

## VOX POPULI, VOX DEI: LOCAL REFERENDA IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC 2000–2020

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*The present study focuses on the use of the local referendum instrument in the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2020. This form of citizen participation in political decision making has become widely and widely used. Based on a complete overview of referenda, an analysis of the distribution of referenda in individual regions is carried out, which clearly shows that referenda are held significantly more often in some regions, which is determined by specific issues of safety or the location of nuclear power plants. In line with Robert Dahl's assumption, it turns out that the highest percentage of referenda are held in smaller municipalities, but this does not usually mean a higher turnout. It turns out that the importance of the issue is often more crucial than other factors. For example, the combination with an election has been shown to be a factor that does not have a major impact on overall participation. The ratio of binding to non-binding referenda shows that this instrument is used very effectively and efficiently, so that most of the referenda held are binding and are used to address issues that have the potential to mobilise citizens.*

**Key words:** referendum; participation; democracy; civil society; Czech Republic.

### 1 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In recent years, debates about the crisis of democratic systems, or rather the crisis of liberal democracy, have become more frequent. However, these debates are not new at all and, at their deepest, are a concomitant of the whole process of democratic establishment. One of the most influential critics of liberal democracy in its parliamentary form was Carl Schmitt (1923), whose work, originally written in 1923, strongly influenced not only conservative thought, but also many other political theorists across the political spectrum. On the other hand, when

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looking at the development of democracy as such, it is necessary to realise that everything is not as clear-cut as it might seem. Bernard Manin (1997) argues and demonstrates quite convincingly that the traditional understanding of the representative model as synonymous with democracy is rather mistaken and that democracy needs to be understood in a much broader context. Even today, the nature of democratic governance is a matter of broad professional but also societal debate that seeks to reflect a greater degree of citizen involvement in political decision making, i.e., calls for a greater degree of citizen participation (Pateman 2000; Della Porta 2013).

In the context of the discussed crisis of legitimacy of democratic governance not only in the V4 area, this issue has naturally also appeared in the Czech political environment. Furthermore, we can register the discussion on the importance of referenda in the V4 countries, for example in the context of Poland (Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2018). The Czech party system underwent quite dramatic changes in the period after the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union, which were also related to the emergence of several new political parties (Maškarinec and Bláha 2014; Šárovec 2016). Among them, there are also parties that, on the one hand, slide towards a populist form of communication (Naxera 2021). The issue of referenda is an integral part of their programmes, with a referendum at national level being a fundamental problem. This is enshrined in the Czech constitution, but there is no act implementing it, so referenda do not take place at this level. De facto, there are no regional referenda either, so the only referenda that take place are referenda at local level. These are the subjects of this text.

The crisis of the so-called civic sector and the related declining level of civic participation (Frič 2016) is also being discussed very intensively, often explained by the lack of interest of citizens. However, the claim about the underdevelopment of civil society is, in a certain perspective, a kind of mantra referring to the authority of Ralf Dahrendorf's famous statement about the necessity of three generations to establish a functional civil society (Dahrendorf 1990). In his study on political activism, Ondřej Čísař points out that the level of civic activism may not be nearly as trivial as research shows, as it is rather the question of how participation is understood by researchers that plays a key role (Čísař 2008, 25). If individual participation, measured by organised membership, is considered, the indicators in CEE countries are generally low, except perhaps for trade unions, which can, however, be seen partly as a post-communist legacy. These data are undeniable, but somewhat reductive, because if other researchers (Petrova and Tarrow 2007) shifted the focus from individual participation to the organizational level, a well-developed network of advocacy organizations emerges. However, this significantly contradicts the conclusions of the first approach. However, other forms of civic participation also include other activities (Navrátil and Kluknavská 2020), such as participation in local referenda. This is what we will seek to analyse in the context of the Czech Republic in the following text, which will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How intensively are local referenda used in the Czech Republic?
2. What is the success rate of referenda?
3. Are there differences between the use of referenda in different regions?
4. Is there a relationship between the size of the municipality and the use of referenda?
5. Does concurrence with elections affect the success rate of referenda?

## 2 DIRECT DEMOCRACY AND REFERENDUM IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Discussions about direct democracy traditionally refer to the period of ancient Athens, which is generally considered to be the cradle of democracy. However, it should be noted that it is not possible to understand democracy there as a suitable variant from today's perspective. Decision-making rights are in the hands of a limited number of inhabitants or citizens. However, citizenship was a highly exclusive matter, subject to several restrictions (most notably gender), and the number of citizens entitled to make political decisions was limited. From today's perspective, we could not talk about democracy in such a setting at all. In the subsequent medieval era, the idea of direct democracy and citizen involvement in political decision-making was completely abandoned, as the authority of the state was derived from the authority of God. The turning point in this respect comes only with the events of the modern revolutions, especially the revolution in England, which culminated in the execution of King Charles I and the absolute turn in political theory towards a contractualist approach. Both Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (Hobbes 2009), and John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* (Locke 1980) no longer derive the power of the state from God but from the citizens. The events of the Great French Revolution, then, influenced by the thought of Rousseau (2006) were only the completion of this process. Rousseau himself says that the people represent the principle of the so-called general will. It should be pointed out, however, that the general will in this conception is not the mathematical sum of the votes of all the citizens, but rather the principle of the common good, but it does recommend that the people should meet regularly to decide political questions, and it is the will of the people that is superior to the decisions of officials. Here we can indeed speak of a certain renaissance of the principles of direct democracy.

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his analysis of American democracy (Tocqueville 2009), also perceived the question of citizens' association as one of the key issues for the development of democratic systems, defending the interests of citizens and protecting them from possible tyranny. Citizens' organizations are usually seen as an indicator of the quality of democracy and are an essential element of a democratic society.

In the following years, however, there was a shift away from greater citizen involvement in the decision-making process, even at the theoretical level, with Schumpeter (2003) reducing citizen involvement in the political process in his definition to a regular electoral act where citizens cast their vote and further do not interfere in any way in political decision-making throughout the term. Such an approach is, of course, mostly unsustainable today and lacks the elements of active citizenship that we consider central to the functioning of democracy itself. Karl Raimund Popper (2002a; 2002b) followed up to some extent with his conception that democracy should also be subjected to constant critical reflection as a tool to make the democratic process more effective and as a control mechanism, but that this form of control and reflection should also take place in regular elections, where voters do not re-elect their representative if dissatisfied.

In the context of further developments in modern political thought and democratic theory, other models that attempt to find alternatives to the representative model and opportunities for greater citizen participation in political decision-making are receiving increasing attention. The main of these models then are the models of participatory democracy, which is mainly

associated with the theoretical work of Carole Pateman (2000) and which is now being built upon around the world with the so-called participatory budget, and the second model is deliberative democracy, the elaboration and popularisation of which has been stimulated by Jürgen Habermas (2005). However, several theorists have now argued that the two models of democracy have de facto similar starting points and goals, a point that Diana Mutz (2006) has elaborated on in more detail. As a rule, these much discussed models today run into the fact that they are very difficult to implement at the national level, which is why, from our point of view, the so-called third generation of deliberative democracy might seem to be the most relevant one, which has started to intensively address the question of the practical implementation of so-called deliberative forums, which could eliminate the conceptual shortcomings and problematic moments of the implementation of the deliberative process (and indeed of the process of direct democracy) in the setting of mass democracies.

This is the problem pointed out by Dahl (1998, 103–118) in his book *On Democracy*, where he takes the position that the size of a given unit, both in terms of territory and population, is a crucial factor influencing the possibilities of realizing broader citizen participation and possible direct democracy, where, of course, an inverse proportionality applies. Thus, the smaller the unit, the greater the possibilities for implementation. Common to most of the attempts made so far in the world is the resolution of issues that could be considered less fundamental to society (Znoj, Bíba and Vargovčíková 2014, 89), except for the technically successful but legislatively unsuccessful attempt to draft a new constitution for Iceland (Della Porta 2020). However, this case also showed that the possibility of citizen participation in national-level issues can work very well. Although, of course, it must be remembered that Iceland's population is around 320 000, which makes such a process much easier.

### **3 LEGISLATIVE ANCHORING OF THE REFERENDUM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

Voter participation is often cited as the most typical example of civic participation in liberal democracies, but it has been on a downward trend in recent years in many countries. This phenomenon has recently received considerable attention in the Czech Republic as well, both at the national (Linek 2010; Linek 2013), regional (Kouba and Lysek 2021), local (Maškarinec 2022) levels, but also in international comparison (Nový 2015). However, unconventional forms of political participation also receive attention (Čísař, Navrátil and Vráblíková 2011), although the theoretical grasp of the phenomenon of local referenda in the Czech Republic is somewhat problematic. The authors differ in their views on this issue. According to Pavol Frič (2016, 99), this is a participatory technique standing on the borderline between conventional and unconventional participation, but it is still, together with local elections, the most effective tool for influencing politics through civic participation at the municipal level (Čermák et al 2011). Similarly, Michael L. Smith (2009) considers the referendum to be a perfectly legitimate instrument. However, the problem arises in understanding the local referendum as a borderline type of participation in terms of conventionality. The local referendum, together with the regional referendum, is enshrined in the legal system of the Czech Republic, unlike the law on the national referendum, which has not yet entered into force. However, this fact is most controversial, as a certain view puts a legal act of civic participation anchored in legislation on the

edge of conventionality. This is because local referenda are largely used as a tool of citizen protest and are often triggered by civil society organisations or civic activists. In our case, however, we try to understand civil society and participation more in the context of how Alexis de Tocqueville understood them, i.e., as specific schools of democracy, the dismantling of which would lead to a reduction in the level of democracy; for this reason we see citizens' interest as a desirable phenomenon and do not try to judge it from a national level. One of these key issues is precisely the involvement of citizens in political decision-making through referenda.

The Act on Local Referenda has been part of the legislation since 1992, when Act No.298/1992 Sb. came into force. Other legal amendments have been made on the issues of validity and bindingness, namely Act No.22/2004 Sb. and Act No.169/2008 Sb., which brought a relatively significant simplification in the issue of local referenda. In the Czech Republic, a referendum can be called in principle in two ways, either by a decision of the council or by a proposal of the preparatory committee. However, this must still be followed by a proclamation of the council. However, to submit a proposal (in the case of a preparatory committee), it is necessary to provide a predetermined percentage of signatures of eligible residents, which is inversely proportional to the size of the municipality. Act No. 169/2008 Sb., submitted by the government of Mirek Topolánek in 2007, brought, first, complications in the approval process (Balík 2017, 65), but also the distinction of the quorum for validity and bindingness, which would be truly distinctive. The threshold for the validity of a referendum was lowered to 35%. This was also expected to result in a higher chance of referenda being feasible in larger municipalities.

The Czech Republic is specific in relatively strong population homogeneity, which prevents or rather suppresses significant regional differences in the identity of the population. As far as differences between regions are concerned, they are determined more by socio-economic status, which not infrequently influences the political orientation and level of participation of the population, while in other countries referenda are often a manifestation of regional identity (Stjepanović and Tierney 2019). In the Czech context, the capital city of Prague, which is also an independent region, has an extremely specific position (Blažek and Uhlíř 2007), while other regions show specific values of the level of political trust and participation more in relation to the political situation (Čermák, Mikešová and Stachová 2016). As a result, regions often develop in a highly asymmetric way and the degree of decentralisation of regional politics leads to significant differences, with some regions having a 'structurally handicapped' status (Baun and Marek 2007), which is reflected not only in the issue of referenda, but also in political representation in general, where, with a few exceptions, more prominent regional political actors are absent (Pink and Eibl 2018). Thus, the referendum cannot be understood as a manifestation of regionalism, but rather as a symptom of the political and socio-economic situation of a given region, reflecting the will and satisfaction of citizens regarding the need to intervene in public affairs.

#### 4 DATA AND ANALYSIS

The analysis was carried out based on a dataset containing all local referenda in the Czech Republic held between 2000 and 2020. This dataset was created based on the publicly accessible database of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech

Republic. However, it contains only referenda held since 2006, as the Ministry did not collect data on local referenda before 2006. The information has therefore been supplemented with the kind permission of Michael L. Smith, who obtained information on referenda not included in the official database for his studies (2007; 2009) and willingly provided this information. The total dataset thus contains information on 378 local referenda (272 of which were eventually binding) implemented between 2000 and 2020 on the territory of the Czech Republic, which was subsequently supplemented with additional data such as the coincidence with elections, etc. Despite this, the analysed dataset has certain limitations, for example in referenda with an unannounced result, but it is still the most reliable source that can show us quite interesting data. However, for our case, we individually searched for unannounced referenda, for example, in local periodicals, so we were able to complete the dataset for the years 2006-2020.

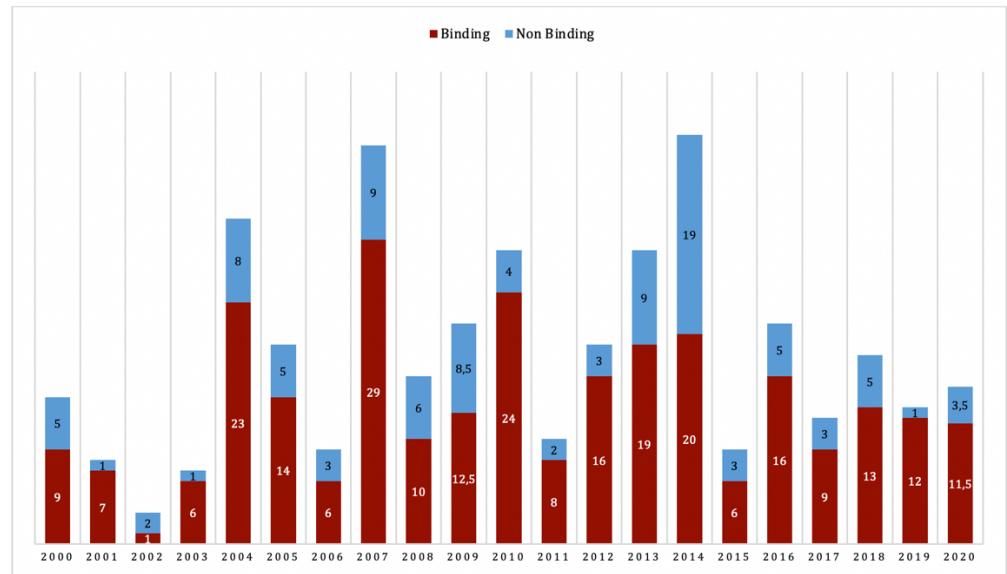
One cannot look for linear dependencies in the rate of implementation of referenda, but according to Balík, these are rather random waves caused by key issues such as the placement of the US radar in Brdy in 2007 or the large wave of referenda on the gambling ban in 2013-2014 (Balík 2017, 68). We should also add that another strong year, 2004, was mainly marked by referenda on nuclear waste repositories. On the other hand, 2006, 2011 and 2015 were the weakest years in terms of implementation, when, however, it was not so much the legislative obstacles that played a significant role, but rather the general lack of interest in using the instrument as a corrective to certain social injustices or other more socially resonant issues. It can also be concluded from the fact that after the above-mentioned legislative amendments, no significant constant increase in the number of referenda implemented can be observed.

#### 4.1 Evolution of the number of referenda in each year and their binding nature

The referendum first appeared in the Czech environment in 2000 and since then it has been a tool used to address a range of local issues and problems. The average number of referenda in one year is 18 referenda with announced results. In the first year, 14 referenda were held, but in subsequent years the number was lower, with only three referenda held in 2002 and only one ultimately binding. However, 2004 saw an increase in the number of referenda as the issue of nuclear waste disposal began to be addressed in connection with the commissioning of the Temelín Nuclear Power Station. The 31 referenda carried out were the third highest number of referenda carried out in one year.

Two years later, in 2006, the Temelín Plant was fully operational and approved, putting the repository issue back in the spotlight and 38 referenda were held. This number has only been surpassed once, in 2014, when 39 referenda were held. This year was thematically linked to the issue of regulating gambling in some municipalities, which was reflected in the frequency and preferred topics of the referenda. The following year, only nine referenda were held. Subsequently, however, the number stabilised again, and its variance corresponds to an average of 18 referenda per year. It should be noted, however, that the number of referenda held was undoubtedly influenced by the easing of the conditions in 2008.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF REFERENDA IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND LEVEL OF BINDING



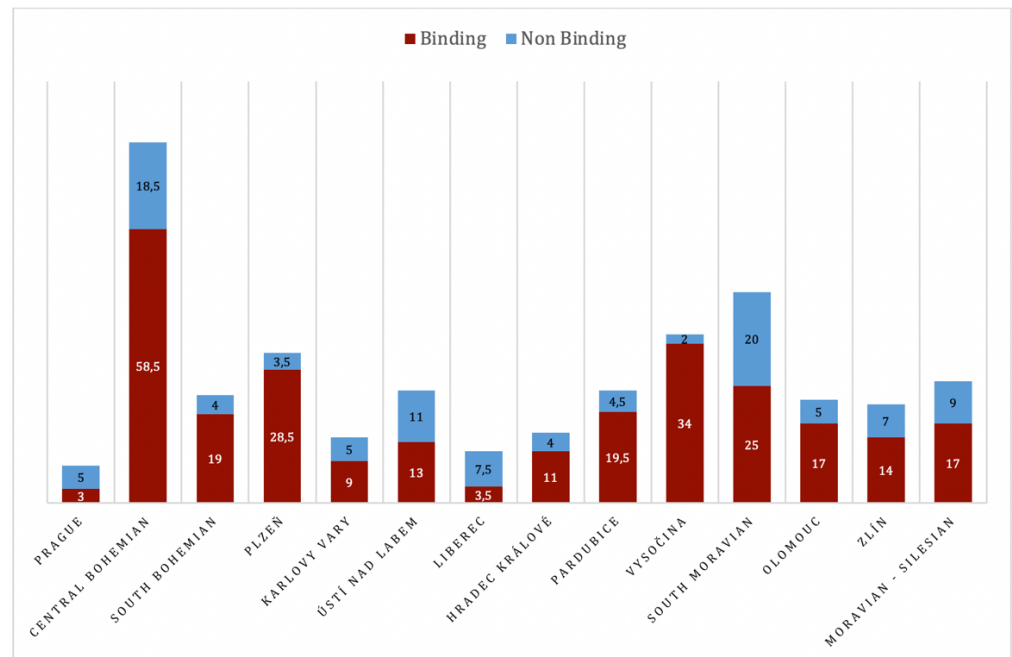
Source: own processing based on available data from the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic and Michael L. Smith's dataset-

#### 4.2 Development of the number of referenda in individual regions

A glance at the number of referenda in individual regions shows an indisputable fact. Referenda are not used evenly, so it can be assumed that local specifics, be it the regional political culture or the socio-economic situation, play a significant role in this phenomenon. Looking at the data, the 0.5 values can be slightly misleading, which could be explained as a kind of semi-referendum. But what is it? In some referenda, for example, there were two or even more questions, and it happened that some of them were not binding, although others asked in the same referendum were. In this case, we decided to enter a proportional part in the result so that the total number of referenda remained unchanged. A value of 0.5 therefore means that half of the questions were binding and the other half not.

The imaginary winner was the Central Bohemian Region, which carried out 77 referenda, that is, the absolute most of all and more than a fifth of all the referenda carried out. The second, the South Moravian Region, implemented more than thirty fewer referenda, exactly 45. The difference between these two regions corresponds, for the sake of illustration, approximately to the sum of the number of referenda carried out in Prague, Liberec and Karlovy Vary. Although the Central Bohemian Region was mainly affected by the radar topic in Brdy and the expansion of the airport in Vodochody into an international one, the South Moravian Region does not have its own "big topic". These are local topics that do not have a significant common denominator. In the case of large, society-wide topics such as the Brdy radar, nuclear waste or airport expansion, the higher rate is understandable and well explained, but the South Moravian Region really made do with local topics. On the other hand, the capital city of Prague struggled with the inefficiency of the use of the instrument, which is probably due to the size of the territorial units and the number of eligible voters, and thus the higher number of voters required for a referendum to be binding. The topics in Prague were almost exclusively related to transport policy or gambling, which seem to be topics that fail to fully mobilise citizens.

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF REFERENDA BY REGION



Source: own processing based on available data from the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic and Michael L. Smith's dataset.

### 4.3 Referendum Topics and Other Findings

Pavol Frič's research shows that more than half of local referenda are held in municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants (Frič 2016, 101), which only confirms Dahl's belief that direct democracy activities are easier to implement in smaller units. Moreover, Michal Nový points out, based on an analysis of referenda, that a key factor positively influencing active participation of citizens are the so-called NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) questions (Nový 2016, 497). These often confront citizens with decisions that directly affect the lives of the community, be it the construction of wind turbines or the establishment of a landfill on the territory of the municipality. The urgency of these issues usually leads not only to greater citizen participation but also to a greater degree of binding and validity of the referenda. It can often be objected that on NIMBY issues, citizens tend to exercise their personal interest and the interest of the local community over higher interests, which can mean complications for politics at the national level.

Stanislav Balík then summarises the subject matters of the referenda by stating that the issues of restricting construction in connection with business and the development of municipal property are of the highest interest, although issues such as the establishment of a nuclear waste repository or the construction of wind power plants play an important role, while the issues of transport and photovoltaics are at the tail of the frequency (Balík 2017, 74). However, several political parties are now pushing for greater use of referenda at the highest level of politics. The Pirates are a typical representative, actively trying to promote more prominent elements of direct democracy (Charvát 2015; Maškarinec 2020; Naxera 2021).



#### 4.4 Size of the municipality and the coincidence with elections

In the Czech Republic, since the introduction of the referendum instrument, a total of 378 local referenda on various issues have been held in the last 20 years. Whether it is questions of construction, merging municipalities, nuclear waste disposal or somewhat non-standard issues such as the future of the municipal restaurant. Of the 378 referenda held, 272 were binding, i.e., 72%. This shows that referenda are relatively successful and that they are being carried out on issues in which citizens have a genuine interest.

Of the total, 275 referenda were not held at the same time as elections, which is generally seen as a tool that usually helps to increase participation, making it more likely that the referendum will be binding. Despite this, a total of 272 referenda were binding, indicating a much greater experience in working with this tool, which leads to a more effective use. Citizens certainly prefer to decide on issues that affect them directly, but there is also a shift in the way referenda are called, towards a more effective use of this instrument.

The Central Bohemian Region clearly dominates in the inter-regional comparison, with 77 referenda, but it should be noted that a large part of them concerned the radar in Brdy. On the other hand, the least use of referenda is in the territory of the capital city of Prague, which is probably due to the size of the municipality, and in the Liberec Region, which has long exhibited a specific form of political competition, as local groups have traditionally scored more points here. These two regions are also the only ones where most referenda were not binding (in Prague 62.5% non-binding and in Liberec 68.2%), while the most effective regions were South Moravia (only 5.5% non-binding) and Plzeň (10.94%). The average value of the binding rate is thus about 72% in favour of binding.

If we look seriously at Dahl's assumption that forms of direct democracy are more appropriate for smaller municipalities or communities, then there is an inverse proportion between the chance of implementation and the size of the unit, that is, the larger the municipality, the lower the chance of implementation. If we look at the size of municipalities in which local referenda were implemented between 2000 and 2020, more than half were carried out in municipalities with up to 1,000 eligible voters, and if we also look at municipalities with up to 5,000 eligible voters, the total is more than 80% of all local referenda carried out.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF REFERENDA BY MUNICIPALITY SIZE

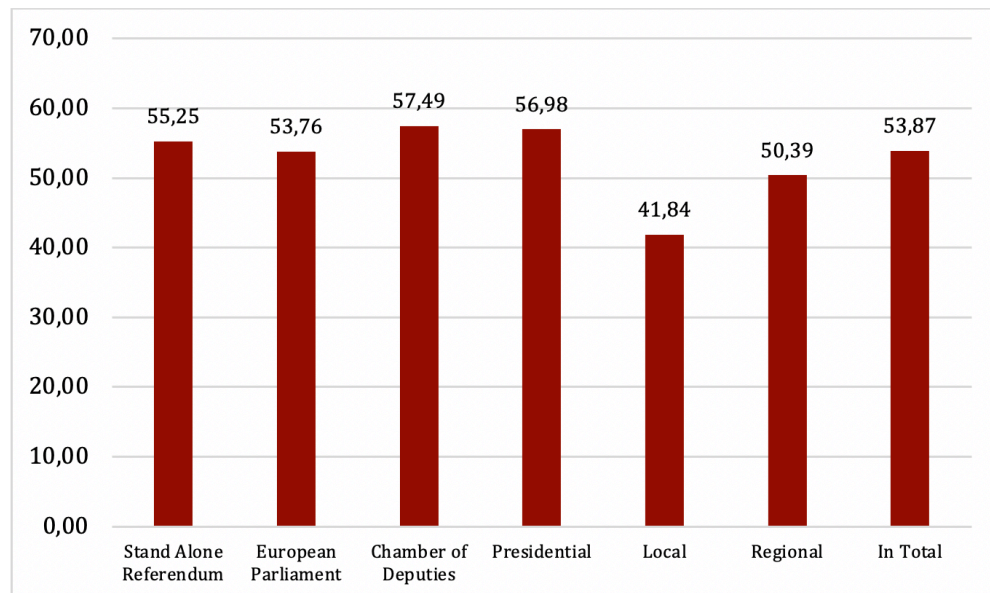
Municipality by number of voters	0-999	1,000-4,999	5,000-9,999	10,000-49,999	50,000-99,999	100,000 and more
Number of referenda	217	100	26	21	11	3

Source: own processing based on available data from the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic and Michael L. Smith's dataset.

The modus of the size of the municipality with a referendum carried out in the period under review is 305 voters. From this we can conclude that Dahl's assumption is indeed fulfilled, and smaller municipalities are more suitable and popular in terms of implementing local referenda. On the other hand, 35 local referenda per 10,000 voters were implemented in municipalities. Less than a tenth of the total number. Here, therefore, the assumption is fully confirmed. However, if we look at the relationship between the size of the municipality and the participation in the referendum by calculating the Pearson correlation

coefficient, the correlation coefficient takes the value of -0.32, which is a medium correlation and shows that this assumption is not as strong as might be expected.

**FIGURE 3: PARTICIPATION IN THE REFERENDUM AND CONCURRENCE WITH THE ELECTIONS**



Source: own processing based on available data from the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic and Michael L. Smith's dataset.

A look at the graph showing the relationship between the participation of citizens in the referendum and the coincidence with the elections may seem somewhat surprising. Although we might expect that scheduling a referendum on the same date as an election would lead to a higher turnout, the effect is rather negligible; in the case of the Chamber of Deputies and presidential elections, the increase is on the order of a few percent compared to the average. What is surprising, however, is that in the case of local elections, we can see an average decline in participation in referenda from 12% compared to the overall average participation. We can also say that, in general, the coincidence with the current elections does not have a significant effect on participation in the referendum. Indeed, a more significant fluctuation is only recorded at the municipal level, where, however, cases have been recorded where municipalities used, to put it mildly, strange practices to reduce participation in referenda (Hronová 2014), leading to extreme fluctuations in participation (deviant case) and the average value decreases as well. However, this does not mean that we can unequivocally state that coincidence with local elections is inappropriate for holding a referendum.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In the Czech Republic, the referendum is an instrument that is becoming part of the widespread practice of political participation. In twenty years, 378 referenda have been held. It is not possible to make value judgements about whether this is a high or low number, or whether it is good or bad. However, we can answer several questions. More than half of the referenda held during the period under review were held in municipalities with fewer than 1,000 eligible voters, and in municipalities with fewer than 5,000 voters, more than 80% of the referenda were held. It can be adequately concluded that smaller municipalities are, indeed,

a more effective platform for such an instrument. Both in terms of impact and in terms of promulgation possibilities. However, this does not necessarily mean that smaller municipalities as a space for implementation always mean a greater chance of success or interest in the referendum. The correlation between the number of voters in a municipality and turnout proved to be moderate and therefore not entirely suitable for stand-alone. Undoubtedly, the nature of the question is also an important factor, with a more significant impact being made by issues that directly affect most of the population in the municipality and have a direct impact on their quality of life, of course mostly in a negative sense. These issues, generally referred to as NIMBY (Not in My Backyard), receive more attention than any other in the Czech Republic, according to research (Nový 2016). Based on this, we can conclude that the success rate of a referendum does not depend directly on the size of the municipality (although they are more common there), but rather on the nature of the question.

In the Czech Republic, almost 72% of all referenda have been carried out in such a way that they were valid and binding. This suggests that referenda are called on issues that have a real impact on the life of the municipality and that calling a referendum today is an activity that is fully professionalised, leading to the setting of conditions that will produce the desired result, which is reflected in both the timing and the wording of the questions.

If we disregard the truly significant and de facto security issues, such as nuclear waste storage facilities or the location of the military base in Brdy, we cannot observe a significant year-on-year increase in the number of referenda held. The number of referenda does not vary significantly even in a year-on-year comparison, usually in the range of 10-20 referenda per year. Therefore, it is not a mass issue, but citizens are not afraid to take advantage of this step. However, of course, the smaller the municipality, the greater the chances of a successful referendum. And the initiators are also familiar with this approach, so that often referenda are held in urban districts rather than in entire cities.

Thus, local referenda are clearly influenced by regional politics and there are very clear patterns of use, as non-binding referenda lead to the non-use of this instrument in the region. Hence, the fact that there are significant differences between the regions, and certainly the acceptance of this instrument, is not unanimous across the regions. Nevertheless, in recent years, a shift towards more effective use can be observed even in these regions (Prague, Liberec Region), where previously referenda ended up being only non-binding. All this rather indicates that in the context of the current debate on the crisis of democratic citizenship and democracy in general in the V4 countries, the instruments of political participation of citizens are becoming established in the Czech Republic.

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## GLAS LJUDSTVA JE GLAS BOGA: LOKALNI REFERENDUMI V ČEŠKI REPUBLIKI 2000–2020

*Pričujoča študija se osredotoča na uporabo instrumenta lokalnega referenduma na Češkem med letoma 2000 in 2020. Ta oblika udeležbe državljanov je postala vedno širše uporabljena pri političnem odločanju. Na podlagi celovitega pregleda referendumov je opravljena analiza porazdelitve referendumov po posameznih regijah, iz katere je jasno razvidno, da se referendumi v nekaterih regijah izvajajo bistveno pogosteje, zlasti v tistih, kjer se pojavljajo specifična vprašanja varnosti ali lokacije jedrske elektrarne. Po predpostavki Roberta Dahla se izkaže, da je največji odstotek referendumov v manjših občinah, kar pa praviloma ne pomeni višje udeležbe. Izkazalo se je, da je pomembnost referendumskega vprašanja velikokrat bolj ključna od drugih dejavnikov. Kombinacija z volitvami se je na primer izkazala kot dejavnik, ki nima velikega vpliva na skupno udeležbo. Razmerje med zavezujočimi in nezavezujočimi referendumi kaže, da se ta instrument uporablja zelo uspešno in učinkovito, tako da je večina izvedenih referendumov zavezujočih in se uporabljajo za obravnavanje vprašanj, ki lahko mobilizirajo državljane.*

**Ključne besede:** referendum; participacija; demokracija; civilna družba; Češka republika.