

Review of the dissertation thesis by Steven Gawthorpe “Rethinking Corruption in the Czech Republic: A Mixed-Methods Approach to a Systemic Problem”

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Research area

The problem of corruption is particularly in post-socialist countries a widely discussed topic, since the local, still insufficiently developed, institutional environment represents a very important ground for it. One area where corruption is particularly strong is public procurement. Its volume in post-socialist countries is above-average, driven both by an attempt to overcome the infrastructure gap and by a higher lack of confidence in the efficiency of “in-house” production. Higher volume of funds, however, at the same time represents a greater risk.

Corruption in public procurement is a complex issue, and therefore it is welcomed that this topic has not only been chosen by the author, but that the author at the same time looks at it using the concept of a systemic corruption. Therefore, I rate the thematic area along with the adopted approach positively. This is an up-to-date topic and an area worth of scientific research. At the same time, it is also possible to assume publication of the results in journals with a non-zero impact factor.

Objectives of the thesis and research questions

The aim of the thesis is described in Chapter 1.1. The author's aim is to find out if it is possible to identify a systemic corruption in the Czech Republic and if so, in what size. In line with this goal, the author specifies three research questions, of which the first one is approachable using review of the existing literature and the remaining two require independent empirical research. The author aims to address the above stated goal using data from the domain of public procurement.

The aim of the thesis is formulated appropriately, same as the first question. The remaining questions would better be disaggregated to more and explicit inquiries. It would also be appropriate to emphasise already within these questions that the issue will only be analysed

using the domain of public procurement. However, the above mentioned remark is not essential, as the author convincingly explains why he chose the area of public procurement.

Structure of the thesis and adopted methods

The thesis is divided (excluding introduction and conclusion) into four main chapters. I consider their arrangement appropriate, as there is respected the principle from general to specific and also from analysis of the current state of knowledge to own empirical analysis. Within the framework of the first chapter, the author – aided by an extensive scope of literature – explains the issue of the public procurement market and the consequences of its hit by corruption activity. The following chapter provides an overview of the existing literature. Chapter 4 describes the research methodology and, finally, Chapter 5 contains results of the own empirical research.

From the methodological point of view, within the first two chapters the author adopts predominantly the deductive method, while the empirical part is based mainly on induction. This is represented by the regression model and further by Kernel density estimator. I consider the adopted methods to be chosen appropriately.

Overall evaluation, comments and suggestions

The theoretical part of the thesis, consisting of the three first chapters, is compiled in a clear and comprehensible manner. The author is able to readily and comprehensibly present individual theoretical concepts and compare them mutually. He appropriately combines resources from economic, political and sociological spheres. The range of resources involved is admirable.

In the case of the empirical part, I assume that more space should be given to description of the source data. It is not always fully clear how individual variables are designed. I also miss descriptive statistics as well as results of the diagnostic tests of the regression model. It would also be appropriate to provide the values of regression coefficients for each year. Greater attention should also be paid to the discussion of regression coefficients' values for the control variables and their interpretation, respectively. I would also welcome a more thorough discussion on the results presented in Chapter 5.7.

Finally, as a weaker part I consider the conclusion where it would be better to summarise the main results and carry out their comparison with similarly aimed studies. I would also welcome the formulation of economic policy recommendations that would be based on the findings presented in the thesis.

Relatively little space is devoted to the evaluation of qualitative research conducted through interviews with selected relevant persons. Here I would expect some form of a structured evaluation, not just a few straight quotes.

However, the above comments do not constitute an overriding obstacle to the acceptance of the submitted thesis. Rather, I think it would be appropriate to express them during the defence and, in particular, to take them into account when publishing the results in professional journals.

Questions for a discussion:

1. While building the regression model, were there tested also forms other than semi-logarithmic?
2. What values reach the regression coefficients of dummy variables for individual years? What is the interpretation of these values?
3. Would it be possible to apply the adopted methodology also to a different field of public policy other than public procurement?

Overall assessment

I consider the submitted thesis to be of a high quality and in correspondence to the requirements stipulated for dissertation theses. The author demonstrated the ability to perform independent scientific work, utilised a considerable amount of literature and demonstrated the ability to apply appropriate scientific methods. On the basis of the above, **I recommend the thesis for a defence before the relevant examination board for defence of dissertations.**

In Prague, 10.1.2018.

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