

CONFLICT, CRISIS, COLLAPSE:

WAVERING URBAN GOVERNMENTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

During the communal election period 2014-2018, the Czech Republic has experienced a previously unseen surge of governing coalition collapses at the level of municipal administration. Judging by the election results, these numerous coalition crises were caused primarily by the weakening of established parties, which appeared unready to fight the appeal of new political groups. At first glance, the destructive variable of political group ANO 2011, officially founded only in 2012, is interlinking most of these coalition collapses. Comparing the number of documented coalition collapses and their impact, urban governments of statutory cities seem to be the ideal sample for thorough analysis. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present a unique comparative analysis of all fourteen Czech statutory cities that experienced a governing coalition collapse in the defined election period. The fact that ANO 2011 party links all these collapses is pointing towards a general assumption that coalition behavior of young inexperienced political parties has the power to “make or break” governments and considerably affect the development of a city, region or country. The frequent and previously unexplored coalition collapses in the Czech Republic show that the length and quality of previous city-specific coalition-making and coalition-maintaining practices is irrelevant when chaos is introduced by such an intervening variable. On the other hand, ANO 2011 entered Czech politics as an ideologically ambivalent party declaring openness and communication with all political partners. Using official statistical and legislative documents and media research, this paper searches for the critical intervening variable using “two Cs” of comparison: 1) cohesion, 2) collision. The presented empirical evidence tries to make sense of the reasons and developments of the coalition collapses in the Czech Republic and discovers that the reasons are all based on the failure to maintain and establish internal and external political networks. In the first stage such networks failed within the ANO 2011 party and in the second stage, they failed among coalition partners. ANO 2011 party emerges from the analysis as a party with an extremely high fluctuation of ambitious representatives and extremely low tradition of political conformity, respect for hierarchy and coalition loyalty at the municipal level. With such a diagnosis, the inability to exist in a political coalition seems to be one of the defining features of the ANO 2011 party.

Key words

coalition breakdown, local government, statutory cities, urban politics

1. Introduction

Roughly every fifth city in the Czech Republic experienced a collapse of the governing local coalition during the previous communal election period 2014-2018. Coalitions in Czech regions also caught the sickness and both Central and South Bohemian regions suffered a governing coalition collapse shortly after the 2016 regional elections. At the state level, the coalition established after 2013 parliamentary elections lasted only 24 months before it faced its fall. Judging by the election results, these numerous coalition crises at all levels were caused

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primarily by the weakening of established parties, which appeared unready to fight the appeal of new political groups. At first glance, the destructive variable of political group ANO 2011, officially founded only in 2012, is interlinking most of these coalition collapses. Comparing the number of documented coalition collapses and their impact, urban governments of statutory cities seem to be the ideal sample for thorough analysis. The Czech Republic is an example of strong, financially independent and autonomous urban governments, governed by collective political leadership. Most legislation is implemented directly at the local level so the collapse of governing coalitions often means paralysis for city governments, which operate with yearly budgets of billions of euros. The paralysis is noticeable particularly when it comes to strategic decisions in public services and projects. Ostrava lost a funding opportunity of 4.8 million euros to be used on intelligent transport systems. In Usti nad Labem, a public tender on communal services for 3.1 million euros was the main point on the agenda of the last city council meeting before the coalition breakdown. Instead of making a decision, the coalition removed the mayor and the city was left without complete political leadership for almost a year. In Brno, the coalition broke down while deciding about merging nine city companies with annual turnover of almost 353 million euros. During such a paralysis in Prague for example, more than 1.7 billion euros in current expenditures and more than 667 million euros in investment expenditures for year 2016 were divided in the absence of councilors for key areas of territorial development, education, city property and sport. In this environment combined with an already very limited four year election period, coalition collapses become a concern not only for politicians but also of the civil society, which can feel the paralysis of city development in daily life.

The purpose of this paper is to present a unique comparative analysis of all Czech statutory cities that experienced a governing coalition collapse. A flaw in cohesion, followed by a personal or policy collision and collapse has so far been documented in fourteen cities – Prague, Opava, Ostrava, Frýdek-Místek, Most, Ustí nad Labem, České Budejovice, Karlovy Vary, Brno, Havírov, Liberec, Jihlava, Chomutov and Prerov. The fact that ANO 2011 party links all these collapses is pointing towards a general assumption that coalition behavior of young inexperienced political parties has the power to “make or break” governments and considerably affect the development of a city, region or country. The frequent and previously unexplored coalition collapses in the Czech Republic show that the length and quality of previous coalition-making and coalition-maintaining practices is irrelevant when chaos is introduced by such an intervening variable. On the other hand, ANO 2011 entered Czech politics as an ideologically ambivalent party declaring openness and communication with all political partners. Using official statistical and legislative documents and media research, this paper will search for the critical intervening variable using “two Cs” of comparison: 1) cohesion, 2) collision. The presented comparative overview will make sense of the reasons and developments of the overwhelming and previously unseen number of coalition collapses in the Czech Republic.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

Chaos within urban coalitions might be unexpected empirically in the Czech Republic but has already been noticed, at least theoretically, in international academic research. The phenomenon is tightly connected with a much broader theoretical area of spatial research. MacLeod and Goodwin (1999) were one of the first to point out the necessity of restructuring the existing understanding of local and regional governance and suggest that terms like urban coalitions can never be fixed precisely because of the constantly changing political, economic and social processes

within a society. Even if one managed to do the impossible – name one urban goal supported by all the parties, institutions, and organizations concerned – the expiration date of a group with such a widely common viewpoint can be less than a few weeks. Perhaps that is the reason why the international academic research so far tends to focus on the formation of coalitions rather than their deconstruction. In coalition-making, we know that actors can follow the game theory scenario, they can be driven by policy-seeking, office-seeking or vote-seeking incentives (Luebbert 1986). Coalition-breaking on the other hand, is much less researched and the destructive transformation of incentives during the life of a coalition remains a question mark. Wolman et al. (2005) apply these concerns in case studies and find that not one of the traditional coalition-making strategies, such as coalitions of shared interests or party-imposed coalitions, are sustainable in modern urban governance in the long run. Urban coalitions thus seem to be stuck in a status quo, too advanced for old-fashioned coalition-building strategies but too rigid for developing alternative routes.

The gravity of such frequent political paralyzes cannot be ignored and must be incorporated in studies of governance capacities and strategic capacities, since a stable and functioning *government* is a necessary (but by far not sufficient) condition for *governance*. Academic research offers numerous routes to stability (and following efficiency) of urban coalition governments, such as the empirically rich strand of research on local leadership. Summarized by Sweeting et. al. (2004), there are three umbrella approaches to leadership in urban governance: a) designed and focused, which follows a unique vision under firm guidance of a mayor and his dedicated staff, b) emergent and formative, which links pragmatic organizational and inter-organizational cooperation on achievable common goals, and c) implicit and fragmented, without direction or integration, swayed by unstable allegiances and partial deals on favorable policies. The last form of leadership is the most likely to end in a breakdown of shifting allegiances and consequently a ruling coalition breakdown. Again, each of the approaches is greatly influenced by the changing societal, economic and political frameworks within a city.

In Czech academic research, authors such as Balík, Cabada or Jüptner have been the most influential in our knowledge about making and breaking communal coalitions. Cabada (2006) organizes the theoretical pillars of coalition formation on all levels under Czech circumstances. Balík (2008-2009), later in cooperation with Havlik (2011), is inspired in his research by Axelrod (1970) and introduces a typology of Czech coalitions based on their ideological proximity. Jüptner (2004 and 2006) dissipates similar grand theories at the communal level of small and medium size municipalities and finds that such coalitions are rarely united by one ideology and political stance. The path to understanding coalitions becomes tricky once researchers reach the problem of the level of analysis. Coalitions at the state government level and at the lowest level of communal politics are often formed with diametrically different procedures and forms of behavior. The research of urban coalitions in populated statutory cities resembles state government politics the most, which is why this research can relate to longstanding volumes of literature on the significance of coalitions in general, such as those of Lijphart, Riker or Buchanan. At the same time however, country specific knowledge of small communal coalitions is essential for small n research, since socio-economic and ideological factors play an immense role in the behavior of political subjects.

Despite their differences, all of the afore-mentioned theories think of urban governments as self-preserving organisms with occasional internal tensions and quarrels. The general idea is that rational actors will pursue their

interests *through* the coalition network since urban and local governance is characterized mostly by cooperative and collective action. Why would politicians willingly break the network, which is the only legitimate structure that enables them to make decisions and influence policy-making? Why have the Czech cities chosen to follow the worst-case scenarios that have so far been documented in international academic research? This paper tries to make sense out of this seemingly irrational behavior in a comparative analysis of fourteen Czech cities. Instead of grasping the topic through existent coalition typologies and theories, this paper leans toward the perspective of networks, which goes beyond the expected politically sane and rational behavior. When one departs from the traditional understanding of *coalition* and loosens the term into a broader theoretical basis of *network*, suddenly more options appear when analyzing its failure. According to Assens and Lemeur (2016, p. 2) a network is a structure fostering collaboration through confidence, the flow of information, complementarity of skills and the pressure of social conformity between peers. It is only through such a deeper background to the term coalition that one can understand the phenomenon of the presented coalition breakdowns.

3. Methodology

The chosen level of analysis is the most empirically rich, with more than a half of Czech statutory cities experiencing a coalition collapse within the years 2014 to 2018. Given the fact that voter preferences in statutory cities usually reflect those in regional and parliamentary elections, analysis of this sample is largely representative of the whole population. Coalition collapses have been registered in the same time period also at the state level, regional level and in great numbers at the municipality level. The level of statutory cities thus provides for an ideal and general applicability of outcomes. Only the 14 afore-mentioned cities which experienced a coalition collapse will be analyzed, even though most of the remaining statutory cities had also experienced turbulent times within their ruling coalition. The 13 remaining statutory cities managed to avoid a complete coalition collapse but oscillated around numerous personal and policy collisions. In the Prostějov city for example, 12 members out of the total 38 left the ANO 2011 party due to irreconcilable conflicts within the party. In Pardubice, the coalition government was so weak and unstable that the opposition had to be negotiated into voting in favor for coalition policies in the city council, otherwise all decision-making would be blocked. These “lucky losers” who managed to live through the election period without a coalition collapse are among the remaining statutory cities of the Czech Republic - Jablonec nad Nisou, Decin, Teplice, Mladá Boleslav, Karviná, Kladno, Zlín, Plzeň, Olomouc, Hradec Králové and Trinec².

This research operates with two pillar terms, which are 1) cohesion and 2) collision, and which were created under the assumption that politicians create coalitions voluntarily in order to govern (draft legislation and execute decisions). The inability to exist in a coalition therefore means an end not only of coalition policy agenda but also an end of decision-making. Such a breakdown is not a result of irrational political behavior but a failure to exist in a broader network of mutual confidence, social pre-requisites and information and skill sharing (see Assens and Lemeur, 2016). The pillar terms of comparison reflect this premise and try to search beyond the standard answers to coalition existence. *Cohesion* is chosen as the first criterion of comparison, as it indicates the level of loyalty and collaborative arrangement, which goes beyond party borders to achieve specific policy actions (Teles, 2016,

² Trinec has become a statutory city only on 31st August 2018 and has had a fairly stable coalition government in the 2014-2018 election period, which continues in the same composition after elections in 2018.

p. 10). This definition was first used by Teles in his book on inter-municipal cooperation but applies just as well to inter (and intra) party cooperation within municipalities. Absence of cohesion in both of these cases means the onset of political conflict. The cases within this criterion can fall into two groups, based on their coalition governments leaning more towards the lack of intra-party cohesion or lack of inter-party cohesion. The former is defined as a crisis of political identity, organizational rules and respected hierarchy. The latter is defined as basic lack of loyalty to declared and sworn coalition cooperation and a coalition program. *Collision* is the criterion that compares the specific nature of conflict, whether it was generally a conflict on the personal level or at the policy level in each of the studied cases. Only the irreconcilable forms of collision are considered in this research, i.e. those which lead to the loss of ability to govern due within the election period (Brunclik, 2014; Balík and Havlík, 2011).

4. State of the art

The election period 2014-2018 is unique in the number of coalition crises but also unique in the rapid and unexpected rise in votes for newly established political parties. Up until the communal elections of 2014, the urban as well as state, regional and municipal political scene, was dominated by traditional established parties – the Czech Social Democratic party (CSSD), Civil Democratic party (ODS) and Czech Communist party (KSCM), with slight interventions since 2010 from TOP 09 party and other moderately popular new parties (CSU, 2014). The three dominant parties had a history of active and stable engagement in post-revolutionary politics in the Czech Republic. As is typical for such established parties, all three are ideologically defined, hierarchically organized with local, regional and state leadership and focus on relatively stable political goals. At the same time, the concept of new parties was never unknown to Czech politics, especially at the urban and municipal level, where new parties and political groups often participated in councils and sometimes even in governing coalitions. These groups and parties were often organized only at the municipal level and usually focused on current local problems in their political agenda. The prototype of a new party started to break with the establishment of firstly Veci Verejné party in 2001 and later the mentioned TOP 09, which both managed to win seats in the parliament thanks to re-inventing and re-formulating conservative democratic topics, case of TOP 09, and adding appeal and modernity to politics, which was the case of Veci Verejné (Hanley, 2011).

However, it was not until communal elections of 2014 that new parties overran the established political elites not only at the local level but also in regional and state elections. The phenomenon was dominated by the surprising victory of ANO 2011 party, which was established only in 2011 and vested its luck into costly political marketing, populism, anti-ideological and anti-establishment stances. *Table 1* illustrates this break and provides a comparative overview of the first three most successful parties (and their city council mandates in brackets) in all the studied cities in the 2010 and 2014 communal elections respectively.

	2010	2014
Prague	1. TOP 09 (26) 2. ODS (20) 3. CSSD (14)	1. ANO 2011 (17) 2. TOP 09 (16) 3. Coalition SZ, KDU-CSL, STAN (8)

Opava	1. SOS PRO OPAVU (17) 2. CSSD (11) 3. ODS (9)	1. ANO 2011 (11) 2. CSSD (6) 3. KSCM (4)
Ostrava	1. CSSD (21) 2. ODS (12) 3. Ostravak (10)	1. ANO 2011 (15) 2. CSSD (12) 3. Ostravak (10)
Frýdek-Místek	1. CSSD (18) 2. ODS (8) 3. KSCM (5)	1. ANO 2011 (15) 2. CSSD (12) 3. Nase mesto F-M (6)
Most	1. Sdružení Mostecané Mostu (26) 2. CSSD (6) 3. ODS (6)	1. Severocesí Most (18) 2. Sdružení Mostecané Mostu (10) 3. ANO 2011 (6)
Ustí nad Labem	1. CSSD (11) 2. ODS (9) 3. KSCM (5)	1. ANO 2011 (12) 2. PRO! Usti (8) 3. CSSD (5)
Ceské Budejovice	1. Občané pro Budejovice (15) 2. CSSD (10) 3. ODS (8)	1. ANO 2011 (12) 2. CSSD (9) 3. Občané pro Budejovice (8)
Karlovy Vary	1. Karlovarská občanská iniciativa (8) 2. CSSD (7) 3. ODS (7)	1. Karlovarská občanská iniciativa (9) 2. ANO 2011 (6) 3. Karlovaráci (5)
Brno	1. CSSD (19) 2. ODS (14) 3. TOP 09 (9)	1. ANO 2011 (13) 2. CSSD (11) 3. Zít Brno with Pirates (7)
Havírov	1. CSSD (15) 2. KSCM (12) 3. ODS (5)	1. CSSD (15) 2. KSCM (13) 3. ANO 2011 (10)
Liberec	1. Zmena pro Liberec (9) 2. ODS (8) 3. CSSD (7)	1. Zmena pro Liberec (12) 2. ANO 2011 (9) 3. Starostové pro Liberecký kraj (8)
Jihlava	1. CSSD (11) 2. ODS (10) 3. KSCM (7)	1. ANO 2011 (8) 2. CSSD (8) 3. KSCM (6)
Chomutov	1. CSSD (8) 2. PRO CHOMUTOV (8) 3. KSCM (6)	1. PRO CHOMUTOV (8) 2. CSSD (8) 3. ANO 2011 (8)
Prerov	1. CSSD (11) 2. KSCM (6) 3. ODS (6)	1. ANO 2011 (9) 2. Spolecne pro Prerov (8) 3. KSCM (5)

Table 1. Overview of party success in communal elections 2010 and 2014

In the elections of 2010, CSSD claimed overall victory in statutory cities with ODS and KSCM closely following. In the elections of 2014, new parties gathered almost 40% of all votes, with ANO 2011 winning in 9 statutory cities, followed by other local political groups and only after by established parties. Further, the sharp step up from the shadow positions of new parties in urban coalition governments, as visible in *Table 2*, shows how in just four years the new parties became power players in urban politics.

	2010	2014
Prague	ODS + CSSD	ANO 2011 + CSSD + Trojkoalice
Opava	SOS PRO OPAVU + CSSD	ANO 2011 + Zmena pro Opavu + KDU-CSL + ODS
Ostrava	CSSD + ODS	ANO 2011 + KDU-CSL + CSSD
Frýdek-Místek	CSSD + KDU-CSL + VV	ANO 2011 + CSSD
Most	Mostecané Mostu + ODS + CSSD	Severocesí Most + KSCM + ANO 2011
Ustí nad Labem	CSSD + ODS + Strana zdraví sportu prosperity	ANO 2011 + PRO! Ustí
České Budejovice	Občané pro Budejovice + TOP 09 + CSSD	ANO 2011 + Občané pro Budejovice + KDU-CSL + TOP 09
Karlovy Vary	Karlovarská občanská iniciativa + TOP 09 + HOCJJ + Alternativa	Karlovarská občanská iniciativa + Karlovaráci + ANO 2011
Brno	CSSD + ODS	ANO 2011 + SZ + KDU-CSL + Zít Brno
Havířov	CSSD + KSCM	KSCM + ANO 2011 + Hnutí pro Havířov
Liberec	Zmena pro Liberec + CSSD + Unie pro sport a zdraví + Liberec občanů	Zmena pro Liberec + ANO 2011
Jihlava	CSSD + ODS + KDU-CSL	CSSD + ODS + KDU-CSL + Forum Jihlava
Chomutov	CSSD + ODS + TOP 09 + Severocesí	ANO 2011 + PRO CHOMUTOV + KSCM
Prerov	CSSD + ODS + TOP 09 + KDU-CSL	Společně pro Prerov + ANO 2011

Table 2. Overview of urban coalitions created after elections 2010 and 2014

As presented above, the coalitions after the 2014 elections were dominated by new parties under the overrunning presence of ANO 2011 in 13 cities out of 14, which faced a coalition collapse shortly after the elections. In contrast, the coalitions formed largely by established parties with the aid of a few local new parties endured throughout the whole election period starting with the elections in 2010. In search for an explanation, this paper utilizes the twofold comparative method of cohesion and collapse, which promises to reveal more thorough empirical explanations of the phenomena rather than using the common typologies and theories mentioned previously.

4.1 Cohesion

As described in the methodology section, cohesion indicates the level of loyalty and collaborative arrangement, which goes beyond party borders to achieve specific policy actions. Cohesion in a coalition government is twofold however, since a political party must achieve internal cohesion composed of shared political identity, organizational rules and respected hierarchy, and external cohesion, in which the declared principles of coalition cooperation and policy program are respected. When exploring the situation of governing coalitions in statutory cities, lack of cohesion was apparently the most burning problem appearing immediately after governing coalitions settled at the town halls. In Prague, the declared reason for the coalition collapse was the “complete loss of trust” among coalition partners (Prchal, 2015). At the same time, intra party distrust among ANO members of the Prague assembly weakened the position of the mayor in the midst of the coalition crisis. Even though the mayor’s position was saved at the outset of the conflict by the ANO party leader, this manufactured stability lasted for no more than two months before the coalition breakdown (Nachtmann, 2015).

A similar mixture of intra and inter party feuds lead to the fall of the coalition in Brno as well. The point of conflict was not the mayor in Brno but a councilor (and ANO member), who sparked harsh criticism within the regional ANO branch almost as soon as he was selected into the coalition government. Assembly members for ANO brought this conflict to the coalition table and started a rapid disintegration of the coalition. Even though the councilor was eventually more or less willingly expelled from the ANO party, the controversy around his position set the wheels of the coalition breakdown rolling (CTK, 2016). Karlovy Vary followed an almost identical path with their ANO councilor, who even though expelled from ANO party, remained a standing member of the coalition. The coalition formed alliances and took sides in this controversy disregarding party affiliation and soon enough disintegrated completely (CTK, 2015). A similar one-person controversy caused the coalition breakdown in Liberec, where the mayor (and ANO member) dismissed his deputy mayor and coalition partner soon after the coalition was created (Psenicková, 2016). Even though the mayor hastily named the councilor back into the position when he realized it might threaten his government, this escapade set start to the coalition breakdown within his own party and also among coalition partners.

Ceské Budejovice is an example of another city with a not so clear cut distinction between lack of inter-party and intra-party cohesion. The opposition in the city assembly, as is her right, demanded the deposition of the mayor (from ANO party) due to incompetence and ineffectiveness. To the public surprise, and possibly also to the surprise of the opposition, the deposition was supported by four members of the coalition (Vácha, 2015). However, no other two cities seem to be so entangled in the inter/intra party cohesion problems like Havirov and Frýdek-Místek. Havirov experienced two consecutive coalition breakdowns within a matter of months. The party charades began with three ANO coalition members migrating to the other coalition party, therefore causing a slightly illogical coalition breakdown, since seats in the coalition still remained secured by the governing parties in the same proportion. Nevertheless the ruling government was overthrown and carried on without ANO only to be overthrown again when one of the coalition parties decided it wanted to revive its previous cooperation with ANO (Pešek, 2016). Frýdek-Místek entered a vicious circle of coalition breakdowns early after the 2014 elections and never really exited it until the end of the election period. Indecent coalition-building tactics of ANO led to the first breakdown a few months after the elections. Indecent coalition-maintaining tactics of ANO killed the next coalition

effort and resulted in a complete disintegration of the ANO party club with two members effectively creating a second ANO party club, which was supposedly more “true” to the declared program. Shortly after, the original ANO club dissolved completely (Štalmach, 2016).

Ostrava, Chomutov, Jihlava and Prerov are perhaps the only cities that appear to have suffered a coalition breakdown due to “standard” inter-party coalition feuds and not intra-party rivalry. In Ostrava, the ANO party declared, that they “had all indications” to believe that their coalition partner (CSSD) was planning a putsch and therefore rushed to outrun them with their own version of changes in the city government (Kucej, 2015). Interestingly enough, the putsch according to ANO resulted in ANO having a majority of the seats in the new city assembly and governing coalition. Chomutov belongs to this group as well, since their coalition breakdown was initiated by a policy topic which cracked inter-party loyalty within the coalition, when the most represented coalition partner was accused of corruption (Strnadová, 2016). In Jihlava, policy problems also resulted in a coalition breakdown, which gave ANO a chance to be a part of the newly formed coalition after being in the opposition for two years despite gaining the most popular votes in the 2014 elections (Pavlíček, 2016). Finally, Prerov experienced an exit of two coalition parties, leaving ANO with another coalition party standing alone and unable to execute decisions. The inter-party turmoil came as no surprise, since Prerov was used to a stable two-party coalition government for 16 years before new parties entered the city government in 2014 (CTK, 2017).

In Usti nad Labem, ANO party took most of the blame for the coalition breakdown since ANO party members in the city assembly removed their own ANO mayor and replaced him and other coalition partners. This putsch was too much even for the state ANO party organization, which dissolved the regional ANO party organization in Usti nad Labem and demanded the resignation of the disobedient party members. The “rebels” however refused to resign and managed to keep the newly formed coalition functional until the end of the election term despite the displeasure of ANO state party (Horáček, 2015). Opava followed a similar scenario of coalition breakdown. The ANO party in the city government split in two fractions, thereby losing the majority coalition votes in the city council. The disgraced ANO state party organization again resorted to dissolving the regional party fraction in Opava (CTK, 2015). A coalition breakdown bordering on legality took place in Most, which corresponded with a regular inter-party conflict scenario until the police started investigating leaked recordings, which revealed bribe and blackmail attempts utilized along the process (Kassal, 2015).

4.2 Collision

After the breakdown of cohesion comes collision, the final point of non-negotiable conflict. In the case of Czech cities, collision was usually escalated at the meeting of the city assembly and was crowned by a motion of no confidence issued by assembly members toward the coalition government. It follows from the cohesion criterion, that flaws in intra-party cohesion usually correspond to personal-level collision and flaws in inter-party cohesion correspond to policy issue collision. However, the Czech cities show that personal-level collision was dominant in most cases. The nature of the conflict lay deep in interpersonal intra-party relations in Ustí nad Labem, where the ANO party consisted of long-standing political figures with intertwined pasts in other political parties (so called professional politicians) standing against newcomers who envisioned radical change (Horáček, 2015). Therefore, personal conflicts started to spread immediately without intra-party structures and mutual respect of hierarchy.

ANO members, who were recruited for being “celebrity” representatives of the politically active segments of society were also the reason for the coalition breakdown in Opava. As oppose to ANO members who switched to the party after political careers in different parts of the political spectrum, the ANO political newcomers were reportedly overly ambitious and greedy (Telaríková, 2015). The ANO party, as a member of the coalition in Opava, also named the presence of their own member as a reason to disband the coalition. Surprisingly, most of the other coalition members were more than willing to lose their role in the government in exchange for arguing over their colleague (CTK, 2015). Brno is another example of intra ANO party collision, which caused a coalition breakdown. The controversial figure of one ANO councilor caused a state wide debate about his presence in the party. The mistrust and suspicion within the councilor’s own party immediately started serving as a reason for coalition breakdown within the coalition (Valásek, 2015).

Another group of cities experienced a coalition breakdown also due to personal problems but this time at the inter-party level. In Ostrava, the problems started with an ANO member, who allegedly tried to secretly lure other coalition partners into reforming the coalition and excluding some existing members. He later declared that this was only a trick to test the loyalty of other coalition partners. However, such actions shook the trust within the coalition and two months later, ANO repeated this strategy publicly in all seriousness (Lesková, 2015). Prague experienced a strong coalition conflict over the presence of one coalition councilor, who himself was not afraid to publicly criticize his coalition partners. The personal conflict was translated into professional incompetence resulting in stripping the councilor of all his assigned agenda of territorial development and an imminent coalition breakdown as a response from his party (Rovenský, 2015). Liberec “copied” Prague in almost every aspect of the coalition breakdown. Again, a personal conflict with a councilor was displayed as an inability to manage her agenda of territorial government and that was presented as a reason for her removal by the mayor (Psenicková, 2016). With this strategy, the coalition breakdown was unstoppable. Most follows this scenario as well, with the official reason for coalition breakdown being failed coalition communication fueled by the bribery attempts committed by ANO coalition members (Kassal, 2015).

Havirov stands on the border between personal inter and intra party level problems. In their first coalition breakdown, the collision occurred solely because of the exit of councilors from the ANO party due to their internal feuds. The second breakdown a few months later was more focused on the fiery debate about finances, where the social democrats could not push through their vision of the city budget (CTK, 2016). Frýdek-Místek was tormented by personal problems of inter and intra party nature even longer. The city representation seemed to lack any sort of categorization on the political spectrum, as members of political parties formed several types of coalitions always based on personal relations between politicians rather than political ideology or program. The repeated coalition breakdowns were therefore the result of discrepancies between declared and actual coalition voting on delicate issues, which have been going on for months prior to the coalition breakdown. Similarly, Ceske Budejovice experienced a coalition breakdown due to the “betrayal” of four coalition members who decided to vote with the opposition for the removal of the mayor and his vice-councilors, reportedly because of personal ambitions, financial gain and lust for power (Nová, 2015).

On the other side of the spectrum stand policy level reasons for the coalition breakdown. Prerov is an exemplary case of that. Disagreement started almost in synchrony with the creation of the coalition and included failed communication with the public, too much autonomy of the city bureaucracy and the lacking transparency of the city government (CTK, 2017). The problems in Jihlava oscillated around urban spatial planning and industrial projects. The disgust within the coalition about the paralyzed decision-making resulted in the gesture of resignation of one councilor and the consequent breakdown of the whole coalition (Jirku, 2016). Chomutov had just one topic of collision, and that was the controversial financial support of the city hockey club and its links to the ANO party. The financial gifts from the club accounts to the ANO party and the reciprocal financial support of the club from the city budget seemed as no coincidence, given the fact that the club CEO was simultaneously a councilor from ANO party (Strnadová, 2016).

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explain the phenomenon of frequent coalition collapses at the municipal level in the statutory cities of the Czech Republic, within the previous election period of 2014-2018. Specific attention has been given to the role of ANO 2011 party in the coalition breakdowns as its presence was one of the new variables in Czech communal politics in the studied period. After a statistical overview of the political situation in studied cities, this paper compared all the Czech cities which experienced a coalition breakdown using “two Cs” of comparison: 1) cohesion, 2) collision. Criterion of cohesion indicated the level of loyalty, cooperation and trust, which translates the same within parties and within coalitions of parties. Criterion of collision then looked at the two-fold nature of the political conflict, once cohesion was lost. Using official statistical and legislative documents and media research, the paper provides a comparative overview of the developments and reasons of coalition collapses in Prague, Opava, Ostrava, Frýdek-Místek, Most, Ustí nad Labem, České Budejovice, Karlovy Vary, Brno, Havířov, Liberec, Jihlava, Chomutov and Prerov.

In terms of cohesion, the methodology used a twofold analysis based on coalition governments leaning more towards the lack of intra-party cohesion or lack of inter-party cohesion. All of the primary political crises in the subcategory intra-party lack of cohesion were caused by problems in the ANO party. Most of the cases tended towards the mixture of intra-party and inter-party lack of cohesion. Nevertheless, all problems in this center area were caused again primarily by ANO party members. Only four cities have suffered a coalition breakdown due to solely inter-party lack of cohesion. However, only one city, Jihlava, is an example of a coalition breakdown caused by the lack of inter-party cohesion *without* any involvement of the ANO party. Regarding the collision criterion, all but three of the studied cities tended to fall into the personal level category of reasons for the collision. Out of these three, only the representatives of Prerov continuously stated similar policy reasons for coalition breakdown, which were not stained by personal hatred, gossip or power scheming. Altogether, even if the failed coalitions managed to re-negotiate their way back into the coalition government in the same party composition, the composition of represented coalition politicians in each party was rarely the same. This is just another part of evidence that proves the individualistic form of politics within the ANO party with high fluctuation of representatives – when one ANO party member fails to realize his political career successfully within a coalition government, there is always a different party member who is willing to take up his place with different political

strategies using different political partners. *Table 3* displays the overview of the cities in terms of what subdivision of each criterion they lean towards.

Cohesion		Collision	
Intra-party lack	Inter-party lack	Personal level	Policy level
Brno»	«Ceské Budejovice	«Ceské Budejovice	
Frydek Mistek»	«Havírov	«Frydek Mistek	
	Chomutov»	«Havírov	«Chomutov
	Jihlava»		«Jihlava
Karlovy Vary»		«Karlovy Vary	
«Most	«Liberec	Liberec»	
«Opava		«Most	
	Ostrava»	«Opava	
	«Praha	«Ostrava	
	Prerov»	Praha»	Prerov»
«Ustí nad Labem		«Ustí nad Labem	

Table 3. Overview of cities analyzed through set criteria

When inserted into the theoretical overview in the first section of this paper, this comparative empirical evidence gathered in the 14 cities proves the immense importance of well-established internal and external political networks for a successful coalition government. In the first aspect, this implies a history of organizational rules, established hierarchy and political identity. In the second aspect, the well-established networks represent the loyalty to declared coalition cooperation and program, which is proven to be very hard to achieve without a history of previous collaboration between political partners. The ANO party evidently lacks both aspects of political networks, therefore their entrance into communal politics almost immediately turned into a destructive and unsustainable form of government. At the same time, the ANO party performs exceptionally well in election campaigns and election battles, where they masterfully use election program promises to their advantage. This contributes even more to the popular shock caused by their consequent destructive participation in communal politics. Unfortunately, the citizens of the affected cities are the ones who take the toll for these governance experiments.

The long-term and short-term effects and implications of the described coalition breakdowns are a topic for a much more expansive research, as is the proper in-depth analysis of each of the cases of coalition breakdown. This paper

tried to achieve only the most descriptive and general goal, which was to provide the first comparative overview of coalition breakdowns in Czech cities, within the election period 2014-2018. More research should be gathered in the area of political networks specifically applied to the case of the ANO party, in order to understand if and how confidence, trust and political conformity is developing between party members. Further attention should be paid to the time validity of such research, since the breaking point between “new” and “traditional” parties has not yet been defined. Such a definition could greatly aid the research, and perhaps even help prevent, coalition breakdowns caused by inexperienced and power-hungry new political groups.

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