

Independent Candidates in the Local Elections of 2014 in the Czech Republic and Slovakia: Analysis of Determinants of Their Successfulness

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ABSTRACT The goal of this article is to test various factors which can potentially explain differences in independents' representation at the local level in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. As the size of a municipality was the almost single factor, whose influence was in both countries at the same direction, together with the generally rather low levels of explained variability, we suggest that for a more adequate explanation of the independents' successfulness, we need to look for other indicators that could far better than the usual socio-demographic variables characterize the form of political competition in the specific municipalities, particularly in those which are associated with a specific political culture or other indicators of similar type, which can be difficult to abstract from aggregate data and their use would require the implementation of specific research on the local level.

KEYWORDS: • local elections • independent candidates • Czech Republic • Slovakia

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1 Introduction

Independent candidacy became a popular research issue in the recent years. For instance, Bolleyer & Weeks (2009) show that the choice of organizational independence over party affiliation represents a reaction to incentives inherent in the electoral, parliamentary and governmental stages that can disfavour party as the most efficient vehicle for individual goal attainment. If one looks at the local level, phenomenon of independent candidacy is rather common than rare not only in the European countries (e.g. Aars & Ringkjøb, 2005; Reiser & Holtmann, 2008) but also in some other parts of the world (e.g. Ndletyana, 2007). Obviously, the topic is not a new one (e.g. Grant, 1973), but, on the other hand, there has not been any systematic research of internationally comparative nature in this field. For these reasons, we need a more comprehensive perspective on the topic in order to develop and test hypotheses about how different factors can potentially explain differences in independent's representation at the local level. Our intention is to contribute to an academic discussion on the phenomenon of independent candidates in local politics and to partly fill in the missing research gap. We have decided to compare successfulness of the independent candidates in the 2014 local elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, thus expand our understanding of the determinants of independents' political representation in Czech and Slovak local councils.

2 Independent (non partisan) element in local politics: research and theory

One can find independent candidates at the national and international levels of politics (e.g. Ehin & Solvak, 2012), however, phenomenon of independent (non-partisan) element in local politics is considered more natural (e.g. Copus et al., 2009). Nevertheless, speaking on independents in local politics in Europe one should not expect any homogeneous picture. It is possible to find numerous country studies (e.g. Costar & Curtin, 2004; Bolleyer & Weeks, 2009; Boogers & Voerman, 2010; Kjær & Elklit, 2010; Gendźwiłł, 2012; Gendźwiłł & Żółtak, 2014) which are focused on situation or development in individual countries. Similarly, interesting comparative research results were collected, for instance, by Reiser & Holtmann (2008) who edited a collection of country studies aimed at the independent local lists in several Western and Eastern European countries. These country studies conclusively showed a colourful picture of use of independent local lists in various European countries.

Generally, it is possible to distinguish three groups of countries in terms of success of independent candidates in local politics. The first group consists of those countries where independent candidates have never been relevant actors in local politics. A classic example of such countries is Sweden, where legal provisions strictly limit activities of independents. Speaking on Sweden, all lists in the local

elections must be headed by a party name, and it is not possible to run for election as an independent candidate. Instead, local parties are formed around specific issues or candidates (Lidström, 2010). The second group includes the countries, where the independents were not very successful in the past, but their electoral importance was increasing recently. For instance, Haček (2010) pointed out that the independent candidates and non-partisan lists have been gaining increasing support in the local elections in Slovenia since the early 1990s, and they are much stronger actors nowadays than two decades ago. A similar development can be found also in Slovakia (Klimovský & Žúborová, 2011). In the third group, there are countries where the independents have dominated for long term. In this case one can mention for instance the Czech Republic, since non-institutionalized independent associations completely prevail in the politics of the Czech countryside (Jüptner, 2008: 36; Balík et al., 2015: 139–142) where the majority of the Czech municipalities are located.

Based on a statistical analysis of 34 countries around the world between 1945 and 2003, Brancati (2008) stressed that electoral systems influence the electoral strength of independent candidates by defining the opportunities for independents to compete for office (i.e., ballot access requirements), the degree to which politics is candidate centered versus partisan driven (i.e., majority/plurality rule, district magnitude, open-list PR, and democratic transitions), and the extent to which small vote getters win seats (i.e., district size and electoral thresholds).

Furthermore, Birch (2010) analyzed aggregate-level data from 31 countries and pointed out that the voters prefer the electoral integrity of candidates and some kind of electoral predictability. This kind of predictability is linked to clear political affiliation. In addition, such voters' approach is positively associated with their propensity to vote. In addition, when candidature for political office is announced by a representative of a particular political party, a low cost signal containing especially personality traits and policy position is supplied to the voters (Jones & Hudson, 1998: 176). Similarly, Wittman (1989) stressed that the political parties and their activities lead to significant reduction of information acquisition to the voters, and basically it has two effects: 1) voters do not need to be familiar with the qualities of the candidates, since they trust in the parties; and 2) parties' activities in the field of political communication enhance voter turnout. This statement is confirmed by some other authors, too. For instance, according to Aars & Ringkjøb (2005), the turnout in the 1990s and the 2000s Norwegian local elections were the highest in municipalities with non-partisan alternatives, regardless of the population size of municipalities in contrast to the 1960s and the 1970s. On this matter it is possible to assume that non-partisan lists have a stronger mobilizing potential nowadays than they did in the past in Norway.

However, the settlement structure (number and size of municipalities) is extremely important, as the municipality size has been considered as one of the key variables affecting the form of local politics, at least since 1973 when Dahl and Tufte published their seminal work, *Size and Democracy*, analysing the relationship between the size of political units and characteristics of their administration. Dahl and Tufte analysed the relationship between the size of the units and party systems and noted that one of the most important factors through which size of political units affects the degree of fragmentation of the party system is diversity. While smaller units are homogeneous (with respect to the opinions, attitudes and goals of their population), increasing size of units increases their diversity (Dahl & Tufte, 1973: 13-14), and there is permanent and obvious differences in political views, interests and requirements (Dahl & Tufte, 1973: 91). This is manifested in increase of organizational diversity and complexity of a wide range of organizations and institutions that produce a higher level of specialization and complexity, and are expected to increase attitudinal diversity (Dahl & Tufte, 1973: 30-40).

Diversity of party competition (e.g. the number of candidates' entities or proportion of the votes for the biggest party) is also associated with increasing urbanization, scope of specialization, differentiation of labour, social differentiation and other factors (Dahl & Tufte, 1973: 100-102). Political diversity thus acts as an intervening variable influencing, along with the size of the monitored units form of political competition. Dahl and Tufte's conclusions were subsequently verified by Anckar (2000), who confirmed the following general rule: the larger the municipality the higher the political fragmentation. A significant role of size was also confirmed by Newton (1982), who showed that in larger cities we can expect not only the existence of political parties but also a developed and competitive party system (Newton, 1982: 201).

Party politicization of local politics might be described as a diffusion of nationally established cleavage structures down to the local level (Aars & Ringkjøb 2005: 161). On the contrary, Bolleyer & Weeks (2009) showed that the choice of organizational independence over party affiliation represents a reaction to incentives inherent in the electoral, parliamentary and governmental stages that can disfavour party as the most efficient vehicle for individual goal attainment. Within this context Aars & Ringkjøb (2005) analyzed time series data from Norwegian local elections, and their focused themselves on the party politicization process in the local electoral arena. Although their research results confirmed a long-term domination of the national parties in Norwegian local politics, non-partisan lists appear successful, and during the time span they investigated, the non-partisan lists obtained mandates in the majority of the municipalities where they stood for election.

If we return to the Czech and Slovak context, the first thing that must be mentioned is the fact, that although these two countries had shared common

history for a very long time, they introduced significantly different democratic local government systems in 1990, including electoral regulations, and nowadays, as stated by Swianiewicz (2014), they represent different groups of local government systems.

For example, Czech local councillors are elected by proportional electoral system using D'Hondt method, 5% threshold (since 2001) and free list (until 2001, the seats in local councils were assigned by a proportional system using the Sainte-Laguë method without the use of any threshold) and the number of elected councillors ranging from 5 to 70, according to municipality size, population. In contrast, in Slovakia the local councillors are elected under the rule of unlimited vote according to the simple majority rule (in multi-member districts), where voters cast votes for individual candidates, rather than political parties (i.e. electoral system where voters have as many votes as there are seats to be filled, and the highest-polling candidate fill the positions regardless of the percentage of the votes they achieve) and number of elected councillors ranging from 3 to 45.

Considerable unity on the above mentioned conclusion that the degree of politicization of local political systems affects the municipality size exists also in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This finding previously verified the amount of work that analyzed the relation between the municipality size and, for example: a) voter turnout (Klimovský & Žuborová, 2011; Ryšavý & Bernard, 2013; Kostecký & Krivý, 2015); b) the success of an association of independent candidates and their coalitions (Jüptner, 2008); c) the emergence of and form of municipal coalitions (Jüptner, 2004); or, d) local party system nationalisation (Maškarinec, 2015).

Finally, according to other authors, the nature of this relationship should be subject to further examination. The question raises primarily of whether the reality is closer to the model of linear association (the bigger the community, the higher the degree of politicization) or model of two different types of policies, among which there is not a smooth transition (Ryšavý, 2006: 967). While the Czech local elections in smaller (and partly in medium-sized) municipalities are dominated by the phenomenon of independent candidates, with increasing municipal size proportionally increasing the role of political parties, which manifests itself most clearly in the case of statutory towns where political parties dominate the electoral contest (Balík, 2009; Klimovský & Žuborová, 2011). On the other hand, even at this level it is not uncommon success of various non-parliamentary parties (cf. Šaradin, 2004: 112-117).

Different level of politicization of local political systems in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is possible to demonstrate on successfulness of the independent candidates in local elections in general and in the district municipalities,

specifically. As we can see in Appendix 1, there is in both countries almost steady increase in the number of mandates won by independents since the first local elections in 1994 to the present. However, while percentage of independents mandates in all municipalities reaches almost 70% in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia only 28.91%. In contrast, while independents' successfulness in district municipalities was for a long time significantly lower, especially in the Czech Republic (about 10%), the major change was associated with last two local elections, when the share of independents mandates reached 22.36% in Czech, or 42.45% in Slovak district municipalities.

3 Data and methods

Before the start of an analysis, two important facts must be mentioned. First, the settlement and municipal structures in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia are extremely fragmented. For instance, at present, settlements with less than 1,000 inhabitants comprise more than 77% of the total number of Czech 6,253 municipalities, but only approximately 17% of the total population of the Czech Republic (CZSO, 2012). The same statement is valid for Slovakia, too. The same settlement category accounts for more than 67% of the total of 2,890 Slovak municipalities, but only 16% of the total of population of Slovakia (Csachová and Nestorová-Dická, 2011). So, due to mentioned extreme diversity of Czech and Slovak municipalities, we have decided to focus our analysis on results of the local elections in district municipalities only (72 in Czech case, or 71 in Slovak case, respectively); districts were spatial units corresponding with the level of NUTS 4/LAU 1. Second, while in the case of Slovakia we work with "real" independent candidates as individuals, in the case of the Czech Republic prevail in our sample so-called institutionalised independent local lists, which is according to Jüptner (2008) possible to differentiate into three groups: a) local municipal parties; b) general municipal parties; c) regional parties. In contrast, independent candidates as individuals – non-institutionalised lists according to Jüptner's (2008) classification – have in our group of cities only very limited success, as they are rooted almost exclusively in the small Czech municipalities.

The main advantage of this choice lies in comparability between the selected units: in both countries we deal with almost all towns with population over 10,000. This sample is sufficient for quantitative methods utilization; and it covers significant parts of country populations – approximately one half (42.74% in the Czech case and 45.73% in the Slovak case).

Another important advantage when working with district municipalities is associated with above mentioned different levels of politicization of local political systems in both countries. While elections in small and partly even in medium-sized municipalities are dominated by independent candidates, the role of political (especially parliamentary) parties increases with municipality size; the bigger

towns or cities are then considered as an important political arena from the perspectives of political parties, and therefore the independent candidates are more likely to compete with the party candidates. On the other hand, electoral competition in the smallest municipalities is almost exclusively limited to independent candidates, and in many cases there is actually no electoral competition at all as there is only one list (Ryšavý & Bernard, 2013: 836-838).

Another problem connected to independents local lists analysis lies in the choice of the independent variables, which is largely limited by the fact that research on this topic (i.e. an analysis of the determinants of successfulness of independent candidates) is relatively unexplored. It is therefore very difficult to define the independent variables on a theoretical basis, and therefore our work is more exploratory in nature, except for the municipality size factor, whose independent effect on many aspects of the local political process was mentioned in the introductory part of the text. Certain restrictions which determined the choice of independent variables was also the availability of data at the level of aggregation.

In view of the foregoing, and the fact that our aim is to control the influence of the municipality size, we choose those independent variables that should characterize both the structure of the population of the municipality and the local social context (social climate); i.e. variable which are characteristic for two basic theoretical approaches used for instance in spatial analysis of voting behaviour – composite and contextual approach (cf. Kostecký & Čermák, 2004: 469-472). Furthermore, Kostecký (1995: 62-64) emphasizes the usefulness of combinations of both approaches, and noted that when working with aggregated data, the composite and contextual type of explanation can not be consistently distinguished because the nature of aggregated data precludes an accurate determination of which of the two approaches is closer to the truth. As such, the choice of the independent variables is to a large extent based on so-called sociological model, which, in explaining the decision of voters in an election, focuses on the analysis of voting behaviour of objectively identifiable social groups, i.e. groups that appear between long-term structuring effects.

The final set of independent variables then includes municipal size and other variables that describe the differences in structure of the population, settlement and economic structure of each municipality, when we use variables, which in the past proved to be significant determinants of voting behaviour in the Czech Republic and Slovakia at the national level (e.g. Krivý, 1996; Lebeda et al., 2006; Szöllös, 2006; Hloušek & Kopeček, 2008; Linek, 2010; Plešivčák, 2011; Madleňák, 2012; Linek & Lyons, 2013), as there are no comprehensive research of the determinants of voters behaviour at the local level in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The data set of socioeconomic indicators (Table 1) for 72, or 71 monitored units was compiled from two basic sources: the decennial population censuses of 2011, and other Czech and Slovak Statistical Offices statistics. The basic independent variable is the municipality size. Given that the monitored data set contains several municipalities whose populations greatly exceed the remaining municipalities, the logarithm to the number of inhabitants is used as a measure of the size of municipality. In an effort to control the influence of the largest cities, the dichotomous variable county seat (or regional capital) will also be used; variable dividing municipalities into two groups: county seat (1) and all the rest municipalities (value 0).

Socioeconomic status as one of the main sources of structural cleavage of Czech and Slovak politics is expressed as unemployment (proportion of the unemployed population) and the number of self-employed per 1,000 inhabitants. The other independent variables represent the most common bases of stratification: The higher education (proportion of people with tertiary education), retirement (proportion of the population aged 65 and over), Catholicism (proportion of the Roman Catholics), to which we add two variables, which may partly (but certainly not entirely) to characterize the influence of local political culture: turnout (proportion of voters participating in local elections) and competitiveness (proportion of the number of candidates to the number of seats in a particular municipality).

Most Czech and Slovak studies had confirmed a significant impact of municipality size on turnout, although this relationship is not completely linear (Kostecký, 2005; Balík, 2008; Kostecký & Krivý, 2015). For this reason, the turnout is possible regarded as one of the indicators of civic participation in local politics. For instance, Ryšavý & Šaradín (2011: 31) argue that it cannot be ruled out that voter turnout, as well as competitiveness, are common manifestations of local political participation relating to the overall climate in the municipality and the level of its civic development.

Similarly, other authors (Jančák et al., 2008) argue that voter turnout is (in local elections) a fundamental indicator of social capital, and when working with aggregated data at the local level, it is one of a few such indicators available. The use of both indicators also enables fact that a positive correlation between competitiveness and voter turnout in Czech municipalities was neither linear nor too strong (Ryšavý & Bernard, 2013: 839–841).

The remaining factors should control the influence of cultural factors which are associated with political history. Important to the Slovak context is the presence of Hungarians as the most populous minority, accounting for approximately 8.5% of Slovakia's total population. As stressed by Bakoš et al. (2015), present local politics and institutional settings of local government in the Czech Republic and

Slovakia have their clear roots in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; while the Czech case contains several elements of 'Austrian heritage', the Slovak environment is linked to 'Hungarian heritage'. In general, Hungarian politics was historically more political party-oriented and it may therefore be assumed that the proportion of independent councillors will be smaller in municipalities with a sizable Hungarian minority.

There is no national minority in the Czech Republic as numerous as Hungarians in Slovakia. For that reasons we use as proxy the dichotomous variable Moravia, which divides the territory of the Czech Republic in Bohemia (value 1) and Moravia and Silesia (value 0), as for instance Kouba (2007: 1021) is expecting (although it was not subsequently confirmed) different electoral behaviour of Moravian voters due to the different historical development of Moravia and considerable politicization of Moravian identity through Moravian parties in the first half of the 1990s.

Finally, it has been already proven that although men tend to prefer institutionalized forms of participation, women prefer rather non-institutionalized forms of participation (Hooghe & Quintelier, 2014). In other words, one may expect that women in politics would prefer rather independent (non-party) candidacy. However, there are other opinions, too. For instance, an interesting statement was formulated by Johansson (2006) who stressed that parties had been more important for selection, career and action of female politicians (Johansson, 2006: 113). Concerning the Czech Republic and Slovakia, a population size of the municipality seems to be an important differentiating factor affecting the success of women in local elections. There is a negative correlation between population size of municipality and success of female candidates in the local elections in Slovakia (Filadelfiová et al., 2000: 54–56). Similar situation is also in the Czech Republic, however, the capital, Prague, is a notable exception, since the political representation of women is closer to the countrywide average there (Šprincová, 2014). Taking into account the facts that both independent candidates and female candidates are more successful in smaller municipalities and less successful in larger ones (for contrary results with regard to women's representation, see Bullock and MacManus, 1991; Smith et al., 2012; Maškarinec, 2016), we assume that a proportion of successful female candidates will be positively associated with a proportion of successful independent candidates.

Table 1: List of independent variables

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Description</i>
Population size (log)	The logarithm to the number of inhabitants
County seats	Dichotomous variable dividing Czech and Slovak municipalities into county seats (value 1) and all the rest municipalities (value 0)
Unemployment	So-called registered unemployment rate (proportion of the number of job seekers and the number of economically active population)
Self-employment	Number of self-employed persons per 1,000 inhabitants
Education	Share of college graduates in the population aged 15+
Age structure	Share of persons aged 65+ in the population
Catholicism	Share of the Roman Catholics in the population
Moravia	Dichotomous variable dividing the territory of the Czech Republic into Bohemia (value 0) and Moravia or Silesia (value 1), based on territorial jurisdiction of courts in pre-war Czechoslovakia
Hungarians	Share of the Hungarians in the population
Turnout	Share of voters (those who have been issued an official envelope) and registered voters (persons listed in the electoral rolls)
Female representation	Share of female local councillors
Competitiveness	Share of the number of candidates to the number of seats in a particular municipality

The Enter method of multiple linear regression (ordinary least squares) was implemented, which was preceded the tests of multicollinearity between independent variables. To avoid problems with multicollinearity, we excluded from the analysis variables with high levels of correlation (e.g., the self-employment variable was strongly associated with the unemployment variable; or turnout, competitiveness, education or county seats variable were strongly associated with the population size (log) variable). Subsequently, multicollinearity in the regression model was tested using the tolerance statistic and the variance inflation factor (VIF).

The results of each regression model are indicated by basic parameters, namely unstandardized regression coefficients (B; measuring the effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable when controlled for all other variables, it tells us how much the dependent variable changes per unit change in the independent variable), standardized regression coefficients (Beta; measuring the weight of each independent variable in the model), and adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted R-squared; measuring the overall performance of the model in explaining variance in the dependent variable).

4 Analysis of results

The empirical results presented in Table 2 show that chosen variables do not explain independents' representation in local councils consistently across models for both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Furthermore, regression models assessing the effects of our independent variables on the presence of independent councillors in Czech and Slovak local councils were not very successful, especially in Czech case. In the Czech Republic, regression model explained 15% of detected variance, while in Slovakia the model was slightly more successful accounted for 34% of the detected variance.

Let us start with models, which regresses the proportion of local council seats held by independent local lists in the Czech Republic on our set of independent variables. First finding shows that a very strong negative and significant correlation exists between municipal size and the successfulness of independent local list in the Czech Republic. Our results thus confirm, that despite the gradual increase in the success of independent local lists in (some) larger cities (especially above mentioned county seats), political competition in Czech local elections is in urban environment still dominated by nationwide (almost mainly parliamentary) political parties. We thus can expect, as it was partially confirmed in previous studies (Maškarinec, 2015) that with the increasing size of the municipalities, the nationalization of Czech local party systems increases and nationally established cleavage structures diffuse down to the local level.

Second, in terms of socioeconomic and demographic variables, we found a positive (although non-significant) correlation between unemployment and age structure (share of persons aged 65+) and independent local lists presence in local councils. This finding counters our expectation, as we expected that especially in municipalities with older population, the tendency to choose more traditional (parliamentary) parties prevail. Similarly, we expect that tendency to vote for non-parliamentary (local lists) alternative will be lower between unemployed populations, thus contrary to our findings.

Contrary to socioeconomic and demographic variables, direction of relationship between cultural factors and dependent variable was in line with expectations, as we found a coherent (although again non-significant) relationship for the Catholicism and Moravia. The independent local list successfulness is lower in municipalities with more Catholicism dominated culture, and similarly lower in Moravian cities; for instance, Moravian cities granted the independents an average margin of 9.62% less seats than the rest of the country. In this context, we can conclude, that the more predominant Catholicism is in a culture of specific municipality, the more willingness to vote traditional parliamentary parties at the expense of independent candidates. As the Catholicism is in the Czech context

predominantly Moravian phenomenon, it is not surprise that Moravia variable works in a similar direction as Catholicism. At the same time, these two variables are partly complemented by the age structure variable, as it can be expected that a higher incidence of Catholicism is (at least partially) associated with higher age structure of specific municipalities' population.

Finally, we confirmed that more favourable environment for independent local lists are in the Czech municipalities, which, at the same time, are more favourable for women representation in local councils. This finding thus confirmed that also in the Czech Republic is possible to prove that women prefer rather non-institutionalized (non-party) forms of participation.

Table 2: Independent local lists' representation in local councils, the 2014 Czech and Slovak local elections (multiple regression models, OLS)

<i>Independent variables</i>	Czech Republic			Slovakia		
	B	Beta	(SE)	B	Beta	(SE)
Population size (log)	-12,922*	-0,300*	(4.948)	-18.335**	-0.294**	(6.822)
Unemployment	1.294	0.198	(0.884)	-1.686**	-0.332**	(0.625)
Age structure	1.937	0.162	(1.416)	4.675***	0.431***	(1.282)
Catholicism	-0.211	-0.055	(0.698)	0.062	0.044	(0.157)
Moravia / Hungarians	-9.624	-0.284	(6.260)	-0.292	-0.160	(0.183)
Women's representation	0.395	0.181	(0.247)	-0.799***	-0.383***	(0.216)
Constant	37.311		(31.875)	104.930		(40.660)
N		72			71	
Adjusted R ²		0.148			0.342	

Note: B: unstandardized regression coefficients, Beta: standardized regression coefficients, SE: standard errors, statistical significance level: ***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$.

As we have found some unexpected and ambiguous results in the Czech local elections, regarding independent local lists representation, the same is true for Slovakia. First finding shows that, similarly as in the Czech Republic, also in Slovakia, the municipal size is the main determinant of independents successfulness; its negative and significant influence of the variable is even stronger then in case of Czechs' municipalities. Important findings, we found also with regard to the other socioeconomic and demographic variables. In contrast to the Czech Republic, we found a significant effect of unemployment and age structure. However, while positive effect of age structure was in the same direction as in the Czech Republic, so the more proportion of retired population in given municipality the more seats for independents in the same municipality, the opposite was true for an effect of unemployment variable. Here, we found negative correlation with independent local lists' representation in Slovak local councils,

indicating that higher unemployment tends to decrease the successfulness of independent candidates.

Different relationships in contrast to the Czech Republic, we found also in terms of cultural variables. While in the Czech Republic, a negative correlation exists between Catholicism and independent candidates' successfulness, the opposite is true for Slovakia, although effect of the variable is rather weak and non-significant. Similarly, contrary to expectation, a negative significant correlation exists between women's descriptive representation and number of independent councillors. While thus influence of Catholicism and women's representation is unexpected and ambiguous, as independent candidates are more successful in municipalities with more Catholics and lower women's descriptive representation, the opposite is true for Hungarians variable. As we expected, the increasing presence of Hungarian population is negatively associated with the share of seats obtaining by independent candidates, although the effect of the variable is not significant. We thus can hypothesize that Hungarian politics remains even today more political party-oriented and independents candidates have a weaker position in the Hungarian municipalities.

5 Concluding remarks and discussion

The aim of the paper was an attempt to analyse determinants of the independent candidates' successfulness in the 2014 local elections in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Our intention was to contribute to an academic discussion on phenomenon of the independent candidates in local politics and to partly fill in the missing research gap due to expanding our understanding of the determinants of independents' political representation in Czech and Slovak local councils.

If we compare the results in both countries, we can conclude that the municipal size was proved in both countries as the most important factor which explains the independent (or the independent local list in Czech case, respectively) successfulness. The results of the analysis thus confirmed that increasing municipal size strongly (and significantly) reduced number of seats, which are independents able to gain in specific municipalities. However, municipal size was the almost single independent variable, whose influence was in both countries at the same direction, and at the same time it was the only variable which was statistical significant in the Czech environment.

In terms of socioeconomic and demographic factors, in both countries the chances of independents to be elected were higher as the proportion of population aged 65 and more increased; however, in Czech case the effect of variable was not statistically significant. In contrast, unemployment variable was positively associated with the representation of independents in the Czech Republic and

negatively in Slovakia, again only in Slovakia the proportion of unemployment population proved as statistically significant. Similarly, nor contextual factors work at the same direction. In the Czech Republic, we found a positive correlation between women's representation and independents presence in local councils, and expected negative association in case of Catholicism; in both cases the effect of variables was not significant. The quite opposite trend (with exception of non-significance) we found in Slovakia. Contrary to our expectations, the influence of Catholicism on independents representation was positive, although its effect was very small. In contrast, the results showed that Hungarian municipalities are less favourable environment for independent candidates in Slovakia, suggesting prevailing Hungarian political culture traditionally favouring party politics to independent candidates.

Furthermore, we found very different results concerning association between women's descriptive representation on local councils and the proportion of seats received by independent candidates. While in the Czech Republic we found positive (although non-significant) effect between those variables, suggesting that women prefer rather non-institutionalized (non-party) forms of participation, in Slovakia the opposite was true, as a relatively strong significant effect of the variable lead us to hypothesize about reasons of that ambiguous effect. As one of the reasons for the different influence of women's representation variable, we can mention the different electoral systems used in both countries. The Slovak electoral system (unlimited vote) is based on the majority logic (where voters vote for individual candidates rather than political parties) and such it is characterized by a greater competitiveness and greater focus on specific personality of candidates, in contrast to Czech proportional system. We thus can hypothesize that for Slovak women is, in an environment of the greater competitiveness, much more preferred to run as candidates of particular political party. Just political parties may offer to women's candidates more support and backing than if they run as an independent candidates, depending in the campaign to the large extent only on themselves, which could be significant diadvantage for women just in the highly competitive Slovakia electoral environment. In contrast, Czech women running as candidates of institutionalised independent local lists may not face such an intense personal pressures from other candidates due to running on the list, so they prefer in more cases candidacy as independents. However, a possible impact of the electoral system is a factor that will require further examination, as well as other possible explanations of that ambiguous result.

Finally, we can conclude that an analysis of the links between the proportion of seats that received independent candidates and potential determinants of their successfulness yielded unambiguous conclusions. The main problem was generally rather low levels of explained variability. At the same time, with only some exceptions in Slovakia, the municipal size was the only independent variable which was statistically significant (especially in Czech case) and relationships

between most others variables was not on the one hand (in some cases) in expected direction and on the other hand these relationships differ between Czech and Slovak municipalities.

The fact that independent variables were successful only in some cases, along with in many cases low explanatory capacity of the models, suggests that for a more adequate explanation of the independents' successfulness, we will need to look for other indicators that could far better than the usual socio-demographic variables characterize the form of political competition in the specific municipalities. These can be associated with, for instance, a specific political culture of municipalities or other indicators of similar type, which can be difficult (or even impossible) to abstract from available aggregate data and their use would require the implementation of specific research on the local level, which would be able to find an indicators of that type.

As another research direction, it then offers to work with not only an indicator of the municipality size (in our case the logarithm to the number of inhabitants), but rather various types of municipalities (according to size or otherwise defined), as an indicator which could verify, whether there are differences in the success of independents between various types of municipalities. For instance, Kostelecký (2011) found that voter turnout in the 2010 Czech parliamentary elections was associated not only with the municipality size (negatively) but also with the location of municipalities. Thus the villages of the inner suburban belt, that are to the largest degree affected by both suburbanization and functionally linking to larger population centers commuting to work, was, on the contrary, positively associated with higher turnout. However, the relationship was quite opposite in local elections (e.g. Kostelecký, 2011: 70-83).

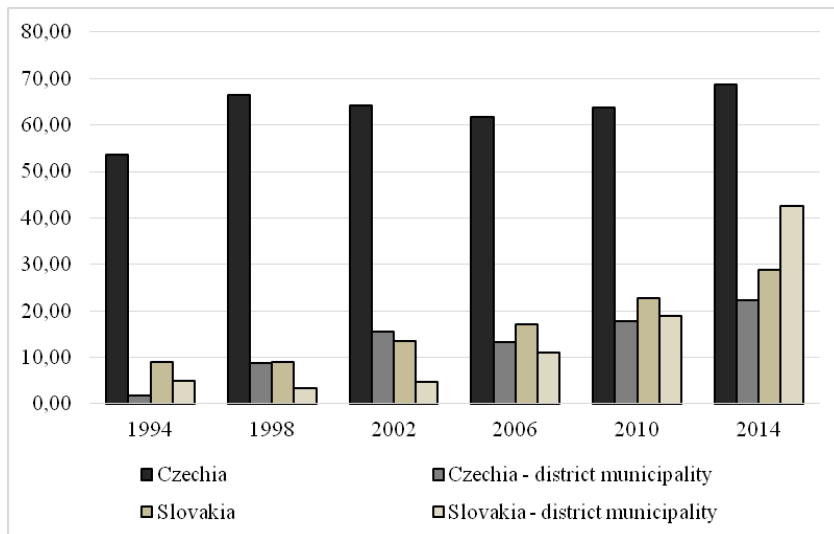
At the same time, an effort to work not only with traditional socio-structural variables, is associated with an assumption that also in Czech and Slovak environment we can expect the enforcement of the phenomena of modernization and individualization. Those which in advanced industrial societies of Western Europe resulted in that the process of individualization has reached such an extent, that the social location of individuals (based in the past on so-called social cleavages [see Lipset & Rokkan, 1967]) became a fluid. More importantly these processes disrupted an affiliation to specific social groups and disrupted the possibility to use classical socio-structural factors as determinants of election behaviour (cf. Thomassen, 2005). In the situation of highly individualized voter behaviour thus may play a much larger role than in the past, factors such as voters' attitudes to important topics (salient issues) (e.g. Thomassen, 2005) or just above mentioned political culture of local communities, which may differ significantly between the various communities which are at the same time similar in terms of

socio-structural characteristics. These local political cultures thus can have a significant impact just at the level of local political processes.

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Appendix 1: Independent lists in local councils, the 1994–2014 Czech and Slovak local elections (percentage of gained mandates)



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