

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	Liberal Democracy and the Limits of State Coercion: The Detrimental Nature of Racial Policing in the United States
Author of the thesis:	Erin Garrett
Referee (incl. titles):	Mgr. Jakub Franěk, Ph.D.

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background: While the theoretical part of the thesis (i.e. Chapters 2 and especially 3) is relatively extensive, the choice of authors and/or topics discussed is questionable. The author should have engaged more robustly with the current literature on racism as well as police violence. On the other hand, the discussion of such topics as the definition of liberal democracy, coercion and persuasion, or negative versus positive liberty could be less wordy. By the way, Chapter 2, i.e. Literature Review, is too long and wordy.

Moreover, one would expect deeper, more critical and ultimately more effective engagement with the primary literature. E.g. the discussion of Berlin's distinction between negative and positive conceptions of liberty concludes that liberal democracy, especially in its American form is based primarily (if not exclusively) on the negative conception of liberty. The author also makes an interesting side note, according to which "European style democracies" put more emphasis on the positive conception of liberty as they "typically offer greater safety nets" (p. 20), i.e. more robust welfare state. Yet, the author does not stop here to ask the obvious question whether the lack of such welfare state provisions as universal health care, affordable childcare or affordable higher education is not linked with the higher levels of police violence in the United States. Description of J.S. Mill as the champion of negative liberty is also problematic as evidenced by the extensive from On Liberty quotation on p. 19, where Mill stresses the importance of "firmness and self-control" necessary to follow one's chosen life-plan.

The explanation of the aims of the US Bill of Rights (p. 19) is misleading. The Bill of Rights was not originally designed to protect the citizens from the overreach of federal power, but rather to protect the political freedom of the States from the overreach of federal power. Currently it is obviously used to protect the rights and liberties of citizens from overreaches of the power of all levels of government (federal, state, as well as local).

The discussion about the differences between coercion and persuasion 25-26 is interesting in its own right. Nevertheless, persuasion is not related to the topic of the thesis in any obvious way. Perhaps it would be more fruitful to contrast coercion with authority, as understood e.g. by H. Arendt.

2) Contribution: The principal claim of the thesis, i.e. that the excessive police violence, especially when selectively used against African Americans is detrimental to the quality of liberal democracy in the United States, is plausible. Nonetheless, the arguments used to justify this claim, especially the argument based on the harm and offence principles are not that persuasive. (1) Both of these principles are meant to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate grounds, rather than methods of coercion. (2) Besides that, strict application of these principles would lead to a conclusion that e.g. gun control laws are illegitimate.

3) Methods: The methods used are appropriate with the exception of Chapter 4, which would benefit from (a) a more clearly defined method and (b) the use of more empirical data.

4) Literature: See above.

5) Manuscript form: In spite of occasional colloquialisms and typos, the thesis is clearly written.

Box for the thesis supervisor only. Please characterize the progress in the working out of thesis (e.g. steady and gradual versus discontinuous and abrupt) and the level (intensity) of communication/cooperation with the author:

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I recommend the thesis for final defence. I recommend the following grade: “D”.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	12
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	12
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	15
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	69
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	

DATE OF EVALUATION: June 6, 2019

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honour)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honour)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing is recommended

The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant for this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts **omitted**? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently **incorporated with the topic** and hypotheses tested? Has the author demonstrated a genuine **understanding** of the theories addressed?

Strong	Average	Weak
20	12	< 8

 points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and ability to draw **conclusions** based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the **policy implications** well founded?

Strong	Average	Weak
20	12	< 8

 points

3) METHODS: Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further **verification and testing**? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or **irrelevant detours** off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 12 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong	Average	Weak
20	12	< 8

 points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author **quotes** relevant literature in a **proper way** and disposes with a **representative bibliography**. (Remarks: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**. If they dominate you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give much better impression. Any sort of **plagiarism** disqualifies the thesis from admission to defence.)

Strong	Average	Weak
20	12	< 8

 points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate **language and style**, including the academic **format for quotations**, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**. The text is free from typos and easy to comprehend.

Strong	Average	Weak
20	12	< 8

 points

Remarks for the referees:

- 1) Download the thesis from the SIS. If you have no access to SIS please ask the secretary of IPS (jana.krejcikova@fsv.cuni.cz, tel. 251 080 214) for sending you the thesis by e-mail.
- 2) Use the IEPS Thesis Report form only for your comments. **It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 400 words.** In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.
- 3) Retain your critical stance. You cannot confer more than 80 points upon a thesis that does not satisfy research standards in top European universities.
- 4) Upload the Report as PDF/A file into the SIS. Instructions how to convert .DOCx to PDF/A): „Save as“ – select „PDF“ – check in „Options or Možnosti“ that „PDF options“ tick „ISO 19005-1 compliant /kompatibilní s/ (PDF/A)“ – „Save“. If you have no access to SIS please send the unsigned PDF file to the secretary of IPS (jana.krejcikova@fsv.cuni.cz).
- 5) Please deliver to the IPS Secretariat, U Kříže 8, 15800 Praha 5 Jinonice, **two hand-signed originals**. Unfortunately, a photocopied report with signature does not suffice. Sorry.
- 6) Your Report will be remunerated, so we need also your account information (separate from this form).