Social structural model and voting behaviour under the conditions of Czech rural areas

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Abstract

From a social viewpoint, Czech rural areas are defined by joint, specific interests by which they differ from the urban environment. In relation to this, this article asks the fundamental question whether class polarization is the background factor of voting results, or if political conflict is based on different factors. The aim of this article is, through a case study of Zatec region, to verify the applicability of the social structural model of voting behaviour of citizens of Czech rural areas.

Key words

Social structural model, voting behaviour, social class, rural areas, vote, right-wing, left-wing, social status.

Anotace

Český venkov bývá ze sociálního hlediska definován společnými specifickými zájmy, kterými se liší od urbánního prostoru. Článek si v této souvislosti klade základní otázku, zda v pozadí volebních výsledků stojí třídní polarizace nebo zda je politický konflikt založen na odlišných faktorech. Cílem článku je prostřednictvím případové studie žatecké oblasti ověřit uplatnitelnost sociálně strukturálního modelu volebního chování obyvatel českého venkova.

Klíčová slova

Sociálně strukturální model, volební chování, sociální třída, venkovský prostor, volba, levice, pravice, sociální status.

Abbreviations

ČSSD = Czech Social Democratic Party, KDU-ČSL = Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party, KSČM = Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, ODS = Civic Democratic Party, SPOZ = Party of Civic Rights – Zemanovci, SUV = Sovereignty, SZ = The Green Party, VV = Public Affairs

Introduction

One of the main interests of current sociology of rural areas is rural development, meaning that sociological research is usually focused on the area of the social determinants of development. This is also applies to the research done of Czech rural areas. Examples of the themes of the research include the Program Leader and his effect on the conduct of the actors of the development (e.g. Hudečková, Balzerová 2010), and the methodological aspects of evaluating the impacts of these programs (e.g. Lošťák, Hudečková 2010), etc. Another theme is, for example, the issue of cross-border cooperation and its influence on the social development

regions (e.g. Husák 2010). The investigated areas include the political interests of rural areas and their mediation and representation. Čmejrek (2008), for example, dealt with the task of political parties in this relation. The question of the political interests of residents of rural areas closely relates to their voting behaviour. Despite the fact that the voting decision-making of electorates in the Czech Republic is quite often a subject of research, the value stances and interests of voters in rural areas and their influence on voting behaviour has until now not received significant attention. Exceptions to this are the works of voting geographers, from which we can gather that the behaviour of residents of rural areas compared to those in urban regions

is considerably different (e.g. Kabát, Pink). Rural areas are often depicted as having a higher tendency to vote for left-wing parties, and less support for the right. However, to this point, the reasons for this have not yet been interpreted.

The behaviour of voters is formed by an inexhaustible number of factors. In the Czech environment was repeatedly investigated, among others, social class structure and its influence on voting behaviour. Social class conflict in traditional democracies is and was in the past the basis for the difference in voting behaviour. The compositional approach, which puts voting behaviour into relation with the structure of the monitored phenomenon, is fairly common in social practice. This also deals with a relationship that was in the past repeatedly proven in a traditional democratic system (e.g. Campbel, Converse, Miller, Stokes 1964, currently e.g. Van der Brug 2010). During the study of the individual levels of political orientation where the object of the investigation is the individual, we ask what this individual's position is in the social structure or his affiliation to a politically-specific group. If the object of the investigation is the population of a given region, the fundamental information is its social structure. Simply put, this approach presumes the relationship of dependence between political orientation and the structural composition of society. In relation to this, the so-called social structural model of voting behaviour is often referenced. This model explains the diverse voting behaviour of objectively-determined social groups (social classes, national or religious groups, age groups, gender etc.). Political orientation of individuals is influenced by their position in the social structure. Disproportions in voting results between regions are a reflection of the differences in the social composition of the population. This is also closely tied to the differences in voting behaviour of residents of cities and rural areas.

The social structural model held a firm position during the interpretation of voting behaviour in countries of Western Europe and North America mainly during the 1970's and 1980's. The gradual decrease in significance occurred mainly because of the decrease in disparity in   social structure and unnatural voting behaviour of social classes (Achterberg, Houtman 2006).

As already mentioned, the investigation into the voting behaviour of objectively determinate social groups was the subject of interest of Czech researchers (e.g. Matějů, Vlachová 2000). From the beginning of the 1990's to 1996 when elections to the Chamber of Deputies took place, it is apparent from these results that voting behaviour

stabilized. In the subsequent period, the election was less of a newly-considered decision and more of repeated preference of the respective party. Among others, the social class identification of voters has a demonstrable influence on this, and it is demonstrated by a significant difference in the voting behaviour of the main social groups (Matějů, Vlachová 2000).

Until now, the relationship between social structure and voting behaviour in the Czech environment has been investigated in the context of the class segmentation of respondents. However, further classification did not occur, and it is therefore not precisely known what decisive factors are in the background of the differences in voting preferences of voters in rural areas and city regions. The key question from the view of social-class voting is whether the differences in voting behaviour are caused by a different social structure of rural area society when compared to that of cities. Generally speaking, it is possible. Perlín characterizes rural areas as a continually delimited area with close social contacts, the existence of informal social controls and participation, and lesser intensity of social and economic contacts (Perlín 1999), and in addition, residents of rural areas are characterized by an unfavourable educational and age structure from which arise the limitations when people assert themselves on the job market. Along with these social aspects, rural areas also differ from an economic point of view. A rural area is a place with significant activities in the areas of farming and the production of food. On the basis of demographic indicators, it is evident that rural areas have a lower population density[1]. If the findings on Czech rural areas are implemented into the theory of social-class voting, the voting of the residents of rural areas fulfils the classic thesis of voting behaviour. According to this thesis, members of lower social classes tend to identify more with left-wing parties.

Material and methods

If we look at the findings on the differences in the social structure of rural areas and city residents, we can then hypothesize that the voting behaviour of rural areas and city residents differs. This hypothesis can be verified on the basis of an extensive investigation into the voting behaviour of an electorate. However, even when we confirm the validity of the hypothesis, we must still answer to what level the political behaviour of the residents of rural areas relates to social class identification, and to what level it is influenced by the specific

[1]Perlín states that within the EU, rural areas tend to be perceived as areas where the population density is lower than 100 residents per 1 km2 (Perlín 1999).

factors that relate to rural areas[2] , and contribute to accepting the status of being a "villager". This question can be partially answered through an investigation of the voting behaviour of diverse social groups of residents of rural areas. The aim of this article also arises from this question. The ambition of the contribution cannot be (in view of the available data) to describe the differences in the voting behaviour of the residents of cities and rural areas in the context of differences in social structure. The aim is, through a case study of the Žatec region, to describe the voting behaviour of objectively-defined social-economic groups of residents (social classes) and thereby contribute to the discussion on the possible applicability of the social structural model of voting behaviour under the conditions of rural areas in the Czech Republic.

There are a number of partial problems that arise from such a determined aim. Two of them are of a fundamental nature. There is a reason for measuring the relationship between social structures and voting behaviour when a society shows a predominantly consistent social status. In such a case, it is valid that the majority of the monitored population achieves a similar social status in various social groupings. The (in) consistency of the social status of individuals will be measured by the relationship between the basic social-economic characteristics of education, income and employment. In addition, the relationship will be further analysed between these individual uncertain social statuses and the subjective evaluation of the position of the individual in a social structure, the so-called subjective status. The utilized method will be an analysis of dependence. The second basic problem is of a cognitive nature. The consistency of voting behaviour on the basis of identification with a social class is only possible in cases where the voter has at least basic knowledge of the political and party system. The ability to orient oneself in the program and ideological orientation of political parties will be tested through the commonly-used continuum of left-wing – right-wing.

The selected subject of the investigation is the Žatec region. In terms of this article, this is an area that is delimited by the borough of the city of Žatec. In the system of transferred capacity of state administration, the city of Žatec is a municipality with so-called extended jurisdiction. The Žatec region is a typical rural area from an economic,

social and cultural point of view. The Žatec region typically has a high number of agricultural lands in the total area of the region, and the landscape is of a farming nature. Among other things, this is a region with a stagnant development in incomes and employment when viewed from the Czech Republic average. Other characteristics include, for example, a low population density, predominant emigration of qualified professionals, as well as young people, over their immigration, etc.

From the view of political characteristics, the residents of the Žatec region (on the basis of elections to the Chamber of Deputies) predominantly identify with left-wing values. In the past, the left-wing parties in this city always received more votes from voters than the Czech average, and in the same comparison, the right-wing parties received less. In the other municipalities of the Žatec region, voters tend to identify with left-wing parties to an even greater extent.

Data were analysed that were acquired through standard discussion with voters that participated in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of Parliament of the Czech Republic in 2006 and 2010 in the city of Žatec and another four municipalities in this region. In 2006, 400 completed interviews took place in the form of exit-polls[3] (a two-stage random selection – in the first stage of the random selection, there were twenty voting precincts, and in the second, every third voter was addressed). There were 400 interviews completed in 2010 as well. The interviews took place during the first ten days after the elections (a three-stage random selection – the first stage of the random selection, the places of the random selection of respondents were decided on, and in the second step the number of completed interviews in individual areas of the selected municipalities in the Žatec region[4] was determined. In the third step, every third citizen was addressed).

Results and discussion

We can consider using the social structural model to explain the voting behaviour of residents of rural areas when society is internally socially fragmented. The investigation of the relation between social class pertinence and voting behaviour presumes the existence of a crystalized social structure. In this case, social class can be understood as a homogeneous social economic group with an internal feeling of solidarity and concurrent specific indicators through which it is differentiated from

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[2] These are social-economic and demographicfactors such as a relatively higher level of unemployment, lower population density, higher employment rate in the agricultural-food sphere andlower education levels, but also political factors such as identification with the thought processes of environmentalists, conservative Christian ideology, and inclination toward political parties that advocate the interests of rural areas, etc.

[3] Interviews are done as soon as the voters leave the voting room
[4] Žatec (310), Libořice (10), Stańkovice (30), Holedeč (20) and Měcholupy (30).

	2006				2010			
	Education	Job	Income	Subjective status	Education	Job	Income	Subjective status
Education	1				1			
Job	0,56	1			0,55	1		
Income	0,8	0,4	1		0,7	0,4	1	
Subjective status	0,83	0,5	0,74	1	0,84	0,46	0,66	1

Source: Kopřiva, 2010

Note: Respondents were not included in the analysis who did not respond to some of the questions aimed at the highest achieved education, employment, income and subjective status, as well as respondents who were not economically active (those who do not work, pensioners, students and trainees). N(2006) = 265, N(2010) = 284.

Table 1: Correlation matrices.

other social classes. As previously mentioned, the investigation of social structural voting behaviour typically arises from the study of the relationship between the position of the individual in a social structure and his voting decision-making (e.g. decisions made over a longer period of time). The position of the individual in a social structure stems from the social status that the individual has available. The decisive status indicators are education, employment and amount of income, etc. (detailed in Bauman 1966).

One can be convinced of the existence of the crystalized social class structure of the residents of rural areas on the basis of the results of the investigation into status consistency, and on the basis of the cohesion between the objectively-measured status of the individual and his subjective perception. If individual status variables are in a close relationship, we can then speak of a consistent social status. In the opposite case, it is then an inconsistent social status. It thus applies that a person achieves several status levels in partial status parts (Grafstein 2005). The prevailing inconsistency of social statuses, just as the discrepancy between objective status and its subjective, points to a non-crystalized social structure. In this case, the usability of the social structural model of voting behaviour of the residents of rural areas can under no circumstances be considered. It would be prevented by the fact that the relationship between belonging to a social class and voting behaviour cannot be measured when the homogeneous social class does in fact not exist in society, or its members are unable to identify with it.

The investigation into status (in) consistency and subjective perception of the position of voters in the social structure in the Žatec region was, from a methodical point view, inspired by the works of Matějů and Vlachova (2000). These are probably the most extensive works devoted to the problem of social imbalance as a variable of voting behaviour

in the Czech environment. The selected variables of social status were education, employment and income[5]. The subjective perception of the position of individuals in a social structure was also measured[6].

The analysis of the dependence between individual variables, and then between variables and subjective status proved the existence of paired associations. In view of the fact that a linear relationship exists between the individual variables of both investigations, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient can be used to calculate the mutual dependence.

Along with subjective status, the individual dimensions of social status mutually embody a strong or mid-level of mutual dependence. Thereby, in the voting population of the Žatec region, a consistent social status prevails. In addition to this, the respondents are aware of their positions in the structure. From this view, the applicability of the social structural model of voting behaviour in the Žatec region can therefore be further considered.

It is only possible to speculate about motivated class identification if the voting behaviour is consistent with their political orientation. In practice, this means that the voter prefers the political party that is a suitable political representative of his/her social interests. In this concept, consistent voting behaviour is cognitively limited. The basic prerequisite is that the voter has at least elementary knowledge of the party spectrum and recognizes which political party is bearer of the given ideological values.

The voter's ability of orientation in the party system

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[5] Education and income were evaluated through a six-level classification. When constructing the income categories, consideration was given to the amount of the average gross monthly income in the Czech Republic and Usti nad Labem region in the respective years. Employment was classified according to the international index of social-economic statues of employment and then further divided according to a five-level classification.

[6] A five-point scale was used to measure subjective status. Respondents declared their positions on this scale.

Highest achieved education	ODS	ČSSD	KSČM	KDU-ČSL	SZ	Another party
Basic + no further education	1,49	3,05	20,29	0,00	4,35	21,43
Apprenticeship without leaving examination	11,94	56,49	30,43	28,57	4,35	21,43
Apprenticeship with leaving examination	5,22	14,50	26,09	0,00	17,39	28,57
High school with leaving examination	58,96	23,66	17,39	42,86	47,83	14,29
College, unfinished university	5,22	0,00	1,45	0,00	4,35	7,14
University	17,16	2,29	4,36	28,57	21,74	7,14
N	134	131	69	7	23	14

Source: Examination of elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2006 and 2010 in the Žatec region

Note: The numbers in columns show the percentage of voters of the party with the respective highest achieved education. Answers of all respondents who answered the questions concerning their voting decision and achieved education have been included in the analysis. In 2006, 378 respondents answered both questions. The absolute majority of them stated that they had elected some of the parties that acquired MP mandates (96.03%).*

*Out of these parties, KDU-ČSL and SZ received low support. The interpretation of the results of these parties is considerably limited by the scope of the selection set of respondents. The monitored relationship between the level of the achieved education and voting support is rather indicative

Table 2: Voting support to parties according to the level of achieved education - 2006. Column percentage.

and the consistency of voting behaviour in relation to the value attitudes of the voters are usually measured by a simple testing method. One of the possibilities is to use a set of statements concerning the program orientation with the task to assign the suitable political parties. A simpler instrument for measuring the knowledge which does not lead to the loss of validity of the acquired data is the differentiation of the typical representative of right and left wings according to the basic dissociation line between the right and left wings. A stumbling block of this method is, however, the necessity to verify the existence of a value-based scale of political orientation (the left-wing - right-wing continuum) in society. In addition, a necessary prerequisite is the knowledge of the voters' basic theory on politics. In the Czech environment, the existence of a politically relevant right-wing – left-wing scale was repeatedly demonstrated (e.g. Vinopal 2006 or Matějů, Vlachová 2000). Its existence was also independently verified through the factor analysis in the Žatec region (Kopřiva 2009). Here, the voter's value attitudes were ascertained through questions correlating with the political "right-wing" or "left-wing" orientation.

By the demonstrated existence of the right-wing – left-wing continuum, and of the knowledge of right-wing and left-wing among the voters acquire the result of the test which measures the orientation of voters in the party system gains relevance. Knowledge of the party system was tested on the basis of assigning individual parties to the right or left wings according to the rate of state distribution[7].

The results of both examinations among respondents demonstrated the prevailing ability to differentiate the main representatives of the left and right wings[8]. Out of 400 question asked this way, 362 (90.5%) were correctly answered in 2006. In 2010, as many as 380 (95%) correct answers were recorded in an identically wide selection set. On the basis of these results, it is possible to come to the conclusion that at least the part of residents of the Žatec region that participated in the election has at least basic knowledge of the party system. It is therefore possible to state that an important majority of voters is able to express their own political orientation by their voting support to the party which is their suitable representative.

The knowledge of the crystallized social structure and of the electorate's ability to vote consistently with their value attitudes makes it possible to get back to the basic question, i.e. whether it is possible under the conditions of Czech rural areas to utilize

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[7] Both in 2006 and in 2010, ODS was selected as a typical representative of right-wing politics and ČSSD as the representative of left-wing politics.

[8] The task of respondents was to answer the question "are the terms 'right-wing' and 'left-wing' often used in politics?" The left-wing parties are distinguished by a higher rate of redistributing revenues from the rich to the poor. On the other hand, right-wing parties consider fair the given distribution of revenues in society. The different attitudes to the redistribution of revenues in society in the Czech Republic are represented by political parties ODS and ČSSD. Which one of these parties do you consider, on the basis of the aforementioned claims, as a left-wing or right-wing?" In this case, the respondent's task was to record the only correct answer. From the viewpoint of a higher validity, negative answers were also taken as incorrect.

Highest achieved education	ČSSD	ODS	TOP09	KSČM	VV	SPOZ	SUV	Another party
Basic + no further education	13,54	7,25	5,88	11,86	6,45	5,56	11,11	6,67
Apprenticeship without leaving examination	43,75	15,94	9,80	35,59	22,58	38,89	25,93	33,33
Apprenticeship with leaving examination	13,54	5,80	7,84	20,34	12,90	16,67	11,11	13,33
High school with leaving examination	26,04	44,93	33,33	27,12	48,39	22,22	14,81	26,67
College, unfinished uni-versity	2,08	10,14	11,76	1,69	9,68	0,00	7,41	3,33
University	1,04	15,94	31,37	3,39	0,00	16,67	29,63	20,00
N	96	69	51	59	31	18	27	30

Source: Examination of the 2010 election to the Chamber of Deputies

Note: The numbers in columns show the percentage of voters of the party with the respective highest achieved education. Answers of all respondents who answered the questions concerning their voting decision and achieved education have been included in the analysis. In 2010, 382 respondents answered both questions.

Table 3: Voting support to parties according to the level of achieved education - 2010. Column percentage.

the social structural model when interpreting the voting behaviour of residents. Education is the main determining factor of a social class (Wright 1985). The demonstrated high rate of closeness of the relationship between education and subjective status documents the importance of education in the value attitudes of residents of the Žatec region. Therefore, it applies that the higher education an individual gains, the higher his position in the social structure. According to the classical thesis on voting behaviour, members of lower social classes are distinguished by their inclination to the left-wing political values and voting support of left-wing political parties. On the other hand, political orientation of members of the higher social classes has a right-wing nature. This is what the voting support of the right-wing parties comes from. Based on this, it is possible to establish a hypothesis that achieved education is an important determining factor of the voting decision. Voters with higher education tend to support right-wing parties while voters with lower education are rather more inclined in their voting decision to the left-wing political parties. Table 4 shows the relationship between voting decisions and education.

The calculated strength of association of variables - the highest achieved education and voting decision – is 0.40 when we use the Pearson's correlation coefficient. The strength of association ranging between 0.3 − 0.7 is usually considered medium (Hendl 2006). In this case, the relationship shows a rather lower dependence. Of course, the result is considerably distorted. A negligible (from the viewpoint of the intensity of the relationship, negative) distortion understandably occurs thanks to

the fact that the category of non-parliament parties (another party) was also included in the calculation. In relation to the established hypothesis, we then find another distortion if the Green Party is included in the calculation of correlation coefficient. This is a political party that declares itself a political entity deviating from the right-wing – left-wing continuum. If the electorate is further divided from the viewpoint of the highest achieved education into two categories with lower and higher achieved education[9] , it shows that 80.65% of respondents with lower achieved education voted for left-wing parties (ČSSD and KSČM) and 75.14% of respondents with higher achieved education voted for right-wing parties (ODS, KDU-ČSL). This also documents that the classical thesis on the voting behaviour applies in the conditions of the Žatec region, and it is definitely not possible to reject the established hypothesis, at least not in the case of the 2006 election.

The results of the distribution of the voting support to individual parties by different social classes differ between 2006 and 2010, which is given mainly by the variation of the two political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies. However, in both cases it applies that the decisive part of the ODS electorate consists of voters with high school education with leaving examination. On the other hand, on the 2006 and 2010 elections ČSSD and KSČM were most supported by voters with apprenticeship without leaving examination. Table

[9] The first category with a lower achieved education consists of respondents with basic and no education, those with apprenticeships with and without leaving examination. The second category consists of respondents with high school education, college graduates or people with unfinished university education, and university graduates.

3 shows the distribution of the voting decision in 2010 according to the level of the highest achieved education.

The combination of the specific conditions which was in the background of voting decisions does not tend to contribute to the assumption of class-oriented voting behaviour. This is given firstly by the fact that the new political parties of the Czech party system (TOP09 and VV) had not been established on the national level until that time. On the basis of its election program, voters had difficulties in localizing the VV political party in the right-wing – left-wing continuum. In the case of TOP09, its right-wing orientation was obvious from its election program. In view of the fact that this was indeed quite new party, this fact did not have to be generally known to a number of voters. In this relation, a question emerges up to what point the changes in the voting behaviour of the voters from the Žatec region were caused by the aforementioned factors, and up to what point they were affected by class identification. Although the correlation analysis used for the calculation of the strength of association between education and the voting decision demonstrates a dependence relationship, its value is relatively small. The value of the calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.35. However, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that this is a distorted result as well. Data of all respondents (N=382) were included in the calculation of the correlation coefficient regardless of what political party they had voted for. While the results of the 2006 examination showed relatively small support to other than parliament-based parties (4% overall), in the case of 2010 it was 7.86%. The rate of standardization of the interviews does not allow for differentiating whether the right-wing parties or left-wing parties prevail among other parties ("another party" in the table), or whether the voters prefer the election parties according to the expected class scheme. The value of the Pearson's correlation coefficient increases if no respondents who did not vote for any of the parliament-based parties are included in the calculation. The newly calculated correlation coefficient shows the value of 0.4. If we divide the voters in the same manner into two categories from the viewpoint of the highest achieved education, it shows that 68.78% of voters with lower education voted for left-wing parties and 73.33% of voters with higher education voted for right-wing parties. Thus, it is also not possible to reject the hypothesis in the case of 2010. However, it is apparent from the result that, in comparison with 2006, the effect of education on the value-wise consistent voting behaviour decreased. The factor influence on the voting behaviour as a dependent variable will thus be much more varied.

Conclusion

The relationship between the positions of individuals in social structure and voting behaviour in elections to the Chamber of Deputies was repeatedly proven in the past in the Czech Republic, and it is thus apparent that the social structural model has its firm place in the interpretation of the voting behaviour of Czech voters. The relevancy of applying the social structural model of voting behaviour, which is a normally utilized concept in the sociological theory when explaining the voting behaviour, was also demonstrated in the conditions of the rural area of the Czech Republic. The investigation was done from the perspective of the possible applicability of this concept in the Žatec region, which fulfils a number of attributes of rural areas.

Based on the data acquired in interviews with voters in the Žatec region, a relationship between the social class identification and voting behaviour was demonstrated. Despite the rather medium strength of association, it shows that voting decision-making of an important part of the Žatec electorate is not at variance with the classical thesis of voting behaviour. This means that the members of the social-economical groups situated on the lower levels of the social structure are distinguished by their inclination to left-wing political values and voting support of left-wing political parties. On the other hand, the political orientation of the members of higher social classes is of a right-wing nature. The voting support of right-wing parties derives from that. Of course, the results of this paper cannot be generalized into the rural areas of the Czech Republic, but they can serve as one of the indicators when we examine the voting behaviour of residents of rural areas.

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