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An Unpredictable Electoral System and its Consequences

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Summary

The 2025 elections have once again shown that the new electoral system, hastily adopted in 2021, produces paradoxical outcomes. At the same time, experience shows that the combination of vote allocation and regional seat distribution can lead to varying outcomes depending on voter turnout and the distribution of support across parties. Why does the system behave differently from one election to another, and what extreme scenarios might it produce in the future? What institutional or legislative adjustments could improve the predictability and fairness of electoral outcomes?

Key Takeaways

- The post-2021 electoral system led to extraordinary disproportions in 2025: the gap between the most and least represented regions increased from a previous average of around 1,800 votes per seat (2002–2021) to 13,107 votes per seat. In addition, the smallest regions lost seats, further weakening their representation.
- While the previous system largely reflected the number of valid votes cast in each region, the 2025 elections produced clear anomalies. The number of seats is no longer determined solely by votes within a region, but also by additional factors linked to redistribution in the second round.
- Since the 2021 reform, the second round has played a decisive role in shaping electoral outcomes. Seats are allocated based on the largest vote remainders of individual parties, which can concentrate gains in specific regions and generate strong majoritarian effects.

Weak Regions are Even Weaker

The overwhelming victory of ANO, driven by strong mobilization in the peripheral regions of the Czech Republic, to some extent obscured the fundamental and often unexpected consequences of the electoral system reform adopted in 2021. First, there was a significant change in the number of seats allocated across the 14 electoral districts. The smallest regions, Karlovy Vary and Liberec, which had consistently been allocated 5 and 8 seats respectively since 2002, were assigned only 4 and 6 seats in 2025. This represents a reduction of roughly one quarter in their representation. Why did this happen?

The electoral system used between 2002 and 2017 relied on a relatively simple formula. The total number of valid votes cast was divided by the number of seats to be allocated, and the resulting figure, rounded to whole numbers, became the so-called national electoral quota (RMČ). This figure was then used to divide the number of valid votes in each electoral district. The number of times the RMČ fit into the total number of votes in a given district determined how many seats were allocated to that district.

As an example, consider the 2017 elections, the last to be held under the previous system. In the 2017 elections to the Chamber of Deputies, a total of 5,060,759 valid votes were cast across the Czech Republic. Dividing this figure by the number of parliamentary seats (200) yields an RMČ of 25,304. Since 208,817 valid votes were cast in the Liberec Region, the RMČ fits into this total eight times ($208,817 / 25,304 = 8.25$), meaning that 8 seats were allocated.

Such a system responds relatively well to fluctuations in voter turnout across districts. Put simply, in areas where fewer voters participate and where more ballots are invalid, resulting in fewer valid votes overall, the number of allocated seats is lower. Conversely, in areas with higher turnout and more valid votes, the number of seats is higher. In a hypothetical scenario where no voter turned out in Prague, and thus no valid votes were cast, the seats (23–25) would be redistributed to other parts of the Czech Republic—namely, those where elections were not entirely ignored.

As a result, between 2002 and 2021, the number of seats allocated across districts shifted slightly (see Table 1 below), though never dramatically—typically by only one seat more or less. The exception is 2025.

Table 1: Number of allocated mandates in individual constituencies in elections to the PSP of the Czech Republic in 2002-2025

Constituency	2002 mandates	2006 mandates	2010 mandates	2013 mandates	2017 mandates	2021 mandates	2025 mandates
Prague	25	25	25	24	24	23	23
Central Bohemia	23	23	24	25	26	26	26
South Bohemia	12	13	13	12	13	13	12
Pilsen	11	11	11	11	11	11	12
Karlovy Vary	5	5	5	5	5	5	4
Ústecký	14	14	14	14	13	14	13
Liberecký	8	8	8	8	8	8	6
Královéhradecký	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Pardubický	10	10	10	10	10	10	11
Vysočina	11	10	10	11	10	10	11
Jihomoravský	23	23	23	23	23	23	24

Olomoucký	12	12	12	12	12	12	13
Zlínský	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Moravskoslezský	23	23	22	22	22	22	22

Source: ČSÚ, 2025

Before examining the 2025 elections in detail as a deviant case, it is useful to briefly outline the concept of representation. The number of seats allocated across individual districts directly affects the level of voter representation—that is, how many voters a single MP represents. The goal of a well-functioning proportional system should be to ensure that each MP represents roughly the same number of voters.

In other words, it should not matter whether a candidate runs for office or a voter casts their vote in the Vysočina or Karlovy Vary region. However, this is currently not the case. If we recalculate the theoretical representativeness of a single seat across all elections since 2002, we obtain Table 2 below. This is done by dividing the number of valid votes cast in each district by the number of seats allocated (see Table 1 above). The resulting figure indicates how many valid votes correspond to one seat in a given region over the period 2002–2025.

Table 2: Share of the number of valid votes per mandate in individual districts in elections to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Czech Republic in 2002-2025 (rounded to whole numbers)

Constituency	2002	2006	2010	2013	2017	2021	2025
	NVV/S ¹	NVV/S	NVV/S	NVV/S	NVV/S	NVV/S	NVV/S
Prague	23458	26260	25493	24438	25477	27278	27654
Central Bohemia	23357	26959	26258	25100	25409	27178	29001
South Bohemia	24241	25953	25624	25931	24255	25834	29029
Pilsen	23588	26277	25479	23948	24683	26334	25249
Karlovy Vary	24228	27423	26032	24535	24428	26061	33860
Ústecký	23904	26767	26129	24149	26130	26938	29816
Liberecký	23680	26939	26740	25306	26102	27694	38355
Královéhradecký	24304	26903	26271	24899	25338	26765	27448
Pardubický	24534	27392	26886	25560	25817	27399	25943
Vysočina	23164	27600	27087	23821	26276	27719	26175
Jihomoravský	23946	26470	25962	24950	25367	27143	27818
Olomoucký	24897	27821	26823	25404	25470	27069	26158
Zlínský	23599	26661	25716	24611	24557	26101	26482
Moravskoslezský	23850	26530	26534	25119	24900	26301	28476

Data Source: ČSÚ, 2025; own calculations

The table above shows that the situation changes slightly from one election to another. What matters, however, is the extent of these differences. At first glance, one might conclude that some regions perform better in certain elections and worse in others—for example, the Pilsen region performs strongly while Vysočina performs poorly (as in 2010), whereas in other elections the pattern is reversed, with Vysočina performing well and South Bohemia lagging behind (as in 2013).

¹ Number of valid votes divided by number of mandates, rounded to units

However, what matters is not the absolute figures, which vary from election to election², but the gap between the best- and worst-performing regions—that is, how large the differences are between them.

Table 3: Difference in the ratio of the number of valid votes per 1 mandate between the best (min1) and worst (max1) regions in the years 2002-2025

	2002	2006	2010	2013	2017	2021	2025
Difference max1-min1	1733	1868	1609	2110	2021	1886	13107

Data Source: ČSÚ, 2025; own calculations

Between 2002 and 2021, the deviation remained relatively stable, with the gap between the best- and worst-performing regions fluctuating around 1,870 votes per mandate. These differences were not particularly pronounced. This changes dramatically in 2025.

The best-performing region, Pilsen, with 25,249 votes per seat, is separated from the worst-performing region, Liberec, with 38,355 votes per seat, by an extraordinary gap of 13,107 votes per seat. In practical terms, one MP from the Pilsen region represents approximately 25,000 voters, while an MP from the Liberec region represents around 38,000 voters (see Table 2 above). A similarly significant disparity can be observed in the Karlovy Vary region.

However, the problem runs deeper and concerns the very nature of representation in the Chamber of Deputies. If voter turnout increased in most districts in the latest elections, one would logically expect a corresponding increase in the number of seats allocated to those districts where more voters turned out in 2025. This was indeed the case in the past. In 2025, however, we observe clear anomalies.

For example, in the Ústí nad Labem Region, voter turnout increased by 4.31 percentage points—the second-largest increase after the Moravian-Silesian Region—yet in the final allocation the region received one seat fewer (i.e. 13 instead of 14; see Table 1 above). Similarly, the Liberec Region lost two seats. By contrast, the South Moravian Region, despite a comparable increase in voter turnout, was allocated 24 seats, a number it had not reached at any point since 2002.

Table 4: Voter turnout in individual districts in the elections to the PS of the Czech Republic in 2021 and 2025

Constituency	2021	2025	+/-
	Voter Turnout	Voter Turnout	
Prague	70,15	71,44	1,29
Central Bohemia	67,95	71,28	3,33
South Bohemia	66,34	69,49	3,15
Pilsen	64,72	68,26	3,54
Karlovy Vary	57,10	60,74	3,64
Ústecký	57,65	61,96	4,31
Liberecký	64,60	68,05	3,45

² If voter turnout increases, the ratio rises, since the total number of parliamentary seats remains fixed at 200.

Královéhradecký	67,86	70,56	2,70
Pardubický	67,89	71,41	3,52
Vysočina	68,93	72,53	3,60
Jihomoravský	66,39	70,07	3,68
Olomoucký	64,69	68,61	3,92
Zlínský	67,43	69,76	2,33
Moravskoslezský	60,56	66,31	5,75

Data Source: ČSÚ, 2025

Disproportion has recently affected primarily regions facing structural challenges. The current electoral system further exacerbates these disadvantages, even though one would expect differences in representation to remain limited, as in previous elections.

The problem is particularly evident in regions that were allocated significantly fewer seats in 2025 than in earlier years. What explains this outcome? The answer is straightforward: the new electoral system.

The Illogical Second Round

Fortunately, the explanation is not difficult to identify. The key factor lies in the different structure of how seats have been allocated since 2021. Until 2017, the entire process took place within electoral regions. If a given region was allocated, for example, 24 seats—as Prague was in 2017—these were distributed among parties as follows: ANO received 6 seats, ODS and the Pirates 5 each, TOP 09 received 3, and ČSSD, STAN, KSČM, KDU-ČSL and SPD each received one—making a total of 24 seats, neither more nor less. The total number of seats was determined solely by the electoral quota (RMČ).

Since the electoral reform, however, the situation has changed. The number of seats is still calculated using the same formula (RMČ) in accordance with §48 of Act No. 247/1995, but the final allocation across regions is now influenced by the so-called second round.

The key variable is the share of seats distributed in the first and second rounds. While in 2021 the ratio was 199 to 1—meaning that 199 seats were allocated in the first round and only one in the second—in 2025 this shifted to 188 to 12.

Table 5: Numbers of regional mandates allocated after the 1st and 2nd ballot in the elections to the PS of the Czech Republic in 2025

Constituency	After 1st Round	After 2nd Round	+/-
Prague	23	23	0
Central Bohemia	27	26	-1
South Bohemia	12	12	0
Pilsen	11	12	1
Karlovy Vary	5	4	-1
Ústecký	14	13	-1
Liberecký	8	6	-2
Královéhradecký	11	11	0
Pardubický	10	11	1

Vysočina	10	11	1
Jihomoravský	24	24	0
Olomoucký	12	13	1
Zlínský	11	12	1
Moravskoslezský	22	22	0

Data Source: ČSÚ, 2025; own calculations

The ratio of seats allocated between the first and second rounds is crucial. While the first round reflects the strength of individual parties within specific constituencies, the second round is designed to serve as a nationwide balancing mechanism.

All seats not allocated in the first round (12 in 2025) are transferred to the second round, along with the remaining votes of all parties advancing to this stage (a total of 892,827 votes in 2025). The value of the national electoral quota (68,679) is then calculated as 892,827 divided by 13 (i.e. 12+1). This figure is subsequently used to divide the remaining votes of each party. If not all remaining seats are allocated in a single step, the same procedure is repeated. This process produces the results shown in the table below.

Table 6: Number of allocated mandates in the second round of elections to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Czech Republic in 2025

Party	Remaining votes in 1st round	N seat II. round	Remaining votes in 2nd round	Final count of mandates	N seats II. Round total
SPD	136 653	1	67 974	1	2
SPOLU	162 360	2	25 002	0	2
Piráti	133 346	1	64 667	1	2
Motoristé	127 806	1	59 127	1	2
ANO	164 169	2	26 811	0	2
STAN	168 493	2	31 135	0	2
celkem	892 827	9	274 716	3	12

Data Source: ČSÚ, 2025; own calculations

In 2025, six parties each won two mandates in the second round. The key issue is how it is determined in which constituency a particular party secures a mandate. In practice, a mandate is allocated to the constituency where a given party has the largest surplus of votes. Thus, SPD won seats in the Pardubice and Vysočina Regions, TOTAL in Prague and the Pilsen Region, etc. (see Table 7 below).

Table 7: Settlement of the second round of scrutiny for individual parties in the elections to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Czech Republic in 2025

party	Prague	Central Bohemian	South Bohemian	Pilsen	Karlovy Vary	Ústí nad Labem	Liberec	Hradec Králové	Pardubice	Vysočina	South Moravian	Olomouc	Zlín	Moravian-Silesian	Czechia
SPD	9 250	4 834	4 797	5 290	13 837	12 935	19 914	1 834	21 938	21 089	2 944	9 824	5 214	2 943	136 653
SPOLU	23 762	13 963	13 719	20 362	2 905	14 760	20 157	6 558	1 455	527	15 992	1 740	9 339	17 121	162 360
Piráti	11 274	20 163	3 614	1 964	8 801	4 539	18 891	2 763	26	20 373	15 719	2 682	1 397	21 140	133 346
Motoristé	8 749	10 166	1 682	83	9 868	3 851	16 933	1 411	166	19 588	17 252	326	21 352	16 379	127 806
ANO	5 960	16 845	7 236	4 973	3 657	16 553	14 951	15 277	10 841	15 292	2 296	20 383	20 534	9 371	164 169
STAN	13 134	6 635	14 659	10 561	14 828	14 779	16 199	15 302	9 546	11 806	16 907	9 570	9 874	4 683	168 493

Data Source: ČSÚ, 2025; own calculations

It is the accumulation of mandate gains in a particular region in the second round that causes significant imbalances in regional representation and strong majority effects. The original idea behind the new electoral system was that the second round should offset the majority tendencies of the Imperiali quota ($V/(S+2)$) used in the first round. However, after two election cycles, we can see that in 2021 the second round was marginalized. As a result, the ANO movement could have won more mandates, even though it received 35,765 fewer votes than the SPOLU coalition³ (ČSÚ, 2025). In 2025, the second round again produced strong majority effects, with ANO winning 75% of mandates (3/4) with 42.49% of the vote in the Karlovy Vary Region, and similarly in the Liberec Region, where ANO won 50% of mandates (3/6) with 34.4% of the vote—much stronger majority effects than those observed under the electoral system used until 2017.

The problem is that the number of seats allocated in individual regions is no longer determined solely by the number of valid votes cast there, but also by the number of parties entering the second round, the relative distances between parties within regions, and the resulting number of remaining votes that determine the allocation of seats in the second round. All of this creates an electoral system that is difficult to predict and leads to paradoxical outcomes that run counter to the intentions behind its design.

It may be worth considering adjustments to the second round of voting in a way that preserves the weight of individual regions to such an extent that differences in representation do not exceed what is considered acceptable. Unfortunately, the complexity and lack of salience of this issue suggest that we may simply have to get used to the current electoral system.

³ ANO received 1,458,140 votes and 82 mandates, while SPOLU received 1,493,905 votes and 81 mandates (ČSÚ, 2025).

Sources

- ČSÚ, 2025. Open data for election results. <https://www.volby.cz/opendata/opendata.htm>

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Karel Sál studied political science at the Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, where in 2016 he defended his dissertation entitled Democracy in the Crisis of Disinterest: the effects of the use of online elections in the electoral process of selected countries. His professional interests include e-Government, internet elections and information freedom. He is the author of several articles, speaks at international conferences and is the founder and editor of the think-tank e-politics.cz.

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