

DOI: [10.52950/SS.2024.13.1.002](https://doi.org/10.52950/SS.2024.13.1.002)

# THE DEMOCRACY TAX - POLITICIANS' IGNORANCE AND VOTERS' LACK OF INFORMATION IN A DEMOCRATIC CONTEST, A CASE STUDY FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC

*VILEM CAP, MAREK FEURICH, MARTIN LUKAVEC*

## **Abstract:**

This paper highlights an important and neglected democracy limitation: voters make decisions based on incomplete information. This leads to inefficient or irrational decisions and applies to elections at all levels of the political system in the Western world. This paper shows that voting with incomplete information leads to the election of incompetent politicians. Testing of the Prague representatives has shown their lack of knowledge to perform their duties. The regression analysis performed does not show a statistically significant relationship between the representatives knowledge and their education or political experience. A possible solution is a sophisticated training system for elected candidates.

## **Keywords:**

democracy, limits of democracy, competence of politicians, inefficiency of governance, rational choice, information asymmetry, education

**JEL Classification:** H11, I21, K10

## **Authors:**

VILEM CAP, Prague University of Economics and Business, Czech Republic, Email:

Vilem.cap@seznam.cz

MAREK FEURICH, Prague University of Economics and Business, Czech Republic, Email:

feurichmarek@gmail.com

MARTIN LUKAVEC, Prague University of Economics and Business, Czech Republic, Email:

lukavec@gmail.com

## **Citation:**

VILEM CAP, MAREK FEURICH, MARTIN LUKAVEC (2024). The Democracy Tax - Politicians' Ignorance and Voters' Lack of Information in a Democratic Contest, a Case Study from the Czech Republic. International Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. XIII(1), pp. 13-32., 10.52950/SS.2024.13.1.002

Acknowledgements: This work was funded by the Internal Grant of the University of Economics in Prague entitled "Determination of the level of knowledge of Prague city district councillors in Laws No. 250/2000 Coll. and No. 131/2000 Coll.". Data from respondents was collected as part of this project. [grant number IG507021].

## Introduction

Almost every year, every democratic country holds some kind of election - municipal, regional, parliamentary, presidential or European elections. The possibility to stand as a candidate is most often limited only by citizenship or by the age of the candidate, but no other restrictions are usually given (EC, 2023). Candidates therefore have to fulfil virtually no conditions in terms of their knowledge or competence. This paper seeks to contribute to the academic and policy debate by drawing attention to a significant negative element in the functioning of democratic political systems, namely the situation where voters make decisions based on incomplete objective information. This reliance on incomplete data leads to inefficient or irrational choices, a prevalent issue in the current democratic model that can lead to the election of incompetent politicians.

The voter's choice of candidates is normally based on subjective factors, objective factors or a combination of both (Cedefop, 2013). Subjective factors are based on the degree of consistency between the form and manner of the candidate's presentation and the voter's opinion of that presentation, where the voter 'identifies' or 'disagrees' with the candidate. Perhaps the most important component of the objective factors, but one which the voter is usually unable to define or identify, is the competence of the politician to hold office (van Noord et al, 2023). Competence to hold office is a practically undefined variable. It includes the willingness to study the background material for deliberations, the willingness to educate oneself in the field of governance, the elementary ability to know and navigate the relevant legal norms, the ability to conduct a debate on the basis of rational arguments, the ability to see the consequences of one's decisions and, equally important, the ability not to bring into the decision-making process the consequences of one's own life situations unrelated to the exercise of the office. However, competence to hold office still has no units of measurement, unlike the age and education of candidates (Grönlund and Milner, 2006). Competence to hold office is usually not defined or identified by the voter, let alone taken into account in the act of voting itself (Delli Carpini (1999). However, the voter has the opportunity to obtain such information, and (unfortunately) mainly at the expense of his or her free time - by watching the minutes of meetings of representative bodies, communicating with politicians, etc. But the question is how many voters are willing to sacrifice some of their free time to watch politicians in order to judge their competence. Objective factors include, for example, the candidate's age, level of education, occupation and other publicly available information about the candidate that has been confirmed by the candidate (property ownership, marital status, number of children, current political party affiliation, etc.). Some of this information also appears on the ballot paper. For age, the general assumption is that older people should have more experience than younger people. Those with a university degree are also expected to have a higher level of knowledge than those with a secondary (or primary) education. Another variable that often appears on the ballot paper is whether the person already holds (or has held) an elected position - for example, if the candidate is a councillor, a deputy or an MP. It is also common to expect that people who have held the office they are standing for will be more competent than those who are standing for the first time. But is age, education or the number of times someone has been elected to office enough information for voters to make a rational decision?

It is clear from the above that assessing the fitness to hold office of politicians (at various levels, including local government) is not a straightforward matter. However, without information on the level of competence of elected local government officials, it is not possible to identify shortcomings and take possible measures for improvement, and without sufficiently qualified

officials, municipalities/regions/states/European Union may, for example, manage public funds inefficiently. There are usually no control mechanisms to monitor the knowledge of candidates. The most common control mechanism for the actions of councillors is the control of the public, which has the right to know about their actions and decisions (Soontjens, 2022). However, this cannot completely prevent ineffective action.

The aim of this research is therefore to find out, using the example of the Czech Republic, whether the representatives of political representation have sufficient knowledge to perform their duties. This research tested the knowledge of Prague municipal districts representatives in two legal norms that are essential for the work of a representative, namely the Act on the Capital City of Prague<sup>1</sup> and the Budgetary Rules of Territorial Budgets<sup>2</sup>. These laws are crucial for the performance of the function of Prague representatives, as they move within them on a daily basis. There are a total of 57 municipal districts in Prague, 10 of which were selected on the basis of a suitable date for the council meeting that provided testing opportunities. These districts were then asked to participate in the research, which ultimately involved 50 representatives. Based on the above research gap and the aim of this article, the authors define 3 research questions.

- 1) *To what extent are representatives familiar with the legislation under which they make decisions?*
- 2) *Are there differences in the performance of councillors within groups by age, education or number of times elected to office?*
- 3) *Is there a connection between the knowledge of the tested laws and the level of education of councillors, the number of times these councillors are re-elected or the age of the councillors?*

The article is divided into the following sections. The introduction is followed by a literature review. The third section describes the methodology. The fourth section focuses on the presentation of the results. The fifth section presents a discussion of the results. The last section is the conclusion, which not only addresses the research questions and the objective of this paper, but also provides suggestions for concrete measures to improve the current situation.

### Literature review

Contemporary literature suggests that education, experience, personal skills and abilities, knowledge of legislation or communication skills can be considered as general attributes representing qualifications (Cedefop, 2013). Some of these attributes are not easily tested, while others are. For example, Pushpa (2016) analyses the legal knowledge of councillors in an Indian district. Other studies focus on the knowledge of councillors in other specific areas - for example, research by Malla, Dahal and Hasegawa (2020) analyses the knowledge of councillors in disaster preparedness in Nepal. However, most studies seem to focus on what we know about politicians and leaders, or how we imagine them to be, rather than what they themselves know (see for example Galston, 2007; Papcunova and Gecikova, 2014; Dimitrov et al, 2014; Eveland and Garrett, 2017; Weaver, Prowse and Piston, 2019; Walgrave et al, 2023).

---

<sup>1</sup> Act No. 131/2000 Coll.

<sup>2</sup> Act No. 250/2000 Coll.

The importance of the qualifications of elected representatives can also be seen in terms of some basic economic theories. According to public choice theory, district representatives can be thought of as politicians ("producers") who are elected to four-year terms in local elections by the citizens ("customers") of the districts, both of whom seek to maximise their own utility in these elections (Boyne, 1998; Protection, 2003). It is in the interest of citizens to elect representatives who will carry out their mandate competently. However, the question remains as to how voters can verify the qualifications of individual candidates and whether available information such as highest educational attainment, age or number of times a candidate has been elected is a sufficiently meaningful indicator. Recent research (van Noord et al, 2023) shows that people generally prefer candidates with higher education to those with lower education, and this preference seems to be mainly due to their perceived higher competence. People with less education perceive candidates with more education as more competent and express strong agreement with the dominance of the university educated when it comes to choosing a political voice. Education refers not only to general competence, but specifically to theoretical or cognitive competence. These competences are the most important factor in electoral decision-making.

Another important finding is that the foundations of political competence are laid at an early age, and it is in primary and secondary school that people are most often introduced to politics, its instruments and content, and the political system in which they live. This is where they first encounter concepts such as constitution, republic, constitutional monarchy, democracy or laws and the legal system. Galston (2001) notes that despite the tremendous increase in the formal education of the US population over the past 50 years, the level of political knowledge has changed little. He argues that today's college graduates know no more about politics than did high school graduates in 1950. Contrary to the findings of 30 years ago, contemporary research suggests that traditional civics education in the classroom can significantly increase political knowledge. It is not only the educational institutions in individual countries that influence political competence and its development, but institutions in general. Grönlund and Milner (2006) come to interesting conclusions in their research on the determinants of political knowledge in a study using data from about 40,000 respondents in 22 countries (from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems conducted by the University of Michigan between 1996 and 2002, Sapiro and Shively (2002)). They argue that knowledge of institutions alone is not enough. For democracy to work, voters need to know enough about political parties and their leaders. Only then is it possible to compare politicians' promises with voters' own policy preferences and to vote for trustworthy individuals whose promises are given sufficient weight and credibility. Research should compare not only the political knowledge of individuals, but also the ability of social institutions to support this knowledge. Thus, it is not useful to find that one nation has higher/lower political knowledge than another. What is important is to find that the existence of certain institutions enables voters from one nation to vote more knowledgeably than voters from another nation. Indeed, such findings can help states to redesign their institutions to better contribute to more informed (i.e. rational) voting. Institutions can be created, abolished or redesigned through political choices.

Very significant conclusions are drawn in an article by Delli Carpini (1999) entitled "In Search of the Informed Citizen: What Do Americans Know About Politics and Why Does It Matter?" He argues that the acquisition and retention of information increases the rationality of choices, and that more information available to citizens leads to a better functioning democracy than less information. Low information has negative consequences for the functioning of democracy - it makes it less likely that the public's participation in elections or opinion polls will reflect their

collective, group and individual interests. In other words, informed citizens are more important for democracy and its functioning than uninformed citizens. He sees it as a problem that more than a small proportion of the population is sufficiently politically informed to meet the high standards of good citizenship. The level of political knowledge of the population can increase significantly with an optimal combination of motivation (e.g. increasing with education, social status or age), opportunity and ability, while the potential for growth in political education is also supported by a significant and strong relationship between the level of political knowledge and socio-economic status and the information and political environment. Opportunity to learn is also important for the acquisition of political knowledge, and the availability of information in an understandable form may be a stronger factor than interest and education. Other findings include that the poor, African Americans, young people and women in particular are generally less politically informed than the elderly, the wealthy, whites and men. The long-term exclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged populations from various parts of the public sector has a negative impact, as certain groups of people are then less able to define their own political interests and act accordingly in political decision-making. In the context under consideration, the idea that democracy naturally leads people to avoid elected positions being held by the most eminent (in terms of expertise, competence and knowledge) people is also suggestive. These people want to remain themselves and do not like to bend over backwards - hence they do not normally engage in politics (Kent, 1826). From this, Tocqueville (2000) postulates, among other things, that universal suffrage is no guarantee of a good election.

The literature review presented here shows that voters generally prefer candidates with higher education to those with lower education - they perceive them to be more competent. It also shows that a significant proportion of society does not have sufficient information to exercise the right to vote in an informed manner, while the rationality of voting increases as information is acquired and retained. The existence of certain institutions and their attitudes - for example, an appropriate form of civic education or the availability of information in a comprehensible form - can contribute to increasing voter information. This paper thus seeks to fill a research gap and to highlight a significant negative element in the functioning of democratic political systems, where voters make decisions based on incomplete objective information. As a result, there is an elementary inefficiency to the point of irrationality of choice, which can lead to the election of incompetent politicians. The following research attempts to verify this.

## Methodology

The research methodology was designed to lead to the fulfilment of the aim of this thesis and to provide answers to the research questions stated in the introduction. Respectively, it was to test the knowledge of municipal councillors in two legal norms that are essential for the work of a councillor and to find out to what extent the differences in the knowledge of councillors are influenced by age, education or experience. Specifically, the Act on the Capital City of Prague<sup>3</sup>, which regulates the status of the capital city of Prague as the capital of the Czech Republic, the region and the municipality, and the status of the municipal districts. And the Act on Budgetary Rules for Territorial Budgets<sup>4</sup>, which regulates the formation, status, content and functions of the budgets of local self-government units and lays down rules for the

---

<sup>3</sup> Act No. 131/2000 Coll.

<sup>4</sup> Act No. 250/2000 Coll.

management of their funds; it also regulates the establishment or creation of legal entities of local self-government units - schools, nurseries, etc.

The research conducted in June 2021 was carried out by testing the knowledge of councillors in selected districts of the capital city of Prague. There are a total of 57 municipal districts in Prague, 10 of which were selected on the basis of a convenient date for a council meeting that provided opportunities for testing. These districts were then approached to participate in the research, which was eventually attended by 50 councillors. The testing was anonymous and usually took place before or after the borough council meeting. Twenty-five closed questions were generated from each bill. The result was 2 separate tests, which were written by the councillors in turn. In total, they answered 50 questions. Each councillor indicated his/her age according to the relevant age category (18-35 years, 36-45 years, 46-55 years, more than 56 years), the highest level of education attained (high school or university - it should be noted here that all participating councillors had at least a high school education) and information on the number of times he/she had been elected as a councillor (1x, 2x, 3x and more than 3x). The actual testing was conducted by projecting each question on a projector, the respondent had a time limit of 30 seconds to answer each question, after which the next question was displayed and the previous question disappeared. Each question was displayed only once. Respondents chose from 4 answer choices, 1 of which was always correct. Representatives recorded their results on prepared answer sheets. Certain rules had to be followed during the testing: not to leave the room during the survey, not to communicate with other respondents and to use only their knowledge as a source of information. At the end of the survey, each answer sheet was marked with a unique identification number, the wording of which was also given to the representative concerned, so that the results could then be matched to the person of a particular representative should he/she wish to obtain an evaluation of his/her answers.

Subsequently, the success rate of each respondent was evaluated. Next, we used the information collected about the respondents themselves as independent (explanatory) variables in the analysis. These variables were: whether the respondents have a university degree, the number of times they have been elected as representatives (1x, 2x, 3x, and more than 3x), and their age (18-35 years, 36-45 years, 46-55 years, more than 56 years). In addition, we used information on the wards whose councillors participated in the survey (unemployment, population and expenditure of the ward - all for 2021, see Annex 1) as explanatory control variables to eliminate the effect of larger wards, wards with higher budgets or wards with higher unemployment.

The list of variables is as follows:

**Table 1 – Variables overview**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>
College	Dummy variable signifying completed under-graduate education or higher
Terms	Number of terms served (including the term currently served)
Age18-35	Dummy variable for age between 18 and 35 years
Age36-45	Dummy variable for age between 36-45 years
Age46-55	Dummy variable for age between 46-55 years
Age56andhigher	Dummy variable for age equal to or higher than 56 years
District Unemployment	Councilmember's district unemployment
District Population	Councilmember's district population count
District Expenditures	Councilmember's districts budget expenditures
PerentOfCorrectAnswers	The councilmember's result in the questionnaire (percent)
$\varepsilon$	error term

*Source: own processing*

Since some of the above variables are dummy variables or variables with repeated values (unemployment, population and expenditure of the municipality) and with a limited sample of responses, the normality condition of the data was not always successful. The impact of this is somewhat limited by the use of robust standard errors in the analysis below.

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess whether councillors' scores are related to their characteristics (e.g. whether councillors with a university degree perform better in terms of knowledge of the legislation in force, regardless of the length of their term of office, etc.). The scores of individual councillors were used as the dependent variable, while their characteristics were used as independent variables.

**Table 2 – Descriptive Statistics**

<i>variable</i>	<i>Obs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Shapiro-Wilk W test (p-value)</i>
College	50	0.60	0.49	0.00	1.00	0.99
Terms	50	2.10	1.05	1.00	4.00	0.22
Age18-35	50	0.14	0.35	0.00	1.00	0.00
Age36-45	50	0.32	0.47	0.00	1.00	0.16
Age46-55	50	0.34	0.48	0.00	1.00	0.30
Age56andhigher	50	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00	0.00
District Unemployment	50	2.62	0.49	2.00	3.20	0.00
District Population	50	25,641	23,675	2,414	104,921	0.00
District Expenditures	50	327,652	281,397	29,710	1,031,853	0.00
PerentOfCorrectAnswers	50	0.58	0.11	0.30	0.76	0.45

*Source: own processing*

The regression model was run in 4 variants, which are defined below:

### **Model 1**

*PerentOfCorrectAnswers*

$$= \text{College } x_1 + \text{Terms } x_2 + \text{age18} - 35 \ x_3 + \text{age36} - 45 \ x_4 + \text{age46} - 55 \ x_5 + \varepsilon$$

### **Model 2**

*PerentOfCorrectAnswers*

$$= \text{College } x_1 + \text{Terms } x_2 + \text{age18} - 35 \ x_3 + \text{age36} - 45 \ x_4 + \text{age46} - 55 \ x_5 + \text{District Population } x_6 + \varepsilon$$

### **Model 3**

*PerentOfCorrectAnswers*

$$= \text{College } x_1 + \text{Terms } x_2 + \text{age18} - 35 \ x_3 + \text{age36} - 45 \ x_4 + \text{age46} - 55 \ x_5 + \text{District Population } x_6 + \text{District Unemployment } x_7 + \varepsilon$$



## Model 4

*PerentOfCorrectAnswers*

$$= \text{College } x_1 + \text{Terms } x_2 + \text{age18} - 35 \ x_3 + \text{age36} - 45 \ x_4 + \text{age46} - 55 \ x_5 \\ + \text{District Unemployment } x_6 + \text{District Expenditures } x_7 + \varepsilon$$

The control variables DistrictExpenditures and DistrictPopulation could not be included in the model simultaneously due to excessive multicollinearity. Therefore, Model 3 and Model 4 use them selectively. To confirm the goodness of fit of the model, the distribution of the regression residuals was compared to the expected normal distribution of the regression residuals using the kernel density of the residuals as shown in the results below and in Annex 2.

## Results

The average result for all 50 questions was 57.88%, the average result for Law 131 (Law on the Capital City of Prague) was 58.96%, and the average result for Law 250 (Law on the Budget Rules of the Territorial Budgets) was 56.8%. Representatives who had been elected to office more than three times had the highest success rates in the tests, which may indicate the important role of experience. Representatives elected once succeeded in 58.22% of the questions. Representatives elected twice succeeded in 58.25% of the questions. Representatives elected three times succeeded in 53.77% of the questions. Representatives elected more than three times succeeded in 61.42% of the questions. Representatives in the 18-35 age group succeeded in 61.14% of the questions. Representatives in the 36-45 age group succeeded in 60.37% of the questions. Representatives in the 46-55 age group succeeded in 58.00% of the questions. Representatives in the 56+ age category succeeded in 51.40% of the questions. Representatives with secondary education succeeded in 58.6% of the questions. Representatives with a university degree succeeded in 57.4% of the questions.

The results of all types of regression model can be found in the regression tables below. As you can see, the 18-35 and 36-45 age categories show a small positive result that is statistically significant with 90% confidence, and the same in all 4 models. The models were also able to explain only 12.26%-14.53% of the total variance. This means that factors such as education level and number of terms served have no statistically significant association with knowledge of the two laws, while age up to 46 years has a positive effect.

The VIF scores are all within the permissible values, indicating that none of the models were significantly affected by multicollinearity. The normality of the residuals could not be confirmed (p-values between 0.0415-0.0420). The kernel density plots (in Annex 2), and however, confirm that although the residuals are not normally distributed, the model is nonetheless random and the model is likely to be well fitted. Different transformations of the variables were tested, including logarithmic, exponential and polynomial, without achieving a better fit.

**Table 3 – Regression results**

<i>PerentOfCorrectAnswers</i>	<i>PerentOfCorrectAnswers</i>	<i>PerentOfCorrectAnswers</i>	<i>PerentOfCorrectAnswers</i>	<i>PerentOfCorrectAnswers</i>
College	-0.0177 (0.0331)	-0.0122 (0.0352)	0.0114 (0.0179)	-0.0096 (0.0351)
Terms	0.0138 (0.0166)	0.0147 (0.0166)	0.0114 (0.0179)	0.0155 (0.0175)
Age18-35	0.1145 * (0.0620)	0.1190 * (0.0615)	0.1139 * (0.0628)	0.1266 * (0.0635)
Age36-45	0.1009 * (0.0509)	0.0991 * (0.0519)	0.0951 * (0.0532)	0.1012 * (0.0529)
Age46-55	0.0688 (0.0503)	0.0720 (0.0500)	0.0676 (0.0508)	0.0751 (0.0503)
District Population		(-0.0000) (0.0000)	(0.0000) (0.0000)	
District Unemployment			-0.05 (0.0818)	(0.0179) (0.0815)
District Expenditures				(-0.0000) (0.0000)
Intercept	0.4887 * (0.0624)	0.4938 * (0.0655)	0.6091 * (0.2103)	0.4579 * (0.1985)
Observations	50	50	50	50
R-squared	0.1226	0.1310	0.1382	0.1453
Residual normality (kernel p- value)	0.0420	0.0418	0.0416	0.0415
Mean VIF robust st. errors in parentheses	1.5600	1.5000	3.0700	2.8300

\* p<0.1 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

Source: own processing

We find this finding very interesting, as it contradicts the widely held view that experience and education make politicians more familiar with the regulations that relate to their competences. Moreover, it appears that the qualities of individual respondents cannot be explained by these characteristics alone, and only age plays a (small) role. What could explain the missing 85% of the variance not included in this analysis? We suggest that it lies in individual factors - individual characteristics of politicians that cannot be captured by simply measuring experience or education. And it is these individual characteristics that can be referred to as 'competence to hold office'. The results also strongly suggest that electing political representatives on the basis of their education or experience is ineffective because it does not yield a better

understanding of the legislative regulation that competent politicians should possess. Choice by age groups could be a more effective strategy if we elected younger candidates.

## Discussion

The results of the research suggest that the preference for candidates with higher education (over candidates with lower education) on the basis of the perception of their higher competence does not produce the expected results and can be described as mistaken. In fact, representatives with secondary education succeeded in more questions than those with higher education. In the same way, we can proceed with the idea that candidates with higher education have better theoretical knowledge and are better able to apply it in their decision-making in practice (van Noord et al, 2023). We believe that higher education does not automatically imply higher competence to hold elected office. It is therefore necessary to shift today's perception of educational attainment (especially in politics) to where it objectively belongs - a high school diploma or university degree is merely a document certifying the completion of a certain number of study tasks culminating in final exams or theses.

The research also identifies as ineffective the selection of candidates according to the number of times they have been elected to political office (again, a statistically insignificant association with knowledge of legislation). We believe that although the information that a candidate is (or has been) a member of an elected body may lead to an assumption of greater competence, it is not a sufficient argument for a 'well-informed voter'. Indeed, a considerable amount of objective information is missing for a rational choice.

There is also evidence to suggest that there are factors other than education or experience that influence the ability of representatives to work with the relevant legislation and to perform public functions in general. We define them as follows: the willingness to study the material for deliberation, the willingness to educate oneself in the field of governance, the elementary ability to know and navigate the relevant legal norms, the ability to conduct a debate on the basis of rational arguments, the ability to see the consequences of one's decisions and, equally important, the ability not to bring into the decision-making process the consequences of one's own life situations unrelated to the exercise of the office. They partly coincide with the general characteristics that constitute qualifications - education, experience, personal skills and abilities, knowledge of legislation or communication skills (Cedefop, 2013). We refer to these factors by the term 'competence to hold office' and include them among the objective factors on which voters decide when choosing their representatives. We believe that voters overwhelmingly do not have this important piece of objective information, and this is the case for most candidates. We also believe that the assumption that certain groups of the population have a reduced ability to define their own political interests and to act on them in political decision-making (Delli Carpini, 1999) is not only true for certain groups of the population, but also in general, because of the reluctance of voters (especially the high time costs) to find out more information about candidates, and also because this information is often not available. It would also be appropriate to define certain levels or units of measurement for 'competence to hold office'.

Inadequate voter political knowledge is a common and long-standing negative element of democratic society that receives too little attention. One can agree with the claim that despite the huge increase in formal education of the US population over the last 50 years, the level of political knowledge has hardly changed (Galston 2001). If voters had sufficient political

knowledge, they would prefer to vote for competent candidates. The number of correct answers in the survey (57.88%) suggests that the election of such candidates does not occur, and this across urban districts in a city of over 1 million.. If it is true that the level of information in a given area can be raised by civic education in schools (Galston, 2001) or by support from selected social institutions (Grönlund and Milner, 2006), a society-wide debate is needed on the appropriateness of the current setup of the education system in countries with democratic political regimes. And to take concrete measures if it is judged to be insufficiently effective in terms of the level of political knowledge of the electorate compared to other, especially culturally closer, countries. In this respect, one can agree with Grönlund and Milner's ideas.

The combination of insufficient political knowledge on the part of the electorate and insufficient competence to hold office on the part of politicians creates a synergistic effect of inefficiency in the functioning of democratically elected institutions and their subordinate public and private sector bodies. This creates a 'democracy tax' paid by society as a whole, not for the existence of the principle that 'virtually anyone can stand for office' - this principle is a fundamental element of democracy and it is dangerous and harmful to question it. "We pay the 'democracy tax' because voters lack a significant amount of objective information about candidates that they would otherwise surely take into account when voting! This is why incompetent candidates get elected. We believe that there is an inverse correlation between increasing the level of knowledge of voters and politicians and the ineffectiveness of democracy. It is the increase in knowledge that can provide a positive argument to refute the belief that universal suffrage does not guarantee good elections (Tocqueville, 2000).

It is equally important to recognise that elected representatives are often not obliged to have the appropriate level of knowledge. This is a crucial difference from, for example, civil servants, who are often sanctioned for not fulfilling this obligation and are obliged to upgrade their qualifications. While this set-up does not prevent elected representatives from learning, it does not motivate them to learn and understand the legislative system and its mechanisms, and may also contribute to creating a dependency on officials working in the institution they administer who do have this knowledge. This arrangement also creates a clear inequality, where it can be said that the information asymmetry between politicians and civil servants, as discussed for example by Bendor (1987), may have its legislative roots in some countries. And the dependence of less educated politicians on a more educated bureaucracy can give unelected officials a significant position and the ability to directly influence policy decisions.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to provide a unique perspective on the workings of democracy and to identify one of its major limitations, namely that voters never make decisions based on all the objective information they can get about candidates. Voters make decisions based on subjective information (e.g. identification with a political party, proximity of opinion, or the marketing self-presentation of candidates) and only some of the objective information (such as a candidate's age, education, and occupation) provided on the ballot paper. However, deciding on the basis of incomplete objective information leads to inefficiency or even irrationality of choice, which is a common and tedious fact in the current concept of democracy. In order to achieve this goal, the 3 research questions were defined as follows:

- 1) *To what extent are representatives familiar with the legislation under which they make decisions?*

- 2) *Are there differences in the performance of councillors within groups by age, education or number of times elected to office?*
- 3) *Is there a connection between the knowledge of the tested laws and the level of education of councillors, the number of times these councillors are re-elected or the age of the councillors?*

The research shows that making decisions based on this information does not lead to the election of competent politicians. Taking the example of the Czech Republic, a test of the knowledge of Prague city councillors showed that they had insufficient knowledge of the two laws under which they most often make decisions. The average knowledge of the two laws was 57.88%. Regression analysis suggests that there is no significant statistical relationship between knowledge of these laws and either the level of education of the councillors or the number of times these councillors have been re-elected. Only low age (45 years and below) has a positive effect on the results of the representatives. Unfortunately, the results of the research can be generalised to elections at all levels of the democratic political system in the European Union and the Western world. If W. Churchill criticised democracy for this reason, he was certainly right.

When we ask questions about democracy, we usually ask whether something is "democratic" or not, but it is all the more necessary to ask whether we can do anything to improve the level of our democracy and thus not forgetting the quality aspect of democracy. Electing our representatives on the basis of their competence and ensuring that public finances and public affairs in general are managed by experts, by people who are not only fit for office, but above all competent, is crucial to improving the quality of democracy.

The solution to the problem of incompetent politicians may lie on several levels described below. We consider the most important one to be the creation of a system of education for all citizens at central level, which would include training, the transmission of practical knowledge, final testing and an output in the form of a certificate (for the various levels of the country's political administration) and a score on the final test. The emphasis would be on the practical side of things ('competences for office'), with graduates being able to participate directly in the work of elected bodies. The training would not be compulsory and would be free of charge for successful graduates who would receive a certificate of successful completion. Unsuccessful participants, who could repeat the course, would pay for the cost of the course themselves. Successful graduates could be retested every 2 years by repeating the final test, plus they would receive regular information from the educational authority on amendments to legislation, etc. All successful graduates of the above training would be legally guaranteed the opportunity to indicate on the ballot the year they took their last successful test and the score from that test. This additional information on the ballot would work "both ways" - it would give the politicians who successfully completed the training the opportunity to communicate this information to the voters, and the voters would (at virtually no additional cost) learn another piece of information that is, in the view of the authors of the article, crucial to the exercise of their right to vote.

The expected consequence of these steps is to balance the influence of the role of subjective and objective factors in the voter's decision and, ideally, to allow the election of politicians with whom the voter subjectively identifies and who, at the same time, have demonstrated through training and objective testing their level of competence to hold office. The voter's ability to support those with low levels of competence is, of course, unaffected. However, if economic theory is correct and the voter's objective is indeed to maximise his utility, i.e. to elect people

who will help maximise his utility, then the implementation of the above measures should contribute positively to increasing the voter's utility. This is similar to choosing a cook, a banker or a chimney sweep with excellent references instead of choosing "among many people without references".

A limitation of this research may be its narrow focus. Future research should include more cities or regions to get a more comprehensive picture, or try to identify other measurable factors that could be used to identify policymakers' competencies. All research in this area is vital. Inadequate attention to this issue can lead to significant inefficiencies in the long run.

## References

- Act No. 131/2000 Coll. Zákon o hlavním městě Praze. *Zákony pro lidi - Sbírka zákonů ČR v aktuálním konsolidovaném znění*. Copyright © AION CS, s.r.o., [online 19.11.2023]. Source: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-131>.
- Act No. 250/2000 Coll. Zákon o rozpočtových pravidlech územních rozpočtů. *Zákony pro lidi - Sbírka zákonů ČR v aktuálním konsolidovaném znění*. Copyright © AION CS, s.r.o., [online 19.11.2023]. Source: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-250>.
- Act No. 312/2002 Coll. Zákon o úřednících územních samosprávných celků a o změně některých zákonů. *Zákony pro lidi - Sbírka zákonů ČR v aktuálním konsolidovaném znění*. Copyright © AION CS, s.r.o., [online 28.01.2023]. Source: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2002-312>.
- Act No. 491/2001 Coll. Zákon o volbách do zastupitelstev obcí a o změně některých zákonů. *Zákony pro lidi - Sbírka zákonů ČR v aktuálním konsolidovaném znění*. Copyright © AION CS, s.r.o., [online 28.01.2023]. Source: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2001-491>.
- Bendor, J., Taylor, S., & Van Gaalen, R. (1987). Politicians, bureaucrats, and asymmetric information. *American Journal of Political Science*, 796-828.
- Breton, A., & Wintrobe, R. (1975). The equilibrium size of a budget-maximizing bureau: A note on Niskanen's theory of bureaucracy. *Journal of Political Economy*, 83(1), 195-207.
- Boyne, G. A. (1998). *Public choice theory and local government*. Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Cedefop (2013). The role of qualifications in governing occupations and professions. *Working paper No. 20*. [online 28.01.2023]. Source: [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6120\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6120_en.pdf).
- City Hall of Prague (2023). Budget for 2021 [online 30.09.2023]. Source: [https://www.praha.eu/jnp/cz/o\\_meste/finance/rozpocet/rozpocet\\_na\\_rok\\_2021/index.html](https://www.praha.eu/jnp/cz/o_meste/finance/rozpocet/rozpocet_na_rok_2021/index.html).
- Curtis, T. B. (1966). Power of the House of Representatives to Judge the Qualifications of Its Members. *Tex. L. Rev.*, 45, 1199.
- Czech Statistical Office (2023). Statistical bulletin - Capital City of Prague. Prague - 1st to 4th quarter 2021. [online 30.09.2023]. Source: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/g-nezamestnanost--dc18ys5nf5>.
- Czech Statistical Office (2023). Statistical Yearbook of the Capital City of Prague. Prague - 2022. [online 30.09.2023]. Source: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/26-scitani-lidu-domu-a-bytu-pc8gwyw12f>.

- Delli Carpini, M. X. (2000) In search of the informed citizen: What Americans know about politics and why it matters, *The Communication Review*, 4:1, 129-164, DOI: [10.1080/10714420009359466](https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420009359466).
- Downs, A. (1965). A theory of bureaucracy. *The American Economic Review*, 55(1/2), 439-446.
- Dimitrova, D. V., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2014). The Effects of Digital Media on Political Knowledge and Participation in Election Campaigns: Evidence From Panel Data. *Communication Research*, 41(1), 95–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211426004>.
- EC (2023). Municipal elections. [online 28.01.2023]. Source: [https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/elections-abroad/municipal-elections/index\\_cs.htm](https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/elections-abroad/municipal-elections/index_cs.htm).
- Eveland, W. P., Jr, & Garrett, R. K. (2017). Communication Modalities and Political Knowledge. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication: Oxford University Press*. doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.018.
- Galston, W. A. (2007). Civic knowledge, civic education, and civic engagement: A summary of recent research. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 30(6-7), 623-642.
- Galston, W. (2001). Political knowledge, political engagement, and civic education. *Rev. Polit. Sci.* 9. 217-34.
- Grönlund, K. & Milner, H. (2006). The Determinants of Political Knowledge in Comparative Perspective. *Scandinavian Political Studies*. 29. 386 - 406. [10.1111/j.1467-9477.2006.00157.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2006.00157.x).
- Keller, J. (2007). *Sociologie organizace a byrokracie*. 2., přeprac. vyd. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, p.182. ISBN 978-80-86429-74-8.
- Kent, James (1826). *Commentaries on American Law*. Vol. I (1 ed.). New York: O. Halsted.
- Musil, M. (2006). *Veřejná ekonomie*. Praha: Oeconomica, p.118. ISBN 80-245-1048-0.
- Malla, S.B., Dahal, R.K. & Hasegawa, S. (2020). Analyzing the disaster response competency of the local government official and the elected representative in Nepal. *Geoenviron Disasters*, 7(15), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40677-020-00153-z>.
- van Noord, J., Kuppens, T., Spruyt, B., & Spears, R. (2023). When and Why People Prefer Higher Educated Politicians: Ingroup Bias, Deference, and Resistance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 49(4), 585-599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672221077794>.
- Ochrana, F. (2003). *Veřejná volba a řízení veřejných výdajů*. Praha: Ekopress. p.184. ISBN 80-86119-71-8.
- Orr, G. (2022). Qualifications to be an elected representative. *Comparative Election Law*, 305-321.
- Papcunová, V., & Geciková, I. (2014). Qualitative assumptions of elected representatives and officers in local self-government in the Slovak Republic. Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Viera-Papcunova/publication/291098858\\_Qualitative\\_assumptions\\_of\\_elected\\_representatives\\_and\\_officers\\_in\\_local\\_self-government\\_in\\_the\\_Slovak\\_Republic/links/5d2439cca6fdcc2462ce119a/Qualitative-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Viera-Papcunova/publication/291098858_Qualitative_assumptions_of_elected_representatives_and_officers_in_local_self-government_in_the_Slovak_Republic/links/5d2439cca6fdcc2462ce119a/Qualitative-)

[assumptions-of-elected-representatives-and-officers-in-local-self-government-in-the-Slovak-Republic.pdf](#)

- Pushpa, K. S. (2016). Study on the Legal Knowledge of Elected representatives of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Tumkur District Karnataka State-India. *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(10), 1419-1426.
- Sapiro, V. & Shively, W. P. (2002). Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 1996–2001: Module 1 Micro-District-Macro Data [dataset]. Ann Arbor, *University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies*.
- Soontjens, K. (2022). Do politicians anticipate voter control? A comparative study of representatives' accountability beliefs. *European Journal of Political Research*, 61(3), 699-717.
- Tocqueville, A. de. Democracy in America. Prague: Academia, 2000. ISBN 80-200-0829-2, pp. 150-1521.
- Tollison, R. D. (2004). Rent seeking. *The encyclopedia of public choice*, 820-824.
- Weaver, V., Prowse, G., & Piston, S. (2019). Too much knowledge, too little power: An assessment of political knowledge in highly policed communities. *The Journal of Politics*, 81(3), 1153-1166.
- Walgrave, S., Jansen, A., Sevenans, J., Soontjens, K., Pilet, J. B., Brack, N., ... & Loewen, P. J. (2023). Inaccurate Politicians: Elected Representatives' Estimations of Public Opinion in Four Countries. *The Journal of politics*, 85(1), 209-222.



## Attachments to the article

## Annex 1

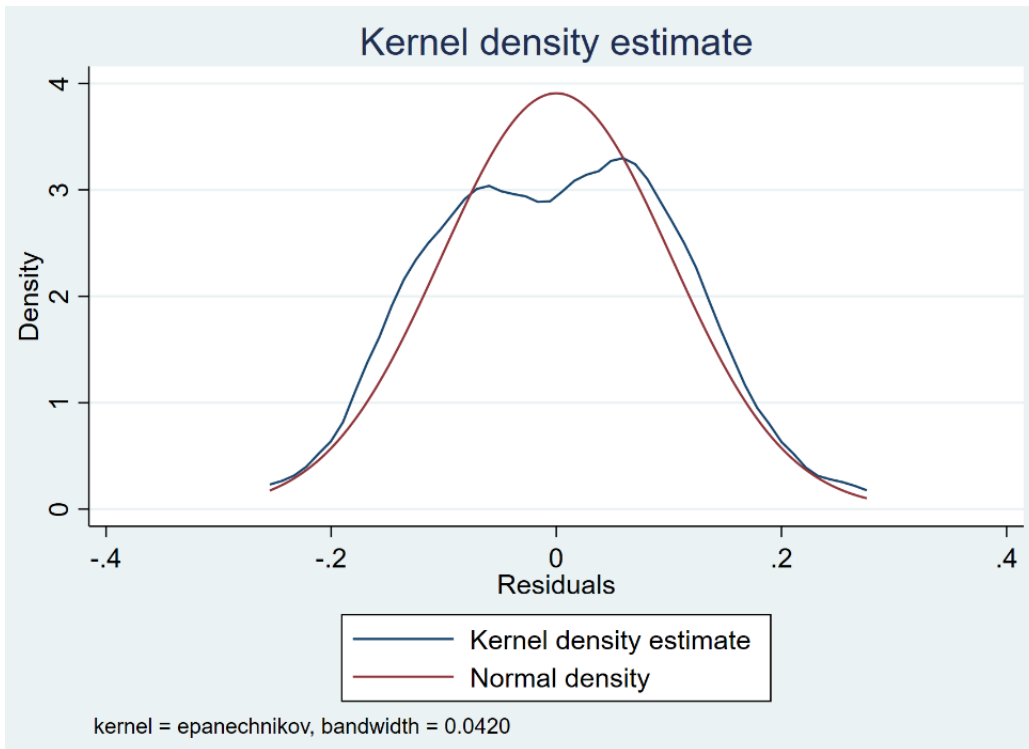
**Information on the districts whose councillors participated in the survey (unemployment, population and expenditure of the district - all for 2021)**

Year 2021	Name of City District	Unemployment (in %)	Population	Budgetary expenditure (in thousands CZK)
1	Štěřboholy	2,00	2 464,00	29 709,76
2	Kolovraty	2,30	3 944,00	59 688,02
3	Běchovice	2,00	2 414,00	84 527,15
4	Klánovice	2,00	3 511,00	61 086,05
5	Praha 14	3,00	47 014,00	718 846,30
6	Kunratice	1,90	10 091,00	67 947,99
7	Praha 7	3,10	44 442,00	524 186,84
8	Vinoř	2,50	4 528,00	51 068,17
9	Praha 20	2,60	15 303,00	223 000,48
10	Praha 8	3,20	104 921,00	1 031 852,83

Source: the Czech Statistical Office, Prague City Hall

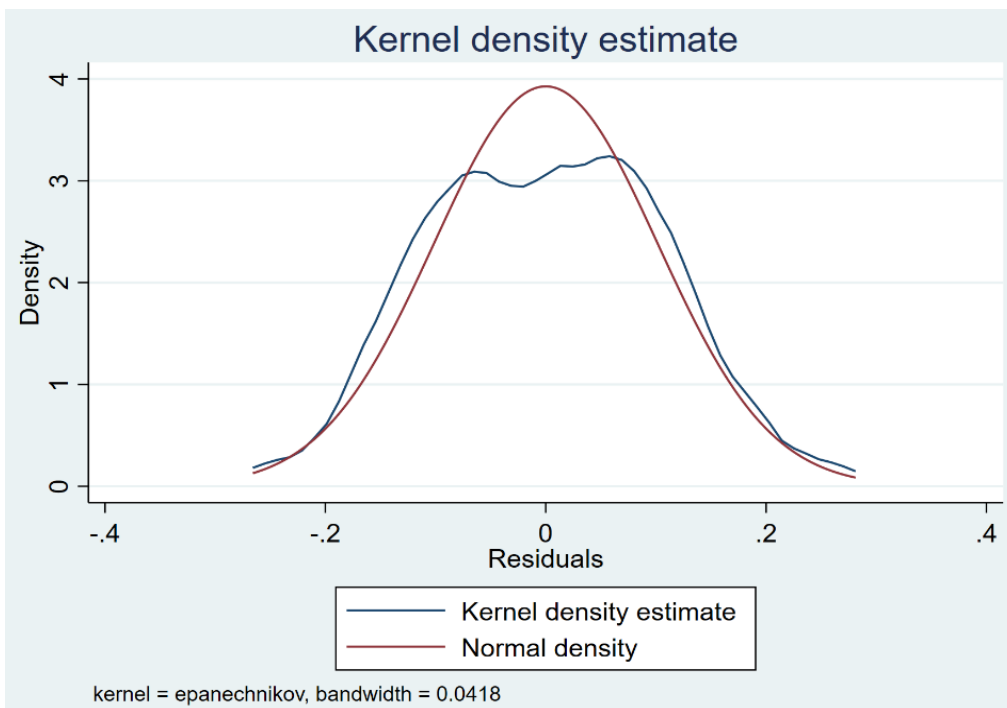
Annex 2

**Kernel densities of residuals - Model 1**



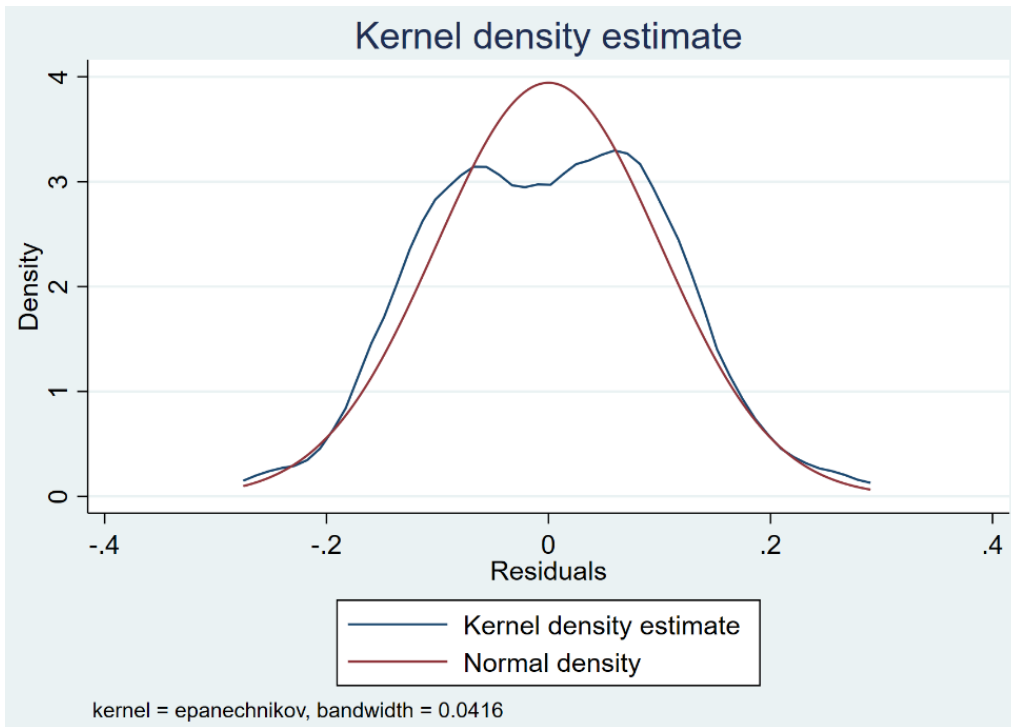
Source: own processing

**Kernel densities of residuals - Model 2**



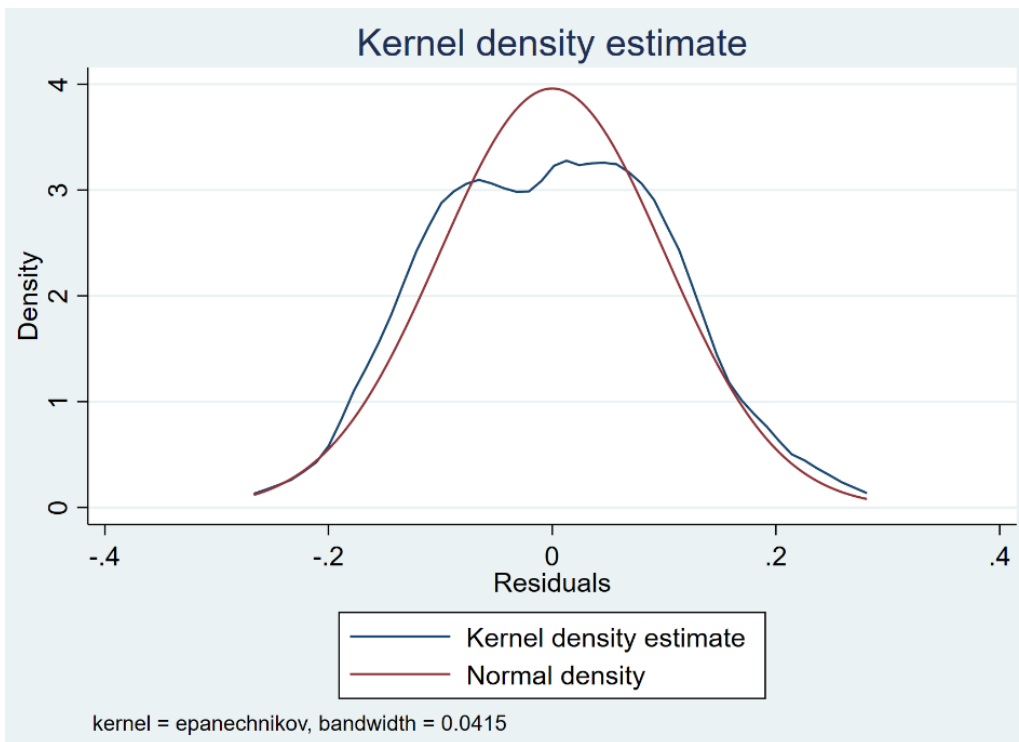
Source: own processing

**Kernel densities of residuals - Model 3**



Source: own processing

#### Kernel densities of residuals - Model 4



Source: own processing

## Author contributions

### **Conceptualization, Vilem Cap and Marek Feurich.**

Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.

### **Methodology, Vilem Cap, Martin Lukavec and Marek Feurich.**

Development or design of methodology; creation of models.

### **Validation, Vilem Cap, Martin Lukavec and Marek Feurich.**

Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.

### **Formal analysis, Martin Lukavec.**

Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyse or synthesize study data.

### **Investigation, Vilem Cap.**

Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.

### **Resources, Vilem Cap.**

Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.

### **Data curation, Vilem Cap and Martin Lukavec.**

Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.

### **Writing—original draft, Vilem Cap and Marek Feurich.**

Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).

### **Writing—review and editing, Vilem Cap and Marek Feurich.**

Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre- or post-publication stages.

### **Visualization, Martin Lukavec.**

Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/data presentation.

### **Supervision, Vilem Cap.**

Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.

### **Project administration, Vilem Cap.**

Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.

### **Funding acquisition, Vilem Cap.**

Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.

**All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.**