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The Czech Pirate Party: A New Alternative, Not Only
for the Young

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Abstract

In 2017, in addition to the traditional, old, and more recently established political parties, a new formation – the Czech Pirate Party – espousing more participative principles, including the use of online platforms for discussions – arrived on the political scene in the Czech Republic. This newcomer to the parliamentary ecosystem, shortly after achieving success at the national level, also managed to attract significant support in local elections. For this reason, there is currently a Pirate Party parliamentary group present in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber of the Czech parliament), while simultaneously the mayor of Prague and members of the ruling coalition in Brno – the second biggest city in the Czech Republic – also represent the Pirate Party. Furthermore, recent opinion polls show support for the Pirates running at about 14%. This is coupled with another new feature: the young age of the party's elected parliamentarians and local councilors, which brings new challenges to politics. After the elections, a number of commentators immediately dubbed the Pirate Party a 'youth party.' But is this really the case? What forms of participation do the party and/or its members use and encourage? This article offers answers to these questions. In particular, it presents the electoral base of this new political party through interpretative analysis. The data are based on election results triangulated with other sources – specifically, a Czech election study is juxtaposed against a quantitative survey carried out by three academic institutions in the Czech Republic (the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University, Brno; Palacký University, Olomouc; and the Institute of Sociology at the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague). These statistical tools enable us to identify in great detail the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Pirate Party voters (for instance: age, education, their views about contemporary democracy, and the timing of their decision to vote) and map their attitudes towards other parties and their leaders. The article reveals how popular the Czech Pirate Party is among the younger generation of voters, where the latter come from, and what political preferences they had previously.

Keywords: *Czech Pirate Party, Czech politics, members of parliament, Czech Republic.*

1. Introduction¹

In the autumn 2017 elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,² nine political parties won seats, and some of them took their places on the parliamentary benches for the very first time. In addition to the long-established parties of previous years, these included the extreme-right and populist Freedom and Direct Democracy, which drew upon the legacy of its predecessor, the Dawn of Direct Democracy; the candidate list of Mayors and Independents likewise managed to cross the electoral threshold. Though this latter party had previously been represented in the Chamber, it was as part of the liberal TOP 09 parliamentary party group. The third newcomer was the Czech Pirate Party, or 'the Pirates' for short. Polling 10.79 per cent of the vote and returning 22 MPs, it became the second most successful party of the opposition. Thus, a new party managed to breakthrough into parliament; one that in the previous term had attracted attention by organizing protest rallies and vigorously criticizing the established order. The Pirate MPs rank among the youngest in the Chamber. Their average age is under 35, only two MPs are over 40 years old, and the others are significantly younger. In addition to their age, they are characterized by their professions – over two-thirds of the Pirate MPs indicated that they worked in IT, while other common occupations included teaching and local politics. Thus the face of Czech politics has substantially changed since autumn 2017, with new, young MPs under the Pirate Party brand appearing alongside the politicians of other parties, many of whom have long-term experience as MPs, regional politicians, or mayors.

This paper starts by describing the Pirate Party's emergence, internal formation, and electoral successes preceding its entry to parliament, and the essential characteristics of its electorate. The first section is based on published articles and party documents, especially their on-line discussion forums. The paper also uses election results and data obtained by an election study undertaken by the Institute of Sociology at the Czech Academy of Sciences and other social science institutions. Personal interviews were conducted with 1,559 respondents – Czech citizens over 18 years of age – immediately after the parliamentary elections. This created a rich store of information, organized around more than 230 variables related to how voters decided in the elections, what motivated them to vote, and other circumstances of electoral decision-making. The major findings of the article are summarized in the conclusion.

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² Elections are held using a system of proportional representation in 14 electoral regions. A modified d'Hondt method is used to convert votes into seats, and fragmentation is prevented by a 5 per cent threshold (additive for coalitions). The voters choose a party candidate list and may award preferential votes on the list.

2. *The Pirate Party in Czech politics and beyond*

The Czech Republic has some historical experience of various ‘mock’ parties. The most recent conspicuous example was a successful local outfit, *Žít Brno*, or Live Brno, which attracted popular attention for its satire of the country’s second-largest city Brno and the workings of its city council (for example, *Žít Brno* renamed the city ‘Krno’). This was a form of protest combined with political activism that achieved success in the 2014 local elections, and also in 2018 (Macková and Macek, 2014).

Earlier activities of this kind include Václav Linkov’s efforts to establish a Liberal Party, but his application was rejected by the Ministry of the Interior. He was only allowed to establish the party and stand for election after a decision of the European Court of Human Rights. He also forced the Czech Supreme Court to pronounce on whether it was acceptable to play noughts and crosses on a ballot paper (Neviditelný pes, 2006; Český statistický úřad, 2006).³

Yet pirate parties can hardly be considered the political descendants of such “mock parties.” As for the core Pirate policies, the crucial issue in 2006 was the legalization of file sharing on the internet. Issues related to and forms of file sharing were the subject of a court case in Sweden involving the representatives of what was then still more of a Pirate initiative than a party. The Swedish Pirate Party (*Piratpartiet*) had its success – notably in the 2009 European elections, where it polled 7.1 per cent of the vote –, which was due not so much to its program as to the trial of its representatives (Frederiksson, 2015). The impacts of the trial and the example of the Swedish party were considerable in that they directly led to the foundation of a wider movement and other pirate parties – even if many of these tend not to contest elections (Almqvist, 2016a).

The pirates focused mainly on issues such as the protection of personal rights and opposition to strict intellectual property rights, but these were often found difficult to grasp or failed to mobilize electorates (such as issues concerned with threats to democracy). In terms of social and economic issues, there were considerable national specifics and differences among pirate parties, but this needs to be considered in the context of their post-materialist character (the German pirates, for instance, embraced left-wing economic and social positions more than others; Uszaki and Vicã, 2012; Charvát, 2015). Pirate parties tend strongly to emphasize the individual, and to overestimate the importance of the internet and its society-wide implications.

Linked with the issue of locating the pirates on a left-to-right axis is the unclear make-up of their electorates. The assumption is that these are primarily young voters (or first voters) from large cities with a higher level of education who embrace post-materialist values to some extent and use the internet extensively on a daily basis. The pirate parties’ profiles and characteristics tend to target this type

³ Another example is the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party. This student initiative unsuccessfully competed in two recent parliamentary elections. Embracing a form of satire and protest, it promised two sunrises a day, and lampooned Orbán’s nationalist policy (Case and Palattella, 2016; Hájek, 2018).

of voter – yet detailed information about this is often lacking or remains rather generic. The success of these parties, then, substantially depends on their ability to mobilize the younger electoral core – but these people tend to choose pirates on the basis of issue voting, and do not choose them *a priori* as a form of protest vote (Zulianello, 2017). Significant mistrust in politics in a country might favor the pirates, as long as they maintain their libertarian approaches (Otjes, 2019). Maškarinec (2017) argued that in the previous parliamentary Czech elections, the pirate voters were recruited from areas with substantial development potential that used to be the strongholds of right-wing parties (such as ODS) – this is somewhat surprising. Support for pirates varied substantially across regions – they did best in Prague and Central Bohemia, but were well behind in Moravia. In Germany, support was homogeneous across the country (Baldini and Bolgherini, 2016).

The pirate parties' efforts were largely unsuccessful, as best shown by the examples from Germany and Sweden, where they failed to penetrate the national level of politics. Attempts to broaden the appeal of their manifestos were not always met with understanding within the parties themselves, leading to conflicts. The parties met with limited success in the European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014. The German Pirate Party (*Piratenpartei Deutschland*) in particular failed to exploit the potential created by its successes in two states (Berlin and Saarland), or to capitalize on the NSA spying scandal (Almquist, 2016b; Baldini and Bolgherini, 2016).

In the Czech Republic, the Pirate Party has enjoyed much greater success.⁴ Whereas the Swedish and German pirates have likely gradually exhausted their potential, given the declining importance of their primary topic (internet regulation), the Czech Pirate Party scored a substantial success only several years later – and under circumstances very different from those of its establishment. The founding of the Pirate Party in Czechia is also linked with the judgment in the Swedish trial. In the Czech Republic, the computer programmer Jiří Kadeřávek took the initiative, and gradually an inner online circle formed on the website *Pirátské fórum* (issues discussed included the name, logo, and statutes of the future entity).

Although initially established as a movement, the Pirates did not remain so for long, as a preparatory committee was quickly formed under Kadeřávek's chairmanship and an online petition was set up to win popular support for the establishment of a political party. This was registered by the Ministry of the Interior on 17 June 2009. Thus the Czech Pirate Party (ČPS) was quickly formed at the national level, but building a territorial organization proceeded only gradually. Some aspects of the party's functioning continued to be rather *ad hoc* in character and bore the marks of a social-political movement rather than a political party (for example, its rudimentary structures, the prior existence of the *Pirátské fórum* as the

⁴ The Pirate Party (*Píratar*) in Iceland is an exception to this: it polled 14.48 per cent of the vote in 2016, and 9.20 per cent in 2017, and has six MPs as of early 2020 (i.e. about a tenth of the total). The party responded particularly well to the issue of corruption in politics and the corporate world (Almquist 2016b; Parties and Elections in Europe 2020).

communication platform, and the limited scope of issues on which the party sought to establish its profile). The online *Pirátské fórum* is one of the hallmarks of the party's identity, affording the option of using contemporary technology for mobilization purposes and for articulating political ideals (Lupa, 2009a; Ministerstvo vnitra, 2019; Almqvist, 2016; Frederiksson, 2015).

3. The Czech Pirate Party's internal formation, participation, and program

From the outset, the party endorsed a policy of reviewing intellectual property rights, support for civic freedoms (such as freedom of speech and access to information) and a democratic orientation (Pirátská strana, 2009b). However, for a long time its program was limited in character with just a few general aspects and essential points on which pirate parties had previously established their profiles. It focused solely on the key pirate priorities as far as the internet and copyright were concerned, with some emphasis on public administration reform and direct democracy. The program hampered the electorate's ability to identify with the party on the basis of concrete proposals or demands as it was silent about matters such as foreign policy or the party's socio-economic profile. The party contested the 2010 parliamentary elections with a similar manifesto, with added calls for greater transparency (Pirátská strana, 2019).

With this as background, the ČPS can hardly be considered a typical political party, at least in its early days. It established its overall political profile very gradually. Inspired by the Swedish example, the Czech party was established and gained support quickly, but regarding the party itself and its program, the creation of a coherent structure took time (Security Portal, 2009; Pirátská strana, 2010). The party only presented a complete program that demonstrated its positions clearly in all crucial policy areas in the run-up to the 2017 parliamentary elections; this manifesto did not avoid such matters as foreign policy, defense, and agriculture (Pirátská strana, 2017).

At the party's founding forum in June 2009, a representative of the preparatory committee, Kamil Horký, was elected the first chair. It is not surprising perhaps that a party which was very much focused on internet and networking issues initially elected an IT specialist to the leadership position. As soon as autumn 2009, Horký was replaced by Ivan Bartoš, who served as chair until 2014. He was then replaced for some time by Lukáš Černohorský. The party contested the 2017 election – in which it achieved its crucial success – under Ivan Bartoš again. Remarkably, the members of the first party presidium elected in June 2009 were aged 21–39 years (Ministerstvo vnitra, 2019; Lupa, 2009b).

Throughout its existence, membership of the party has been limited, and currently (early 2020) it has 1,008 members. There are no major official obstacles to membership; it seems that the Pirates are not interested in mass membership (Fórum pirátské strany, 2019). From the outset, the party permitted two main forms of participation: people could be either members or registered supporters (who were not full members, and whose votes were purely advisory – they could

not be elected to party offices). More recently, the party has introduced the option of suspending membership, an internal protective element for the functioning party (Pirátská strana, 2009b, Deník, 2019). Thus the party offers two levels of participation, with differing degrees of affiliation with the party.

As in the Swedish case, the party's internet forum offers another form of participation, allowing more informal involvement to members and non-members, as well as those interested in membership. This reflects the openness and transparency which form part of the Pirate Party's identity. The internet forum not only provides a communication platform, but through various polls and referendums across the country serves as a kind of virtual party congress⁵ (what they call *celostátní forum*, or country-wide forum; see Helios, 2019). Thanks to its nature, which makes it accessible practically all the time, the forum and the party do not disadvantage, for example, the more flexible members of the party, who can dedicate more time to engaging in party activities (as has been the case with the Green Party; see Kitschelt, 1989), but it clearly may benefit people who have a better command of modern technology (i.e. the younger generation). Recently, this relatively free platform has been criticized by some MPs, and as of 2020 it has included several discussions accessible only to party members (the 'virtual party congress') (Michalčák, 2018, Fórum pirátské strany, 2019)

Judging by its program and discourse, the Pirate Party can be described as a modern liberal party that defends post-material values, opposes corruption, and promotes a large measure of intraparty democracy, something that was typical of the pirate parties in Germany and Sweden (see Jääsaari and Hildén, 2015). As a party of the opposition, the Pirates are among the main critics of the current prime minister, Andrej Babiš. In its utterances and statements, the party focuses on political transparency, the personal responsibility of politicians, promoting e-government, support for small and medium-sized enterprises, and preventing tax avoidance and capital outflows from Czechia via firms owned by entities located abroad. The funding of local development and popular participation in decision-making are important points in the party's program. This was demonstrated by the party's activities in local politics in Brno, where they sponsored a participative budgeting project. This model, in which a part of the city budget is earmarked for projects citizens vote for – who thus decide the activities on which capital is expended –, has become integral to the Pirate Party's program.

To communicate, the Pirate Party uses the internet – not just the party website and various forums, but also Facebook and Twitter. This is entirely typical of pirate communications in other countries. A list of members, including their contributions to the discussions on the party's forums, alongside links to their personal websites, etc., is published on the internet.

⁵ A party body that meets in person once a year, but operates continuously online and is only accessible to party members. Thus it can be said to be in permanent session, deciding certain issues by polls, referendums, etc. (Michalčák, 2018).

The Freedom of Information Act, adopted in Czechia in 1999, is of cardinal importance to the pirates.⁶ They consider any restrictions on the exercise of the rights granted by the act as inadmissible, and are in favor of minimal or no regulation of the internet. For that reason, any surveillance of internet users, mobile communications, etc. is likewise unacceptable to the Pirate Party.

In 2010–2013, before the party entered parliament, it openly promoted cannabis legalization and advocated a reassessment of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs then in force (Pirátská strana, 2009a; Plesníková, 2016; Pirátská strana, 2013). In economic matters, the Pirates support the sharing economy (such as Airbnb) and reject increasing public debt. Like their counterparts in Germany, Czech Pirates call for increases in the minimum wage and the introduction of a minimum pension (Uszkai and Vicā, 2012). Their economic position overall is somewhat ambivalent, as is also the case with other pirate parties. The party's actual position on the Czech membership of NATO has long been subject to doubt and ambiguity (see Kopecký, 2017). Today, the Pirates essentially support membership without enthusiasm and they do not hesitate to criticize, in particular, the involvement of NATO forces outside their home countries (Pirátská strana, 2017b). The Pirates are a pro-European party, supporting EU membership, although they are particularly critical of the democratic deficit (see, for example, criticism of the way the current president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, was elected/selected) and of spending funds abroad (Pirátská strana, 2017a).

From the contemporary perspective, it is evident that the issue of copyright in particular has been pushed to the background to some extent to the benefit of new issues, such as transparency and e-government. The party is also being forced to take positions on economic issues. In this, it follows other pirate parties, which have likewise sought to broaden the scope of their programs (Jääsaari and Hildé, 2015; Almqvist, 2016b).

4. Entry into the electoral arena

Despite the Pirates' initial declaration that they aimed to achieve an 'intellectual shift in society' rather than become a party and fight elections, they were quick to change their position and contested the 2010 elections to the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber of Czech parliament; Idnes, 2009, Security Portal, 2009). This national strategy was twice unsuccessful, in 2010 and 2013, when the party polled 0.80 per cent and 2.66 per cent of the vote, respectively. The 2013 performance made the party eligible for state subsidies (Ministerstvo finance, 2013). This double failure moved the party to change its strategy: to orient itself towards elections at other levels of politics, and to establish a more solid base for itself in a bottom-up fashion. The party fared better in 2014 (4.78 per cent of the vote in the European elections, thus narrowly failing to cross the threshold) and in the subsequent local

⁶ The Freedom of Information Act, no. 106/1999 Coll. enables free access to information. It is a key law for Pirates and their pronounced aim of transparency of policy.

elections. Although not an overwhelming success, the Pirates won seats (not least thanks to electoral coalitions) primarily in the councils of the larger cities such as Brno, Hradec Králové, and Olomouc. In the 2016 regional elections, they won seats in Hradec Králové and, thanks to cooperation with the Green Party, also in South Moravia (Český statistický úřad, 2014; 2016). But it was the 2017 parliamentary elections that indicated a genuine breakthrough: the party took 10.79 per cent of the vote and 22 seats. Thus the Czech Pirate Party became only the second in the world to obtain fully-fledged representation at the national level. As the preceding description shows, this represented not an immediate success, but rather the gradual establishment of the party linked with its gains at lower levels and in so-called ‘second-order elections,’ alongside a gradual broadening of its program and profile to encompass matters that went beyond what are considered typical ‘pirate’ issues.

Table 1: Pirate Party votes and state subsidies

	%	Votes	Seats	State subsidies in €
2010	0.80	42,323	0	0
2013	2.66	132,417	0	520,000
2014 EP	4.78	72,514	0	85,000
2017	10.79	546,393	22	4,700,000 approx.
2019 EP	13.95	330,844	3	390,000

Source: www.volby.cz

The limited personnel of the party proved a significant handicap, and this was manifest, among other things, in its incomplete candidate lists for parliamentary elections, even though the Pirates contested the elections in all 14 regions. In 2010, the party only had 141 out of 343 possible candidates across electoral regions, and this placed limits on its potential success. Even in the 2017 elections, ČPS did not field all 343 possible candidates (volby.cz).

The make-up of the candidate lists for elections might suggest a lot about the character of the Pirate Party as an alternative for young people. In 2010, only 9.2 per cent of the candidates were aged 50+. Thus, representatives of the younger and middle-aged generations aged 21–49 entirely dominated the lists. A similar trend was repeated in 2013, when of the 192 total candidates, 125 were in the 21–34-year-old age bracket (i.e. 65 per cent), 48 (i.e. 25 per cent) in the middle-aged bracket of 35–49, and only 19 (i.e. 9.9 per cent) were 50+. In 2017, as the number of candidates increased, there was also a slight increase in the representation of older age groups on the Pirates’ candidate lists. Still, of the 338 candidates, 177 (i.e. 52.3 per cent) fell into the category 21–34 years, 107 (31.7 per cent) into the category of middle-aged (35–49 years), and only 54 (i.e. 16 per cent) were aged 50+. Overall, it is evident that the 50+ age bracket has long been underrepresented on the Pirate Party candidate lists. By contrast, younger and middle-aged candidates, especially those aged 21–34, clearly dominate. The older candidates tend to occupy unelectable, complementary positions on the lists (Český statistický úřad, 2010; 2013; 2017).

Beyond the elections to the Chamber of Deputies described here, local elections in early October 2018 posed another challenge to the party. These could be seen as a popularity test for the incumbent parties of the government – largely ANO and ČSSD, though the government is propped up by KSČM – and they fared badly. By contrast, increasing support for the opposition – ODS and the Pirates – was evident.

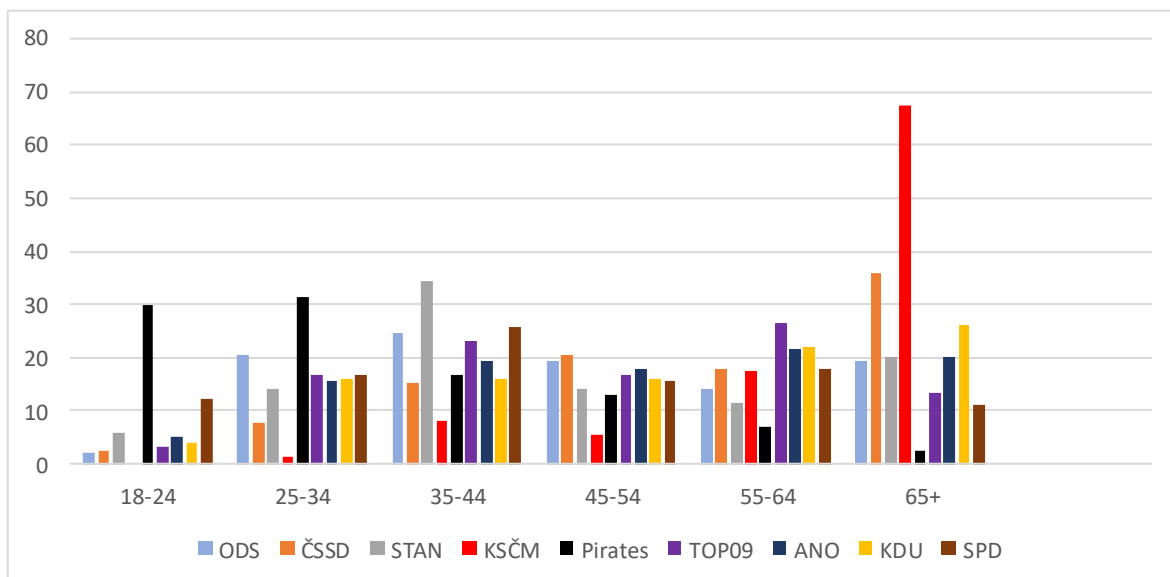
The 2018 local elections confirmed that large cities (Prague and Brno) constitute the Pirates' electoral core. Especially in Prague, leader Zdeněk Hřib did not hide his ambition to win the election. The polls differed in their predictions of the Pirate share of the vote, though they expected it to be highest in Prague. And so it was: the party placed second, taking more than 17 per cent of the vote. Less than one percentage point separated it from the victorious party, ODS (which polled 17.86 per cent of the vote). Thus winning 13 seats, the Pirates brokered a coalition with the liberal group of TOP 09, STAN, and KDU-ČSL, led by former justice minister and previously a popular ODS politician Jiří Pospíšil, and the local group Praha Sobě, led by a local politician, Jan Čížinský. The three partners had 13 seats each, thus commanding a majority of 13 seats in the 65-strong assembly (39 out of 65) and taking the office of the mayor, which was given to the Pirate leader Zdeněk Hřib. The Pirates are also represented in the executive body in Brno, where they have formed a coalition with KDU-ČSL, ČSSD and ODS.

Most recently, the Pirate Party received feedback from voters in the 2019 European Parliament elections, where they were placed third, polling a little less than 14 per cent of the vote and taking three seats. Thus the Pirates' representation in the EP is comparable to that of other Czech parties. At the time of writing (early 2020), pollsters indicate that the party are supported by over 10 per cent of voters, and in some months even more (STEM, CVVM, and Medián agencies). Thus, the party has repeatedly confirmed that it is attractive to voters; but what shifts there will be in its support in future is an open question.

5. *Pirate voters*

Who are the Pirate Party voters? Here we can refer to a study undertaken during the four weeks after the elections to the Chamber of Deputies and during local elections in Czechia's second-largest city, Brno. As Table 2 indicates, its voters are young – about half of them are under 35. With increasing age, their proportion decreases, and those aged over 55 constitute less than 10 per cent of the Pirate electorate. Compared with other parties, the Pirates are the exact opposite of the long-established parties, especially KSČM and ČSSD, and partially also of the government party ANO.

Table 2: Age of voters in 2017 (in %)



Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

According to Table 3, Pirate voters are largely satisfied with their everyday lives, although the greatest proportion – about one-third of the party’s electorate – felt ambivalent about this matter. The proportion of very dissatisfied Pirate voters, which might serve to distinguish opposition and anti-system parties on the fringes of the political spectrum, is low compared to most other parties. The share of very dissatisfied voters is particularly large in the electorates of the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) and Communist (KSČM) parties, which are considered extremist or anti-system – as such, the dissatisfaction of their voters could be expected.

Table 3: Personal satisfaction in 2017 (in %)

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Middle	Rather dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
ODS	2.0	16.0	30.0	33.0	19.0
ČSSD	2.5	21.0	32.1	32.1	12.3
STAN	0	17.6	29.4	35.3	14.7
KSČM	2.7	13.3	20.0	42.7	21.3
Pirates	2.9	30.1	34.6	25.0	7.4
TOP09	3.2	16.1	29.0	35.5	16.1
ANO	6.3	37.8	29.9	17.8	7.2
KDU	2.0	23.5	37.3	31.4	5.9
SPD	2.2	20.0	23.3	28.9	23.3

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

It is interesting to observe how sympathetic Pirate Party voters feel towards other parties. Immediately after the elections to the Chamber, the party took on an opposition role and in the two largest cities, Prague and Brno, formed coalitions with parties that were in opposition nationally, such as KDU-ČSL, ODS, TOP 09, and STAN. In Prague, the pirate mayor is supported by a local association led by an MP close to KDU-ČSL, Jan Čížinský. In Brno, the Pirates together with KDU-ČSL and ČSSD – the latter party is gradually being marginalized – support the ODS mayor.

We see that the Pirate electorate is very unsympathetic towards the Communist Party and the far-right populist SPD, STAN as well as towards the government Social Democrats and ANO. By contrast, closest to the pirates are the liberal TOP 09, as well as the conservative ODS. This is less true of another opposition party, KDU-ČSL, towards which the Pirate electorate are nevertheless more unsympathetic than sympathetic.

Table 4: Sympathies for other parties among Pirate Party voters in 2017 (in %)

	Very unsympathetic	Rather unsympathetic	Neither sympathetic nor unsympathetic	Rather sympathetic	Very sympathetic
ODS	11.0	27.0	17.0	33.0	7.0
ČSSD	30.9	42.0	8.6	13.6	1.2
STAN	28.6	25.7	5.7	31.5	2.9
KSČM	38.3	38.7	6.7	6.4	1.3
Pirates	0.7	1.4	2.2	24.2	71.3
TOP09	13.0	22.6	19.4	32.3	6.5
ANO	27.4	32.6	12.2	20.8	2.4
KDU	17.6	31.4	13.7	23.5	2.0
SPD	34.4	11.1	17.8	29.8	1.1

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

Table 5 shows when the Pirate electorate decided who to vote for. The party derives its legitimacy largely from voters who decided how to vote in the last few days before the elections. With the addition of those who made their decision in the few weeks before the elections, this accounts for more than 60 per cent of its electorate. The only comparable party – in terms of obtaining support from voters who decide at the last minute – is the local politician party, STAN. By contrast, the proportion of the electorate showing long-term support for the Pirates is the lowest of all parties in parliament. With traditional parties, such as ODS, ČSSD, and KSČM, the share of long-term supporters ranges from 54 to 81 per cent, and the share of first-time voters is much smaller.

Table 5: When voting decision was made (in %)

	Always un- changed	Long time ago	During last year	Several months ago	Several weeks ago	Several days ago	On polling day	Sympatie
ODS	30.0	24.0	6.0	14.0	11.0	11.0	4.0	7
ČSSD	35.8	33.3	6.2	8.6	1.2	9.9	4.9	1,2
STAN	2.9	8.6	5.7	17.1	22.9	34.3	8.6	2,9
KSČM	49.3	32.0	5.3	1.3	4.0	4.0	2.7	1,3
Pirates	1.5	9.5	8.0	17.5	26.3	30.7	5.8	71,3
TOP 09	29.0	16.1	16.1	12.9	16.1	6.5	3.2	6,5
ANO	8.2	35.3	18.3	15.0	9.8	10.8	2.6	2,4
KDU	47.1	21.6	5.9	7.8	3.9	11.8	2.0	2,0
SPD	5.6	20.0	13.3	33.3	10.0	13.3	3.3	1,1

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

A distinctive characteristic of the Pirate electorate was the large proportion of those who voted for the first time in 2017, or had not voted in the previous elections of the same type. The proportion of first-time voters is much greater than for any other party, as nearly 20 per cent of the voters in 2017 could not vote in the previous elections due to their young age, thus confirming the very young character of the Pirate electorate. Further, nearly 30 per cent were voters who did not participate in the previous elections. Thus, the candidate lists of the Pirates brought those who do not regularly vote to the polling booths, and this was the resource from which the party derived a substantial proportion of its electoral support in 2017. The only other party able to draw on this resource in a comparable manner in 2017 was SPD, with 24.4 per cent.

Table 6: Participation in the 2013 parliamentary election (in %)

	Yes	No	No – I was younger than 18
ODS	84.0	13.0	0.0
ČSSD	87.7	9.9	1.2
STAN	71.4	20.0	5.7
KSČM	92.0	5.3	0.0
Pirates	48.2	28.5	19.0
TOP09	80.6	16.1	3.2
ANO	82.0	13.4	1.6
KDU	92.2	3.9	2.0
SPD	60.0	24.4	7.8

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

Table 7 gives us a better idea of where voters for the Pirate Party came from. We know from Table 6 that nearly half of them were recruited from among previous non-voters. In Table 7 it is apparent that, in smaller measure, Pirate supporters had previously voted for the Social Democrats, TOP 09, ODS, or KDU-ČSL. Compared to other parties such as KSČM, ČSSD, and KDU-ČSL, the Pirates' electorate was more heterogeneous.

Table 7: Electoral swing between 2013 and 2017 parliamentary elections (in %)

2017/2013	ODS	ČSSD	KSČM	Pirates	TOP09	ANO	KDU	SPD (Dawn)
ODS	68.7	4.8	0.0	0.0	12.0	3.6	2.4	0.0
ČSSD	0.0	98.6	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
STAN	12.5	12.5	8.3	4.2	20.8	4.2	12.5	0.0
KSČM	0.0	4.4	88.2	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0
Pirates	7.8	15.6	1.6	15.6	9.4	2.3	4.7	1.6
TOP09	8.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	72.0	12.0	0.0	0.0
ANO	2.9	24.1	2.0	1.2	2.9	58.4	0.4	0.4
KDU	0.0	8.5	0.0	0.0	6.4	0.0	80.9	0.0
SPD	11.3	17.0	7.5	0.0	0.0	22.6	5.7	20.8

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

A frequent topic of campaigning is the conviction, widespread among the electorate, that politicians are corrupt. The emergent political parties in 2010 and 2013, such as Public Affairs and ANO, built their campaigns on criticizing corruption among the ruling elites (Gregor, 2019). Similarly, those who voted for the Pirates were largely (85 per cent) convinced that corruption was ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ widespread – this is in line with the opinions of the electorates of other parties. Interestingly, voters of the incumbent government parties were even more convinced that corruption in politics was widespread. Despite their younger age, the Pirate voters were not very different in this respect from the general population, and thus it cannot be argued, despite the party’s emphasis on transparency, as it has not succeeded in owning this issue, or made it particularly salient. What is more, the issue of corruption was present in earlier elections: if in 2013 it helped ANO to win votes, in 2017 it might have helped the Pirates.

Table 8: How common is corruption among politicians according to voters (in %)

	Very widespread	Fairly widespread	Not very widespread	Nearly absent
ODS	28.3	52.5	9.1	2.0
ČSSD	34.6	54.3	7.4	0.0
STAN	20.0	60.0	8.6	0.0
KSČM	45.3	44.0	4.0	1.3
Pirates	32.4	52.9	7.4	0.7
TOP09	25.8	51.6	12.9	0.0
ANO	31.6	53.6	10.9	0.0
KDU	23.5	58.8	17.6	0.0
SPD	52.3	36.4	4.5	0.0

Source: Institute of Sociology 2017

During most of the second half of the twentieth century, a non-democratic regime ruled in Czechoslovakia, and the positions of the electorate towards democracy

and authoritarianism are repeatedly ascertained by polls. Tables 9 and 10 show that most Pirate voters considered democracy the best form of government; somewhat greater support for the claim was found among the supporters of the liberal TOP 09 and conservative ODS. By contrast, voters for the Communist Party were not among those who considered democracy the best form of government. These positions are investigated further in Table 10, which details what proportions of the electorate found non-democratic regimes to be more acceptable in some circumstances. Pirate Party voters were certainly not among those people who opposed the current political system; rather, they tended to think that liberal democracy was the best option.

Table 9. Democracy is the best form of government (in %)

	Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
ODS	55.6	31.3	11.1	1.0	0.0
ČSSD	27.2	44.4	19.8	4.9	1.2
STAN	26.5	55.9	14.7	2.9	0.0
KSČM	12.0	30.7	34.7	12.0	2.7
Pirates	43.3	36.6	14.9	0.7	0.7
TOP09	67.7	22.6	9.7	0.0	0.0
ANO	36.7	39.3	14.8	3.6	2.3
KDU	41.2	33.3	19.6	2.0	0.0
SPD	24.0	32.0	16.0	9.0	2.0

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

What is shown very clearly is the position of the Communist Party voters, who were the least critical of a non-democratic regime, with nearly half of them admitting that under certain circumstances an authoritarian or other non-democratic form of government might be better, and nearly 19 per cent of them claiming that they did not care what kind of regime was in power. Going back to the Pirates, the electorates of KDU-ČSL, TOP 09, STAN, and ODS exhibited a similar or greater proportion of those believing that democracy was the best form of government. Is the Czech Pirate Party critical of liberal democracy? The data suggest that their voters certainly are not. Despite their young age, as a group they were the second most likely (after TOP09 voters) to endorse democracy most strongly as the best form of government. Thus, they are not radical in this sense, and this may have important implications for the system in the future.

Table 10: Democracy and the form of government (in %)

	Democracy is a system of government that is better than any other system	In some circumstances, authoritarianism or another non-democratic regime is better than democracy	For people like me, it doesn't matter what government regime there is
ODS	82.0	10.0	5.0
ČSSD	58.0	19.8	13.6
STAN	73.5	17.6	5.9
KSČM	25.3	48.0	18.7
Pirates	76.1	11.9	8.2
TOP09	83.9	16.1	0.0
ANO	64.6	18.4	11.5
KDU	70.6	5.9	15.7
SPD	56.7	21.1	16.7

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

The size of town from which parties recruited their voters is a variable that is worthy of note. Data suggest that the Pirate Party's electoral base was spread relatively uniformly across all settlement sizes and there was no clearly identifiable rural/urban divide with this party. Support for the German Pirate Party was similarly uniform during the elections to the Bundestag in 2013 (Baldini and Bolgherini, 2016). The Czech Pirates' support in smaller settlements (of up to 1999 inhabitants) was largely due to the make-up of the municipalities in the Central Bohemia region, which are immediately adjacent to the capital – an area where the party is popular. It is less popular in similarly-sized municipalities such as the Moravia-Silesia region.

Table 11: Settlement size

	Fewer than 799 inhabitants	800–1,999	2,000–4,999	5,000–14,999	15,000–29,999	30,000–79,999	80,000–999,999	1 million and more
ODS	6.0	11.0	7.0	10.0	17.0	17.0	10.0	22.0
ČSSD	6.2	17.3	4.9	13.6	18.5	13.6	13.6	12.3
STAN	17.1	14.3	11.4	20.0	5.7	11.4	20.0	0.0
KSČM	8.0	14.7	5.3	18.7	17.3	17.3	13.3	5.3
Pirates	13.1	11.7	8.0	16.8	10.9	12.4	12.4	14.4
TOP09	6.5	16.1	16.1	3.2	3.2	9.7	19.4	25.8
ANO	8.5	12.7	10.8	11.4	17.6	15.0	11.8	12.1
KDU	13.7	17.6	5.9	13.7	7.8	5.9	19.6	15.7
SPD	6.7	11.1	11.1	18.9	15.6	16.7	11.1	8.9

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

Given the relatively young age of Pirate Party voters, as noted above, we investigated their marital status. In a comparison of voters of all parties represented in the lower chamber of the Czech parliament, single voters were clearly dominant in the Pirate electorate, accounting for more than 60 per cent. The second-highest proportion of single voters was in the electorate of the far-right SPD, while TOP09 took third place with about a quarter of its electorate in this category. The share of the widowed was minimal among Pirate Party voters, and the proportion of those divorced much smaller than in the electorates of other parties.

Table 12: Marital status (in %)

	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed
ODS	19.0	55.0	19.0	7.0
ČSSD	14.8	54.3	14.8	16.0
STAN	22.9	62.9	14.3	0.0
KSČM	5.3	42.7	17.3	34.7
Pirates	60.6	29.2	8.8	1.5
TOP09	25.8	51.6	19.4	3.2
ANO	21.0	55.1	15.1	8.9
KDU	17.6	58.8	9.8	13.7
SPD	37.5	37.5	20.5	4.5

Source: Institute of Sociology, 2017

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, let us ask: who are the Pirates, the new Czech political party, and what new information have we learned from their activities in politics? The Pirate Party has been successful in appealing to young voters, especially first-time voters and previous non-voters. Its success is due to a number of circumstances, which the party has been able to exploit well. First of all, its emphasis on modern communications is made possible by information technologies. The party also capitalized on the mood in society at a time when restrictions on the internet were under protest, and, thanks to state funding for political parties, obtained money to finance its campaign for the 2017 parliamentary elections. The party found a way of appealing to young people – half of its electorate was under 35 and had made their voting decision in the days or weeks before the elections. The party did not enter into a coalition immediately after the elections, taking an opposition role in relation to other parties that its voters mostly found sympathetic. Members of its electorate are clearly supporters of a liberal-democratic regime, which they consider the best form of government.

Since 2017, the party has established a distinctive opposition profile, and does not hesitate to criticize the prime minister, Andrej Babiš. The Pirates highlight that the prime minister is being investigated for EU subsidy misuse for private gain; the party has refrained from supporting the PM on a number of measures and does not curry favor with President Miloš Zeman. All of this

increases its popularity with the young generation, who do not support the current elite. The position of the Pirate Party is aptly summed up in their slogan ‘We shall not support a government that threatens the foundations of liberal democracy, and relies on the votes of KSČM or SPD.’ For this reason, it is among the more electorally successful parties in large university cities with a greater concentration of young electorate, such as Prague and Brno. In such places the government coalition finds it harder to build any legitimacy, and this is one of the reasons why the Pirates were successful in appealing to ‘metropolitan liberals’ and winning enough votes to obtain representation in the lower chamber of the Czech parliament. Ahead of the 2017 elections, the Pirates were a good alternative for the former voters: they were no extremist party, and they had a presence in popular awareness as they had been involved in the political system for some time. Of course, they had the advantage of being relatively fresh and a protest party; they capitalized on the disappointment created by incumbent parties; they had no problematic past; and their manifesto, with its emphasis on digitalization and marijuana legalization and a novel style, was intelligible to the young generation. Despite this, they were able to create a professional appearance, and did not look like a random, incoherent grouping. The party’s leading figures and candidates were largely young people – the leader was 36 years old at the time of his election to parliament – and this corresponded to the young age of its electorate. Considering how many people decided to vote for the Pirates at the last minute, the timing of their campaign was probably propitious. They were able to present themselves as a convincing liberal alternative in time for the 2017 national elections, compared to more conservative parties on the right such as ODS, TOP 09, and KDU.

The results of the upcoming elections will tell us more about the future of the Pirate Party, indicating whether the results of 2017 represented just a short-term swing in electoral support in a more modern direction, or whether the Pirates will find a permanent place for themselves in Czech politics.

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