



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Czech Republic political briefing:  
Parliamentary Election Is Over: What Do the Results Say?  
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# Parliamentary Election Is Over: What Do the Results Say?

## Summary

*A regular election to the Chamber of Deputies, the lower chamber of the Czech Parliament, was held on October 8–9. The results are interesting for several reasons. Prime Minister's movement lost its dominance, being defeated by a right-wing opposition coalition. The difference between these two subjects was the narrowest ever (0.67 per cent). Traditional left-wing parties – the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party – suffered a crushing defeat, gaining no mandates for the first time in history. Besides, the Pirate Party, which was expected to take the office of Prime Minister a few months ago, lost 18 seats. The election was also typical of a relatively high voter turnout (the highest since 1998) and the largest number of the lost votes. Altogether, virtually 48 per cent of citizens do not have their political representative.*

## Introduction

The October parliamentary election has brought several unexpected results and unprecedented phenomena. Despite recent predictions, the opposition succeeded, gaining a majority of seats in the lower chamber.<sup>1</sup> The difference between the former so-called democratic opposition and the Prime Minister's ANO movement, a hegemonic political force over the last years, is big. The 2021 election, therefore, will probably result in a completely different government coalition. It is also because the two other left-wing parties that were *de iure* or *de facto* members of the ruling coalition between 2017 and 2021, failed and lost all mandates in the Chamber of Deputies.

## Shortcomings of the electoral system

The lower chamber is going to be composed of four subjects – ANO movement (72 seats), SPOLU (71 seats), PirSTAN (37 seats) and SPD (20 seats). At first glance, it may seem a more transparent, constructive and stable composition, since only four subjects gave gained the

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<sup>1</sup> See Zemánek, L. *One Month before the Election: Recent Development & Foreign Policy Agenda* (2021, September 15), china-cee.eu. Retrieved October 14, 2021, from <https://china-cee.eu/2021/09/15/czech-republic-political-briefing-one-month-before-the-election-recent-development-foreign-policy-agenda/>.

mandates. For sure, it would be a positive move forward as, so far, the Chamber of Deputies have suffered from excessive fragmentation, undermining the stability of governance. It is typical of the Czech system that the government is formed by several, at least three subjects which makes effective governance hardly possible. Compromises have become the essential feature and *conditio sine qua non* of political life, leading to a long-term dissatisfaction of the public as well as politicians themselves. The point is that no party is able to fulfil its programme because is forced to make substantial concessions to other political subjects needed for the very establishment of the government. This reasoning is not aimed against the democratic or parliamentary system but is to shed light on one of the most serious problems of Czech post-socialist politics. There are tools and methods how to make the system more stable and beneficial for the people, for instance, weakening of the proportional representation principle of the electoral system in favour of plurality voting.

Subject	Votes	Percentage	Seats
<b>SPOLU</b>	1.493.905	27.79%	71
<b>ANO</b>	1.458.140	27.12%	72
<b>PirSTAN</b>	839.776	15.62%	37
<b>SPD</b>	513.910	9.56%	20

**Table 1: Results of the election**  
**Source: Czech Statistical Office, volby.cz**

### **Creating coalitions**

Such considerations could find positive responses among the public how indicated by the recent development and electoral behaviour. An unexpected number of voters supported SPOLU (which means „Together“). It is not a single party but a coalition made up of three individual parties – the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party (KDU-ČSL) and TOP 09. The grouping is a centre-right, liberal formation with some conservative characteristics, explicitly Western-oriented. They succeeded especially because the political representatives had managed to unite, thus overcoming the above-mentioned fragmentation. An analogous tactic was chosen by the PirSTAN, another coalition, constituted by the Pirate Party and the Mayors and Independents (STAN), a liberal, progressivist political force with extreme stances in the foreign policy. The final synergy of the second coalition is, nevertheless, somewhat doubtful, since the Pirates as the initial leader

started to lose support while the Mayors and Independents were gradually strengthening.<sup>2</sup> This tendency, deepened by a sharp public campaign against the Pirates who were depicted as new leftist revolutionaries, resulted in a considerable unsuccess of the Pirate Party. The coalition obtained 37 mandates but a mere 4 of them were gained by the Pirate candidates. It was enabled by the possibility to choose up to 5 candidates on the electoral list, who are then given priority within the vote-counting process.

The tendency towards forming broader coalitions found echoes among minor parties as well. The sovereigntist, national-conservative, right-wing Tricolour Movement, supported by former President Václav Klaus, agreed on close cooperation with Free Citizens' Party and the Freeholder Party. This bloc, however, did not succeed, gaining 2.76 per cent of votes. The question is how the individual members of both coalitions will be cooperating in the lower chamber and a potential government, whether they will keep the joint organisation structures or even tend to merging. The latter would be transparent and beneficial in terms of the long-term development of the Czech political and electoral system. The existence and candidature of dozens of parties or movements belong to the main maladies of the post-1989 political life.

### **Citizens without representation**

This fact leads not only to high fragmentation and instability of the system and governance but also to a high number of wasted votes. The voter turnout has been 65.43 per cent this year, amounting to 5.414.637 votes out of 8.275.752 in total. It is one of the highest turnouts in the history of contemporary parliamentarism. The table below shows the turnout in the election to the Chamber of Deputies since the establishment of the Czech Republic.

<b>1996</b>	76.41%	<b>2010</b>	62.60%
<b>1998</b>	74.03%	<b>2013</b>	59.48%
<b>2002</b>	58.00%	<b>2017</b>	60.84%
<b>2006</b>	64.47%	<b>2021</b>	65.43%

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<sup>2</sup> Compare with the domestic political development in spring: Zemánek, L. *Rise of the „New Left“ and a Conservative Reaction: New Constellation* (2021, April 12), china-cee.eu. Retrieved October 14, 2021, from <https://china-cee.eu/2021/04/12/czech-republic-political-briefing-rise-of-the-new-left-and-a-conservative-reaction-new-constellation/>.

Undoubtedly, it is a positive signal. At the same time, however, the successful subjects gained only 80.09 per cent of votes, which is a historic minimum – together with the results in 2010 (see the following table in which the percentage expresses the share of valid votes cast in favour of the elected subjects):

<b>1996</b>	88.84%	<b>2010</b>	81.15%
<b>1998</b>	88.68%	<b>2013</b>	87.38%
<b>2002</b>	87.45%	<b>2017</b>	88.40%
<b>2006</b>	94.02%	<b>2021</b>	80.09%

It means that the record number of people and their interests will not be represented in the lower chamber.<sup>3</sup> To put it concretely, 1.069.359 citizens had voted for subjects that gained no seats. Moreover, there are 39.547 whose ballot was invalid and other 2.861.115 people who absented from participation in the election. Whereas 4.305.731 adult citizens will have their political representatives, the remaining 3.970.021 (i.e. 47.97 per cent) will not. And this poses a serious problem in terms of the legitimacy of the existing liberal democratic regime. Even if take into consideration only those who voted for unsuccessful subjects, many people are sceptical about liberal democracy, its ideology, values, rules and institutions, about the Western orientation of our country and the present shape of the European integration. Never before happened that several relatively strong minor subjects ended up gaining more than 100 thousand votes. In this election, the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), the oldest Czech political party found in 1878, suffered a historic defeat when obtained 4.65 per cent of votes. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) experienced the same destiny in a year of the centenary of the establishment of the party in 1921. Communists got 3.6 per cent. A recently found movement Přísaha („Oath“) has presented itself as a populist catch-all party focusing on the fight against corruption and the introduction of law and order. After several months of existence, the movement gained 4.68 per cent. The aforementioned anti-EU coalition led by the Tricolour Movement obtained 2.76 per cent while the radical sovereigntist Volný blok („Free bloc“) – 1.33 per cent.

The aim of this analysis is not to describe marginal features but to point to the fact that the strongest among the unsuccessful represent predominantly critical, more or less radical

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<sup>3</sup> *Přes milion hlasů propadlo, letos jich bylo rekordně mnoho* (2021, October 10), echo24.cz. Retrieved October 12, 2021, from <https://echo24.cz/a/SYTQ6/pres-milion-hlasu-propadlo-letos-jich-bylo-rekordne-mnoho>.

citizens opposing the long-term status quo. If count up these votes together with SPD, it amounts to 26.58 per cent. The critical, anti-establishment segment of society is underrepresented substantially. This state of affairs cannot be changed swiftly. Nevertheless, it clearly shows that the potential for an alternative, sovereignist policy is enormous. The results of the October election, therefore, do not reflect real attitudes, sentiments and interests in Czech society. It is caused by the fragmentation of the political subjects, rivalry and clashes of particular interests between individual political actors, shortage of talented, ambitious leaders and last but not least the overall setting of the electoral system. It will be worth noting whether integration projects will be going on to make use of the existing potential.

### **Conclusion**

The October parliamentary election is over but that is only beginning. The former Chamber of Deputies is to be dissolved and Andrej Babiš' Government is to resign. Concurrently, the first rounds of negotiations about a new cabinet have already started. Given the number of deputies of individual subjects in the lower chamber, the coalitions are supposed to form the Government in the following weeks or months. However, it is President Miloš Zeman who charges somebody to put together the cabinet. The situation has become complicated due to President's illness and disability. It is, therefore, likely that the post-election processes will be protracted, not being excluded that Miloš Zeman will put forward different solutions to the hot political situation.