Report on **Bachelor Thesis**

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

Student:	Vojtěch Válek
Advisor:	Barbara Pertold-Gebicka
Title of the thesis:	The impact of COVID-19 on election outcomes: The case of the Czech Republic

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

Please provide a short summary of the thesis, your assessment of each of the four key categories, and an overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion. The minimum length of the report is 300 words.

Short summary

The bachelor thesis by Vojtěch Válek is uncovering how the covid-19 pandemics affected general election results in the Czech Republic. Vojtěch zooms on parlimentary elections that took place in October 2021 and asks whether regions that were differently affcted by covid-19 pandemics in terms of infection and/or death rates did vote differently. His analysis is first performed using the cross-section of district-level election results. Next the author compares the 2021 election results with previous elections to reveal potential changes in voters' behavior. The analysis is not fine-polished, but one can see some consistent results there. Most importantly, when comparing the 2017 and 2021 election results one clearly sees that ANO lost most votes in districts that were harmed the strongest by covid.
Vojtěch changed the topic of his thesis as late as in Spring 2022 and, consequently, he had very little time to prepare the thesis. It is, unfortunately, visible in the submitted version. Nevertheless, the thesis is complete and presents relevant results, what makes it ready for defense.

Contribution

The contribution of this thesis is clear: it points to the importance of the pandemics for polititians that were in power during the pandemic times. While there have been some studies written on this topic for the US, no study was performed for the case of the Czech Republic. The thesis of Vojtěch Válek thus opes this topic locally. After some polishing it could be a neat reference clearly showing how pandemics interacts with politics.

Methods

Vojtěch works with district-level data describing the 2021 election result that are combined with district-level data on socio-demographic indicators. This dataset is later augmented with data from previous election years, namely 2017 and 2013. Unfortunately, the data used for analysis is not well described in the thesis. For example, the reader has to read in between lines to figure out that district-level data is used and that there are 77 such districts in the Czech Republic.

Given the structure of the data, Vojtěch applies adequate econometric tools. When analyzing the data from the year 2021 alone, he applies a simple OLS. When comparing data from several election years, he applies panel data methods. His intuition that there might be some unobserved factors that bias OLS estimates performed on cross-sectional data is correct. However, it is only presented in the thesis on the level of intuitive feeling. There is no explanation of what potentially could be the problamatic unobserved facttor. This is important, because it might determine the direction of the bias (upward/downward) and – most importantly – one should know whether the problematic unobserved factors are constant over time or not. Only in the former case the bias would be eliminated by the use of fixed effects transformation or by first differencing.

Hausman test is correctly used to compare fixed effects and random effects estimates. Also, the discussion about the appropriateness of fixed effects or first differencing is correct. It seems that Vojtěch has good intuition here, although the explanation written out in the thesis is not complete. It is

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important to notice that covid inferctions and covid deaths happened only after the 2017 elections and, consequently, these variables have zero values for both 2013 and 2017, while being positive for 2021. This makes first-differencing a more appropriate approach, as it basically leaves the value of the infections/deaths variables as is for the 2021 vs. 2017 comparison, while giving it a zero value for the 2017 vs. 2013 comparison.

One last note concerns the comparison of cross-sectional data analysis for 2021 with the analysis of panel data combining all three election years. Vojtěch had to drop several relevant explanatory variables when working with the panel data, because the source of these data was the same for 2013 and 2017 years and naturally there was no variation in these variables between these two years. Because of this it is not clear whether the difference between OLS for the year 2021 and FE/FD for all three election years is driven by unobserved factors that wee eliminated using FE/FD or is driven by dropping some relevant explanatory variables from the model. This is why I like more the comparison of cross-sectional data analysis with the analysis of two-period panel data where the same explanatory variabes are used in both approaches.

Literature

The literature review is relevant. It covers both: studies analyzing voting results in the pre-covid era and studies ,and studies analysing the relationship between covid and voters' behavior. Relevant conclusions are drawn from the literature revew. However, one important paper is missing: Palguta, J., Levínský, R., & Škoda, S. (2022). Do elections accelerate the COVID-19 pandemic?. *Journal of Population Economics*, *35*(1), 197-240.

Manuscript form

The manuscript is logically organized, tables are clearly presented and the text is written in good English. Some parts of the thesis read better (for exaple, the literature review), some worse. The introduction is a bit chaotic, connections between paragraphs are missing (sometimes even between sentences within paragraphs). Nevertheless, the thesis as a whole makes a good impression.

Overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion during the defense

The bachelor thesis by Vojtěch Válek is a good piece of work. As I have written at the beginning of this report, Vojtěch changed the topic of the thesis in the last moment. This made him work on the thesis with high time pressure and gave very few occasions for student-advisor interactions. Nevertheless, Vojtěch managed to prepare a complete, consistent piece of work which could form a relevant reference after some fine-tuning. All in all I believe that the presented thesis fulfills the requirements for a bachelor thesis at IES, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, I recommend it for the defense and suggest a grade B.
The results of the Urkund analysis do not indicate significant text similarity with other available sources.

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
Contribution (max. 30 points)	29

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Methods	*(max. 30 points)*	25
Literature	*(max. 20 points)*	18
Manuscript Form	*(max. 20 points)*	15
TOTAL POINTS	*(max. 100 points)*	**87**
GRADE	**(A – B – C – D – E – F)**	**B**

NAME OF THE REFEREE: Barbara Pertold-Gebicka

DATE OF EVALUATION: 28.8.2022

*digitally signed on 28.8.2022
by Barbara Pertold-Gebicka*

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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