

In the last few decades there has been an expansion of institutions of direct democracy in most developed countries. The Czech Republic has been no exception and over the past 25 years, there has been a rise of direct democracy in the Czech Republic.

The aim of the dissertation is an analysis of the use of direct democracy in the Czech Republic. Although the analyses are based mainly on data from the Czech Republic, the aim is also to contribute to scholarly debates in the field of direct democracy research. I focus on the following questions:

Who supports the use of direct democracy and who participates in it in the Czech Republic?  
How do voters form opinions and what are the characteristics of direct democracy campaigns?  
What is the effect of direct democracy on other forms of political participation?

I view direct democracy as an institutional innovation and evaluate it based on three criteria: inclusiveness, competence and efficiency. First, I focus on who supports the expansion of direct democracy. I also study the patterns of turnout of various social groups in direct democracy (inclusiveness). Second, I analyse the processes of opinion formation in direct democracy campaigns to find out, whether it can be regarded as competent or not. Last, I analyse whether direct democracy leads to increased or decreased political engagement (efficiency).

The results of the analyses show that direct democracy in the Czech Republic does not fully satisfy these criteria. (1) Great popular support for direct democracy does not seem to translate into real voting behaviour and direct democracy seems rather to replicate the existing biases in political participation. (2) When voting in direct democracy, citizens are subject to framing discursive strategies that work no matter how well-informed they are about the issue at stake. This questions the ability of citizens to vote competently as the issue of what is a competent vote ceases to make sense. (3) Finally, direct democracy enacted on local level does bring about increased political engagement in subsequent elections, but this seems to be an effect of politicized local community conflict – not a pure direct effect of experience with direct forms of decision making.