

Vlastimil Havlík: Centrist Populist Parties in the Czech Republic: ideology and voters. Habilitation thesis, Brno 2016.

General comments:

This is an interesting thesis on a very interesting topic. I have enjoyed reading it, and I appreciate getting the chance to review it. To start with the conclusion, I find it worthy of being defended and *I therefore recommend that you proceed with the habilitation procedure.*

Populist parties are a rather new phenomenon in the Czech Republic, and the thesis is therefore timely. The topic is interesting in and by itself, as well as in an international context. The author has, as far as I can see, a good command of the international literature on populist parties, as well as of the methods employed, and the thesis is a valuable contribution to the empirical research in this field. It also expands the existing research on Czech parties and voting behavior. As a scholar with an interest in Czech as well as Slovak politics, I think a comparison between Czech and Slovak centrist populist parties (and their fate) is a promising avenue for future research.

My objections to the thesis are minor, and mostly related to presentation (see below). However, I think the point (in chapter 4) about the lack of ideology is a little overstated, and I am not convinced that the transformation of voter support (chapter 5) is very durable. I can see why one would want to put the more technical parts of operationalization etc. in an appendix, but the manuscript will be easier to read if more of the methodological reflection in the appendix is integrated in the text. Figures and tables generally need to be explained better.

Finally, if the thesis is to be published as a book – and it should – language editing is definitely needed. Especially in the appendix there are quite a few errors (in particular many missing articles – ‘the’ and ‘a’, and a few typos). I think it is a good idea to ask a native speaker to go through the text.

Chapter by chapter:

1. Introduction

Good introduction to Czech politics and to the literature on populism, but not entirely convincing as to why the Czech Republic is an ideal case. Populist parties emerge also in old democracies. Besides, the author probably did not choose the Czech Republic over other cases; I rather suspect that he chose to focus on populist parties in the Czech Republic.

This is nevertheless a minor point, and the introduction as such is well written.

2. Populism

This is a competent survey of the literature on populism. The beginning is a little confusing, and I am not sure it is necessary to mention all these different views, many of which do not strike me as particularly fruitful for what the author sets out to do. The text makes good sense from the middle of page 32, where he starts to talk about Mudde. My recommendation would be to cut down the beginning of the chapter. Otherwise also this chapter is fine.

3. Centrist populism in the Czech Republic

The introductory part on the history of Czech populism is well written. The method used for the qualitative analysis is plausible, and I find the analysis of all three parties well informed. As for the quantitative part, the use of programs makes sense, but I am less convinced by the use of expert surveys to confirm the placement of the parties. All it says is basically that the author agrees with the experts, or vice versa.

That being said, I think the point about the lack of ideology (in the qualitative part) is a little overstated. They may not take a very clear stand on issues related to traditional left–right competition during the campaign, but I don't find any of the parties ideologically empty. The agenda of VV and Úsvít was arguably to some extent about the rules of the game, and the strong emphasis of ANO 2011 on competent businessmen placed it on the centre-right in the eyes of the voters (see e.g. *Image politických stran – září 2013, Naše společnost*, v13-09) already before the election. By 2015 a majority of ANO's voters placed themselves on the right or centre–right (CVVM 2015). I have interviewed representatives of ANO myself, and they confirmed my impression that the party is right of centre. As Havlík et al. 2014 (p.207) have pointed out, ANO got over 60 percent of its 2013 voters from the center–right government parties ODS, TOP 09 and VV.

I see the temptation to overstate the ideological emptiness, but I think it should be resisted.

I have two small additional comments to the part about Public affairs (VV):

p. 72. VV bylaws were amended on June 23, 2012, after which only party members could take part in nomination processes. According to the bylaws, section III. 3g), members of VV had the right to

‘volit v přímé volbě lídra kandidátky do zastupitelstev krajských měst, krajského zastupitelstva, zastupitelstva hl. m. Prahy, Poslanecké sněmovny Parlamentu ČR a Evropského parlamentu a kandidáta do Senátu PČR; právo volit v přímé volbě má člen Strany vždy ve vztahu ke kandidátce příslušné dle místa bydliště člena’.

This right did not, according to the amended bylaws, apply to supporters of VV (věčkaři). They now only had the right to take part in referenda on political questions (Stanovy IV6d).

The VV webpage does not exist anymore, but it can be accessed through Wayback Machine. The bylaws in question are here:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20121102112706/https://www.veciverejne.cz/stanovy.html>

p. 73–74. The arguments (or rhetoric) of Public Affairs – ‘we want to move forward’ and the emphasis on ‘common sense’ – are actually quite common for centrist parties elsewhere, whether they are populist or not. This is therefore in my opinion not a feature of centrist populist parties, but of centrist parties in general, and the reason is usually that other issues or conflict dimensions are more important to them. It is possible that I have misunderstood the thesis on this point, but in that case, it needs to be made clear in the final manuscript (still assuming that it will be published).

4. Electoral support and voters

The introduction, the part about context and the theoretical part all make good sense. The same goes for section 4.3 on data and methods, and most of the text part of the analysis. However, I find the maps more confusing than illuminating. Since the strongholds of the 'old' parties are also partly overlapping, I think it would be better to illustrate the (lack of) overlap between the populist parties and the others using more maps (not only one). Or perhaps color the strongholds of each of the populist yellow.

The tables (in section 4.4.1) showing correlations are instructive, but I miss information about whether these correlations are significant and at which level (0.01 or 0.05). I assume we are talking about Pearson's R here. This should definitely be included in the final text. I noticed that the correlations between ANO and the parties on the right were around .30 (table 5), and that the support of ANO correlated with the share of businessmen and was inversely related to unemployment. Considering the centre-right profile of ANO this is not surprising.

Turning to individual level data (4.4.2), I find this part of the chapter very difficult to read without having read the appendix first. In case of publication as a book, my suggestion would be to include enough from the appendix to make the section accessible to a non-expert reader. The questions that form the basis for the analysis should in any case be reproduced in the appendix.

On page 130, the author writes that '**there is only a significant positive effect of "Entrepreneurs" in the case of VV...**', but information about significance is missing for all figures here as well as for figures 6.1a through 6.3d in the appendix. More explanatory text under each of the figures will make the manuscript easier to read. What do the numbers in figure 7 stand for?

5. Conclusion

The conclusion aptly sums up the argument of the thesis. The question is of course how durable the (alleged) transformation of voter support is. Considering that VV is defunct and the original Úsvít is nowhere near the electoral threshold at the moment, centrist populism does not seem to be very successful in the long run. ANO took voters mainly from the centre-right already in 2013, and its voters have become more centre-right even since 2015, according to CVVM. It is thus hardly a centrist party anymore. It would be interesting to hear the author's take in this.

(See also details below).

Oslo, 15 February, 2017

Elisabeth Bakke

Details – need to be fixed before publication of the thesis as a book

[This is primarily meant as help to the author in completing the manuscript].

p. 95, last paragraph: should be rephrased (does not read well).

p. 137, third last line: the author probably means ‘**people who were less satisfied with democracy were LESS likely to vote for VV**’.

p. 152: missing year of publication for **Bågenholm (XXX)**.

Appendix

p. 189, last 4 lines. The meaning is unclear. Please rephrase.

1) ‘**313 interviews collected 2002 interviews**’??? Do you mean that 313 interviewers (as in research assistants) made interviews with 2002 respondents?

2) ‘**432 interviews took place and they gathered 1857 completed questionnaires**’. So did each person answer several questionnaires, or do you mean that 432 research assistants did 1857 interviews?

3) ‘**Finally, [the] 2013 study was carried [out] by 289 interviews and 1653 respondents were interviewed**’. Here it is clear that 1653 answered the survey, but the way it is formulated, it seems that several respondents were present at the same interview. Again, there were probably 289 interviewers (research assistants).

p. 192, line 8. Something is missing in the end of the sentence ‘**political values are the most vulnerable to change during the [WHAT?]**.’

p. 192. Here you refer to ‘generation dealingment’; in the figures in chapter 4 and in table 13 it is generation_desilusion. I assume they are meant to be the same? (In English it is generation disillusion, by the way).

p. 193, table 2. Is the variable **education_high** high school education? If yes, consider changing the name. When I see education_high, I think of university education.

p. 194, operationalization of the left–right dimension: something is missing after ‘**and about [the] role of [the] state in [the] economy**.’

p. 195, libertarian/authoritarian values. ‘**I measure [the] libertarian/authoritarian dimension by a single variable**’. But which one?

p. 196, Communist/Post-communist values. What do you mean by the ‘**ability of office-bearers of [the] communist regime to hold a public office**’? Is this a normative question (should they hold public office?) – or a question of competency (do they have the necessary skills to hold public office?).

p. 197, first paragraph and Table 6. It is not clear what kind of questions you refer to as Q 39a, b, c. Either give the wording of the questions or explain better what they are about.

p. 201, table 13. The abbreviations under ‘operationalization’ are not clear. What is for instance ‘S.8 gt 1 and S.8 It 3... etc’? If you are going to use these abbreviations, you must explain them under the table. ‘Q29f’ is presumably Question 29f in the survey, but you have not listed the questions anywhere. I suggest that you also include a list of the questions you have used in the analysis – full wording.