



May 2026

Postal Voting: Lessons from the First Experience

Karel Sál

Summary

After years of intense debate, postal voting was introduced in the Czech Republic, allowing voters to use it for the first time in the parliamentary elections held in autumn 2025. Did the expectations of its supporters—who viewed the reform as a step toward broader electoral accessibility—materialize? And, conversely, were the concerns raised by its critics confirmed? Finally, how did the votes of Czech citizens living abroad influence the overall election results in the Czech Republic? These are the key questions explored in this paper.

Key Takeaways

- In the 2025 elections, a total of 8,978 voters cast their ballots by post, of which 8,757 votes were valid. This represented only around 30% of all votes cast abroad and only a fraction of the original estimates, which ranged from 100,000 to 300,000 votes.
- Research shows that new voting methods tend to be adopted gradually and usually have only a limited mobilizing effect. Postal voting therefore changed mainly the method of voting for already active voters, rather than bringing tens of thousands of new voters into the electoral process.
- In practice, postal voting primarily helped several hundred Czech citizens living abroad for whom traveling to a polling station at an embassy or consulate was genuinely difficult. The overwhelming majority of postal votes, however, were cast from European countries.

Promising Expectations, More Modest Reality

Let us begin with a brief look at the numbers. In the 2025 elections to the Chamber of Deputies, 37,654 voters registered from abroad (representing 0.46% of all eligible voters), of whom 29,888 ultimately cast their ballots (0.53% of all votes cast). Voter turnout abroad reached 79.38%, which was 10.43 percentage points higher than overall turnout. Of these 29,888 voters, 8,978 used postal voting, meaning that around 30% of all voters abroad cast their ballots by mail.

A total of 221 envelopes were declared invalid because they did not meet the legal requirements—for example, due to a missing identification slip, an unsigned declaration, or a record showing that the voter had already voted by another method. The remaining 8,757 valid postal votes were distributed among four electoral districts according to Annex No. 1 of Act No. 268/2024 Coll.: Prague (792 valid votes from the “rest of the world” category¹), the Central Bohemian Region (1,384 valid votes from the “Americas” category²), the South Moravian Region (4,296 valid votes from the “rest of Europe” category³), and the Moravian-Silesian Region (2,285 valid votes from the “Western Europe” category⁴)

Compared to the 2021 elections, when postal voting was not yet available, the number of registered voters abroad, participating voters, and valid votes all increased (see Table 1 below). At the same time, however, the first election experience clearly showed that postal voting did not meet expectations. The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by Jan Lipavský, estimated that out of approximately 600,000 Czech citizens living abroad, as many as 100,000 might use postal voting (CNN Prima News, 2024). Ivan Bartoš, “based on consultations with experts and comparisons with foreign examples,” estimated that postal voting could bring 100,000–150,000 additional votes, while then-Minister of the Interior Vít Rakušan even spoke of 300,000 votes (Grim, 2024).

The reality, however, was very different. In total, only 8,978 citizens abroad voted by mail—less than one tenth of what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and government representatives had expected. The actual figures therefore seem to support the arguments of critics such as Alena Schillerová (“I am genuinely fascinated by the enormous differences between the numbers presented by representatives of the governing coalition”) as well as Marek Benda (“I think both sides greatly overestimate this issue. It will not mean tens or hundreds of thousands of additional votes from abroad, nor will it fundamentally affect the outcome of the elections”) (Grim, 2024).

¹ Algeria, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Ghana, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Japan, South Africa, Jordan, Cambodia, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Korea, Kuwait, Cyprus, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Thailand, Taiwan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Zambia.

² Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, and the United States.

³ Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Croatia, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Moldova, Germany, Norway, Poland, Austria, Romania, Russia, Greece, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, the Vatican, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

⁴ Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Spain.

Table 1: Number of Eligible and Participating Voters, Voter Turnout, and Valid Votes Cast Abroad in Elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic Since 2002

Elections	Registered Voters Abroad	Participating Voters	Of Which Postal Votes	Voter Turnout [%]	Valid Votes
Parliamentary Elections 2002	4,135	3,763	—	91.00	3,742
Parliamentary Elections 2006	8,041	6,744	—	83.87	6,702
Parliamentary Elections 2010	10,667	8,222	—	77.08	8,172
Parliamentary Elections 2013	14,132	10,571	—	74.80	10,529
Parliamentary Elections 2017	14,990	10,527	—	70.23	10,494
Parliamentary Elections 2021	18,808	13,236	—	70.37	13,184
Parliamentary Elections 2025	37,654	29,888	8,978	79.38	27,945

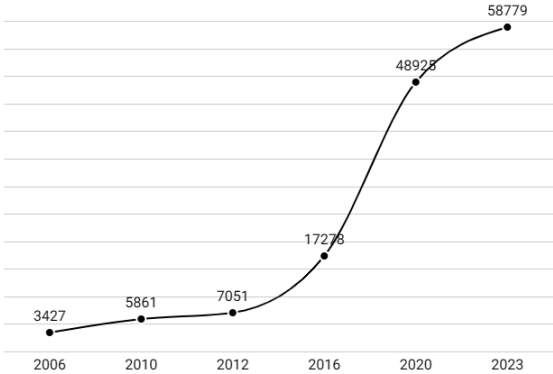
Source: Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), 2026.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the figures presented by the previous government were far removed from reality. The question remains whether this was intentional—to increase the media relevance of the issue and thereby improve its chances of passing through the legislative process—or rather a result of naivety combined with insufficient expert preparation.

Thanks to electoral behavior studies that are no longer particularly new (see, for example, Lukáš Linek, 2013), we know that the adoption of new voting methods tends to be relatively slow. Such innovations are primarily used by already active voters who merely change the way they cast their ballots. The mobilization effect of postal voting—that is, a situation in which a new voting method attracts previously absent voters—is generally limited. Moreover, adoption itself, even when positively received, is a long-term and uncertain process influenced by a range of difficult-to-measure but potentially significant variables.

Using Slovakia as an example (see Figure 1 below), we can observe that a new voting method typically requires several electoral cycles before voters adopt it on a wider scale, with the major increase in postal voting occurring between 2012 and 2020. While this interpretation may be partly correct, it overlooks the fact that between 2006 and 2023 the number of eligible voters (+231,070) and participating voters (+93,856) increased significantly, alongside broader changes in the migration patterns of the Slovak adult population (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2024). Assuming that Czech voters would adopt postal voting at the same speed and to the same extent as Slovak voters—despite different emigration patterns between the Czech and Slovak populations—is therefore insufficiently grounded.

Figure 1: Total Number of Postal Votes in Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2006–2023



Source: Grim, 2026.

For the reasons outlined above, we should question the assumption that the sharp increase in the number of registered and participating voters abroad in the 2025 elections was primarily driven by the introduction of postal voting. If we look at Table 1 above, it becomes clear that the increase in turnout occurred mainly at embassies and consulates themselves. In a hypothetical scenario in which postal voting had not been available in the 2025 elections—and those who voted by mail had therefore not participated because of travel or time constraints (although studies suggest that the vast majority of them would likely have voted anyway)—there still would have been roughly 7,500 more voters abroad than in 2021.

The rise in participation was therefore more likely driven by the overall political atmosphere, growing social polarization, and broader mobilization that also spread abroad through the media and social networks, rather than by postal voting itself. At the same time, Czech citizens have continued to change their travel behavior, particularly regarding international travel, making the contrast between the pandemic year 2021 and the year 2025 especially significant.

This also weakens one of the main arguments put forward by the authors of the postal voting legislation, who stated in the explanatory memorandum that: “Allowing them [i.e. voters abroad; author’s note] to vote by mail often means enabling them to exercise their voting rights under reasonable conditions. This applies especially to the large territorial districts of diplomatic missions (in the Americas and Australia).” (596/0: 15)

However, if we examine the final results, we find that the overwhelming majority of postal votes (6,742 out of a total of 8,978 submitted envelopes, i.e. 75.1%) were cast in Europe, where voters abroad generally have relatively easy access either to an embassy or to the Czech Republic itself. The remaining 2,236 postal votes came from the rest of the world combined. In reality, therefore, we are talking about at most several hundred voters for whom the democratic deficit described in the explanatory memorandum actually applied⁵—that is, excessive distance and a complicated, time-consuming, or costly journey to a polling station. Such voters certainly exist, but their overall number is very small, and the data clearly confirm this.

⁵ “The exercise of voting rights abroad is often complicated for Czech citizens by the large distance between their place of residence and the relevant diplomatic mission. This applies particularly to countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, where sizeable Czech expatriate communities live.” (596/0: 12)

The Impact of Postal Voting and Voters Abroad More Broadly

Another major topic connected to postal voting was its potential influence on election results in the Czech Republic. Given that only 8,757 postal votes ultimately entered the official count—and that these votes were distributed among the four largest electoral districts in the ratio of 792:1,384:4,296:2,285, namely Prague, the Central Bohemian Region, the South Moravian Region, and the Moravian-Silesian Region—even a non-expert must conclude that the overall impact was highly marginal.

If we focus on the difference between each party’s overall share of the vote and its share among voters abroad for the parties that advanced to the official count in 2025 (ANO, ODS, TOP 09, KDU-ČSL, STAN, Pirates, SPD, and Motorists), we arrive at Table 2 below. While ANO recorded the largest negative disparity between its overall election result and its support abroad (-30.56 percentage points), the Pirates performed best (+19.27 percentage points), followed by SPOLU (+15.9 percentage points) and STAN (+10.25 percentage points).

Election results from 2013 to 2025 clearly show that parties currently in opposition tend to perform better among voters abroad than governing parties, and this trend did not change even after the introduction of postal voting (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Share of Votes Won in Elections, Share of Votes Won Abroad, and the Resulting Disproportion for ANO, ODS, TOP 09, KDU-ČSL, STAN, the Pirates, SPD, and Motorists in 2013–2025

	2013			2017			2021			2025		
	CZ [% of votes]	Abroad [% of votes]	Disproportion [p.p.]	CZ [% of votes]	Abroad [% of votes]	Disproportion [p.p.]	CZ [% of votes]	Abroad [% of votes]	Disproportion [p.p.]	CZ [% of votes]	Abroad [% of votes]	Disproportion [p.p.]
ODS	7,72	10,45	2,73	11,32	12,53	1,21	27,79	34,26	6,47	23,36	39,26	15,90
TOP 09	11,99	36,55	24,56	5,31	26,09	20,78	-	-	-	-	-	-
KDU-ČSL	6,78	9,95	3,17	5,80	7,39	1,59	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pirates	2,66	2,85	0,19	10,79	19,48	8,69	15,62	50,47	34,85	8,97	28,24	19,27
STAN	-	-	-	5,18	7,17	1,99	-	-	-	11,23	21,48	10,25
ANO	18,65	9,55	-9,10	29,64	7,62	-22,02	27,12	4,99	-22,13	34,51	3,95	-30,56
Úsvit/SPD	6,88	1,87	-5,01	10,64	4,10	-6,54	9,56	2,19	-7,37	7,78	2,04	-5,74
Motorists	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,77	2,32	-4,45

Source of data: Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), 2026; author’s own calculations.

One limitation of the precinct-level data provided by the Czech Statistical Office is that they do not contain information on the number of votes cast for individual parties with regard to the type of voting method used (i.e. whether voters abroad voted by mail or in person at an embassy). As a result, it is impossible to isolate only postal votes in the analysis, making it necessary to work with all votes cast abroad together—both those submitted physically at embassies and those sent by mail.

And how would the elections hypothetically have turned out if only voters residing in the Czech Republic had participated—that is, in a scenario where voting from abroad was not permitted at all and voters who in reality cast their ballots abroad in the 2025 parliamentary elections had decided,

in protest, not to travel back to the Czech Republic, with all of them abstaining entirely? This is illustrated in Table 3 below. In terms of government formation, the situation would not have changed significantly, since the distribution of seats among the parties would have remained the same. The current coalition of ANO + SPD + Motorists for Themselves would still have held a majority of 108 seats.

Table 3: Recalculation of the 2025 Parliamentary Election Results Excluding Votes Cast Abroad

Party	Recalculated Votes [abs.]	Actual Votes in Parliamentary Elections 2025 [abs.]	+/-	Recalculated Seats	Actual Seats in Parliamentary Elections 2025	+/-
ANO	1,939,403	1,940,507	-1,104	80	80	0
SPOLU	1,302,374	1,313,346	-10,972	52	52	0
Pirates	496,644	504,537	-7,893	18	18	0
STAN	625,509	631,512	-6,003	22	22	0
SPD	437,039	437,611	-572	15	15	0
Motorists for Themselves	379,951	380,601	-650	13	13	0

Source of data: Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), 2026; author’s own calculations.

What would have changed, however, is the distribution of seats between the individual scrutiny rounds. Instead of winning 78 seats in the first scrutiny round and two seats in the second scrutiny round, ANO would have obtained 77 seats in the first round and three in the second. For the remaining parties, the distribution of seats between the scrutiny rounds would have remained unchanged.

As a consequence of the lower distribution of votes into the four largest electoral districts, the allocation of seats among the regions would also have changed, although not dramatically. The South Moravian Region and the Moravian-Silesian Region would each have lost one allocated seat (from 24 to 23 seats and from 22 to 21 seats respectively). By contrast, the Central Bohemian Region (from 26 to 27 seats) and the South Bohemian Region (from 12 to 13 seats) would have gained seats.

Naturally, this would have affected the parliamentary representation of individual parties in the Chamber of Deputies. In the case of ANO, SPOLU, SPD, and Motorists for Themselves, all elected MPs would have remained the same regardless of whether votes cast abroad were included or not. For the Pirates, Andrea Hoffmannová from the Moravian-Silesian regional list would not have entered parliament; instead, the party would have been represented by Helena Straková from the Central Bohemian regional list. In the case of STAN, Jakub Krainer from the South Moravian regional list would not have won a seat, and Barbora Poláčková (an independent candidate) from the South Bohemian list would have entered the Chamber of Deputies instead.

The difference between the scenario without votes from abroad and the actual outcome therefore amounts to a change of only two MPs in two parties (the Pirates and STAN). STAN would also have been represented by more women (14 instead of the current 13), and an independent candidate (Poláčková) would have replaced a party member (Krainer) within the parliamentary group. Overall, the impact of votes cast abroad was therefore very limited.

This also relates to the fact that the current system for distributing votes cast abroad—namely, their fixed allocation among the four largest electoral districts—makes little sense from the perspective of regional representation. The rationale behind the current arrangement was concern over influencing electoral competition, which is explicitly mentioned in the explanatory memorandum itself:

“Concerns about distorting the balance of elections to the Chamber of Deputies by assigning votes to a single electoral district are unfounded, since the amendment to the Election Act adopted in connection with the Electoral Administration Act already introduced the distribution of votes cast abroad among the (...) largest regions.” (596/0: 13)

However, from the perspective of regional representation—which is particularly important in proportional systems using multiple electoral districts, as is the case in the Czech Republic—it makes little sense that a voter living in the United States, who before emigrating had participated in political life in Brno throughout their life, should suddenly have their vote counted in the Central Bohemian Region merely because of a draw conducted by the electoral commission. The Czech electoral system has long paid little attention to where votes cast abroad should actually be allocated. In the past, there was a single district; since the 2025 elections there have been four, but the system still ignores the fact that most voters have a demonstrable connection to a specific place within a particular electoral district.

Even for citizens who have lived abroad for decades, territorial affiliation to a specific municipality can be established relatively easily. Austria provides a good example. In parliamentary elections, votes cast abroad are assigned to a specific municipality based on a cascade of criteria (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2025: 4; translated by the author):

1. place of registration in the electoral register, if not...
2. place of last residence in Austria, if not...
3. place of the parents' last residence in Austria, if not...
4. place of birth in Austria, if not...
5. place of residence of spouse or partner in Austria, if not...
6. place of last employment in Austria, if not...
7. place of property ownership in Austria, if not...
8. place of possession of assets or exercise of property rights in Austria, if not...
9. other ties to Austria.

Voters fill out their ballots and send them to a designated address in Austria. The votes are then counted in the voter's home municipality, which is logical because it preserves the territorial affiliation of postal voters. A similar system exists in Hungary, which was one of the reasons why determining the final results of parliamentary elections took several days. In Slovakia, by contrast, such a problem does not arise because elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic are conducted within a single nationwide electoral district, meaning it is irrelevant whether votes arrive in Bratislava or Košice.

The Czech Republic should address the issue of representing voters abroad as soon as possible because—as the authors of the law themselves anticipated—the number of such voters will continue to grow over time. As their share increases, it will become ever more apparent that the current system of vote allocation creates illogical and, in some cases, even absurd situations.

Conclusion

To summarize, the introduction of postal voting did not meet the expectations of its proponents. The number of people voting by mail reached only a few thousand, and the overwhelming majority of these votes were cast in European countries. While the argument concerning “voters living far from polling stations” is valid, in reality it applies only to a relatively small number of Czech citizens.

Paradoxically, in an effort to equalize access to the exercise of voting rights, lawmakers created a new inequality. At present, voters residing within the Czech Republic have access to fewer voting methods than voters living abroad. In attempting to remove inequality for several hundred citizens, the system effectively created 8,215,662 less “equal” individuals who simply have the misfortune of voting at home. Those who were once considered privileged—because, according to the proponents of the reform, they lived closer to polling stations than others—have thus become the disadvantaged group. This is probably the most significant effect of introducing postal voting, which is rather unfortunate.

When looking at the statistics on the use of postal voting, one inevitably begins to ask what the true motivation behind the adoption of this law actually was. Was it genuinely an effort to help Czech expatriates abroad, or rather a fairly straightforward calculation that lowering barriers to voting exclusively for citizens living outside the Czech Republic could increase the number of voters who, in the overwhelming majority of cases, support the parties of the then-governing coalition (see Table 2 above). That, however, is a question each person must answer for themselves.

Sources

- 596/0 - Návrh poslanců Víta Rakušana, Petra Fialy, Mariana Jurečky, Markéty Pekarové Adamové, Ivana Bartoše, Josefa Cogana, Marka Bendy, Aleše Dufka, Jana Jakoba, Jakuba Michálka, Lucie Potůčkové, Evy Decroix, Jiřího Navrátila, Michala Zuny a Olgy Richterové na vydání zákona, kterým se mění zákon o správě voleb a některé další zákony. Zástupce předkladatele: Rakušan V. a další. Doručeno poslancům: 7. prosince 2023 v 15:27. <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/text/orig2.sqw?idd=239826>
- Bundesministerium Inneres, (2025). Antrag auf Eintragung in die (Verbleib in der) Wählerevidenz und/oder Europa-Wählerevidenz. Publ.: 22. 12. 2025. https://www.bmi.gv.at/412/files/formular_antrag_waehlerevidenz_auslandsoesterreicher_nbf_20240318.pdf
- CNN Prima News, (2024). Ministerstvo zahraničí promluvilo ke korespondenční volbě. Záznam tiskové konference MZV. Publ.: 23. 1. 2024, 11:42. <https://cnn.iprima.cz/video/ministerstvo-zahranici-promluvilo-ke-korespondencni-volbe>
- ČSÚ, (2026). Výsledky voleb a referend. www.volby.cz
- Grim, J. (2024). Kolik hlasů navíc přinese korespondenční volba? Z koalice zní odhady od jednotek až do stovek tisíc. Irozhlas.cz. Publ.: 19. 1. 2024, 6:30. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/kolik-hlasu-navic-prinese-korespondencni-volba-z-koalice-zni-odhady-od-jednotek-2401190630_jgr
- ŠÚSR, (2024). Voľby do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky. Publ.: 7. 2. 2024. slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal/ext/themes/elections/parliament
- Linek, L. (2013). Kam se ztratili voliči? Vysvětlení vývoje volební účasti v České republice v letech 1990–2010. Brno: CDK.

Author



KAREL SÁL

Analyst

Karel Sál, Ph.D. is a political scientist specializing in electoral systems, voting behavior, and voter targeting. He is an expert in public opinion polling and innovative research methods. He collaborates with political parties, helping them tailor election campaigns to specific target groups, select campaign themes, and analyze media coverage. His work for IPPS focuses on the erosion of traditional ideological systems, freedom of speech, the future of European integration, and Czech domestic politics.

Publisher



INSTITUTE FOR POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The Institute's mission is to improve the Czech political and public environment through professional and open discussion and the creation of a lively platform that names major problems, develops analyses of them and offers recipes for their solution through cooperation of experts and politicians, international conferences, seminars, public discussions, political and social analyses available to the entire Czech society. We are convinced that open expert discussion and understanding of the nature and causes of individual problems are a prerequisite for any successful solution to the problems of contemporary society.



Martinská 2, 110 00 Praha 1



+420 602 502 674



www.politikaspolecnost.cz



office@politikaspolecnost.cz