

# NATIONAL AND CLASS ASPECTS OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA (1925-1935)

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## Abstract

In the political system of the First Czechoslovak Republic the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) presented itself as an internationalist party that fulfilled one of the main goals of the Communist International. This resulted primarily in the fact that it was the only major political party at that time that actually gained the support of citizens of both Czechoslovak and German nationality. This article thoroughly examines the electoral support for the Communist Party in terms of the nationality of its voters. In the Czech environment, the Communist Party mainly attracted the attention of workers in industrial regions. In the German environment, this phenomenon is similar, except that in the elections in 1935, half of the former Communist Party voters found the Sudeten German Party a better alternative. This leads to the idea that voters for the Communist Party were also German nationalists, who could understand the internationalism of the communists as a means of breaking up Czechoslovakia before Sudeten German Party was founded. The aim of this paper is to answer the question on importance of nationality and also of class origin of CPC voters.

**Key words:** electoral geography, electoral behaviour, communism, nationalism.

## INTRODUCTION

In the Czech environment, the pioneering article is the brief analysis of Jan Náhlovský (1922) commenting on the statistical overview of the elections to the National Assembly in 1920 and elections to municipal councils in 1919, also supported by maps. Later on, because of the absence of free political competition in the period 1948–1990, there was nothing to research and only the historical election results from the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic were examined by historians several times. However, after the fall of the communist regime, Czech electoral geography boomed. The first works on this topic started to appear (Blažek and Kostelecký 1991) after the free elections of 1990. In an effort to identify general trends of electoral support

for renewed parties that referred to their own history, many works focused on the historical perspective and also examined the elections in the period 1918–1938 (Jehlička and Sýkora 1991; Daněk 1993; Balík 2002; Maškarinec 2011; Kostelecký et al. 2014). Šerý and Urbančíková (2011) examined historical elections but only focused on one election in a small area, while Fňukal (2008) examined the techniques of electoral manipulation such as gerrymandering or malapportionment in the 1907 elections in the Czech lands.

This study will examine the nature of the electoral base of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) in the period of the so-called First Republic. This political party ranked among the most powerful parties of its time and inherently also among

the most controversial ones. Its ideology focused on workers, who were a large group of voters in this developed country. Strength of socialist thoughts was confirmed in communal elections in 1919 which the Czechoslovak and German social democrats convincingly won. Parliamentary elections in 1920 only affirmed this state. Shortly after, the radical socialist wings in both social democratic parties separated themselves and founded CPC (Marek 2005). This development was closely watched by former social democratic voters and has an impact on their voting behaviour. The first elections in which the Communist Party participated, in 1925, showed that it classified among parties with the largest electoral support. Moreover, its voters were of both Czechoslovak and German nationality. Internationalism, which was the determining ideology of the Third Communist International, and the associated negative attitude towards the republican establishment, could have been initially perceived by the German irredentists as an acceptable alternative to other negativistic German political parties. Thus, the question about importance of class origin and nationality of CPC voters is the main aim of this paper. This study is a contribution to the above-mentioned electoral studies of the First Czechoslovak Republic from a geographical point of view.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Analysed data

The basis of the present analysis is data published by the State Statistical Office after each election to the Chamber of Deputies of the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia. These publications contain basic information about voters, election turnout, the electoral gains of individual political parties and mandates assigned to them. All three elections that were monitored are processed to the level of judicial districts and the last two also to the municipal level by special datasheets for each electoral region. Because of the object of our research, we examined the elections on 15 November 1925 (Náhlovský 1926), and in more detail the elections on 27 October 1929 (Náhlovský 1930) and 19 May 1935 (Náhlovský 1936).

This data was supplemented by basic demographic data based on the census in 1930, which was used for further statistical analysis of all the aggregate data. We used statistical lexicons of municipalities in both Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia (State Statistical Office 1934a, 1934b, 1935). For other indicators, such as occupation of population, data from official sources based on the 1930 census was used.

It is necessary to remark that on the base of the data available only general conclusions can be made, since such aggregate data does not include any specific information about individuals. There are further quantitative methods for drawing certain conclusions from aggregate data divided in units by so-called ecological inference but their validity is still disputed (King et al. 2004). This analysis deals with the threat of ecological fallacy by using works of historians on a similar topic.

One of the methods used for the visualisation of election results is the so-called core electoral support. This is an area with the highest voting support, where a certain party wins 50% of its total electoral gain. It is calculated by ranking the districts according to the relative election results of a certain party from the highest to the lowest. Subsequently, the contribution of votes from individual districts in the total gain of the party is calculated. These values are cumulatively added together until they reach the 50% level. The districts that become a part of this aggregate belong to the core electoral support for a particular party. In the Czech environment, this method was first used by Jehlička and Sýkora (1991), calling this area the electoral support area.

In this work we will use the core electoral support only on a long-term basis to visualise the number of cases when a judicial district belonged to the core electoral support, which we call the core electoral support intensity. This way it is easy to find areas with a stable core electoral support, i.e. those that always belong to the core electoral support.

We used correlations for indicating possible relations between groups of statistical data. The Pearson correlation coefficient expressing the strength of linear relationship between two groups of data

was used. If two groups of data show a certain similarity in data distribution, it is assumed that there is a relation between them and its degree is demonstrated by these correlations. The value of the coefficient ranges from  $-1$  (inverse relation) to  $+1$  (direct relation). When the correlation coefficient has a value of  $0$ , no statistical relationship between these two rows of data exists. In this article, the indication of correlation is considered to be the values of  $+0.35$  or  $-0.35$ . A correlation is conclusive if its values are higher than  $+0.7$  or lower than  $-0.7$ . Correlation coefficients exceeding  $\pm 0.35$  are shown in bold in the tables. Serious limitation of this method is the fact that even a strong correlation between two variables does not imply or prove their functional relation. It is only possible to suggest potential explanations on the base of a correlation (Warner 2013). A similar methodology was used in the analysis of the evolution of electoral support for the Christian Democrats by Voda (2010) or Šerý and Urbančíková (2011) who focused closely on the elections in the Hlučín district in 1929.

### The study area and its specific features

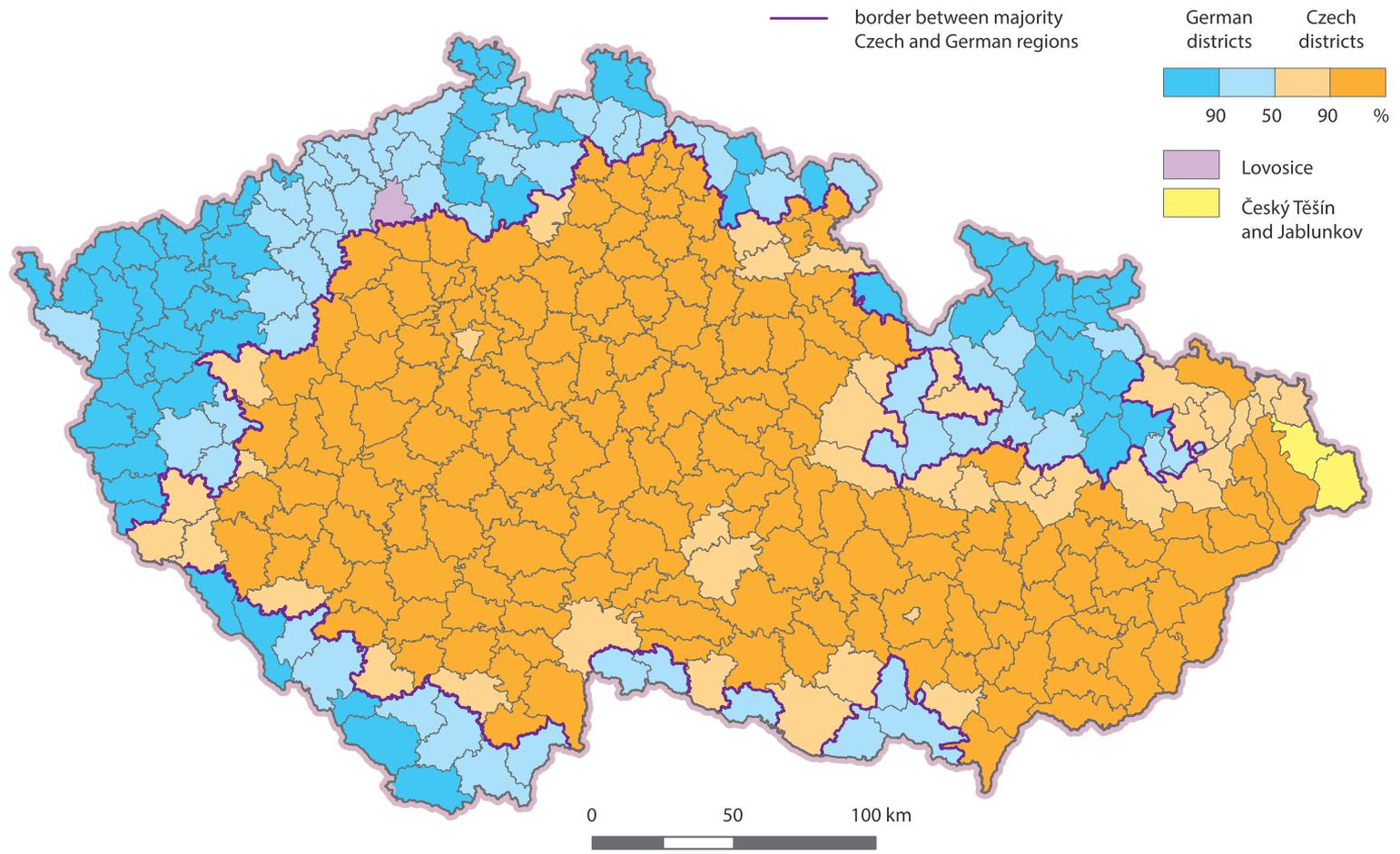
Elections can be studied on several territorial levels. The choice depends on the intention of the study, the timeframe and availability of the data. According to Prescott (1969), geographers should strive for the lowest territorial level possible in order to achieve the highest precision of their analysis. In an effort to avoid ecological fallacy it would be ideal to use data on the individual level but such case is only theoretical (Warner 2013). The electoral statistics of the First Republic included municipalities, judicial districts, political districts, electoral regions, historical lands and finally the whole of Czechoslovakia. We have chosen judicial districts as the basic territorial level, which were the basic statistical unit until 1949 when they were replaced by newly defined districts (Hledíková et al. 2005). In the period under analysis, between 1925 and 1935, there were no significant changes in the definition of the judicial districts. The most significant change that occurred in relation to the elections in 1925 was the reorganisation of districts within Prague, where the districts of Smíchov and Karlín were newly divided

into three districts (Prague West, Prague North and Prague East). For the purpose of these analyses, we will consider that the former Smíchov district equates to the district of Prague West and that the former district of Karlín equates to the district of Prague East, as these new districts were situated within the territory of the former districts. Considering the rather illustrative role of the elections in 1925 in this study, and especially because most of the analyses work with districts of the same national character, the distortion of the data in these cases is only marginal. The overall area examined is the area of the present day Czech Republic, i.e. the territory of Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia, which at that time consisted of 15 electoral regions.

Considering the traditional judicial districts, it is necessary to mention one special feature of the elections, which is the division of the capital city of Prague into two parts. Part A consisted of districts I–VII and XVI–XIX, Part B consisted of districts VIII–XV. Basically, Part A includes the districts on the left bank of the Vltava River together with the Old Town (I), New Town (II), Josefov (V) and Vyšehrad (VI), as the electoral statistics considered the central part of Prague as one single part. Part B is located on the right bank of the Vltava River, with the exception of the interior districts. This classification is used only in the electoral statistics and for its needs Prague A and Prague B formed their own electoral regions (Náhlavský 1930).

Along with the preservation of the “urban” judicial districts of Brno-city and Olomouc-city, which most authors combine with the adjacent districts around them (those known as Brno-surroundings and Olomouc-country) the resulting number of judicial districts is 332. This number provides a reasonable compromise between the volume of processed data and the need for “fineness” of the resulting maps and analyses.

As a result of the national composition of inter-war Czechoslovakia, it was also necessary to take into account the different national environments of the studied districts. As we are dealing with districts where one nationality dominated as well as with districts where the two nationalities were rather



**Figure 1** National composition of judicial districts in the Czech lands according to the 1930 census. Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

balanced, a certain simplification is necessary. Districts are then referred to as either Czech or German districts. A judicial district is designated Czech if the absolute majority of the population was of Czech (more precisely Czechoslovak) nationality. Similarly, German districts contained an absolute majority of Germans. However, three districts do not fit into this classification. The district of Lovosice, where in 1930 49.6% of the inhabitants were German and 48.7% of the population of Czechoslovak nationality, is classified as a German district. Conversely, the judicial districts of Český Těšín and Jablunkov, where the two aforementioned nationalities were accompanied by a strong local Polish minority, are classified as Czech districts, since Czechs markedly outnumbered Germans (Český Těšín – 43% Czechoslovaks, 10.1% Germans; Jablunkov – 30.1% Czechoslovaks, 1.7% Germans).

For some calculations (e.g. the Pearson correlation coefficient) it was necessary to differentiate the character of the studied areas even more precisely. The districts were then divided according to the following scheme and the whole situation is illustrated in Figure 1. The number of districts falling into an appropriate category is in parentheses:

- **Czech districts** (Czech nationality 50% or more; a total of 212, including also the judicial districts of Český Těšín and Jablunkov);
- a subset of 90% *Czech districts* (Czech nationality 90% or more; a total of 172);
- **German districts** (German nationality 50% or more; a total of 120, including also the judicial district of Lovosice);
- a subset of 90% *German districts* (German nationality 90% or more; a total of 62).

## THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM OF THE FIRST REPUBLIC

According to the Czechoslovak Constitution of 1920 the legislative body was the National Assembly. It consisted of the Chamber of Deputies, with 300 members, and the Senate, with 150 senators. Elections to these two bodies took place in 1920, 1925, 1929 and 1935. According to the constitution, the right to vote was general, equal, direct and

secret. It was also awarded to soldiers (only until 1927) and for the first time also to women. At that time, Czechoslovakia ranked among those countries with the most democratic right to vote.

In the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, any citizen of Czechoslovakia who had reached the age of 21 had an active right to vote, provided he or she was registered in the electoral list of a municipality, with the only requirement being a three-month residency in the municipality. The electoral list was published half a year before the elections. Voting was obligatory and permissible reasons for non-participation in the elections were clearly specified (age over 70 years, health issues, etc.) However, sanctions were rather rare, as no fixed punishment was set for an unexcused absence. For the purposes of the elections the area of the Czech lands was divided into 15 electoral regions (23 in the whole of Czechoslovakia), which had the number of mandates allocated according to their population. It was necessary to update the law before every election according to the changes in the population. The candidates had to be older than 30 and were elected for a six-year term (Filip and Schelle 1992).

The votes were converted using the principle of proportional representation. Votes were processed at the level of electoral regions. After the votes had been counted by municipal and district election commissions, the results were sent to the regional electoral commission, which conducted the first of three scrutinies, which were used to convert votes to mandates. The first scrutiny was carried out on the basis of the Hare method, so the electoral quota was obtained by dividing the total number of valid votes and number of seats to be elected in the region. Further scrutinies were carried out at the national level by the Central Election Commission, which gradually allocated mandates for votes not used in the first scrutiny. Votes for parties that did not win any mandates in the region were forfeited and were not converted. For the next two scrutinies, new candidate lists of candidates who had been unsuccessful in the first scrutiny were established (Filip and Schelle 1992).

## THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ITS ELECTORAL SUPPORT

### Elections in November 1925

The first elections analysed in this study took place in 1925. These were already the second parliamentary elections carried out in the independent Czechoslovak Republic. The first elections took place in April 1920 and the CSDWP (Czech Social Democratic Workers' Party) won with a total gain of 25.7% of the votes (22.2% on the territory of the present day Czech Republic). In the elections of 1925, its support receded drastically to only 10.2% in the Czech lands. This was caused mainly by the establishment of the Communist Party, which split off from the Social Democrats in 1921. The Communist Party became the second strongest party in Czechoslovakia, with a gain of 13.1% of the votes and achieved the third best result in the Czech lands, where it was surpassed only by the traditionally strong RPPF (Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants) and CPP (Czechoslovak People's Party), which did not receive the same support in the Czech lands and Slovakia. This would be similar in the subsequent elections.

The November elections of 1925 also indicated future trends in the spatial distribution of electoral support, which largely persisted throughout the period of the First Republic. In Figure 2, we can see the dominant cluster of a high level of support to the west of Prague (Kladno and surroundings) and also including Prague, which extends up to the area of the Ore Mountains and to the east to the Elbe region. Other areas with high levels of support for the Communist Party are somewhat insulated. In Bohemia it is the area of Frýdlant and Liberec, and in Moravia the area to the south and east of Brno, namely the Břeclav region and the area between Zlín and Uherské Hradiště. Another area where the Communists received high support was Ostrava. On the contrary, the areas of western and southern Bohemia, the Jeseníky Mts., the eastern part of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands and Moravian Wallachia showed the lowest support. To some extent, the areas with low support for the Communist Party can generally be described as mountain

areas, with the exception of the Jizera Mts. and Ore Mts. Additionally, the support for the Communist Party in Moravia-Silesia was generally lower.

At the Third Communist Party Congress in 1925, Antonín Zápotocký made a speech dealing with the number of communist party members among workers. His findings largely correlate with the voting results of the Communist Party. According to him, the smallest ratio of Communists among the workers was in the Pardubice, Pilsen and Ostrava regions, where it did not exceed 2%. This ratio was high in the region of Prague and Kladno (above 5%) and the highest ratio was in the Liberec region, where it reached 6.1%. Brno showed an average number of slightly above 3%. With the exception of Ostrava (which was, together with Pilsen, identified as a stronghold of social democracy), this "ratio of potential agitation" can be related to the electoral results of the Communist Party in that year (Rupnik 2002).

### Elections in October 1929

In 1929, the Communist Party, probably as a result of internal party struggles in the Czech lands, gained a slightly lower support, but not as much as was expected at the time. In the Czech lands, 9.9% of the voters opted for the Communists, while 10.2% of the voters in Czechoslovakia did so. It was one of the biggest surprises of these elections (Kárník 2003). The decline in support was more pronounced at the state level, where the Communist Party won 11 seats fewer than in previous elections. The communists ranked fourth in the elections and were beaten by the CNSP (Czechoslovak National Socialist Party), as well as by the CSDWP, their direct competitor. The winner was again the Agrarian Party (RPPF), with an overall gain of 15% of the votes.

The elections of that year give us a very similar picture as the previous ones (see Figure 3). In principle, there was no big change, but the support was a little weaker; the differences between districts decreased. The decline in electoral support for the communists was nationwide – it occurred in 225 districts, while support for the Communist Party increased

**Table 1** Election results of the Communist Party in the Czech lands in 1929 and 1935.

Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

Districts	Bohemia		Moravia-Silesia	
	1929 (%)	1935 (%)	1929 (%)	1935 (%)
Czech	9.53	10.52	9.78	9.82
90% Czech	10.08	11.12	9.92	9.00
German	11.67	6.35	4.76	2.85
90% German	11.13	5.76	6.01	2.52
Total	10.30	8.89	9.01	8.62

in only 75 districts. The most tangible decrease was in the districts of Slaný (−15.5 percentage points) and Kladno (−15.0 pp). The support increased most in the districts of Tachov (+7.0 pp) and Sokolov (+11.8 pp).

The elections also confirmed the trend of considerably lower support for the communists in German districts in Moravia and Silesia. See Table 1, which also shows the results of the next parliamentary elections in 1935. This is due to the fact that the primary decisive factor in supporting the Communist Party was not a national issue but its extreme socialist orientation. The judicial districts with a German majority were very much of a rural character, so there were not many radically minded workers. In comparison to Bohemia, the German districts show much better results for professionally oriented parties, such as the GCSPP (German Christian Social People's Party) which was the best of the German parties here with 6.7%, and the GFL (German Farmers' League), which beat the GSDWP (German Social Democratic Workers' Party), a winner in Bohemia (Náhlovský 1930). This phenomenon in scope of Moravia and Silesia was observed also by Daněk (1993).

### Elections in May 1935

In the following elections, the Communist Party defended its position in the Czech lands, at least in terms of the number of votes; its support, however, dropped to 8.9%. New votes were gained mainly in Slovakia and Ruthenia, so with a total result of

10.3% it did not lose any mandates. In that year, all the Czechoslovak parties were beaten by the newly-established irredentist Sudeten German Party (SGP) with a gain of 15.2%. The Czechoslovak state-forming parties were protected by the electoral system, which brought the SGP one mandate less than the RPPF (14.3%). The CPC was fourth, again surpassed by the Social Democratic Party, its greatest competitor.

Electoral support for the Communist Party in the last parliamentary elections held in interwar Czechoslovakia slightly dropped again. Even though it was only a slight decline, on the map of electoral support (Figure 4) it is much more evident than in the previous elections, when its election result could be called a decline. It is caused by the great territorial differentiation of the changes. The decline was recorded mostly in the border areas with a German majority. On the whole, support for the communists dropped in 216 judicial districts. Districts with the largest decline in support, where the support fell by more than 10 percentage points, included Cvikov (−18.4 pp), Kadaň, Chrastava, Falknov nad Ohří (today Sokolov), Německé Jablonné (today Jablonné v Podještědí) Frýdlant, Vidnava, Liberec, Tanvald and Podbořany. All these districts had German majorities. The highest increase in support was in Police nad Metují (+8.0 pp), Železný Brod (+7.2 pp) and Slezská Ostrava (+6.8 pp). Except for a significant decline in the area along the Ore Mountains and in northern Bohemia, the electoral support did not change substantially.

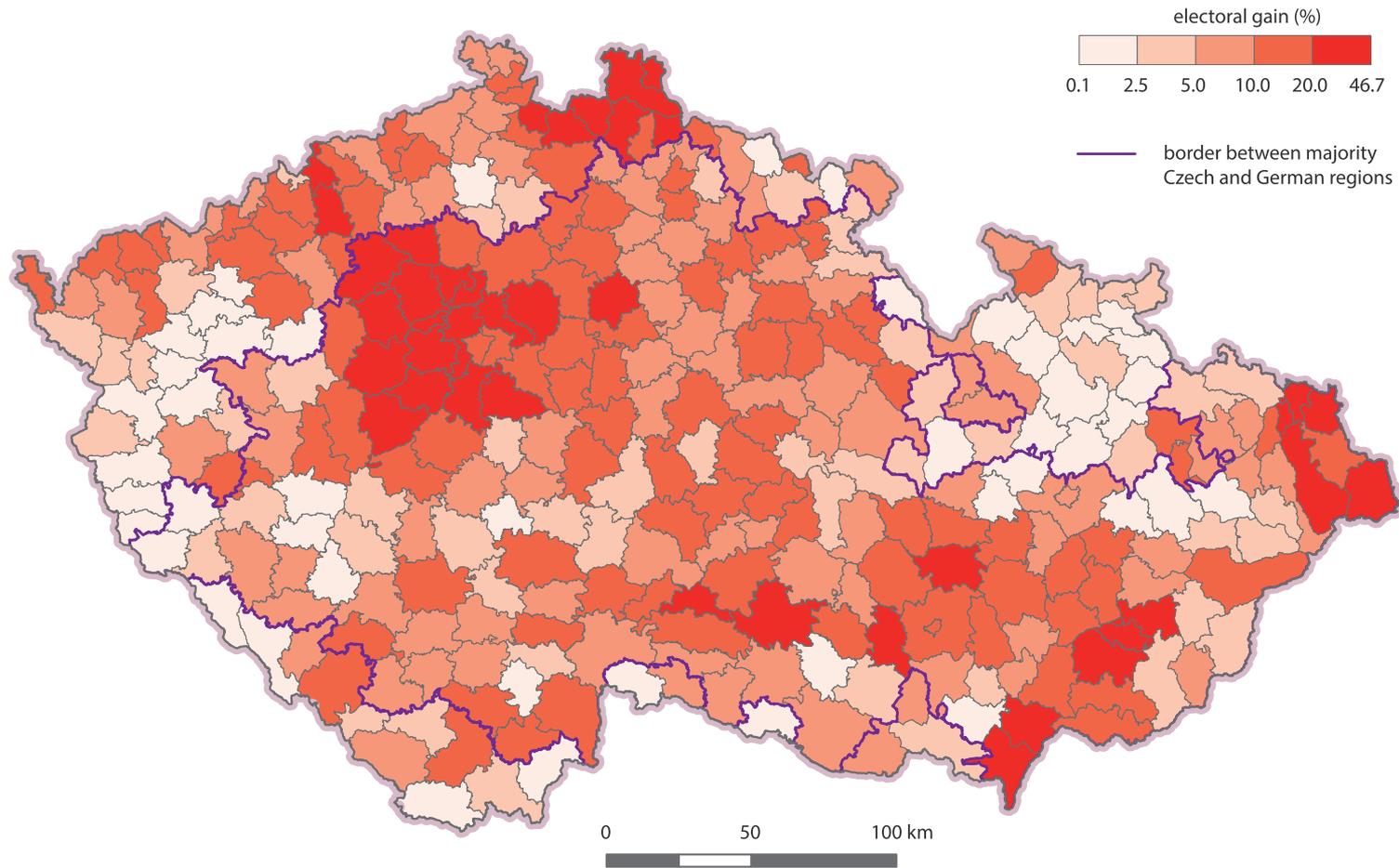
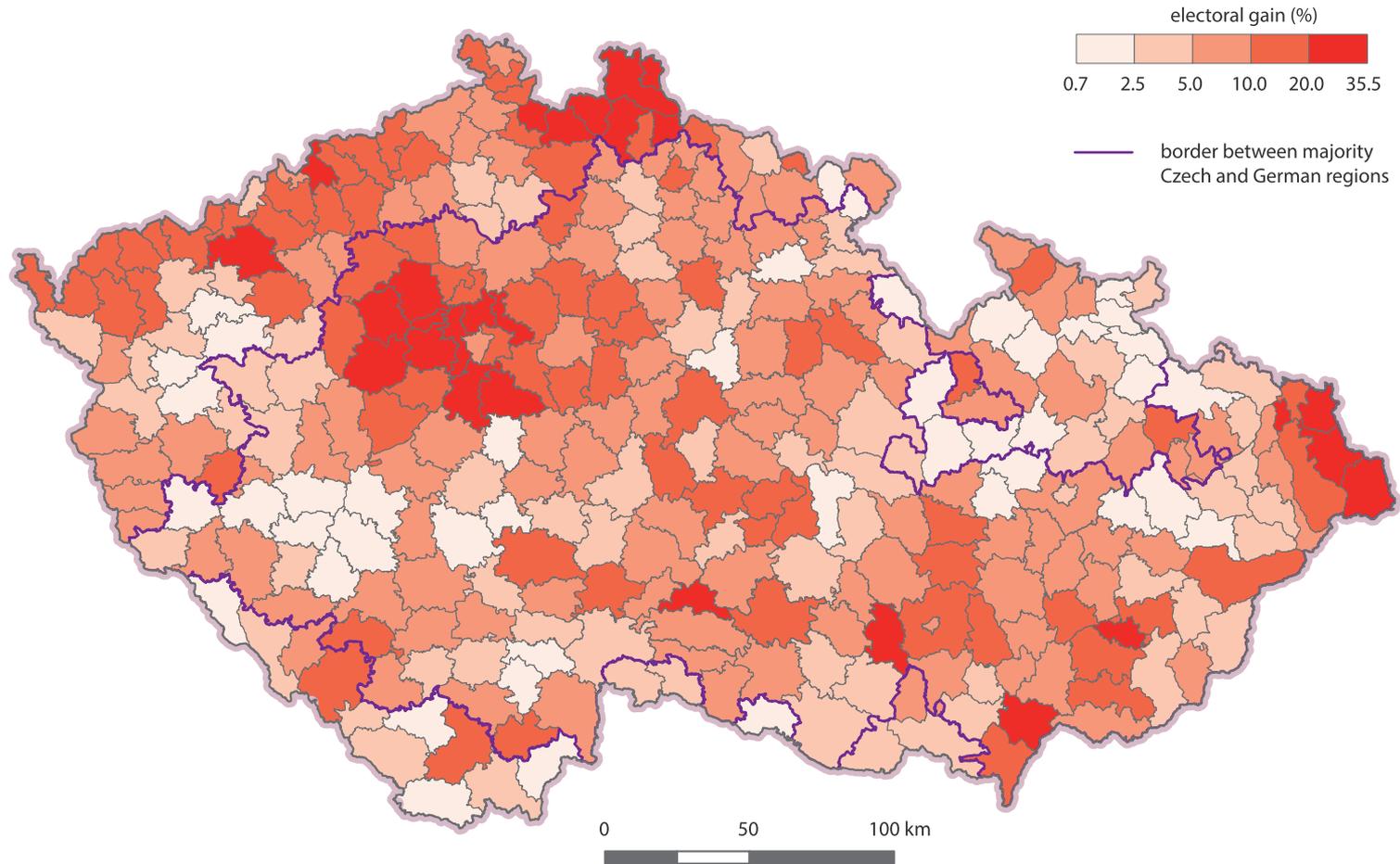


Figure 2 Spatial distribution of electoral support of CPC in 1925 elections. Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.



**Figure 3** Spatial distribution of electoral support of CPC in 1929 elections. Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

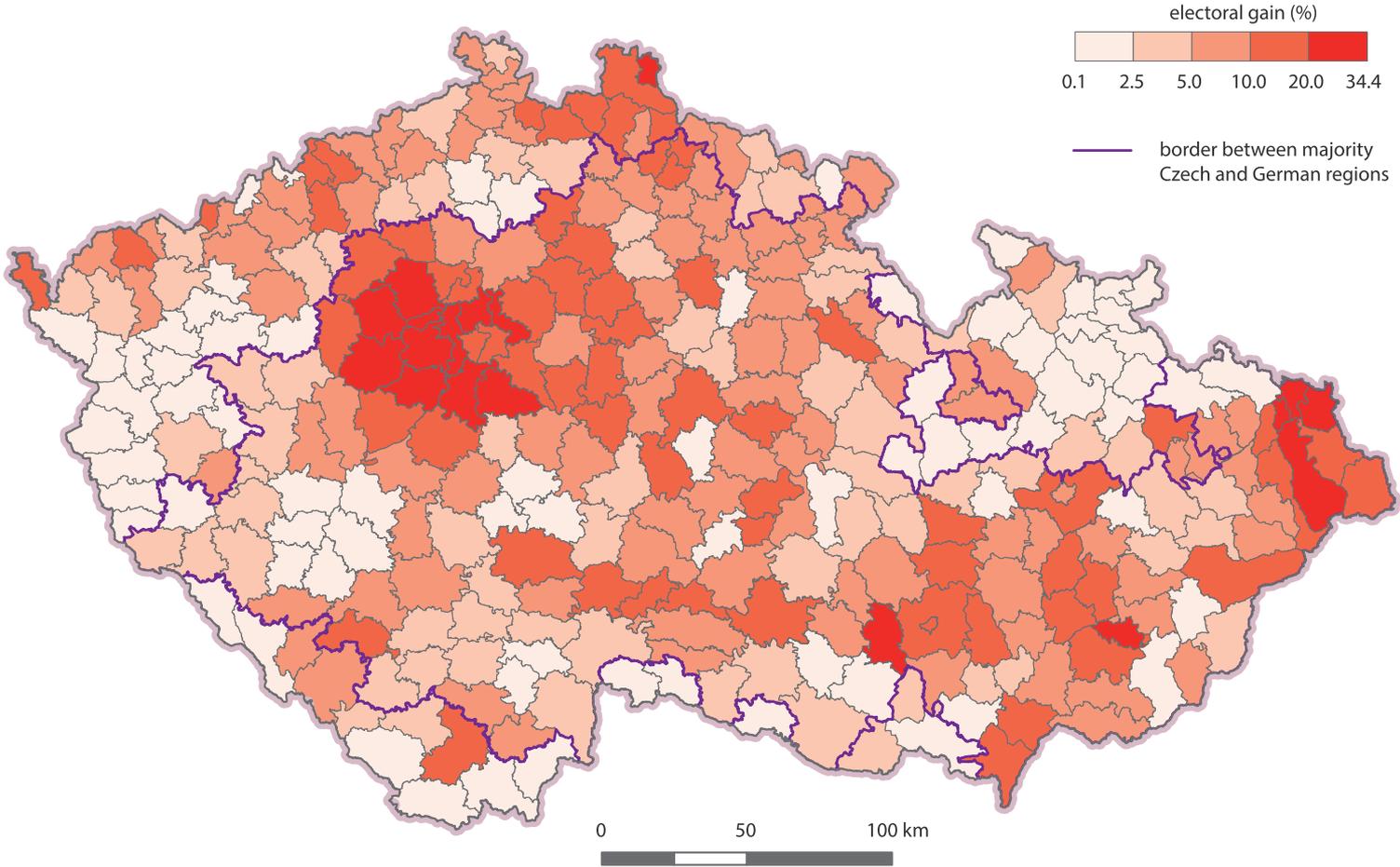


Figure 4 Spatial distribution of electoral support of CPC in 1935 elections. Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

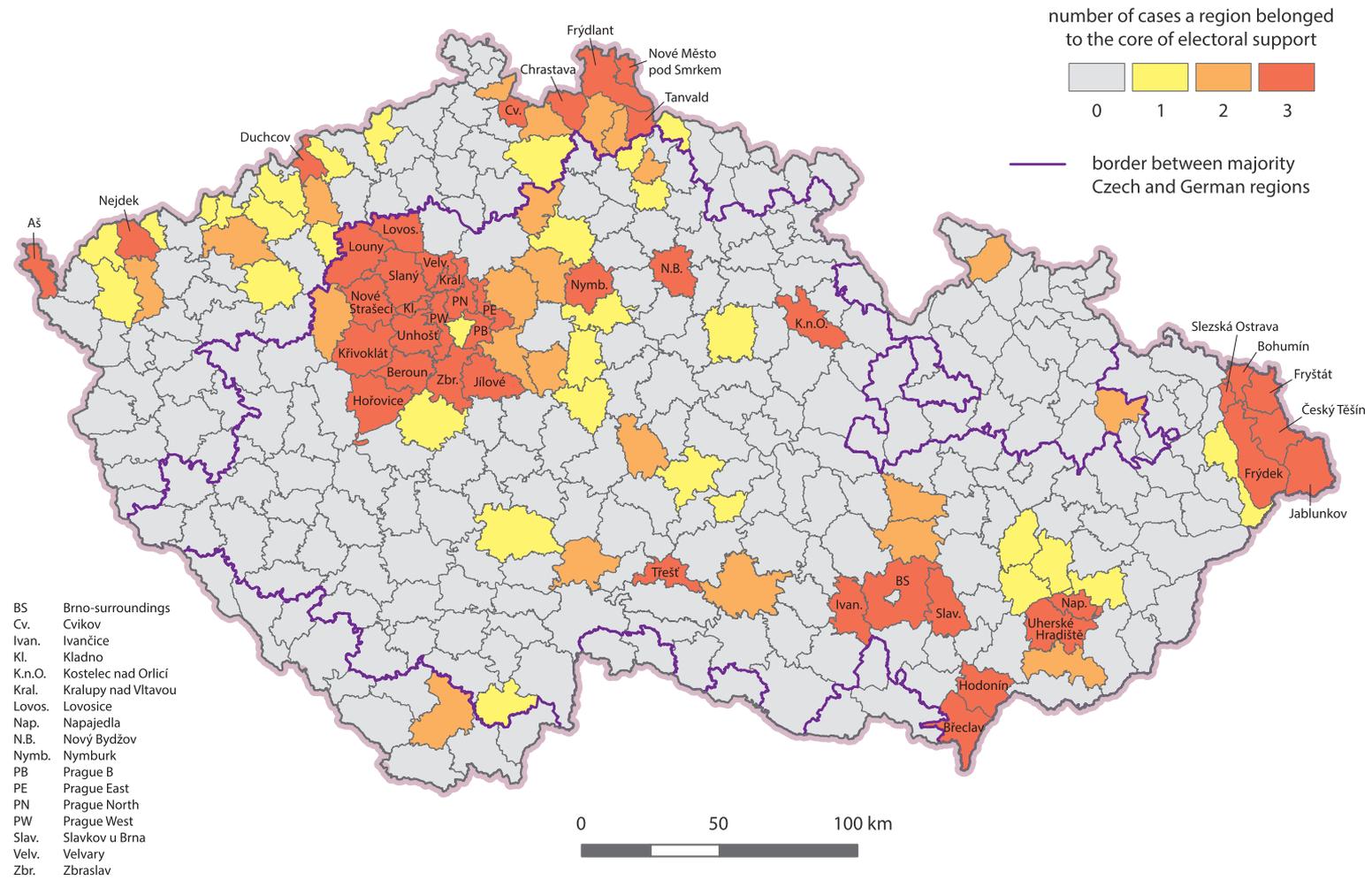


Figure 5 Intensity of core electoral support of CPC in 1925–1935. Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

## **TOTAL STRUCTURE OF ELECTION RESULTS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN THE PERIOD 1925–1935**

As shown in Figure 5, it is possible to identify several areas with high levels of support for the Communist Party in the period of the First Republic. The first and most important is the area of Prague, with the highest number of contiguous districts (17 in total) of the main stable core, namely, the districts of Beroun, Hořovice, Jílové, Kladno, Kralupy nad Vltavou, Křivoklát, Libochovice, Louny, Nové Strašecí, Slaný, Unhošť, Velvary, Zbraslav and districts in the territory of Prague (Prague West, Prague North, Prague East, Prague B). A significant part of them also regularly ranked in the top positions of districts with the highest relative gain of the Communist Party. A summary of these districts is shown in Table 2. The largest part of the core continues towards the Ore Mountains, where, however, the Communist Party lost in the elections of 1935 (Král 2013).

Another important part of the electoral stable core is the area of northern Bohemia, and although the Communists also lost here in the 1935 elections, five judicial districts belong to the main stable core of support for the CPC: Cvikov, Chrastava, Frýdlant and Nové Město pod Smrkem. The losses in the German districts are clearly documented in Table 2, where four of these districts were regularly in the forefront of the results, but not so in 1935.

Another electoral stronghold of the communists in the interwar period was the Ostrava region; the main stable core here included six judicial districts – Bohumín, Český Těšín, Frýdek, Fryštát (today Karviná), Jablunkov and Slezská Ostrava. As these districts were strongly ethnically mixed, we can assume that the communists had some support from Poles living in Cieszyn Silesia, but to define how strong this support was is beyond the scope of this paper, since this support would have to be analysed at the lowest possible territorial level.

Another cluster of electoral support can be found around Brno. However, the city of Brno itself never belonged to it; it was a traditional stronghold

of the National Socialists (Rupnik 2002). The main stable core there included the districts of Brno-surroundings, Ivančice and Slavkov u Brna. The rest of the electoral support is fragmented and it consisted of districts on both German and Czech parts of Czechoslovakia.

Another possible approach to the overall structure of the election results is to focus directly on voters. The basic sources of demographic data are the official census data published in statistical lexicons of municipalities (State Statistical Office 1934a, 1935) or in the journal *Československá statistika* (State Statistical Office 1934b). Beside the population size of the communities, these sources also provide their religious, ethnic and occupational structure. All the last indices are also used in this study. This data was examined on the basis of calculations of the Pearson correlation coefficient, which should give us information about the inclinations of particular ethnic, religious or class groups to vote for the Communist Party. Similarly, a negative value of the coefficient shows some unlikely tendencies.

The correlation coefficient calculations are carried out not only for all districts in total, but also for nationally similar districts. The resulting values are shown in Table 3. The most evident values trace to the negative relations among Roman Catholics, which are more pronounced in German districts than in the Czech ones. The reason is the higher proportion of those of German nationality belonging to the Catholic Church and their negative attitude to the reformatory Czechoslovak Hussite Church, which was commonly professed by Czechoslovaks. This phenomenon was observed in all the elections that were monitored. The strengthening of this correlation in the 1935 elections can be explained by the decrease in support for the Communist Party in the border districts with German population, which had a more positive relationship to Catholicism than the Czechs. In the case of a correlation with the share of the population without religion the situation is quite clear. A direct positive connection is significant throughout the whole period of the First Republic. Only in 1929 is it slightly lower, owing to the greater dispersion of electoral support for the Communist Party.

**Table 2** Top 10 districts with the highest electoral gain for the Communist Party in the First Republic.

Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

District	1925		1929		1935	
	Votes	Gain (%)	Votes	Gain (%)	Votes	Gain (%)
Slaný	15,740	46.7	10,977	31.2	12,807	34.4
Kladno	11,129	41.2	7,507	26.2	9,850	31.4
Smíchov *	6,457	38.8				
Unhošť	6,802	38.8	5,610	29.5	5,898	27.8
Chrastava	6,238	38.5	5,899	35.5		
Nové Město pod Smrkem	2,236	35.8	2,007	33.3		
Cvikov	2,706	34.4	2,774	35.5		
Nové Strašecí	4,411	33.1			3,702	24.7
Napajedla	3,162	31.2				
Slezská Ostrava	7,610	31.1			9,154	30.2
Prague North			4,202	30.9	5,784	34.0
Prague West			3,456	29.9	4,669	31.0
Frýdlant			5,172	27.5		
Fryštát			11,900	27.4	13,400	27.1
Prague East					6,241	27.9
Jílové					3,213	24.3

Note: \* The Smíchov judicial district was divided in 1927 into the newly established Prague West judicial district, with a part of it being joined to the Prague North judicial district.

According to the not very convincing values of the correlation coefficient we can see a hint of the fact that the inclination of Czechoslovaks to vote for the Communist Party was higher. This phenomenon is again less evident in the case of the elections in 1929. Since, in view of the fact that correlation as a very simple method has its limitations, we cannot make any general conclusion here.

Correlation with class oriented indicators (share of workers in mining industry and workers in agriculture) is quite significant and indicates direct or indirect connection between these indicators and the

share of votes for CPC. The reason for lower values in the German environment is the small amount of mines there and a more diversified industry in northern Bohemia (glass and fabric manufacturing), together with rural based German districts in Moravia and Silesia. This phenomenon in Moravia and Silesia is pointed out by Daněk (1993), who supports his statements by the results of regression analysis, which show a significant correlation of support for the Communist Party with the ratio of people employed in the mining industry, while the dependence on the ratio of people of German nationality was very low.

**Table 3** Values of the Pearson correlation coefficient between the election results of the CPC and selected demographic indicators in the period 1925–1935. Sources: CZSO (2008); SSO (1934a, 1934b), author's calculations.

Districts	Elections 1925					
	Czechoslovaks	Germans	Roman Catholics	Non-believers	Mining	Agriculture
Czech	0.170	-0.231	-0.310	<b>0.449</b>	<b>0.452</b>	<b>-0.439</b>
90% Czech	-0.044	-0.002	-0.269	<b>0.446</b>	<b>0.460</b>	<b>-0.490</b>
German	0.175	-0.253	<b>-0.573</b>	<b>0.504</b>	0.252	<b>-0.451</b>
90% German	0.220	-0.300	<b>-0.429</b>	<b>0.618</b>	0.053	<b>-0.426</b>
Total	0.186	-0.212	<b>-0.396</b>	<b>0.472</b>	<b>0.356</b>	<b>-0.362</b>

Districts	Elections 1929					
	Czechoslovaks	Germans	Roman Catholics	Non-believers	Mining	Agriculture
Czech	0.120	-0.199	-0.247	<b>0.380</b>	<b>0.426</b>	<b>-0.408</b>
90% Czech	-0.062	-0.009	-0.209	<b>0.395</b>	<b>0.403</b>	<b>-0.465</b>
German	0.036	-0.046	<b>-0.455</b>	<b>0.478</b>	0.238	<b>-0.497</b>
90% German	0.147	-0.245	<b>-0.335</b>	<b>0.578</b>	0.169	<b>-0.450</b>
Total	0.015	-0.044	-0.295	<b>0.384</b>	0.347	<b>-0.427</b>

Districts	Elections 1935					
	Czechoslovaks	Germans	Roman Catholics	Non-believers	Mining	Agriculture
Czech	0.119	-0.202	<b>-0.377</b>	<b>0.467</b>	<b>0.426</b>	<b>-0.408</b>
90% Czech	-0.084	0.020	-0.334	<b>0.489</b>	<b>0.403</b>	<b>-0.465</b>
German	0.114	-0.125	<b>-0.505</b>	<b>0.536</b>	0.238	<b>-0.523</b>
90% German	0.060	-0.192	<b>-0.418</b>	<b>0.696</b>	0.169	<b>-0.513</b>
Total	0.319	<b>-0.350</b>	<b>-0.487</b>	<b>0.497</b>	0.345	<b>-0.369</b>

### THE COMMUNIST PARTY AS THE ONLY BIG INTERNATIONAL PARTY

From its establishment in May 1921, the Czechoslovak Communist Party acknowledged the Third International, which was already based on communist ideology and therefore sometimes called the Comintern. The Communist Party originated through the splitting of the radical wing of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Labour Party under the leadership of Bohumír Šmeral. The basic political cadre and potential voters of the newly formed party were therefore recruited mainly from supporters of this state-forming political party and therefore they were almost exclusively

Czechoslovaks. However, the communist idea was strictly internationalist and therefore at the time of its origin the adoption of politically active communists, regardless of their national origin, was assumed.

The main inflow of new CPC members was represented by radical socialists from the German social democrats, which was going through a similar development to its Czechoslovak counterpart. The communist wing of this party, led by Karl Kreibich, called for entry into the Comintern in March and later formed the German section of the Communist Party. By the end of September 1921, Hungarian, Polish and Jewish

radical socialists had also converted to the Communist Party and the party thus officially became an international entity (Marek 2005). The next part of this paper will examine how the Czechoslovak communists got on with maintaining the proclaimed multinational character of the party in a multinational country.

First, we will focus on the very genesis of the electorate of an entirely new party. As mentioned above, in the first parliamentary elections which it contested, the Communist Party achieved a completely unexpected success. We may ask where it drew its votes from. Because it was a new political entity that split off from the Czechoslovak and German Social Democrats, we can assume that most new CPC voters had voted for these parties in previous elections. The CSDWP, the winner of the election in 1920, showed the greatest loss (12 percentage points) in the 1925 elections. The support for GSDWP also dropped to 7.5%, which is almost half of its previous support (a loss of 6.7 pp).

The answer to this question can be found in Table 4, which shows the correlation between electoral support for the Communist Party in 1925 and combinations of the number of votes lost by political parties between the 1920 and 1925 elections. We included only the parties where the transition of voters could be assumed: socialist parties and German nationalist parties in two cases. In 1920 the GNP (German National Party) and GNSWP (German National Socialist Workers' Party) contested the election together as GEC20 (German Electoral Coalition 1920). Therefore, their results cannot be separated. The idea that German nationalists could vote for the Communist Party may not be completely misleading. In 1925, the communist rhetoric could still be understood as irredentist. The Communist Party presented itself as a transnational party and in the German border districts it had a predominantly German character, e.g. in Trutnov (Král 2010).

The districts in which the elections were not held in 1920 are obviously not included in the correlations. Districts in the territory where the district of Zlín originated were combined. No other adjustments

were made. The influence of Valtice and Vitorazsko (České Velenice and surroundings), which were incorporated into the state after 1920, was not considered.

Because of the increase in the number of voters and votes between the elections examined here it was necessary to clean the data of the distortion caused by this fact. The absolute numbers of votes in the 1925 elections were reduced to 86% of their original state, which is exactly the ratio between the total number of votes cast in the elections of 1920 and 1925. By this adjustment the distortion was minimised.

From the table we can conclude that there was very probably a transition of former CSDWP voters in Czech districts and GSDWP voters in German districts. On the contrary, the correlation with the change of electoral support for the CNSP showed almost no dependence, and if so, it is rather a negative relationship. The combination of the two Czechoslovak socialist parties confirms this phenomenon. The influence of the National Socialists slightly reduced this correlation coefficient. The highest degree of dependence is exhibited by the total loss of both social democratic parties, which, in the case of districts with an absolute Czech majority, exceeds 0.9. These results confirm the accuracy of the previous reasoning based on the percentage loss of support nationwide. The vast majority of the voters of the Communist Party voted CSDWP or GSDWP in the 1920 elections. The CPC had a Czech character in Czech districts and a German character in German districts. Therefore it succeeded in implementing its proclaimed multinational character in practice.

The following analysis will show the reality more closely, because it does not focus only on one election, but on all the elections in the period covered by the research. Thus it will be possible to monitor the development of the CPC in those years when the party was going through major changes. The biggest change was a stormy change of leadership in the first half of 1929, just before the elections that took place in the autumn of the same year. The newly elected leadership headed by Klement

**Table 4** Value of Pearson correlation coefficient between the results of the Communist Party in 1925 and the difference between the results of selected parties between the elections in 1920 and 1925.

Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations..

Correlation with CPC	Districts				Total
	Czech	90% Czech	German	90% German	
CSDWP 1920–1925	<b>0.903</b>	<b>0.879</b>	0.206	–0.081	<b>0.728</b>
CNSP 1920–1925	–0.009	0.145	0.153	–0.226	0.049
GSDWP 1920–1925	0.248	–0.008	<b>0.892</b>	<b>0.873</b>	<b>0.373</b>
GNP+GNSWP 1920–1925	0.343	0.297	<b>0.692</b>	<b>0.483</b>	<b>0.362</b>
CSDWP+CSNP 1920–1925	<b>0.892</b>	<b>0.864</b>	0.230	–0.097	<b>0.719</b>
CSDWP+GNSWP 1920–1925	<b>0.915</b>	<b>0.906</b>	<b>0.883</b>	<b>0.694</b>	<b>0.891</b>
CSDWP+CNSP+GNSWP 1920–1925	<b>0.908</b>	<b>0.916</b>	<b>0.864</b>	<b>0.744</b>	<b>0.879</b>

*Note:*

CNSP – Czechoslovak National Socialist Party

CPC – Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

CSDWP – Czech Social Democratic Workers' Party

GNP – German National Party

GNSWP – German National Socialist Workers' Party

GSDWP – German Social Democratic Workers' Party

Gottwald had a completely different approach to the direction of the party and it gradually transformed it from a mass party numbering hundreds of thousands of members into a party of professional revolutionaries. The number of party members dropped sharply and at the end of the First Republic it was only at a third of its original level (Marek 2005).

In 1934, the sympathy of Czechoslovak citizens of all nationalities for the Communist Party underwent big changes. First, the leaders of the party had to resort to exile in Moscow because of the government's reaction to the divisive propaganda of the Communists against the "fascist dictatorship" of the Prague Castle and the Government "Five", which was formed by the strongest Czechoslovak parties involved in the government. This had a rather negative impact on the public reputation of the party, but in that year another thing happened that may have had a significant impact on potential voters. In June 1934, Czechoslovakia established a diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union and even launched trilateral alliance negotiations

together with France. This slightly diminished the public fear of the communist Soviet Union, to which the Czechoslovak communists were clinging (Rupnik 2002). Later, communist propaganda responded by lessening the criticism of the government policy and started to communicate in a more state-forming way. This was something what could cause problems to a number of radical German voters who, after the abolition of the nationalist parties GNP and GNSWP might have lacked an acceptable alternative (Kárník 2003).

In the 1935 elections, the support for the CPC in the border areas decreased, which was primarily due to the candidacy of the irredentist Sudeten German Party (SGP). The German nationalists saw a better chance of national self-determination in Henlein's radicalism than in the communist party. The following lines indicate whether this was also reflected in the election results.

The total distribution of votes and the votes of the Communist Party are shown in Table 5. From this it is evident that 30% of all its votes were

**Table 5** The share of votes for the Communist Party and for the socialist parties in Czech and German districts in the period 1925–1935.

Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

	Relative share (%) of votes for				Total votes (%)
	CPC	CSDWP	CNSP	GSDWP	
<b>Elections 1925</b>					
Czech districts	75.35	90.60	90.87	12.63	69.73
German districts	24.65	9.40	9.13	87.37	30.27
<b>Elections 1929</b>					
Czech districts	68.17	92.15	91.47	13.10	69.80
German districts	31.83	7.85	8.53	86.90	30.20
<b>Elections 1935</b>					
Czech districts	80.61	90.90	90.00	14.43	69.82
German districts	19.39	9.10	10.00	85.57	30.18

collected in the German districts. Already in the 1925 election, it showed that nationality was not decisive in a voter for the Communist Party, as was the case with virtually all the other major parties of the time. This is evidenced by the fact that in the majority of German districts nearly a quarter of all votes were cast for the Communist Party. In the following elections the party reached an almost “ideal distribution” among voters from the nationality point of view and therefore to some extent an even spatial distribution of its support. The difference between the share of the total number of votes and the votes for the Communist Party was the smallest in this period. In German districts, the communists had even greater support, as indicated in Table 1. The subsequent decline in 1935 is also very noticeable, as the share of votes in the German districts even dropped below 20 percent.

For comparison, the table shows similar calculations for the socialist parties of the time (CSDWP, CNSP and GSDWP). Because of their national orientation, their support was completely different from that of the communists, which again supports the thesis that the communists were able to maintain the transnational character of the party.

Now we will focus on the loss of communist votes in the 1935 elections. In Table 6, we can see a noticeable loss of votes for the Communist Party in the German environment. While in 1929 the Communist Party in these districts enjoyed even slightly higher support than in those with a Czech majority, in 1935 its support dropped by nearly a half. On the national scale, this huge loss almost disappeared as a result of the slightly higher level of support for the Communist Party in highly populated districts with a Czech majority. Therefore, the CPC in these elections already had a markedly Czech character.

We can only speculate about which party the former German voters of the Communist Party moved to. To a large extent, we can assume a shift to the radically nationalist Sudeten German Party (SGP). For example, in the German district of Trutnov there is a statistically highly significant correlation between the election results of the SGP in 1935 and the sum of the votes for the banned GNP and GNSWP, just as with the Communist Party in 1929, which proves not only its distinctly German character, but also the great likelihood of a significant shift of voters from the Communist Party to the Sudeten German Party (Král 2010). Kárník (2003) also mentions this phenomenon in his work on the Communist

**Table 6** Changes in the electoral support for the Communist Party and selected German parties in the years 1929 and 1935. Source: CZSO (2008), author's calculations.

	Districts				Total
	Czech	90% Czech	German	90% German	
<b>CPC</b> ( <i>Communist Party of Czechoslovakia</i> )					
Vote share 1929 (%)	9.62	10.03	10.38	10.17	9.85
Vote share 1935 (%)	10.26	10.53	5.71	5.73	8.88
Index 1935/1929	1.07	1.05	0.55	0.56	0.90
<b>GSDWP</b> ( <i>German Social Democratic Workers' Party</i> )					
Vote share 1929 (%)	1.66	0.39	25.38	29.98	8.82
Vote share 1935 (%)	0.96	0.21	13.21	13.29	4.66
Index 1935/1929	0.58	0.54	0.52	0.44	0.53
<b>GFL</b> ( <i>German Farmers' League</i> )					
Vote share 1929 (%)	2.12	0.57	17.19	20.05	6.65
Vote share 1935 (%)	0.65	0.14	5.99	5.99	2.26
Index 1935/1929	0.31	0.25	0.35	0.30	0.34
<b>GCSPP</b> ( <i>German Christian Social People's Party</i> )					
Vote share 1929 (%)	1.61	0.49	16.52	19.71	6.12
Vote share 1935 (%)	0.85	0.16	6.58	6.62	2.58
Index 1935/1929	0.53	0.33	0.40	0.34	0.42
<b>SGP</b> ( <i>Sudeten German Party</i> )					
Vote share 1935 (%)	4.11	1.06	54.74	60.79	19.38

Party in the 1935 elections. The losses of the Communist Party in border areas were not very different from the losses of the German parties, including the Social Democrats. For example, in the district of Horní Planá, the number of voters who chose the Communist Party dropped to a fifth. Thus, despite its ideology the Communist Party did not withstand the onslaught of Henlein's SGP any better than the other German parties did. In his initial analysis of the work of the State Statistical Office on the elections Náhlovský (1936) also supposes that the decline in support for the Communists was caused by the SGP.

For comparison, Table 6 indicates the results of other German parties, where the GNSWP dominates, although its support in German districts dropped by half. This is a very similar result to that of the Communist Party.

In this comparison, the German civil parties come off even worse, especially the German Farmers' League, whose support dropped to a third of its former level. We can conclude that the Communists' resistance to the pressure of the newly formed Sudeten German movement was similar to that of Social Democrats but better than that of the other German parties.

## CONCLUSION

From its establishment and throughout the so-called First Republic, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was one of the strongest political parties in the country. It was successful even though it showed, with the exception of the last years of the Republic, a very negative attitude to the government policy and the system in general. This was caused by its ideology, which, *inter alia*, proclaimed the right to the self-determination of nations in the sense that the nations would completely “dissolve” in a communist society. In terms of class struggle, which is the cornerstone of the ideology of the party, it is logical that the communists had higher support in the working-class environment and thus in areas with a heavy concentration of industry. These were mainly industrial areas near Prague and to the west of it, the areas with a strong textile tradition around Liberec and Frýdlant and coal-mining districts near Brno and Ostrava. These areas with the highest levels of support for the CPC correspond well to the numbers of active communists among the workers. In relation to religion, the CPC was predominantly elected by non-religious citizens throughout the First Republic, which is a phenomenon that has persisted until today, as confirmed, for example, by Kylaoušek and Pink (2007).

The intensity of the support for the communists and the very genesis of the Communist Party encourage the idea that it was indeed the multinational organisation which it claimed itself to be. We have examined this thesis from the viewpoint of electoral geography and have come to the conclusion that the success of the new party in the first elections in 1925 was due to former voters for the CSDWP and GSDWP and to a similar extent, *i.e.* regardless of nationality. The key to its success was not only the charismatic leadership of Bohumír Šmeral and the promise of prosperity under the dictatorship of the proletariat. In German regions, the CPC probably became a good alternative to the negativistic parties of that period, *i.e.* the GNP and GNSWP, which still fought against the Czechoslovak state as a whole. The main German political currents of the time, which were the Social Democrats, Republicans and Christian Socialists, had already reassessed

their attitude and gradually became more active in their participation in the government. The German nationalists may have perceived this as a betrayal of the German irredentist ideas of 1918–1919.

In the elections in October 1929, despite the dramatic changes that the Communist Party had recently undergone, the CPC again enjoyed good results and the share of the German vote in the overall promotion of the party increased. Otherwise, however, we can say that because of the previous elections, the party retained its position both in the political system and on the political map.

The elections in 1935 are probably the most interesting, looking at the previous results of the CPC and our analysis, because its electoral support underwent major changes. The CPC succeeded in the Czech environment and achieved even better results in percentage terms than in the previous elections. In the German environment, however, it failed completely, probably because of the easing up of its rhetoric and the more state-forming presentation of the party in public, which was preceded by an improvement in international relations with the Soviet Union. Through this the CPC disqualified itself from receiving possible support from German nationalists. German parties and the Communist Party got a very tough opponent in these elections in Henlein’s populist rhetoric calling for a revision of the attitudes of Germans to Czechoslovakia. Although the Communist Party resisted this campaign better than the other German parties (GFL, GCSPP) it lost half of its support and its overall results were similar to those of the GSDWP. It can therefore be concluded that if we perceive the Communist Party as a German party in the German environment, it was elected only by convinced communists, which was analogous to the behaviour of the German followers of social democratic ideas.

Following the above analysis and partial conclusions, we can say that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia managed to keep its transnational character at least in the elections in 1925 and 1929. The party had a Czech character in the Czech environment and German character in the German environment. In the last parliamentary elections before the war,

when German nationalism had become stronger in the border areas, the CPC evidently had the character of a Czechoslovak party and the former German voters largely shifted to the Sudeten German Party.

In relation to other nationalities in the area under research, such as the Poles and the Jews, because of their overall distribution it is difficult to come to a reliable conclusion. It is true that the Communist Party had strong support in districts with a high share of those of Polish nationality, but any meaningful conclusions could be formulated only on the basis of a more detailed analysis at the municipal level or extensive archival research.

Basically, the class origin of a voter was the most decisive factor as shown by the correlation analysis, which indicated a higher positive relation with the share of persons working in mining industry and of persons without religious identification. Certainly, a German worker in an industrial area of Bohemia had a higher motivation to vote for the Communist Party than a German farmer in the Jeseníky Mts. with a radical attitude towards Czechoslovakia, no matter how attractive the communist rhetoric could be for him. This fact was reflected, for example, in a comparison of the results of the Communist Party in Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia, with an evidently lower success in the German environment, which was mostly mountainous and rural.

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## Résumé

### Národnostní a třídní aspekty volební podpory Komunistické strany Československa (1925–1935)

Tato studie je příspěvkem ke studiu Komunistické strany Československa, především volebního chování jejích voličů v prostorovém aspektu. Strana samotná se v politickém systému první republiky proklamovala jako nadnárodní a tím naplňující jeden z hlavních cílů komunistické internacionály. To se projevilo především na skutečnosti, že jako jediná velká politická strana té doby skutečně ve velkém získávala hlasy u občanů československé i německé národnosti. Tato práce podrobila volební podporu KSČ důkladnému zkoumání právě z hlediska národnosti jejích voličů.

Předmětem zájmu byly volby do Poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění v letech 1925, 1929 a 1935, což byly nejdůležitější volby, kterých se KSČ zúčastnila. Analýza byla provedena na úrovni soudních okresů, se kterými operovala i základní volební statistika. Celkový počet těchto okresů je 332. Pro potřeby výpočtu některých ukazatelů bylo třeba rozlišit i okresy podle národnostního klíče, který pak slučoval okresy do národnostně podobných regionů. Základní metodou pro prostorovou lokalizaci volební podpory bylo tzv. jádro volební podpory, respektive jeho intenzita. Multifaktorová analýza výsledků voleb pak byla podepřena výpočty Pearsonova korelačního koeficientu.

Z hlediska třídního boje, který je i základním kamenem celé ideologie strany, je logické, že měli komunisté vyšší podporu v dělnickém prostředí a tím i v oblastech silného soustředění průmyslu. Jedná se především o průmyslovou oblast v okolí Prahy a na Kladensku, oblast se silnou textilní tradicí na Liberecku a Frýdlantsku, a černouhelné těžební revíry v okolí Brna a Ostravy. Těmto oblastem s nejvyšší podporou KSČ dobře odpovídají i počty aktivních komunistů mezi dělnictvem. Ve vztahu k náboženství měli po celou dobu první republiky vyšší tendenci volit občané bez vyznání, což je jev, který předešlou situaci jen potvrzuje.

Míra podpory komunistů a i samotná geneze KSČ nabádá k myšlence, že byla skutečně onou nadnárodní organizací, za jakou se prohlašovala. Tuto tezi podrobila tato studie zkoumání z hlediska volební geografie. Výsledkem je skutečně fakt, že v prvních volbách v roce 1925 stáli za úspěchem nové strany s velkou pravděpodobností bývalí voliči ČSDSD (Československá sociálně demokratická strana dělnická) i DSDAP (Německá sociálně demokratická strana dělnická), a to podobnou měrou, tedy bez ohledu na národnost. Hlavním klíčem úspěchu nebylo jen charismatické vedení B. Šmerala a slibovaný blahobyť za diktatury proletariátu. V německých oblastech se pravděpodobně strana stala dobrou alternativou k negativistickým stranám té doby, jimiž byly DNP (Německá národní strana) a DNSAP (Německá nacionálně socialistická strana dělnická), které stále ještě bojovaly proti československému státu jako celku. Hlavní německé politické proudy té doby, jimiž byli sociální demokraté, agráři a křesťanství sociálové, již přehodnocovali svůj postoj a postupně se stávali aktivistickými s podílem na vládě. To mohli němečtí nacionalisté chápat jako zradu německé iredentistické myšlenky z let 1918–1919.

V následných volbách v říjnu 1929 se i přes bouřlivé změny, které KSČ krátce předtím prodělala, dočkala opět slušného výsledku, kdy podíl německých hlasů na celkové podpoře strany ještě vzrostl. Jinak se ale dá říci, že si vzhledem k předchozím volbám strana udržela svou pozici jak v politickém systému, tak i na politické mapě.

Ve volbách roku 1935 strana zaznamenala největší změny ve volební podpoře. Strana v českém prostředí uspěla, dosáhla dokonce procentuálně lepšího výsledku než v předešlých volbách. V německém prostředí však zcela propadla. Dáno je to nejspíše zmírněním rétoriky a státotvornějšímu vystupování strany na veřejnosti, čemuž předcházelo i oteplení mezinárodních vztahů se Sovětským svazem. V očích německých nacionalistů se tak strana diskvalifikovala z možné podpory. Německým stranám a taktéž i KSČ vyrostl v těchto volbách velmi těžký soupeř, kterým byla Henleinova populistická SdP (Sudetoněmecká strana) požadující opět revizi postoje Němců k Československu. Přestože komunistická strana této kampani odolávala lépe než jiné

německé strany (BdL – Svaz zemědělců, DCV – Německá křesťansko-sociální strana lidová), ztratila polovinu své podpory a celkově si vedla podobně jako DSDAP. Lze tedy vyslovit závěr, že pokud budeme v německém prostředí uvažovat o KSČ jako o německé straně, volili ji už jen přesvědčení komunisté, analogicky se chovali němečtí stoupenci sociálně demokratické myšlenky.

Na základě výše uvedených analýz a dílčích závěrů tak můžeme konstatovat fakt, že se KSČ dařilo udržovat nadnárodní charakter minimálně ve volbách roku 1925 a 1929. Zjednodušeně lze konstatovat, že v českém prostředí měl elektorát KSČ český charakter a v německém prostředí charakter německý. V posledních parlamentních volbách před válkou, kdy už v pohraničí velmi sílil německý nacionalismus, byla již strana výrazně československého charakteru a bývalí voliči v řadách Němců přešli z velké části ke straně sudetoněmecké (Kárník 2003; Král 2010).

Přesto však byl na prvním místě rozhodující třídní původ voliče. Jistě větší motivaci k volbě komunistické strany měl německý dělník v některé z průmyslových oblastí Čech, než německý rolník na Jesenícku s radikálním postojem vůči Československu, třebaže by mu byla KSČ sympatická svou rétorikou. Tento fakt se projevil například ve srovnání výsledků KSČ v zemi české a zemi moravskoslezské, kdy byla patrná nižší úspěšnost v německém, převážně horském a rurálním prostředí.

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