward (or punish) him at election time (Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2008). Instead, the caretaker government with its general level of civility and diplomacy demonstrated that the Czech political scene could be "cleaner" and prompted the public's desire for political change.

An unplanned shake-up occurred within the ODS leadership just 3 months before the election. Topolánek stepped aside as the ODS leader in March after making controversial statements about Jews and homosexuals. Petr Nečas, the party's deputy chairman, replaced him.

The primary issues in the election campaign were the Czech economy and the desire not to wind up in the same economic straits as Greece. The parties emphasized reducing the public debt and deficit. Consistent with their ideological positions, the ODS proposed reducing expenses through cuts in unemployment and pension benefits, while the ČSSD advocated for increasing revenues in order to protect social programs. The platform of TOP 09 stressed balancing the budget through budget cuts, introducing university tuition, and health care co-payments.

Due to the cancellation of the early parliamentary elections, the prolonged election campaign (essentially August 2009–May 2010) was the most expensive in Czech history. The ČSSD spent the largest sum, estimating that it spent 200 million Czech Crowns (Kč), though unofficial estimates suggest they spent about double this amount.⁶

3. Electoral system

Voting took place Friday, May 28 from 14:00 to 22:00 and Saturday, May 29 from 8:00 to 14:00. The 200 MPs are elected from the 14 electoral districts using the d'Hondt formula (Plecitá-Vlachová and Stegmaier, 2008). The system remained the same as in 2006 with one exception. In

2006 voters could cast up to 2 preference votes to change the order of candidates on the party list, but in 2010 voters had up to 4 preference votes. In the 1990s, Czech voters had 4 preference votes and an individual candidate had to receive at least 10% of the vote, counted from all votes the party received in an electoral region, to move up the party list. The electoral reform passed in 2000 during the "opposition agreement" period (Roberts, 2003) reduced the number of preferential votes to 2, and lowered the preference vote requirement from 10% to 7% (Charvát, 2010). While substantial parts of the reform were abolished by the Constitutional Court, the reduction in preferential votes and the 7% requirement were included in the 2002 election act. The return to 4 preferential votes along with a 5% threshold to move up the party list was proposed by Topolánek's government as a step toward increased personalization of elections and more open lists. These changes were adopted in October 2006 (Voda and Pink, 2010), and as we note later, they had an impact on the election results.

4. Election results

Voter turnout was 62.6%, a slight drop from 65% in 2006. Table 1 presents the 2010 and 2006 election results for parties that received more than 1% of the vote in either of these elections.⁷ In 2010, 27 parties, unions, or blocks competed in the election. Five parties surpassed the 5% threshold for parliamentary seats (ČSSD, ODS, TOP 09, KSČM, VV), while another 5 parties received between 1% and 5% of the vote. The remaining 17 parties each garnered less than 1% support.

The results for 2010 compared to 2006 illustrate greater equalization of party strength. The two strongest parties throughout the post-communist period, the ODS and the ČSSD, saw their support levels drop substantially. As seen in Table 1, the ODS's vote share dropped just over 15 percentage points from 35.4% in 2006 to 20.2% in 2010, and the ČSSD experienced a 10 percentage point drop from 32.3% to 22.1%. Together, these two parties received 1.4 million fewer votes in 2010 than in 2006.

Most observers expected the ČSSD to do much better than it actually did. Opinion polls suggested the party would win around 30% of the vote⁸ – a marked difference from the 22% it received. Despite the first-place showing, the lackluster performance represented a defeat for the party and its leader Jiří Paroubek. Paroubek immediately resigned his position as party leader, earning him the moniker "the victor who lost".⁹

The KSČM, which had been the 3rd largest parliamentary party, received 11.27% in the election, a small drop from their 2006 results, but resulting in the same number of seats. The party has maintained a parliamentary presence throughout the post-communist period. To the extent

⁵ CVVM April 2010 report: http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/101033s_pi100429.pdf and CVVM February 2009 report: http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100882s_pv90318.pdf

⁶ http://zpravy.idnes.cz/nejdraz-vysly-hlasy-volicu-cssd-za-jeden-strana-utrtila-260-korun-pyq/domaci.asp?c=A100603_212249_domaci_vcl

⁷ Full election results for all parties nation-wide and by region can be found on the Czech Statistical Office election website: <http://www.volby.cz/>

⁸ The CVVM early-May election poll showed that the ČSSD would receive 30.5% of the vote http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/101038s_pv100519.pdf(graph 2) and its April poll showed the party at 30% http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/101031s_pv100421.pdf(graph 2).

⁹ *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, 31 May 2010, page A1.

Table 1
Results of the Chamber of Deputies election, Czech Republic, 28–29 May 2010.

Party	2010	2010	2006	2006
	Vote Share	Seats	Vote Share	Seats
Czech Social Democratic Party [ČSSD]	22.1	56	32.3	74
Civic Democratic Party [ODS]	20.2	53	35.4	81
TOP 09	16.7	41	–	–
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia [KSČM]	11.3	26	12.8	26
Public Affairs (VV)	10.9	24	–	–
Christian and Democratic Party – Czechoslovak People's Party [KDU-ČSL]	4.4	–	7.2	13
Party of Civic Rights – ZEMANOVCÍ	4.3	–	–	–
Sovereignty – Jana Bobosikova Bloc	3.7	–	–	–
Green Party [SZ]	2.5	–	6.3	6
Workers Party of Social Justice	1.1	–	–	–
Party of Independent Candidates and European Democrats [SNK ED]	–	–	2.1	–
Other parties	2.8	–	3.9	–
Invalid votes	0.6	–	0.4	–

Total electorate in 2010: 8,415,892. Turnout in 2010: 62.6%. Source: Czech Statistical Office (www.volby.cz/). Notes: We list only the 2010 and 2006 results for parties winning 1% of the vote or more. 26 parties competed in the 2006 elections and 27 parties competed in 2010. For full results of these and other Czech elections, see www.volby.cz.

that older cohorts support the party (Stegmaier and Vlachová, 2009; Linek, 2008), the decline of the party is inevitable, unless the party manages to appeal to voters concerned about economic security.

TOP 09 and Public Affairs were newcomers to national politics and they offered voters who were dissatisfied with the main parties other options to express their discontent. The press proclaimed Schwarzenberg “the king of the elections,”¹⁰ upon his party’s strong 16.7% finish. Its first-place showing in the Prague region with 27.3% of the vote, led Prague Mayor Pavel Bém to resign his position as ODS party leader in Prague.¹¹ Public Affairs won almost 11% of the vote, giving Radek John strong negotiating power since a coalition of center-right parties would need support from his party.

Of the parties that received less than 5% of the vote, two had previously held seats in parliament: the Greens and the KDU-ČSL. The 2006 parliamentary election was the first in which a Green party in post-communist Europe won seats. But, the party was marred by in-fighting and defections, including Schwarzenberg’s move to become the leader of TOP 09 in the summer of 2009, which diminished their election chances.

One of the country’s oldest political parties, the KDU-ČSL, narrowly missed securing parliamentary seats. The Czechoslovak People’s Party was founded in 1918 uniting Catholic interests in Moravia and in 1919 it became a national party (Krejčí, 1995, 188).¹² The party won parliamentary seats in each election during the interwar

years and again in 1946. In the 1990 elections they competed under the KDU umbrella (Jehlička et al., 1993) and in 1992, they merged with the KDU to form the KDU-ČSL. Support for the party during the post-communist era has never been especially strong, because only about 27% of the population identifies as Catholic, while 59% are non-believers.¹³ In addition to this, its downfall can also be attributed to internal party conflicts, which led the former party leader Kalousek and some of his colleagues to break away and establish TOP 09.

The number of women elected to parliament increased from 15.5% (31 MP) in 2006 to 22% (44 MP) in 2010. This represents a significant increase given that the percent has been stagnant at about 15% throughout the post-communist era. The interest group “Fórum 50%”, which works toward the goal of parliamentary equality, appealed to voters to give preferential votes to female candidates to move them up the party list and into parliament. While 27.2% of candidates were women, without preference voting, only 30 of them (15%) would have made it into parliament.¹⁴

5. Government formation

Coalition discussions among the 3 center-right parties progressed quickly and the new government was ready in seven weeks. While the ODS and TOP 09 campaign platforms placed them solidly in the center-right, Public Affairs had run their campaign on an anti-corruption platform. Thus, it was hard to pinpoint their particular ideological placement and what type of coalition partner they would be. The new government declared itself the “government of fiscal responsibility”. It announced cuts in the 2011 budget

¹⁰ *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, 31 May 2010, page A9. “Králem voleb je kníže Schwarzenberg” [“The king of the elections is prince Schwarzenberg”] by Jan Gazdík.

¹¹ The Czech Republic is divided into 14 electoral regions. Regional results can be found on the Czech Statistical Office website: <http://www.volby.cz/>

¹² The KDU-ČSL website contains a detailed history of the party in Czech <http://www.kdu.cz/Dokumenty/Historie.aspx>

¹³ 2001 Census data: [http://www.czso.cz/csu/2003edicniplan.nsf/t/7A002F081C/\\$File/41100308.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2003edicniplan.nsf/t/7A002F081C/$File/41100308.pdf)

¹⁴ See the article on the Radio Praha website: <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/129230> or the Fórum 50% website: www.padesatprocent.cz

to reduce the deficit and promised political reforms starting in 2012.

The gender composition of the cabinet and the Chamber's leadership received attention. For the first time in Czech history a woman, Miroslava Němcová (ODS), is the chair of the Chamber of Deputies. Further, two of the three vice-chair positions are held by women: Vlasta Parkanová (TOP 09) and Kateřina Klasnová (VV). In contrast, PM Nečas's 14 member cabinet is comprised exclusively of men.

6. Outlook

With its solid majority, the coalition should be successful in enacting their policy priorities. The government has promised to balance the budget, reform the pension, health care, and tertiary education systems, fight corruption, and enact practices to increase government transparency. The government has declared its interest in cooperation within the EU and NATO; however, Czech entrance into the Eurozone is not among the priorities of the government or the Czech National Bank. Given the Czech budget challenges and the economic crisis in Europe, it seems that plans for the adopting the Euro will be on hold for a while.

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The 2010 presidential election in Poland

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The 2010 Polish Presidential election was held in two rounds on 20 June and 4 July. This election, originally planned to take place in the autumn, was brought forward as a consequence of the sudden death of President Lech Kaczyński in a plane crash in April, several months before the official end of his mandate. This event greatly overshadowed the election. Indeed, the main contestants were Bronisław Komorowski, the Speaker of the Sejm (lower

chamber of parliament) who had become acting President after the incumbent's death, and the twin brother of the late President, Jarosław Kaczyński. Komorowski was the candidate of the ruling party, the liberal conservative Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO), while Kaczyński represented another party from the right of the political spectrum, the social conservative Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS). Bronisław Komorowski won the election by a small margin. The victory of the PO candidate brings an end to a period of cohabitation during which the head of the state was a member of an opposition party.

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