

Report on Bachelor Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Student:	Natália Dusková
Advisor:	Mgr. Barbara Pertold-Gebicka M.A., Ph.D.
Title of the thesis:	Do less developed regions vote populist parties? The case of Slovakia.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):

Short summary

The thesis analyses determinants of support for two populist political parties in Slovakia in the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections at the level of districts.

Contribution

The thesis provides a contribution towards literature by looking at the most recent election in Slovakia and also by comparing it with the election in 2016 in order to analyse potential dynamics in populism.

Methods

It is obvious that Natália thought extensively about the models in the thesis and their composition. Firstly, the author chose OLS as a baseline model and then estimated a model with pooled data to incorporate results of both parliamentary elections. Finally, the author applied the method of first differences as an approach to estimate the pooled data. The independent variables included in the model were carefully picked as a result of applying the variance inflation factor method which was used to test for multicollinearity.

I have only a couple of comments / objections:

- In the analysis, I miss the share of highly educated people among the independent variables as I believe that the variable would have an impact on the support for the populist parties (in the chapter "Conclusion", Natália considers adding variables such as education but it is not clear to me why she has not already included the variable in the analysis).
- During the defense, Natália should be careful not to fall into the trap of ecological fallacy which in the context of the thesis means that she would wrongly deduce the nature of individuals from the district in which those individuals live: e. g. on p. 40 the author says: "The surprising results were that Roman Catholics favoured voting for LSNS..." when in fact based on the estimated models we can only say that "in the districts with a higher share of Roman Catholics, support for LSNS is likely to be higher." Once the author fully realizes the character of this fallacy, it becomes obvious that adding gender structure as a variable (which the author mentions in "Conclusion") is meaningless given that there is almost no variation in the share of males (or females) across districts.
- It is not clear to me why Natália picked only SMER and LSNS with respect to populism. I could imagine that there are many other parties which had their candidates in both 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections and can be considered as populist parties.
- It would be helpful if the author specified what the age boundaries are for both the "pre-productive age" and "productive age" which are related to the variables that were used in the models.

Literature

I have no objections to the way the author processed the existing literature related to the topic of the thesis.

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Manuscript form

The thesis is written with a sufficient level of English. It is written in LaTeX, it is well structured and overall fulfills academic standards. I appreciate the included maps of electoral support for both parties considered in the thesis. There are only a couple of minor inconsistencies in the text:

- Quotation marks are sometimes written in a wrong way.
- Figure captions are sometimes placed above and sometimes below the figure.
- In some places the author states “LSNS”, in other places “LSNS”.

Overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion during the defense

Overall, the thesis is of a very high quality and with a clear contribution. In my view, the thesis fulfills the requirements for a bachelor thesis at IES, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, and hence I recommend it for the defense and suggest a grade A. Importantly, the results of the Urkund analysis do not indicate significant text similarity with other available sources.

I believe that if the author considers extending the models in the thesis (e. g. increasing time span in the fixed effects model with the 2012 parliamentary election or taking spatial context into account using a spatial econometric model), the thesis can serve as a basis for an article published in an international journal.

Suggestion question for the discussion during the defense:

The work by Pink et al. (2012): “Volební mapy České a Slovenské republiky po roce 1993: Vzorce, trendy, proměny” which analyses results of elections held both in Czechia and Slovakia (similarly with the author of the thesis, it performs the analysis at the level of districts), stresses the problem with the areas with a higher share of people with Hungarian nationality, which make the distribution of the dependent variable (represented by electoral results) non-normal. In order to standardise distribution of the dependent variable, Pink et al. (2012) removed from their analysis districts with a share of Hungarian people above a certain threshold.

During the defense, it might be interesting if Natália explains whether this is necessary (taking also into account a relatively small data sample the author works with) and how this approach may or may not impact both results of the model and their statistical inference.

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution</i> (max. 30 points)	29
<i>Methods</i> (max. 30 points)	28
<i>Literature</i> (max. 20 points)	20
<i>Manuscript Form</i> (max. 20 points)	18
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	95
GRADE (A – B – C – D – E – F)	A

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NAME OF THE REFEREE: Mgr. Michal Kotrč

DATE OF EVALUATION: May 27, 2021

*Digitally signed (27. 5. 2021):
Michal Kotrč*

Referee Signature

EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

CONTRIBUTION: *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

METHODS: *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

Overall grading:

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 – 70	D
51 – 60	E
0 – 50	F