

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
Fakulta sociálních věd
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PROTOKOL O HODNOCENÍ MAGISTERSKÉ PRÁCE
(Posudek vedoucí)

Práci předložil(a) student(ka): Hanh Bui Thuy

Název práce: Presidential Directives as Instrument of President's Obama Policy-Making

1. OBSAH A CÍL PRÁCE (stručná informace o práci, formulace cíle):

In her thesis, Hanh Bui Thuy focuses on Barack Obama's use of presidential directives as a policy-making tool. Since president Obama was frequently accused of so-called "imperial overreach", the author aims to research whether these accusations have any merit. At the same time, the key research question of this thesis is to prove that "due to the uncooperative Congress and increased expectations of the public, President Barack Obama had to use unilateral directives to advance the key points of his policy-making agenda - immigration reform and gun regulation" (p. 29). The research question is broken down into several hypotheses:

1. After voting him into office, the public put great expectations on Obama to actively change and transform the political situation in the United States (p. 30).
2. Immigration reform and gun regulation were among the key issues of President's Obama policy agenda (p. 31).
3. President Obama tried to pass these key issues of his agenda through legislation in Congress (p. 31).

2. VĚCNÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (náročnost, tvůrčí přístup, argumentace, logická struktura, teoretické a metodologické ukotvení, práce s prameny a literaturou, vhodnost příloh apod.):

In my opinion, Hanh Bui Thuy selected a very challenging, but timely topic, which required a lot of research. Her work is well-organized and the author takes the reader step-by-step through building her argument.

At the beginning, the author explains the different types of presidential directives. In the second chapter, she introduces the theoretical framework of William G. Howell's Expectations Gap. Here, she also lists key scholarship on U.S. presidency, which includes classic works by Richard Neustadt, Clinton Rossiter, and Louis Fisher. I appreciate that besides the classics, she goes beyond and adds research by more contemporary scholars. In the third chapter, the author explains the concept of expectations gap, which is a phenomenon that played a very important role in case of Barack Obama. Here, she also identifies the key issues of Obama's political agenda, which, as the author admits, was originally derailed by the financial crisis of 2008-2009. Still, using evidence from Obama's campaign platform, campaign speeches, and later presidential speeches, she persuasively establishes that immigration indeed was an important policy issue for Obama, particularly due to the increasing importance of Latino voting bloc for the Democratic Party (p. 35). The case of gun regulation is, as the author correctly points out, slightly different from immigration. While not a top issue for Obama as a candidate, the topic of gun regulation was imposed upon him due to mass shooting incidents that took place during his administration. Particularly the Newtown tragedy pushed the issue of gun regulation to the forefront of Obama's attention. In chapter 4, Hanh Bui Thuy shows

that Obama Administration started with the assumption that cooperation with Congress was important and legislative changes had to be achieved by the legislative branch. Tracing the process of pushing for legislation on immigration and gun regulation, the author then shows that Obama indeed exhausted all options in trying to pass legislation through the Congress and, at the urging of his advisors, resorted to executive action. The author points out, on multiple occasions, that the U.S. Congress was uncooperative, passive, and unproductive.

In conclusion, Hanh Bui Thuy summarizes her findings as follows: "Feeling the pressure of expectations on making significant changes on the issues, combined with the frustrating resistance from Congress, President Obama issued presidential directives in the form of executive actions to make some, albeit partial, progress towards immigration reform and gun violence reduction. (p. 68). The author then also pushes back against the accusation of Obama for abusing his powers. Based on the categorization of presidential directives, Hanh Bui Thuy proves that the presidential directives analyzed in this work often bore less legal authority than executive orders, but since they were often wrongly depicted as executive orders by media or by Republican politicians, it created the impression of Obama's imperial overreach. The author conveniently includes tables and graphs, which illustrate e.g. number of different types of presidential directives introduced by different presidents (to show decline in use of executive orders and increase in use of presidential memoranda and proclamations) and the distribution of Democratic and Republican forces in Congress that Obama had to work with.

3. FORMÁLNÍ A JAZYKOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (jazykový projev, správnost citace a odkazů na literaturu, grafická úprava, formální náležitosti práce apod.):

Language-wise, the text is well-written - and here, I must compliment the author for making a huge progress. Original drafts of the thesis had numerous grammar as well as stylistics issues. Through meticulous work, the author was able to fix most of them. Still, there are a few typos and a few minor language issues, such as "amount of mass shootings" instead of "number of mass shootings". The author provides her own-generated tables and works with abundance of sources - both primary and secondary. Overall, her work fulfills the requirements for master's thesis.

4. STRUČNÝ KOMENTÁŘ HODNOTITELE (celkový dojem z bakalářské práce, silné a slabé stránky, originalita myšlenek, naplnění cíle apod.):

In my opinion, Hanh Bui Thuy presented a very interesting deep dive into the powers of American president and illustrated well the expansion of presidential power using the example of President Obama. She definitely fulfilled all the goals established at the beginning of her thesis and satisfactorily answered all the questions she wanted to address by this analysis.

While it is true that the Congress during Obama's administration really belongs among the most passive Congresses in U.S. modern history, I would argue that at least part of Congress was willing to work with Obama on putting together a legislative proposal (as evidenced by draft of bills on both immigration and gun regulation, which were debated on the floor of the House or the Senate). However, Obama and his allies were unable to overcome the opposition to their legislative proposals - here, partisanship and polarization came into play. So, Congress was not entirely passive, but it for sure was uncooperative - and once the GOP gained control, it could be even described as resistant towards any White House initiative. This however is just a minor issue in the process tracking - and it does not bear any major consequence for the thesis' conclusion.

In my opinion, the thesis still could be redacted a bit. While I understand that the author wanted to provide as much context as possible, some - particularly historical passages - are a bit redundant. This namely concerns the passages on history of immigration law as well as gun regulation.

5. OTÁZKY A PŘIPOMÍNKY DOPORUČENÉ K BLIŽŠÍMU VYSVĚTLENÍ PŘI OBHAJOBĚ (jedna až tři):
1. When president rules by decree that is not made public in the Federal Register, how can such decree be challenged?
 2. For what reasons did Republicans (Boehner) oppose the Dream Act and the Assault Weapons Ban?

6. DOPORUČENÍ / NEDOPORUČENÍ K OBHAJOBĚ A NAVRHOVANÁ ZNÁMKA
(A-F):

The thesis fulfills requirements for Master's theses and is recommended for defense. I propose grade A.

Datum: June 5, 2019

Podpis: Jana Sehnalkova