

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

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

Title of the thesis:	Technocratic-Populism in India: How Modi & the BJP Maintain Their Vast Winning Coalition
Author of the thesis:	Sabyasachi Saikia
Referee (incl. titles):	Dr. Petra Guasti, M.A., PhD, Dr.habil.

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

1) Theoretical background:

The Master Thesis stands on a sound conceptual and theoretical basis in terms of theoretical background. Mr. Saikia dedicated extensive attention to the development of his theoretical framework. He combines theoretical technocracy and a performative-relational approach to populism. Given the combined focus of the work on both the demand side (H1 and H3) and supply-side (H2), the theoretical framework is a good fit. The author deploys heuristics and secondary analysis of existing data in the demand-side analysis. Analytical categories are clear and defined. However, there is room for improvement – especially as operationalization is insufficient. The author seeks to analyze both the political discourse and political practices on the supply side. However, an in-depth analysis of both would be beyond the scope of the thesis. Hence more parsimony would narrow the somewhat broad scope and improve the analytical depth. Furthermore, the author would have benefited from more engagement with the literature on Latin America, where technocratic appeal originates.

2) Contribution:

Populism, especially in its authoritarian/illiberal form, represents a major challenge for contemporary democracies worldwide. While significant attention has been paid to the rise of populist leaders in Europe and the Americas, the study of populism in Asia is in its nascent phase. India represents a crucial case - as the most populous democracy in the world, where the quality of democracy steadily declined during the tenure of Narendra Modi. Theoretically and conceptually, India is a test case – to what extent can concepts developed for the Western context be applied in the Global South? How does populism manifest in a country where the process of modernization is ongoing, development crucial, and socio-economic inequalities rampant?

The thesis represents an important and novel contribution in this respect. In the supply-side analysis, the author demonstrates the particular character of Indian populism as a mixture of technocratic populist and Hindu nationalistic appeal. Both appeals are complimentary, demonstrating the ability of populism as a thin-core ideology (cf. Stanley 2008) to combine with other ideologies such as technocracy and nationalism simultaneously! This finding is important and goes beyond the existing typologies that separate technocratic (valance) and right-wing populism (cf. Zulinaello 2019). Furthermore, the author demonstrates that the notion of technocracy deployed in India operates ‘under the paradigm of democratic technocracy’ (p. 50). Technocracy and technocratic populism in India are thus not opposed to democracy.

In the supply-side analysis, the author can illustrate that populists combine various appeals to reach diverse audiences. At the same time, while technocracy alone is not detrimental to democracy, it becomes a threat when combined – as in the case of Modi – with an authoritarian style of politics and executive aggrandizement (cf. for the analysis of CEE Guasti 2020, 2021). The new social contract proposed by Modi offers technocracy in exchange for power by presenting the latter as necessary to achieve the earlier.

I would also like to highlight section 5.2. on limitations and implications, which is exemplary.

3) Methods:

Methodologically the thesis is composed of two types of analysis – demand and supply-side. This allows the author to assess the appeal of technocratic populism in India from the citizen perspective (reception of the populist appeals) and elite perspective (deployment of the populist discourses by Modi). However, methods and especially operationalizations remain nascent and represent a major weakness of the thesis.

4) Literature:

Mr. Saikia covered the literature well in a significant state-of-the-art review. Here, he focused on technocracy, populism, technocratic populism and provided a dense overview of Indian politics. In his critical appraisal of the literature, Mr. Saikia demonstrated a good hold of classical and contemporary literature in all four of these fields.

5) Manuscript form:

In terms of structure and form, the manuscript is well done – it is well structured and well written, albeit it can be repetitive at times. Syntax and citations are well done. Figures, predominantly graphs, are exemplary, always indicating source and N.

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

The supervision was tenuous at the start – the development of the theoretical and conceptual framework was time-consuming and effective supervision was required. However, the progress was gradual and accelerated over time once the framework was in place. Comparatively, significantly more supervision was required.

Suggested questions for the defence are:

Please elaborate on how Indian technocratic populism diverges from its Western European and Latin American counterparts? What are the main similarities and differences?

I recommend the thesis for the final defence.

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	20
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	20
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	15
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	85
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	B

DATE OF EVALUATION: 24.1.2022



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. The thesis is not recommended for defence.

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 to 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	15	< 10	points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and the 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 a given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the **policy implications** well-founded?

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	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	15	< 10	points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates the author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author **quotes** relevant literature in a **proper way** and works 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 a much better impression. Any sort of **plagiarism** disqualifies the thesis from admission to defence.)

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	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	15	< 10	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 (katerina.bubnova@fsv.cuni.cz, tel. 296 824 641) 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 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 on 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 (katerina.bubnova@fsv.cuni.cz).
- 5) Please deliver to the IPS Secretariat, Pekařská 16, 158 00 Praha 5- Nové Butovice, **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).