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Perspectives of Czech Youth Activists: Political Culture & the Cycle of Passivity

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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to gain insight into the current political culture of the Czech Republic, through the perspectives of current youth activists. Three separate interviews were held in order to accomplish this. A representative from The Young Conservatives (Mladi Konzervativci), The Young Social Democrats (Mladi Socialni Demokrate), and European Values (Evropske Hodnoty) were interviewed concerning their opinions regarding the current Czech political environment. Each youth activist was asked questions focusing on how their specific group organizes, how they personally became politically involved their personal reasons for becoming politically involved, and their opinions regarding the Czech current political dynamic. Three topics were consistently discussed within each interview; the lack of civic education, the negative views associated with mainstream Czech political parties, and the image of corruption within society. Their perceptions concerning the upcoming presidential elections and their solutions regarding the current Czech political problems are also explored. While no concrete conclusions are drawn, observations regarding a cycle of political passivity amongst Czech youth are proposed. Through the opinions detailed in this small group of the politically active youth, it is proposed that the current lack of civic education and understanding, the negative views surrounding political parties, and the pervasive image of corruption all fuel a cycle of political passivity amongst Czech youth.

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Introduction

Political perceptions held by the public contribute in establishing the specific political culture of a society. While it is important to always investigate and consider the political perceptions held by every section of society, this study chose to try to gain insight into the current Czech political atmosphere through the perspective of Czech youth activists. Youth activists were chosen as the focus for this study due to their influential social and political involvement throughout Czech history and also due to the researcher's interactions with politically active American youth as an undergraduate Political Science major. It is also useful to note that this study defines the term "politically active youth" as a section of Czech society, ranging from ages 18-30, that are involved in some formal political organization. Even though the data utilized within this study was collected from individuals representing three different political organizations, there was definitely a trend amongst the discussed topics within each interview. This study aims to highlight the perceptions held by youth activists regarding current political topics. Based on this select group of interviews, it is suggested that certain topics such as a lack of civic and political education within current Czech school systems; negative opinions regarding political parties; and the image of widespread corruption, all fuel a cycle of political passivity amongst young people. Their views on the upcoming Presidential elections and their opinions regarding applicable solutions to the political problems within the current Czech political society will also be illustrated and applied within the context of this paper. Initially, information regarding methodology and organization background will be explained. Secondly, the opinions of Czech youth activist concerning political and social topics will be showcased. Finally, the researcher

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will analyze those opinions and relate them back to a circle of political passivity amongst Czech youth. Even though previous studies have investigated current changes in youth activism within the Czech Republic, this research project aims to merely explore Czech youth perceptions.

Methodology

Instead of employing the traditional quantitative research methods and designs largely associated with academic political science studies, this project primarily utilized qualitative research techniques. Also, the usage of qualitative data provides a more intimate and personal understanding of the current perceptions held by youth activists. This intimacy is especially useful when discussing their opinions of the current political culture within the Czech Republic. Three separate interviews were conducted as the main source of qualitative data for this study. In an attempt to gain opinions from contrasting political perspectives, a representative from The Young Conservatives (Mladi Konzervativci), The Young Social Democrats (Mladí Sociální Demokraté), and the European Values (Evropské Hodnoty), were interviewed within this study. Before the interview process began, a set of about fourteen questions was produced and presented to a political scientist to ensure their relevance within the context of the research study (See Appendix for question set). Also, two interviews were held with two Czech political scientists who are currently active within their fields, in order to gain some background information on the current political atmosphere, and their views on Czech youth activism.

During the actual interview, each youth representative was asked the same questions from the previously discussed question set. The question set utilized within this study was divided into three specific categories. The first part contained questions

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focusing on the specific communication and organization details of each political group, mainly asking how each respective group congregates, how they reach out to other young people, and their individual goals and focuses. The second was more concerned with each interviewee's personal reasons for getting involved and why they chose their specific organizations. Finally, the last section contained questions concentrating on each individual's opinions regarding the current political and social environment within the Czech Republic. Each answer was recorded on a digital recorder and also through handwritten notes taken by the interviewer. Once the interview process was completed, each interview was transcribed, and then coded to find the relevant themes between the three interviews. Ultimately, the topics that were previously discussed were found, and then presented to the same political scientist to once again ensure their significance and relevance within Czech political society.

Background

Three representatives from three separate youth organizations were interviewed for this research project: Matěj Trávníček from The Young Conservatives, Radek Hlaváček from The Young Social Democrats, and Jakub Janda from The European Values. Each interviewee was over eighteen years of age, and agreed to have their opinions quoted and utilized within the study. Even though the opinions expressed by each youth activist are the main focus in this paper, it is also necessary to consider the background information of each individual's affiliated political organization.

Understanding the political agenda and purpose of each organization will also provide greater insight into the personal, political and social goals and priorities of each youth activist. The first youth activist, Trávníček, has been a member of the Young

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Conservatives since 2004. At this time he was sixteen years old. Similar to many other groups, The Young Conservatives organization was founded in 1991, after the implementation of numerous political and social reforms influenced by the 1989 Velvet Revolution. According to Trávníček, the organization has over 800 members, 100 of which are very active. As a political organization, The Young Conservatives focus on “enabling young people, lets say right wing minded young people, to get involved, and to get in touch with us” (Trávníček, 2012). Once an individual becomes a member, it is up to them if they want “to go to politics, or just be active as a citizen way” (Trávníček, 2012). The Young Conservatives also describe one of their main goals as promoting “the conservative values for young people” (Trávníček, 2012). While the term “conservative values” can be applied to many different topics, this youth organization mainly supports conservative thinking in terms of economic policies and reforms. These policies generally include conservative opinions regarding “taxation, the deficit, government spending, the role of the state, and the size of the state” (Trávníček, 2012). In terms of gaining new young members, the Young Conservatives believe that the best members, the ones that are most likely to be very active, are those “who come by themselves” (Trávníček, 2012). Even though there is no active campaign to gain new members, The Young Conservatives try to have a public presence through various conferences. Conference topics can range from subjects relating to “environmental issues, foreign policy, presidential elections, economic issues, and the politics of other countries as well” (Trávníček, 2012). Members of The Young Conservatives range from ages 18-35, and can have a joint membership within The Civic Democrat Party, also known as ODS, when they turn 18. Even though this joint membership is possible, The Young

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Conservatives still consider themselves as an independent organization from the Civic Democratic party (Trávníček, 2012).

The second Czech youth organization is formally known as The Young Social Democrats. Compared to the Young Conservatives, the Young Social Democrats represent opposite ideological values. According to Hlavacek, The Young Social Democrats primarily focus on the ensuring the “idea of human dignity within the capitalist system”, instead of concentrating on economic issues (Hlavacek, 2012). The Young Social Democrats embody traditional Social Democratic values. These values usually focus on issues concerning the availability of good healthcare and education options, a reliable pension system, and the destruction of corruption within Czech society. Hlavacek, a member since he was eighteen, explains that The Young Social Democrats are concerned with national and international economical issues, but stresses that “ you have to always think about the human dignity and the human rights, there is no excuse for lowering them, or threatening them” Hlavack, 2012). In order to convey these ideals within the public sphere, this organization usually utilizes public demonstrations, magazine articles, and even occasional television appearances. Like the Young Conservatives, The Young Social Democrat organization is independent from the formal Social Democratic Party, but a joint membership is possible, once an individual reaches eighteen.

Unlike the previously mentioned groups, The European Values organization is defined as a non-partisan think tank. The European Values was founded in 2005 through the efforts of several master degree students who “were all involved with European affairs within the context of politics and they really wanted to put their messages, not

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through the political parties, but through some method of civil society”. Formally, European Values defines itself as “non-governmental, not-for-profit, pro-European think-and-action tank that works to promote freedom, personal responsibility, and a active civil society” (evropskehodnoty.cz). European Values extensively utilizes high profile public debates concerning “Czech interests”, conferences on both a national and international scale, and internal internship programs for young individuals who want to become involved on the political and social scene (Janda, 2012). Even though the formal goal of European Values is not to politically mobilize the youth generation, they try to utilize the public debates and forums to “make young people feel that politics might be cool or fun” (Janda 2012). In addition to their public debates and conferences, European Values utilizes social media outlets, like Facebook to broadcast their various events. Janda, a member since 2010, has seen first hand just how influential the power of Facebook can be on group organization and public attendance, especially concerning the attendance of the younger population. Their distinct utilization of Facebook, has allowed them to market their events more specifically to young people, overall increasing attendance to their public debates and conferences (Janda 2012).

Perspectives On Youth Political Passivity

As previously stated within the introduction, this paper will work to emphasize the opinions of active youth, regarding the political atmosphere of the Czech Republic. Between the three conducted interviews, one common topic discussed was the political passivity of the Czech population, especially amongst the younger generation. Political passivity can be basically defined as the lack of public action within the political system. In order to be politically active, individuals can vote, join political parties, attend political

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debates or conferences, or hold public demonstrations. Even though the Young Conservatives, the Young Social Democrats, and European Values are all organizations that represent different political and social ideals, each individual commented on the lack of interest amongst the Czech youth population, regarding political affairs. Unlike the other two interviewed individuals, Trávníček argued that the current political complacency within the Czech Republic is “common within all society,” and is not just something experienced within the youth population (Trávníček 2012). Even though there is currently a large amount of dissatisfaction regarding the political environment, there is little action from the public to organize change. Instead of channeling their frustration into actions that could have some effect on the political culture, Trávníček argues that the public is “too busy drinking beer” (Trávníček 2012). According to Trávníček, when there is an issue within Czech society “you go to pub, you drink beer and you say ahh ahhh ahh, that’s bad that’s bad, and um you get five or ten beers and you go home and go to sleep, and the next day is the same,” thus fueling this cycle of complacency.

In contrast to Trávníček, Hlaváček and Janda discussed political passivity more specifically within the context of the youth population. In Hlaváček’s opinion, “the young people within the Czech Republic are totally passive,” and says that there is a “gap” between the general public and those within the political system (Hlaváček, 2012). As previously stated, the Young Social Democrats are predominately concerned with social issues that effect the entire Czech society, such as the availability of appropriate healthcare and the preservation of a reliable pension system. Even though the Young Social Democrats organization tries to make these issues interesting to young people, the youth population mainly only mobilizes to fight issues that directly affect them, such as

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the issue of the “scholarship” (Hlaváček 2012). The issue of the “scholarship” refers to the current debate about whether or not the public should be responsible for paying for their university education, instead of the state. While the scholarship reforms is an example of an issue that caused the youth population to become politically active, when issues that don’t have a direct effect on the youth population arise, such as wage cuts for doctors or firemen, there is little to no reaction from the youth population (Hlaváček 2012). Like Trávníček, Hlaváček believes that there is currently “a high level of discontent” within political society, but the youth generation believes “that it can get better without their activism” (Hlaváček 2012). While Janda does not use the term political passivity explicitly, he does agree that there is a low amount of youth who politically active. Janda also comments on the fact that Czech political parties “have no people at all” (Janda 2012). While there is a stronger support for NGO’s compared to political parties by the younger population, this is still a relatively low number. This number is especially low when compared to the preset amount of political and social dissatisfaction felt by Czech citizens. Not only do these youth activists see an issue with the amount of political activism within the entire society, two of them also comment on the lack of political participation within the youth community. The issue of political passivity is a complex one. Using the opinions expressed through this study, the researcher purposes that the forthcoming issues discussing the lack of civic and political education, the “dirty” appearance of the political parties, and the widespread image of corruption within Czech political society fuels a specific cycle of political passivity amongst Czech youth.

Perspectives on Civic Education

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The need for reforms within the Czech education system was also widely discussed throughout each interview. Each individual identified the lack of understanding regarding how to become active within the political system, as one of the main reasons for the political passivity amongst Czech youth. Groups like the Young Conservatives have a hard time gaining members because “there is a low level of knowing that something like MK exists” (Trávníček, 2012). Membership within the Young Conservatives is also hampered because Czech citizens are not aware that “organizations like MK are normal in other Western Civilizations”. According to Trávníček, “people are trying to be active, but they do not know how to be active”. Without the appropriate knowledge of how the political system functions and the individual’s role within the system, it is almost impossible for someone to become seriously politically engaged. Even though Trávníček acknowledges this need for an increase in civic education, he still believes that even if these reforms are made “we can not expect the rise of political activity,” within the Czech Republic. He believes that a “specific post-communist political culture has developed” in the Czech Republic, and that certain things, like political activism, “will forever be different”. Even though political activism will never be exactly the same as other countries, certain steps must be taken to show those who want to become involved what their resources are. Maybe once this occurs, it will take those politically interested and frustrated individuals out of the pubs and into the formal political sphere.

Like Trávníček, both Hlaváček and Janda agree that there is a need for a more serious development of civic studies within the Czech education system, but each of them also illustrates additional problems within the school systems. Even though Hlaváček

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agrees with the outlawing of “political propaganda” within schools, he believes that there should be more discussions concerning political issues (Hlaváček, 2012). In order for these discussions to occur, “the teachers must lead students to talk and think about political issues” (Hlaváček 2012). This can be done with or without the teacher disclosing his or her opinions in regards to the political event or topic. But, due to low wages and fear of causing any “conflicts”, the teachers within the Czech education system do not prompt any political discussion amongst their students (Hlaváček, 2012). Hlaváček believes that this gap in the education system further leads to the existing “passivity of young people” (Hlaváček,2012) .

As with the previously illustrated opinions of Trávníček and Hlavacek, Janda agrees that the current youth population has no idea how to become politically or socially involved. From his perspective, “all people who want to get involved, have no idea how to do that, and they all come to me because they think that I’m the insider” (Janda 2012). Janda has also conducted his own research in terms of investigating the teaching of modern history within Czech schools. Through his interviews with teachers and other experts within the education field, Janda has also identified an issue concerning the methods and time when topics involving civic and political engagement are taught. According to Janda, the education system doesn’t allot the appropriate amount of time within the academic calendar for the teaching of “the civics” (Janda, 2012). Also, civic topics are mainly taught within the third and fourth year of high school. This is problematic because this is also the time when Czech students are preparing to take their exams to get into university. Because of this clash of interests, Janda believes that students are more focused on studying for these exams, “and don’t really give a crap

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about what is going on in the classroom” (Janda, 2012). Even the university classes regarding the civics have a “weak connection to what happened after 1948, or the second half of the twenty-first century” (Janda 2012). Unless an individual takes it upon himself or herself to learn how to be politically and civically engaged, they would have no idea how to access and operate within the political system. Ultimately, the failure of the education system to prompt some political and social debate, and inform students of their political resources seems to create a certain cycle of passivity amongst the younger generation. There also seems to be a section of the youth population that wants to become active within the social and political sector, but are unaware of their options.

Opinions Regarding Images of Czech Political Parties

Another factor within the current political environment that might also be fueling passivity amongst Czech youth is the public image associated with political parties. Membership within a political party is commonly seen as the quintessential form of conventional political activism. Although there are numerous political parties within the Czech Republic, “there is three times less members of political parties (in the Czech Republic) than in Germany” (Trávníček, 2012). Even though it is possible to become a member of a political party once an individual turns 18, there are only a small number of young people who actually participate or associate with mainstream political parties. In terms of the relationships between the youth political organizations included within this study, such as the Young Conservatives and the Young Social Democrats, and their affiliated political parties, the Civic Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party, a complicated dynamic can be seen. Even though the Young Conservatives promote themselves as an independent organization from the ODS party, they recently signed a

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formal treaty recognizing themselves as the youth organization of the Social Democratic Party. This treaty also illustrates that the ODS party is the only party that the Young Conservatives will cooperate with (Trávníček, 2012). Even though Trávníček works closely with the ODS party, he illustrates a more pessimistic picture of the public image regarding political parties. He explains how multiple political parties are losing voters due to corruption scandals and examples of dishonesty within the parties. This distance between the public and the political parties is causing further frustration within the political atmosphere. “The people are not satisfied, and they do not know what to do,” explains Trávníček. This frustration with the political parties ultimately causes the society to further fall into their passivity (Trávníček, 2012).

As with the Young Conservatives, the Young Social Democrats also identify themselves as an independent organization from the Social Democratic Party. With that being said, the Young Social Democrats depend on the help from the Social Democratic Party, such as representation within formal political affairs, in order to have their ideas taken seriously. In order for them to actually change things, they must “start to work with the party, and participate there” (Hlaváček, 2012). While the Young Social Democrats and the Social Democratic Party share a lot of the same political opinions and ideas, the Young Social Democrats “are more aimed to the topics of young people, and this causes some “communication” problems between their organization and the party (Hlaváček, 2012). The Social Democratic Party does extend some internship and assistant opportunities to members of the Young Social Democrats, but in the past, this has just allowed the party to exploit the interns as unpaid workers. This exploitation usually occurs during an election campaign, and usually involves the younger members “working

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on the streets for the party for no money” (Hlaváček 2012). Although this improves their connection with the party, it is not in the manner they want, and the connection quickly decreases once the campaign is over.

In terms of his opinions regarding the public’s perceptions of the parties, Hlaváček paints a rather negative picture. Unlike Trávníček, Hlaváček argues that the public feels a great amount of mistrust towards the political parties. Even though the majority of the individuals involved within the political parties are “normal people that just care about these topics and want to help,” the majority of the public views the entire party as “mafias that usually aim to steal money from people” (Hlavacek, 2012). While this opinion might seem harsh, it is something that has progressed throughout recent Czech history. After the revolution in 1989, the Czech people had high hopes for their government. Although there was a complete reform within the political sector, the Czech people are ultimately still disappointed with the system. Due to numerous corruption scandals within the government, something that will be discussed later on, the Czech public feels as if “the revolution was stolen from them in the favor of the parties” (Hlaváček 2012). This feeling of betrayal has caused the public to resent the political parties, causing them to abstain from joining and associating themselves with them, once again leading towards a politically passive society.

Like the others, Janda also expressed negative opinions about Czech political parties. Although European Values is a non-partisan organization, Janda does identify himself with the values of the Top ’09 party, but does not become a formal member because “it would really put some scratches on my involvement with the European Values” (Janda, 2012). One of Janda’s largest issues with the Czech political parties is

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how closed off they are to young individuals who want to become politically involved.

The political parties further portray this “dirty” image by closing themselves off to politically interested youth. According to Janda, “it is almost impossible to become a member of the Social Democrats or the Civic Democrats” (Janda, 2012). Those who are fortunate enough to break into the party “will stay at the lowest level” no matter how talented or qualified they may be. Even though there are many qualified young people who want to become politically involved, they are not interested in becoming members of political parties, because they do not want to “beg for their place” (Janda, 2012).

Unfortunately this only adds to the current dynamic of political frustration within the Czech Republic.

This lack of openness within the political parties can be explained by the fact that they feel threatened by the presence of new, young, and educated activists. Individuals who are involved within current political parties are not open to new young members, because “it would get some old people, who are not really effective and have been sitting on their chairs since 1994, out of the party, and it would get young progressive and effective people in the party,” according to Janda (Janda, 2012). Due to the lack of accessibility of the current political parties, and the inability for an individual to progress once he or she is a member, there is little to no participation by young people within formal political parties. Due to the lack of knowledge regarding other forms of political activism, young people within the Czech Republic view participation within political parties as one of the only ways they can be politically active. This of a lack of civic education and understanding, combined with the negative views associated with Czech

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political parties, drives Czech youth to not want to be involved in the current political sphere.

Views On Corruption

Another prevalent issue discussed within each interview was the topic of corruption within the Czech political and social context. As previously discussed, the public had high hopes for their government and society after 1989. According to Hlaváček, those that once participated in the 1989 political protests and are now involved in current politics “are showing to other people that they have lost their ideals” (Hlaváček, 2012). Hlaváček uses the current Minister of Defense as an example of this “loss of deals” (Hlavacek, 2012). “For example, our current Minister of Defense is one of the major leaders of the students movements in 1989, be he stole some money” (Hlaváček, 2012). Unfortunately, the years that followed 1989 were defined by a number of high profile corruption scandals, ultimately diminishing the public’s faith within the political system. Even those who were once fighting for political and social reforms in the Velvet Revolution have been involved in public corruption scandals. This infidelity by those within the political system has only caused the public to further dislike conventional political parties. All of three of the young people interviewed within this study illustrated strong, yet varying, opinions regarding corruption, and the role it plays within the current Czech political and social scene. Even though Trávníček was motivated to become a member of the Young Conservatives due to the “huge corruption and very bad economic policy” that engulfed the 2004 government, he believes currently there is merely an image that everything is corrupt (Trávníček, 2012). He believes that the public has this idea that “there are so many scandals and everything is corrupt”, but in

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reality “this current government is solving the corruption” (Trávníček, 2012). Trávníček also believes that the current Prime Minister, Petr Necas, is against compromising in terms of corruption, and that his government is first to actively punish those who are found to be corrupt. Even though he believes that the corruption scandals concern “problems from the past”, he also believes that this image of corruption within the current society is causing the youth population to not be politically active (Trávníček, 2012). Janda also supports Trávníček’s opinions, when he argues that “ this is the first government who has used the power of law to fight corruption” (Janda, 2012). Although this is the first government to actively fight corruption, Janda believes that “they have no idea how to communicate how they deal with corruption” to the general public (Janda, 2012). This lack of communication causes the public to still “not want to get involved with the parties because they are all seen as corrupt” (Janda, 2012). This is just another factor within Czech society that is causing anger amongst the youth population, and causing them to become passive.

According to these two youth activists, there is a current misconception regarding corruption within the Czech Republic. The corruption scandals of the past seem to be haunting the modern political environment and overshadowing the current government’s fight against corruption. This misconception regarding corruption might be shattered with the implementation of more political discussions within the Czech education system, as previously discussed within this study. If educators were able to accurately inform students about the lessening amounts of corruption scandals, and the current government’s decreasing tolerance regarding those who commit corrupt acts, the youth population might have more positive opinions toward the political system. If the youth

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population has more positive opinions of the political system, they might be more likely to become politically involved.

While Janda and Trávníček express an improving view on the amount of corruption within the current Czech society, Hlaváček expresses a more negative opinion. According to Hlaváček, “corruption is the biggest issue” within the current Czech political and social society (Hlavacek, 2012). Contrary to the previously discussed opinions, Hlaváček does not believe the current government is doing enough to combat past and present issues concerning corruption. In his opinion, “the government does not do anything against,” and instead of passing laws against corruption, they are just constantly involved in new scandals all of the time (Hlaváček 2012). In order to combat this issue, Hlaváček supports plans to make the punishment for corruption “asymmetric” to the crime. He believes that if the punishment is stronger, it will make the thought of committing corrupt acts less attractive. Since the image of corruption is predominately associated with mainstream political parties, young people once again do not want to become involved within the political parties. They are afraid that their membership will change them or “corrupt” them. This opinion was not expressed by Hlaváček, but rather by his friend Petr. Even though he was present for our interview, Petr is not a politically active youth. Even though Hlaváček is trying to convince Petr to become politically active, he says it is too stressful for him. This is a perfect example of how the widespread image of corruption is making the younger generation less attracted to political parties. Hlaváček believes that “no one wants to be a minister or a deputy because they just feel that it will destroy them” (Hlavacek, 2012). Since the majority of the youth population believes political parties to be completely corrupt, they believe their involvement “will

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lead them to be corrupted” (Hlavacek, 2012). Once the problem of corruption is remedied within society, he “strongly feels that people will come more to the parties” (Hlavacek, 2012).

Perceptions Regarding Czech Presidential Election

2013 marks the first year in the history of the Czech Republic where the President will be elected through a public vote. Considering the fact that is a historically and politically significant even within Czech society, it is important to try to understand the current perceptions held by the youth population concerning this presidential election. Due to presidential candidates like Vladimir Franz, Trávníček believe that “there is quite a big influence in youth activism” (Trávníček, 2012). This is argued by Trávníček mainly because it is the younger generation that is “highly involved within his campaign”, and ultimately convinced him to run for the presidential office (Trávníček, 2012). Trávníček also describes how the Civic Democratic Party is working with their candidate, Mr. Sobotka, “to promote his candidacy to young people” (Trávníček, 2012). Both Franz and Sobotka are apparently reaching out to the younger generation by giving lectures within the universities and meeting with young people. Even though there are multiple candidates who are being endorsed by the younger population, Trávníček does not believe that there will be an increase in the amount of young people who vote within this election. He argues that the percentage of young people who vote in this presidential election will be the same amount as those who voted in the general elections, around 20-30% (Trávníček, 2012).

While Trávníček refrained from portraying the election in either a positive or negative light, Hlaváček believes that the 2013 elections will not change anything. He

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argues that a change “will only happen in 2014, when there are elections in the lower chamber” (Hlaváček, 2013). His negative opinions are mainly caused by his belief that there is no strong candidate to support. The two front-runners, Fischer and Zeman, are not considered to be particularly suitable for the position. Both Fischer and Zeman were previous Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic. Even though this means that both candidates have experience within high profile political affairs, neither is widely known as an extremely influential Prime Minister. While Fischer is known for not making any monumental mistakes a Prime Minister, he is also known as the Prime Minister that didn't do anything (Hlaváček, 2012). While Zeman and Fischer do not represent any innovative political ideals or platforms, Hlaváček believes that they have a strong support within the general public because people have strong sentimental ties to the past (Hlavacek, 2012). Considering the negative connotations held by political parties, Hlaváček believes that the “youth generation will basically support some independent candidate” (Hlaváček 2012). Although he believes that the younger generation will generally support an independent candidate, he is surprised at the amount of youth support there is for the Social Democratic Party's candidate, Jiri Dienstbier. Although he is associated with the Social Democratic Party, Mr. Dienstbier is known to be quite an independent politician, even within his own party (Hlaváček, 2012). Although he does have a considerable amount of support within Czech society, Hlaváček believes that Dienstbier would make a better Minister of Justice or Chairman of the Social Democratic Party, at this time, rather than the President of the Czech Republic (Hlaváček, 2012). Even though neither Fischer nor Zeman seem to be what the Czech Republic currently

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needs in terms of a presidential figure, Hlaváček believes that they are the most likely to win the election.

Unfortunately, Janda shares Hlaváček's negative outlook on the upcoming presidential election. He strongly argues that there will be huge levels of dissatisfaction amongst the public after the election. This is because the public "will see that the direct vote has done nothing" (Janda, 2012). Like Hlaváček, he views the two frontrunners, Zeman and Fischer, as candidates who represent "old ideas" and the "old generation" (Janda, 2012). They are not the new faces the Czech political scene needs to help restore confidence within the system. Janda does think that there are certain candidates that could be seen as "progressive", but are not considered as serious contenders because they "are not able to reach out to the audience" (Janda, 2012). Although the 2013 presidential election could be utilized as a method for the public to instill some change within the political system, it will most likely just further perpetuate feelings of frustration within the current Czech society.

Political Solutions From Youth Activists

Consider the fact that the majority of the interviews conducted within this study revolved around negative aspects of the Czech political society, it was interesting to hear possible solutions concerning the restoration of public faith within the Czech political system. In addition to a stronger policy against corruption, Hlaváček believes that the solution lies within the construction of a new constitution (Hlaváček, 2012). In his opinion, the current Czech constitution is "very vague", and filled with gaps and questions. Relating back to the topic of a lack of civic and political education or understanding within the Czech Republic, Hlaváček believes that "people don't even

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know what is written in the constitution” (Hlaváček, 2012). If the public was aware what was actually written in the constitution, Hlaváček believes that there would be a large consensus to have it changed. This is another example of how improvements within the field of civic and political education might help remedy certain political frustrations, and help restore political activism amongst Czech youth.

Janda also endorses a rather drastic solution, in terms of restoring security within the political system, and making activism more attractive to the younger population. Due to the negative images of political parties, and the strong impact this has on the amount of youth political activism, he supports a complete reform form within the political parties. In order for this internal reform to occur, “ the current political parties get have to get their ass’s beat in the current elections” (Janda, 2012). This “wakeup call” will cause “internal crashes within the party, which would make for the leading person of the party to step down, and the middle generation will have to get involved”. Along with the incorporation of the middle generation within the political parties, Janda believes these internal reforms will also bring more young people into the political parties. The whole negative “discourse” concerning Czech politics will only be changed once the faces associated with the political parties are changed (Janda, 2012). Janda identifies this negative political discourse as the belief that “politics are bad and the politicians are bad” (Janda 2012). Once the general public can see that their actions can have an effect within the political spectrum, they will be more likely to want to become active, and break this current cycle of political passivity.

Concluding Remarks and Analysis

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Even though this study has a limited scope, the perceptions expressed by each politically active youth have helped provide insight into the current political culture of the Czech Republic. After analyzing the information supplied by this small sample of Czech active youth, observations regarding a cycle of political passivity amongst Czech youth were proposed. While this is a very complex matter, some of the topics discussed in this paper seem to all have some direct effect on the current level of political participation amongst the Czech youth population. This cycle of political passivity is not something that sprang up over night, it is something that has been cultivated within Czech society since 1989. After the implementation of numerous political and social reforms during the early 1990's, the majority of the Czech population had high expectations regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of their political system. Unfortunately, these expectations were not met. Instead, numerous high profile political officials and representatives were more known for their corruption scandals than their political policies. Due to the highly publicized nature of these scandals, the public began to only associate political parties as dirty and corrupt, instead of useful political and social outlets. This feeling of betrayal felt by the public regarding the Czech political parties caused the public to become detached from the political culture. This detachment, coupled with the lack of an effective civic education system, has caused the current youth population to have almost no desire to become politically active. Due to the corrupt image and lack of accessibility associated with Czech political parties, the youth population does not want to be associated with them, but are unaware of how else to become involved, thus adding to their frustration and lack of political involvement.

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In order to combat this cycle, the public must regain their belief that their actions within the political sphere actually mean something. They have to restore their faith in the political system and their specific role within that system. This might occur if the political and social issues raised by the three active youth within this study are addressed. From this study, it seems that the youth population must be prompted to consider and discuss current political events and issues within their school systems. These discussions will not only raise their understanding about what is currently occurring within the political sector, but will also help them understand how they can personally become involved and make a difference. Secondly, Czech youth must play a larger role within the formal political parties. Once younger new members become associated with the parties, it will help change the negative images held by the public. Ultimately, the public must regain its faith in the political parties, and the political system. This faith will only be restored once they are aware of their political opportunities, and make an active effort to involve themselves within political events and issues. This is only half the battle though. The political parties must become more open to new members, especially those who represent a younger demographic.

Initially, this study was only intended to highlight the perceptions of currently active Czech youth. Even though the opinions expressed by these three politically active youth were interesting by themselves, they held an even more fascinating meaning when applied to the larger political and social scene. Their perspectives relating to these three topics were consistently discussed in each interview; the lack of civic education within school systems, the negative images surrounding political parties, and the widespread image of corruption. After analyzing these perceptions, the researcher saw a relationship

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between these topics and the lack of political participation within the youth community. After the public's high expectations for the post 1989 government were not met, they lost their faith in the political system, and made them view conventional political parties in a negative light. This loss of faith and negativity surrounding conventional methods of political activism has prompted the public to involve themselves with political organizations and events. Political passivity is further fueled by a lack of education regarding political events, topics, and systems. The youth generation is barely aware of current political events and manners in which they can be politically involved, creating more distance between them and the political sphere. While those who were interviewed did not discuss the specific cycle outlined in this paper, they all mentioned how the discussed topics place a negative connotation on politics, obviously making it less attractive amongst the younger generation. Even though was study was conducted on very basic level, hopefully it will lead to more in depth analysis pertaining to the topic of political passivity amongst the youth population, and what is necessary to remedy this issue.

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Appendix

Question SetGroup Organization

- How many active members do you have within your organization?
- What would you say is the average age within your organization?
- How do you reach out to the larger youth community to gain members?
- What role does social media (Facebook) play within your organization?
- What is the specific agenda of your organization? What are your primary focuses?
- What is your relationship with your mother organization?
- What actions does your organization take to effect the political environment on a larger scale?

Personal

- What and did you become politically active? Why?
- What age did you become a member of your organization? What made you chose that specific organization?

Reflections on the Current Political/Social Environment

- Do you see any problems with the current amount of youth participation within political groups? If so, what do you think has caused these problems?
- How do you think the immense development of NGO's and volunteer groups has effected youth participation within political parties?
- Do you think there is a wide consensus of mistrust regarding the current youth population and conventional methods of political activism?
- What do you think attracts youth activists to your specific organization? What improvements do you think your organization can make to become more attractive to the current youth generation.
- Why do you think it is important to work to involve the youth population within politics, and how you effectively communicate this with the public?
- Do you see any difference with youth activism now compared to youth activism of the past (1989)?
- What effect do you think the upcoming presidential election will have on youth activism?
- What specific role does youth political groups play within the larger social and political atmosphere within the Czech Republic?