Introduction of the Election Cycle Model:
The Case of the Czech Republic 2006–2007

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to analyze how political marketing was used and applied in the 2006 electoral campaign and how marketing influenced and changed party behaviour (even after the elections). Political marketing can be described as the use of marketing concepts and methods in politics. It allows us to analyze political parties from a new and different perspective. We focus mainly on the relevant political actors (who were successful in entering Parliament), with special attention to the campaign of the Social Democrats (ČSSD). The objectives of this paper are to analyze the electoral process as a changing and evolving activity and to answer the following questions: How did the party formulate its strategy and how did it use political communication? Second, how was the campaign organized? Third, what attitude do Czech political parties hold towards campaigning and elections and what changes may be expected in this area?*

Methodologically, we will approach the topic by introducing the Election Cycle Model. This is a heuristic model which examines elections, campaigning and governing as mutually influenced processes. We are aware that the model was tailor-made for the 2006 Czech Elections but it still offers a very solid framework for further analysis of party behaviour.

Key words: *Czech Republic, ČSSD, Election Cycle Model, Elections, ODS, Political communication, Professionalization*

Political communication and the exploitation of political marketing strategies in the electoral race are no longer the concern only of party analysts. They have become highly interesting for social scientists, as well. Recent developments in party politics have made it clear that contemporary political parties will eventually arrive at a more or less professional style of doing politics. The issue chiefly turns on the level of party communication with voters and the ability to persuade them. The motivation is clear: to achieve better election support and, from a long-term perspective, better strategic results. Political parties are hiring external consultants, marketing experts and agencies who prepare "scenarios" for further party moves (Plasser 2002: 251; O'Shaughnessy 1990: 128-148; Wring 2005: 2-5 and others). To provide proof of the increased impact of political marketing on the political scene is, however, a difficult process. It is necessary

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to choose criteria appropriate to enable the behaviour of the political parties to be examined and, in this case, their marketing orientation in particular.

Introduction

The selection of appropriate criteria is a crucial problem in this particular research field. The professionalism of party behaviour is assumed but no one knows for sure how to measure it. During recent decades, lots of models and classification schemes have been introduced. The models usually offer a set of tools for analyzing changes in party behaviour (A. Panebianco, D. M. Farrell, P. Norris etc.) or concentrate on political campaign development (Wring 2005). Logically these are very often influenced by the criteria chosen and political culture of the environment under scrutiny. The above should not be taken to indicate that these models are irrelevant or inaccurate; the intent is to emphasize the heterogeneity of existing research and the limits on its ability to encompass all relevant issues.

Moreover, existing models are usually focused on the pre-election period, i.e., election campaigns. However, political competition must be viewed as a complex process and thus must it be analysed. Therefore, we attempt to introduce a (partly) new model. The Election Cycle Model is a comprehensive (but simplified) model which takes in the political process, the election cycle, party behaviour and political culture. Our main objective is to cover the entire election cycle with consideration for the strategies of relevant participants (political parties, voters etc.). The first portion of the paper describes and explains the model.

Secondly, we focus on the Czech party system. The central line of the election contest will be identified. The long-term conflict between the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) presents a very good example for studying the capability, flexibility and use of various political marketing methods. In the proposed model, we try to show how intensive political communication can be beyond the pre-election period. Our effort is to identify tendencies toward a stance of constant, ongoing campaigning and marketing by political parties. Our categorization of the political parties present in the Czech Parliament will therefore be introduced. This categorization will be based upon their communication and marketing strategies.

We are aware that existing models such as the Lees Marshment model of the marketing process by Jennifer Lees-Marshment and Darren Lilleker (2004) or the framework introduced by Aron O'Cass (1996), R. P. Ormrod (2005) and others might be of use in the particular case of the Czech Republic. However, to introduce a new model, which seems more appropriate to us, is a

challenge and an opportunity for further research in this area of politics.

Theoretical outline – introduction of the new model

The basic outline derives from the model of the "electoral market"[2] by Polish political scientist Marzena Cichosz (Cichosz 2002: 94) and from the general election cycle model (Nordhaus 1975; Lindbeck 1976; Rogoff 1990[3]). The general election cycle model is based upon the assumption that, as the elections approach, politicians try to control public expenditures (and thereby strengthen their competitions). Our intention was to analyse the political process, electoral cycle and the way in which political parties organize their campaigns altogether as a mutual and complex process.

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[2] The electoral market is understood as a place for political interactions and transactions, such as elections among political parties, the media and the voters. Economic, legal, political and socio-demographic factors define the market.

[3] Rogoff 1990 (c.f. Lidborn 2003: 5-6) operates with three phases of the election cycle: (a) Pre-election prediction : In the election year, voters re-elect those politicians who provide a higher level of spending for the public good and a lower level of taxation, since this is a signal of high competence. (b) Post-election prediction: After the election, re-elected politicians provide a higher level of spending for the public good and lower levels of taxation than untried politicians, because they are on average more competent. (c) Post-election prediction: After the election, re-elected politicians cut back on the level of public spending and increase taxes as compared to their election year levels since the re-election incentive is weaker (i.e., no need to signal).

Figure 1 Election Cycle Model

The model creates three basic categories – "A", "B" and "C". "A" stands for a political party which is or will later become a member of the governing coalition. "B" represents the coalition itself and "C" stands for the political parties of the opposition. It was our intent to omit the category for non-parliamentary parties. Those parties may be found under "environment"[4].

Every involved political actor must find appropriate communication strategies in order to provide clear signals to the voters[5]. By "signal", we mean simple information about "benefits" (for voters of these parties) and by "competence", we mean the ability to persuade voters that the party can solve salient problems (case "A" and "B") and that the party offers the best solution or alternative for the future ("C").

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[4] The environment consists of legal regulations, economic conditions, political culture and voter's socio-demographic profile. It also contains novel factors, which may influence the political systems – such as new political parties, international relations, international corporations, lobbying, special interest groups, the media, etc. All these actors may bring alternative topics to the system and interfere with the governing parties' interests.

[5] We may speak of position and valence issues. "Position issues are those that involve advocacy of government actions from a set of alternatives over which a distribution of voter preferences is defined. Valence issues are those that involve liking of the parties for some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate." (Stokes 1963)

These strategies incorporate reassurance about the correctness of governmental actions and about their benefit for most voters ("B"). This is followed by convincing voters of the positive influence of the governing policy by furthering pre-election policies or more precisely pre-election promises ("A"). Another section shows criticism of and attacks on political opponents ("C").

Single political actors systematically build background for the next competition in the upcoming electoral term. In evaluating parties, voters consider not only the party's success but also its ability to communicate its failures. Political parties communicate with their voters all the time and try to catch the voter's attention. The purposes of this activity are to keep at least minimal awareness of the political party, its role in the party system, eventual benefit for the voters and the political system in general. One's attention can be drawn in many ways: the party organizes unexpected press conferences on current topics, takes out newspaper advertisements, holds public meetings and many other kinds of events. The form communication takes relates to the party's position in the system (e.g. the relations between the government and opposition). It is likely that the communication style of the governing party will be more "serious" and concentrate on relevant topics, in contrast to the opposition. Opposition parties choose to communicate more emotional and radical topics.

Clearly, party communication strategies do not proceed in a social vacuum. Parties listen to the *vox populi* during the election cycle and try to change public opinion and mood (at the same time they are aware that they should at least partly fulfil their election promises[6]). Public opinion very often becomes the opposition's strongest argument for explaining political issues. If the government is forced to introduce reforms with a negative impact on some social segments, the opposition immediately accuses the government of catering to certain segments at the expense of others. The same situation applies to the government's policy statements. If the opposition is very good in controlling and using public opinion, it can create very difficult conditions for the governing parties. Public opinion and the demands of the electorate are very important for both at the same time – for both the governing parties and the opposition. The aim of this paper is not to claim that political actors should change their policies every time the opinion polls are announced. Nevertheless, monitoring social trends and opinions can be very helpful in creating party policies and formulating party rhetoric.

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[6] If the party must create the coalition and sign the coalition agreement, it is obvious the delivery might become more complicated. Contrarily, if the party can create single flavor government, it will be necessary to concentrate on delivery.

To describe the model simply, it shows, e.g., the phase of "market intelligence" and "policy adjustment" only once, although those activities are usually conducted continuously. In the "campaign" phase, we propose a double evaluation of political actors – based initially on their former policies and secondly on their programmes for forthcoming elections and the impact of the campaign. During the campaign, the parties seek out the best position from which to attack their opponents and introduce their political proposal/programme, leadership and the chief campaign themes (see Figure 2.).

Figure 2 Political campaign structure
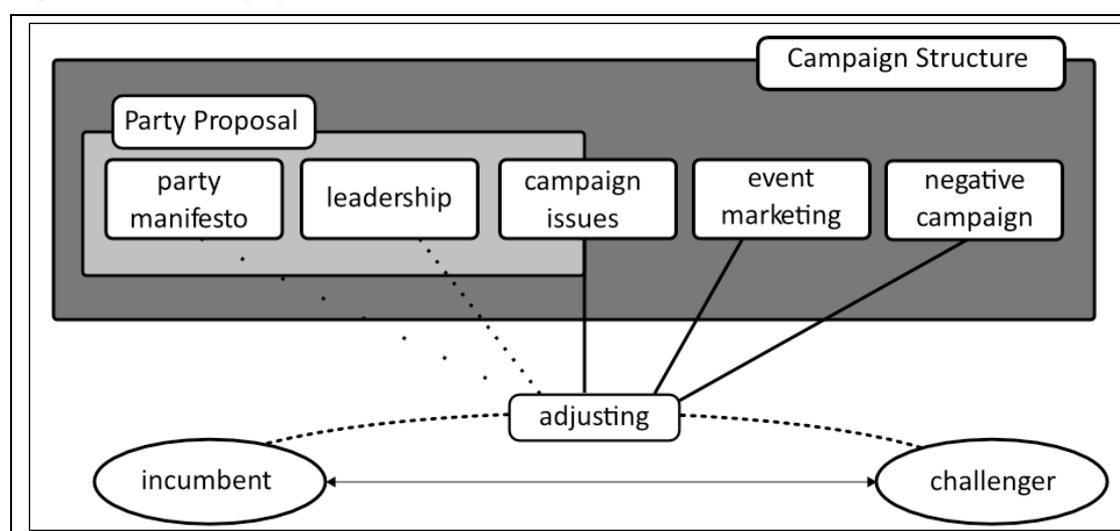
Figure 2 shows the importance and possibilities that result from further work with campaign structure. Obviously, it is very difficult to change some parts of the campaign (specifically the programme). Leadership, campaign issues and others can be modified in connection with changes in opinion polls or opponents' strategies. This makes campaigns more dynamic and attractive for voters.

The product (the programme) and its packaging (the campaign) are prepared in advance (e.g., the Czech Social Democrats start doing marketing intelligence more than one year before the actual elections) and they are based on marketing intelligence, party competence and "issue ownership". The party proposal is based upon a set of topics the voters automatically associate with the party[7] (issue ownership Petrocik 1996; Eibl 2006: 31-35)[8]. Additionally, the party must

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[7] Every party has a certain image and identity. It is usually based on values, ideology or tradition. The party should keep a well-defined image and not change its identity radically.

[8] Sensitive or problematic topic demanding an instant solution give the party an advantage. It also strengthens its

deal with current topics (salient issues) and partly with those presented by their opponents (see Table 1).

Table 1 Election campaign structure: Issues typology

Election Manifesto	Election Campaign	Leadership	Spin Doctoring/ Negative marketing	Event Management
	- manifesto issues - campaign issues - owned issues - strategic issues - defence issues			

Table 1 shows the typology of various particular issues. It sets up differences between manifesto, campaign, owned, strategic and defence issues. Generally it may be said that "owned" issues are the first to appear in the campaign (being understood as "winning" topics). In mutual interaction, strategic and defensive issues follow (position and high conflict issues). These may be understood as the dominant structural issues in public discourse. Every party must therefore take up a position (Hinrichs 2002: 52).

We gradually introduce the set of strategies and activities which help parties to succeed in the elections and persuade the voters during the term. This enables the creation of a party categorization based upon the strategies employed. We do not claim to create an absolute classification. On the contrary, we understand the categorization as a dynamic scale which represents ideal types. The parties conform to these types only approximately.

For party behaviour, we use three parameters (see Figure 3) – marketing intelligence, the party manifesto (as the definition of product in broader sense) and the campaign (in broader sense again – the election campaign, the permanent campaign). Here again, we are aware of the simplification, but we do not consider it as disadvantage for the model. To the contrary: involving more parameters would make the categorization even more complicated (in the model as introduced, there are 27 possible combinations; adding one parameter would enhance the number of combinations up to 256).

As in the Lees-Marshment model, we work with three ideal types. In contrast to the original model, we do not take into account the delivery phase. We took into consideration only party strategies without any further evaluation. Consequently, we can study political parties more

competence in the contest with political actors (issue salience Bélanger 2005; Kleinnijenhuis, De Ridder 1998; van der Brug 2004; Soroka 2002; McCombs 2005: 550).

precisely from the functional-instrumental point of view and focus on the communication-marketing strategy base.

Figure 3 Party categorization
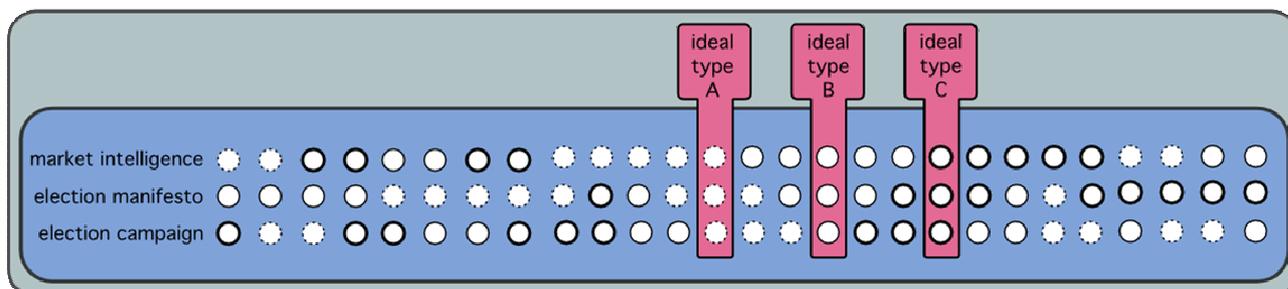
The ideal type A party does not focus on any of the factors (market intelligence, manifesto and campaign) under observation. This does not, however, automatically mean the party fails at the elections. This strategy may be chosen, e.g., by a minority party whose identity and support are an implicit part of its election programme. In some cases, this strategy can be effective for single-issue parties or populist formations (but in combination with a strong and visible campaign).

The ideal party of type B devotes immediate attention to all factors. Barring any surprise results, such a party may enter parliament without huge effort. Its support is founded on traditional voters but may also represent an alternative to the governing party.

Example C represents the professional political party. The party concentrates on analyzing the electoral market, follows the opinion polls and leads a flexible campaign. During the term, the party not only "rules" but "informs" about its results. If the party is in opposition, it is an active and strident critic.

Application of the model: The 2006 Czech elections

As already indicated, this model was crafted for the Czech political environment. Therefore, we begin with a short introduction to the Czech political system.

The Czech Republic (along with Hungary) is usually considered the country with the most consolidated political scene among the countries of the former Soviet block (Kopeček, Šedo 2003). The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy with a small electoral market. Legislative power is vested in a two-chamber parliament: the House of Deputies (lower house) and the Senate (upper house). The clearly dominant role is assigned to the lower house, which has 200 members and is elected using a proportional electoral system (Stojarová, Šedo, Kopeček, Chytilek

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2007: 48)[9] which slightly favours larger political parties. The Senate has 81 members elected by majority vote in a two-round run-off system. In this article, we focus on the lower house of the Czech parliament, the House of Deputies.

There are five parties in the current Czech House of Deputies: the Czech Social Democratic Party (*Česká strana sociálně demokratická*, ČSSD), the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (*Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová*, KDU-ČSL), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, KSČM), the conservative Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS) and the Green Party (*Strana zelených*, SZ). Most of these have retained stable and territorially homogeneous support from the electorate since the mid 1990s (with the exception of KDU-ČSL and SZ; for more details see Šedo, Chytilek 2007). The practical structure of the Czech electoral market is similarly settled and solid: the system keeps its five-party format, re-confirmed when the Green Party entered Parliament in the last election "replacing" the Union of Freedom (US-DEU). There is also a gradual strengthening of support for the two strongest parties (they recently obtained almost 68 % of votes / 155 seats). In the longer term, this confirms the stability and durability of the parties in the House of Deputies. Despite this tendency, the system remains open to new actors, who nevertheless mainly represent an alternative to the smaller parties rather than a threat to the established "big" parties (Eibl, Chytilek 2007: 172).

However, it is not an easy task to apply standard Sartorian typology to the Czech party system. The chief poles of the Czech party system may be seen to be occupied by the liberal-conservative right wing ODS on the one side and the left-wing ČSSD on the other. However, the logic of practical functioning is strongly influenced by the presence of a "third (half-) pole" – Communist Party. KSČM is the only non-transformed (ex-)communist party in Central Europe. All other parties refuse to co-operate at the governmental level. Therefore, the party has a very low coalition building potential and represents an anti-system opposition party (Mareš 2002: 83).

Czech political scientists (Strmiska 2007; Kopeček, Hloušek 2001 and others), according to the Sartorian tradition, consider the Czech party system to be one of semi-polarized pluralism. This corresponds to the configuration of poles, including the character of the minor pole embodied by the KSČM, and to the polarity-related notion of party interactions, including the

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[9] The Czech Republic is divided into 14 constituencies (each with 5-25 seats up for grabs). The legal threshold is set at 5 % for a single party, 10 % for two-member coalitions, 15 % for three-member coalitions and 20 % for four (or more) parties. Voters may select up to two preferences for their favourite candidates on semi-closed party lists. The distribution of seats takes place on the basis of the d'Hondt divisor (Stojarová, Šedo, Kopecek, Chytilek 2007: 16).

specific field of interaction between ČSSD and KSČM. Such a situation is especially complicated for the Social Democrats, because they share an agenda which is partly similar to that of the Communists. The shift towards polarized pluralism could start by opening co-operation between the two left-wing parties at the governmental level, or at least by KSČM (openly) supporting a minority ČSSD cabinet. However, this is an extremely sensitive topic, as noted above. Anti-communism is a theme which arouses conflicts and plays an important role in the electoral contest.

The importance of the 2006 elections and post-election developments in 2007

To stake out a clear position in the electoral market was one of the most important elements of electoral strategy preparation in the 2006 general elections[10]. There were four key players – Civic Democrats, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and the Communists.

The winner of the 2006 general elections with a record 35.38% share of the votes (81 seats) was the conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS). ODS was followed by the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD; 74 seats)[11], the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM; 26 seats) and the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL, 13 seats). A surprise was the electoral success of the Green Party (SZ; 6 seats). Total turnout for the election was 64.7 % (Czech Statistical Office 2006).

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[10] The method for political parties' candidature in parliamentary elections is determined by law No. 247/1995 of the Legal Code Concerning Elections to the Parliament of the Czech Republic, which also makes its presence felt in the campaign. Paid television advertisements on commercial channels may not be used in the Czech campaign. The conditions for financing and sponsorship are regulated as well.

[11] The Czech Social Democratic Party is not an ex-communist party but an authentic social democratic party, with a tradition extending back before World War II.

Figure 4 Election 2006 results and party categorization
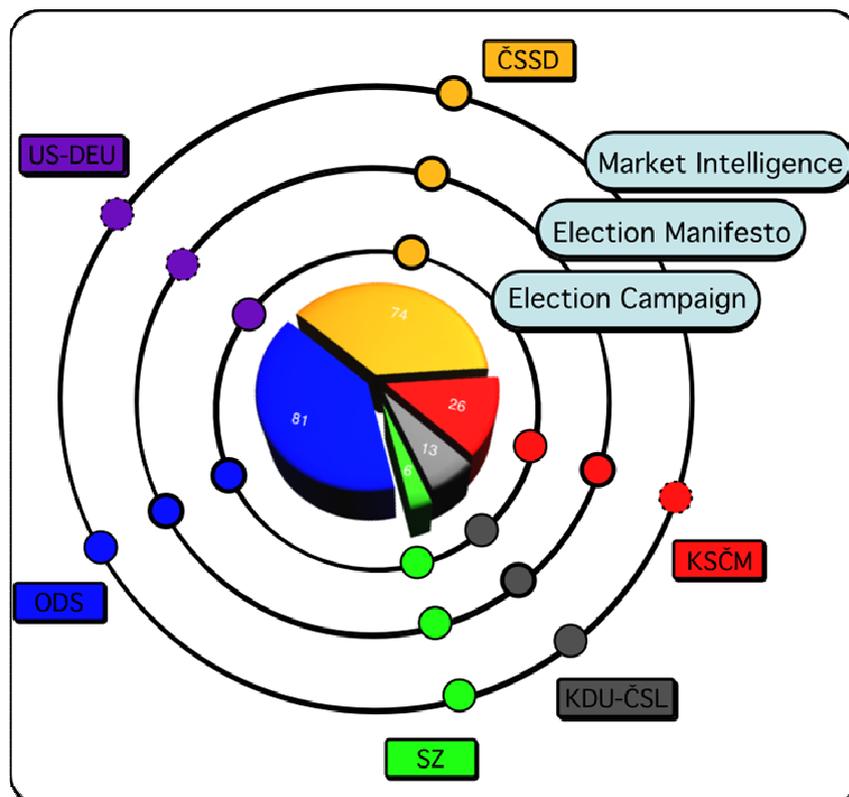
The Czech party system, as shown in Figure 5, tends toward categories "B" and "C"[12]. In this paper, we will focus on the two parties representing the main poles of the Czech party system, the Civic Democrats (ODS) and the Social Democrats (ČSSD). Both parties use developed communication and marketing strategies to prepare an attractive product for voters. ČSSD entered the elections as the incumbent and ODS as the challenger, with the label "the economy experts". The way in which both parties prepared and campaigned for the general elections in 2006 formed a watershed in the short campaign tradition of the Czech Republic. The campaign aroused exceptional media and public attention. It exceeded Czech standards in terms of its intensity, as well as in terms of its messages and the level of visual processing. The campaign was labelled negative, brutal, aggressive, confrontational, offensive and low (Matušková 2006b: 5).

It is important to stress initially that the campaign was more thematically orientated than any before it, and concentrated on programme questions. On the other hand, the campaign was substantially personalized and the pre-electoral match escalated into a sharp duel between the two

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[12] The Freedom Union (US-DEU) falls into category "C".

leaders, Mirek Topolánek[13] (Civic Democrat) and Jiří Paroubek (Social Democrat); this, in spite of the fact that the Czech Republic has a proportional electoral system, focused more on party competition. The chairpersons of the two leading parties, ODS and ČSSD, were presented to the public by electoral strategists as future prime ministers and representatives of distinct paths for the future of Czech politics: right or left, with or without the Communists[14]. The Social Democrats indirectly admitted the possibility of making a coalition with Communists. This substantially fuelled the polarization of the campaign.

The electoral scene was polarized by the media and the overall atmosphere culminated in pre-election TV duels to which only the leaders of ODS and ČSSD were invited. The main topic of the elections turned into a conflict between the governing ČSSD and media-favoured ODS (Petrová 2006). The way ČSSD built its campaign also fundamentally influenced the electoral presentation of ODS. Hindsight confirms that the campaign process and its dynamics involved a consciously led and well-realized electoral strategy by ČSSD. The final campaign resulted largely in the suppression of small political entities (as happened with, e.g., with KDU-ČSL or KSČM), which were not able to raise the interest of the media. The exception was the Green Party and its unexpected electoral success.

The heavy weight battle: ODS vs. ČSSD[15]

In the following section, we focus in detail on the electoral campaigns of ČSSD (the incumbent) and ODS (the challenger). Their protracted, harsh debate lasted the entire campaign. All other parties were overshadowed by their campaigning style, with the support of the media. The final contest was reduced to the duel between Topolánek (ODS) and Paroubek (ČSSD).

According to opinion polls, ODS had been in the lead in front of ČSSD since January 2005 (Kunštát 2006). ODS entered the election with a campaign focused on the economy and social reforms. In November 2005, the Civic Democrats organized a party convention in Brno and attracted media attention. All TV channels broadcast images of the future election winners and carried stories about planned social reforms (Matušková 2006c). The chief topic of the convention was the presentation of the flat tax reform – an issue meant to be the main theme of

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[13] Mirek Topolánek, the chairman of ODS, became prime minister and formed the government after the elections.

[14] Regarding the historical fact, the question of anti-communism in former post-communist countries is still considered a significantly sensitive subject.

[15] The chapter is based on information from an interview with Jiří Šnéberger – campaign manager of ODS and with Alexander Braun from PSB Associates, Prague, June 26, 2006.

the campaign. The high point of the convention came with the screening of the election spot "On the Blue Path Together" (Renč: 2005), built around the party's slogan.

In the year 2004, preceding the elections to the European Parliament, ODS undertook a wide-ranging survey of attitudes. The results very clearly showed dissatisfaction by loyal voters with the arrogant image of the party. The party was perceived as a reckless organization strictly for businesspeople. There was a need to remake the party image. The changes came together with a new leader, Mirek Topolánek, who replaced Václav Klaus, one of the founding fathers of the party. Václav Klaus is the president of the Czech Republic and is very well known for his distinctive image.

The flagship campaign theme was to be the previously noted flat tax reform. ODS decided to sidestep the negative image and attacks of their opponents (later in the campaign they tried to introduce a negative campaign towards ČSSD, but without any visible success[16]). The campaign was planned as decentralized and varied by region. The Prague campaign was exceptional in every respect (it even chose different colours and a different layout). Topolánek, as the party leader, joined the campaign intensively from May 2006.

ČSSD started to work systematically on the preparation of its political offer and electoral strategy a year prior to the elections (Social Democrats were noticeably behind ODS in the opinion polls). The party was not internally united and had to face many media scandals[17]. That led to the replacement of the Prime Minister, Stanislav Gross, in the government leadership by the outsider Jiří Paroubek. Paroubek succeeded in unifying the party very quickly, at least in terms of its public face. In public opinion surveys, he very quickly ranked amongst the most popular politicians in the country.

One of the biggest campaign surprises was that Social Democrats hired the American consulting firm Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates, Inc. (PSB) to prepare their campaign.[18]

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[16] In January 2006, the party introduced the "Masks" campaign. The aim of this poster campaign was to accuse the Social Democrats of cooperating with the Communists (ODS 2006b). However, the euroAWK advertising agency refused to mount the posters.

[17] The resignation of the Social Democrat Prime Minister, Stanislav Gross, because of the unexplained financing of his apartment, or the Unipetrol case, Diag Human and many other affairs.

[18] BBDO, Saatchi and Saatchi and other foreign advertising agencies and consulting companies cooperated with Czech political parties in the early the 90s. However, this was not bilaterally satisfactory cooperation. Experts from advertising agencies often complained about the work. Politicians did not easily believe or accept their working methods. Czech campaigns are mainly labour intensive (Farrell 1998) and electoral strategies are often prepared by politicians who want to have the last word. Very often, the services of Czech commercial and advertising agencies

PSB was responsible for the groundwork of the electoral strategy and marketing-oriented campaign. After a series of focus groups, they provided ČSSD with a large benchmark poll. In this poll, they laid great stress on the way voters perceived the individuals running for office, and how they react to the political programmes on offer and individual programme tasks. The agency further developed a model indicating how voter preferences might evolve given certain sets of circumstances. This poll formed the core of the entire campaign. The research also showed that voters, only a year prior to the elections, did not have a defined image of the party nor connect it to a specific political programme. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the campaign was to seek an advantageous position in the electoral market and make use of it building on the fact that ČSSD stood as a candidate while already in the position of leading the country. This guaranteed practically constant media attention. At the same time, it also limited the party in formulating the main themes for the campaign. It was necessary to persistently point out government achievements and to defend and promote the government's policies and legislation adopted.

ODS held a completely different position and entered into the elections with a clear image. It was seen as being a party of businesspeople, which after eight years in opposition had no other ambition than to win the elections and carry out radical economic reforms even at the expense of social benefits.

So ČSSD was confronted by several fundamental targets – to link its brand with clear content, to attack the favourite position of ODS and their main programme points. Social Democrats chose social security as the main topic of the campaign, with the motto "Welfare and Prosperity". The electoral programme was identically named. The purpose of the motto was to persuade voters of the party's expert role. ODS choose a different strategy – they decided to introduce a portion of their program, serially, every week. That way, ČSSD could not criticise the entire electoral programme. In March, the Civic Democrats took out "ODS plus" posters across the Czech Republic to promote tax reform[19]. Immediately afterwards, striking blue posters with the title "ODS minus" appeared in the streets, using the characteristic ODS graphical look and quoting programme points. The posters announced: we will apply education fees, cancel free healthcare, increase taxes, etc. It may be said that ČSSD reacted immediately. Their "ODS minus" response was extremely effective in criticizing the proposed tax reform. One of the

are used (Matušková 2006b).

[19] The advertising campaign "ODS plus" was profoundly inspired by negative ads "Merkel Minus" used by German Social Democrats (SPD) against tax reform presented by Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in parliamentary Election 2005.

classical methods of negative advertising is to purposely attack the electoral strategy of the strongest competitor, with the attacks as personal as possible (Cwalina 2004: 110-11).

By attacking tax reform, Social Democracy successfully deprived ODS of its chief campaign theme. The Social Democrats also attacked the ODS programme in election commercials, whose meaning should not be overestimated within the framework of the campaign[20].

Even though it was purely a political fight, the public was taken aback by the intensity of the negative campaign. Negative advertising is an exceptionally effective weapon that may be double-edged. At a certain point, the level of criticism may backfire against its source. During the campaign, ČSSD kept a positive image with hardly any problem. ODS was not able to effectively and clearly react to the systematic attacks of ČSSD. Moreover, they could not attack their opponents. Voter research indicated that those voting for the Civic Democrats do not perceive negative campaigning positively.

After losing its main campaign theme, ODS somehow got lost in the campaign. In addition, the whole process was under the control of the Social Democrats. They were in control of the flow of the campaign.

ČSSD put together its product – its electoral programme as well as its strategy, which was successfully promoted throughout the whole campaign. The electoral programme was logically influenced by values – a classic social democratic catalogue. In further campaigning, ČSSD's targeting was outstandingly successful. Its chief goal was to eliminate a situation in which a decision is made about the Social Democrats on the basis of whether it is an appropriate party to keep in government, whereas ODS is judged on the basis of whether it can stand its ground as a governmental party.

The Social Democrats therefore tried to present the campaign systematically as a referendum on the future of the Civic Democrats. The deciding moment was the fact that Jiří Paroubek was a strong leader, whose popularity greatly exceeded the popularity of the party. In the case of the opposition ODS, the situation was reversed – its leader, Mirek Topolánek, was perceived as a weak politician and his party as strong. Therefore, PSB recommended ČSSD

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[20] Telecasting of political adverts in the Czech Republic is limited by law. They can only be telecast during the hours determined by law (No. 247/1995) on Czech Television. The importance of political spots is therefore reduced to a sort of "obligation" that the parties must fulfil within the electoral contest, which impacts negatively upon the quality of political adverts. Should the election law not be changed, we cannot expect any marked change in the future in the importance of election spots. The adverts are inspired by American commercials from the years 1992 and 1996, but also by the German and Polish electoral campaign of 2005.

consciously shape the campaign as a duel between two party leaders. This was the most advantageous strategy; it enabled the party to divert attention from its lack of thematic content. To push the campaign as a constructive duel of manifestos (programmes) was much more efficient for ODS. The Civic Democrats were trying to push a thematic campaign.

Communication in the campaign – realization and visual appearance

Focus group results clearly showed the Social Democrats were in want of a clear image. The solution was to make a radical change. ČSSD used orange for the campaign in place of their traditional yellow (on the advice of PSB), which is connected with the sun, power, wealth, joy and rule (Janik-Wiszniowska: 174). The beginning of the campaign was preceded by the January Programme Conference at which the Social Democrats introduced their new image. From that time forward, the new orange colour appeared everywhere (on bus sides, on roses given out by leaders or on the skirts of hosts and nametags at the election gathering). Shortly afterwards, thematic billboards (very simple) appeared which focused on presenting social values (free education, healthcare, etc.).

ČSSD chose negative advertising as one of its main means of communication. The second intended strategy was to centre the campaign around Jiří Paroubek – the Prime Minister and a strong leader. By contrast, ODS was trying to promote not only its leader, Topolánek, but other politicians as well[21]. Paroubek skilfully used the support of foreign politicians in the media, and during the campaign appeared in public with the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, French President Jacques Chirac, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and many others. Blair supported his colleague in the campaign by, for instance, giving him two double-decker buses[22]. As a play on Blair's gift, Topolánek met David Cameron at the Ruzyně Airport and they exchanged little models of blue buses (Marjanovič 2006).

The Social Democrats are also distinguished in the campaign by an extraordinary ability to react swiftly to their competitors' moves. ČSSD regularly analysed public opinion research and, thanks to good knowledge of the political market, was able to react quickly to the steps of ODS. In reaction to one of the final pre-electoral ODS spots, in which a ČSSD cabinet was introduced

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[21] This was especially visible in the TV debates. Mr. Paroubek attended the first debates by himself. Topolánek, by contrast, was always accompanied by colleagues and consultants (Petr Gandalovič, Miroslava Němcová and others). This was the reason why Social Democrats labelled Mr. Topolánek as a weak, incompetent leader. The Topolánek strategy was to show he was a team player and that his teams consist of highly qualified experts.

[22] The tradition of electoral buses in the ČSSD was established Miloš Zeman who went through the Czech Republic in a bus called Zemák in 1996.

as a "government without a face", Jiří Paroubek called a press conference the next day to introduce the form of his government should the party when the election. Paroubek worked intensely on using voter research and publicizing it in the media. When the results went against ČSSD, the research was not made public. ČSSD used research to play politics via the media and by doing so, created the image of an election winner. Generally, the ČSSD campaign made a unified impression and the campaign was centralized. Social Democrats used "traditional" methods (numerous meetings with voters, public debates, various regional events and concert series with popular singers etc.). New space was also given over to "new" methodologies (especially the internet – ČSSD created a special election website at www.volbycr.cz). A high level of flexibility in voter communication may be seen to be a huge party achievement. The campaign was visible, fast and aggressive. Constantly attacking opponents enabled the party to hide its own thematic vacuum.

For the first time in the Czech Republic, the internet played a significant role in the elections. ODS created special election pages as well. Party leader Topolánek updated his pages regularly; he himself played a very interesting role in the campaign. He was exposed to a systematic flow of strong attacks on his person by Jiří Paroubek. Compared to the strong perceptions engendered by the leader of the Social Democrats, Topolánek was something of a blank slate at the start. He was nevertheless powerful in communicating with ordinary people during the campaign. From May on, he and his wife were engaged in the campaign, travelling from one Czech city to another. Topolánek was becoming much more persuasive and confident in his new role.

The impression that the elections were a referendum between ODS and ČSSD was supported by the media, as well. The only party leaders invited to the final television debates were Topolánek and Paroubek. The clash between them embodied the symbolic peak of the campaign. Political adverts did not get high ratings (considering the airtime) but the debates did (Petrová 2006). Mirek Topolánek's team of media advisers focused on the final three debates and tried to an image for their candidate of a serious politician and public official. The aim was to make Topolánek act pragmatically, like a professional politician, and to focus on promoting the programme and particular issues. He always entered the TV studio with a little team of advisers and helpers. Paroubek was always alone and in the final debates, his tiredness was visible.

The conclusion of the campaign focused on raising emotions amongst voters, the main topic being anti-communism. The role of public opinion research was also noteworthy. TV debates were always followed by an assessment of their results and questions about who had

"won" the debate. In this case, both parties had research clearly supporting their candidate. ODS cooperated with Factum Invenio and ČSSD with the STEM agency.

Post-election hangover

Social Democracy lost the election battle with ODS and ended up in the second place. If we look at 2006 elections from a different angle, Social Democracy outshone the majority of its competitors in terms of the way it led its campaign. The party dictated the main themes and dynamics of the 2006 campaign, and therefore fundamentally influenced the political communication of its competitors.

At the campaign close, the Social Democrats were hit with the "Kubice Affair"[23]. It is difficult to speculate the extent to which this case influenced the election results. Of greater importance was a theme which had been underestimated but which is strong on emotional appeal – anti-communism. ODS stressed during the campaign that the Social Democrats would be willing to create the first electoral coalition with the Communist Party since 1989, were they to win the election. With the help of the media, the feeling was created that the vote was really a matter of principle. One outcome was the high election turnout, reaching almost 65 percent. The elections had therefore received unprecedented attention in the Czech Republic. Also new was the first Czech "get out the vote" campaign[24], under the name, "Decide it" or "To vote".

Nevertheless, the situation did not quiet down after the elections. Immediately after the ODS victory was announced, Paroubek organized a press conference and made a highly emotional statement about the electoral results. He compared the victory of the Civic Democrats to the moment in February of 1948 when the Communists had seized power. The situation was very bizarre. Up to this point, Paroubek had always acted like a cold-blooded professional. Now, here he was appearing on television screaming and attacking everybody. He later apologized for his statement but the population and the media were alarmed.

The right wing ODS won a record percentage of votes. Together with its potential coalition partners – the Christian Democrats and the Green Party – ODS had exactly a hundred seats. The same number of seats was occupied by the Social Democrats and the Communists.

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[23] The published police report was to prove the linkage of the ČSSD leaders to organized crime. The most attention was gotten by making this report public a day before the elections.

[24] A group of film directors created the project. The aim of the campaign was to address a group of young non-voters between 18 and 30 years of age. At the internet address www.rozhodneteto.cz, it was possible to download spots trying to explain in a humorous way that it is important to vote.

Protracted and difficult post-election negotiations followed that reminded one of slapstick comedy at times.

A super coalition including all parties except KSČM was not possible because of the bitter animosity between ODS and ČSSD during the campaign. Topolánek therefore carried on negotiations aimed at a minority coalition and later a coalition involving ODS, SZ and KDU-ČSL. Paroubek repeatedly claimed he had the recipe for building the coalition. The situation was particularly difficult for Topolánek in creating the government. Paroubek commanded a decided share of media attention and repeatedly stressed that Topolánek could not succeed in forming the government and was not competent to be prime minister. The public was very disillusioned. ČSSD blocked coalition negotiations several times and managed to push their own points into the government programme and to prevent some planned reforms (Havlík, Foltýn 2006: 188-196).

What was extremely interesting about the whole process was the way that Paroubek managed to control the negotiations. He reiterated again and again that he was the only one capable of building a functional government and should therefore lead the negotiations talks. To demonstrate the negotiation atmosphere, he even managed to get one of the coalition discussions broadcast by Czech television.

It took until January of 2007 to put the coalition government together, almost eight months after the elections (the government got the support of two MPs from ČSSD, who were later expelled from the party).[25] ČSSD announced that it was now the opposition, and that because it was not a member of the governing coalition, further realization of its programme points would be complicated.

Post-election communication

Warnings about the condition of the national economy were the first steps taken by the first Topolánek coalition. The government attempted to persuade citizens that the economy was in an alarming state, whose ills were brought on by the Social Democrat government. The Ministry of Finance bought a few ads in the largest newspapers (MF Dnes, Lidové noviny, Hospodářské noviny)[26] with the title "Information for Citizens of the Czech Republic about the State of Public Finances" (the ads were published on 22 September). The Minister of Finance,

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[25] It should be mentioned this was the second Topolánek government. The first was appointed on September 4, however the government did not survive a confidence vote and coalition negotiations continued.

[26] The advertisement was printed as well in the daily Metropolitan Express (distributed only in Prague).

Mr. Tlustý, was instantly accused by ČSSD of lying and manipulating the data. In addition, he was criticized for using public money to pay for advertisements and continuing the campaign against the Social Democrats. The advertisements became a hot issue with the public, not because of the information they presented, but simply because this type of message was being used for the very first time. The content of the adverts was later disputed even by the ministry's economic manager, Mr. Janota (MF Dnes, 29. 9. 2006, p. 1). He was quoted in the advertisement but disagreed with its conclusions and repeatedly criticized the minister, Tlustý. He was later fired from his position. Shortly after this event, the first Topolánek government failed a vote of confidence and another round of negotiations began.

It must be said Topolánek himself, as prime minister, is not a master of communication. He very often makes serious errors in communicating with opponents[27] or journalists. After repeated criticism and a few very clumsy statements, media consultants recommended he stay on a kind of "media diet".

A significant problem for the new government is the controversial politician Jiří Čunek (KDU-ČSL), who has been accused of racism and involvement in a corruption case being investigated by the police. An additional complication for the current government is its inability to explain clearly the impact of its proposed economic reforms. The government neglected to mention any negative impact on particular social segments. The reform was presented as the best solution for everybody. The Social Democrats have therefore labelled the government an alliance of the rich and plan to take the proposal to the Constitutional Court. They have only one aim – to undermine the position of the governing ODS and create a good starting point for the next campaign. For this purpose, ČSSD in June published a short stitch-book entitled "40 Factual Reasons for Saying No to the Government" (ČSSD 2007b).

Another example of governmental communication politics is the question of building an antiballistic base on the territory of the Czech Republic. Public opinion is largely against the base and the opposition is demanding a referendum. The government is not communicating with voters and dealing directly with US officials. The opposition, with Paroubek in the lead, is taking continual advantage of this to create an image of an incompetent and crude government. In May,

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[27] His love affair with politician Lucie Talmanová and separation from his wife were revealed publicly. MPs from non-governmental parties were disturbed by his obscene gesture in the parliament (he raised his middle finger towards a group of MPs from the opposition). He later excused himself and tried to explain it as a friendly gesture to his coalition partner, Mr. Kalousek. One of his latest media mistakes was using the German expression "es kommt der Tag" in a text message for a journalist from Tabloid Šíp. This relates to the Nazi politician Konrad Henlein (see MF Dnes, 13.4.2007, p. 3).

Středoevropské politické studie   roč. IX, č. 2-3, s. 114-138
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ČSSD even published a leaflet entitled "100 Days of Scandals, Mistakes, Vulgarisms and Obscurantism" (ČSSD 2007a).

Topolánek does not communicate with the media. Paroubek's strategy is the converse. He is always ready to comment on any problem, and the party puts out several press releases each day[28]. The opposition, mainly ČSSD, tries to get media attention whenever possible. The aim of this strategy is to systematically build the image of a "party for the people". One of the last "staged events" was to deliberately provoke another vote of confidence in the government. It was obvious the opposition would not have the requisite majority. The motivation was clear – to get on the front pages of newspapers and make headlines in the TV news (see Paroubek 2007).

Election Cycle Model and the Czech Republic – remarks for further research

Very clearly, the campaign did not end when the votes were counted. Social democrats are very serious about their role in the opposition. They systematically seek out every misstep by the coalition government and wait for the moment to attack. Actors are creating or seeking communication strategies; some are trying to avoid the attacks of their opponents.

The model introduced above suggests there are three types of communication strategies in relation to the position of the actor in the system.

(1) The government coalition communicates policies – e.g. criticism of "the heritage" from previous governments.
(2) By joining the coalition, specific governing parties demonstrate the benefit of doing so.
(3) The opposition attacks the government and tries to weaken its position in the public mind.

In the Czech environment, we meet mainly with the first and third strategies; the second is present only latently and relates to the communist party. Any minor party wishing to form a coalition with the Social Democrats will depend upon support from either ODS or the Communists. But, given their mutual animosity, a coalition involving both ODS and ČSSD makes for an unlikely prediction. Support from the Communists is unacceptable to the majority of parties. Collaboration with KSČM would create a precedent affecting the further functioning of the party system. Considering the strong anti-Communist mood in society, this would not be

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[28] The motivation is clear. Paroubek is working on the image of a friendly omnipresent politician, ready to self-sacrifice for everybody. Unlike Topolánek, who only comments on important matters, his aim is to work on the image of a public official.

very tactically effective in the next elections. The government's strategy of criticizing its predecessors appeared in the form of newspaper advertisements prepared by the Ministry of Finance, however they were perceived very negatively. The government therefore stopped the adverts. Later it was forced to deflect opposition attacks and explain its own mistakes. From this point of view, it is possible to claim that the government's communication strategies are not very successful. They are mostly devoted to explaining away the government's own misunderstandings rather than presenting its policies and successes in the national and international arenas.

On the other side it must be said that the opposition led by ČSSD has been highly effective. It focuses on more than just criticism. The Social Democrats are also preparing for the next election. The Social Democrats are a highly professionalized party whose strategy and moves are based upon recommendations from external consultants and from analysis of the electoral market. The post-election has followed on fluently from the election campaign. The same conclusion applies to ODS. The level of professionalization is quite high, but the party seems not to be using the tools of political marketing effectively.

Conclusion

The electoral campaign 2006 and post-electoral developments have brought many novelties into the way the election race is organized and into the political contest. The greatest breakthrough in the campaign was actually the systematic use of political marketing and electoral market and voter analysis. It may be stated that there has been a revolution in the use of political marketing methods in the Czech Republic. The most dynamic actors in the parliamentary elections were the Social Democrats, whose style of campaigning altered the way in which the electoral campaign was organized and understood.

The 2006 campaign was exceptional not only because of the level of professionalization: the intensity and use of negative marketing and advertising was highly significant. The whole election race was reduced to a very personal conflict between ODS and ČSSD. This battle between the two most important actors in the political system may anticipate further trends in campaigning. The professional parties will compete with the traditional parties.

Moreover, the campaigns continue even after the elections. That is why we have examined the entire process as a cycle. Recent political developments show that intensive communication between parties and voters continues. Unusually, continuous campaigning is being used more by the opposition than by parties in the government.

All these tendencies and trends in campaigning support the proposed model. Clearly,

testing must be done in the entire (and forthcoming) election period and the results compared. The model provides us with a solid framework for further analysis. The next task will be to apply and test it on another party political system.

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