Thesis evaluation Gaston Rieder

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Programme details

Programme: European Politics and Society

Specialisation:

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Thesis details:

Title: Challenges to government formation in Western European parliamentary democracies (1980-2019)

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

In my assessment, the thesis is free of plagiarism.

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by J. Váška: it can be made public throught the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

Overall, I congratulate the author on an outstanding master thesis. Based on truly impressive bibliography, it presents an original and highly relevant research programme, which it carries out in a very convincing manner, masterfully employing advanced statistical methods. The presentation and discussion of research results, and their limitations, is absolutely convincing, too. The thesis is logically structured, very well and compactly written and it fully complies with all standards of academic work.

I strongly recommend that the thesis, or alternatively the results, is published.

Supplementary points and questions for oral defence:

Why did you chose year 1980 as the starting point of your time frame? Did you consider other options? Are there any disadvantages involved?

I assume the term "parliamentary democracies" used in the title of the thesis ex definitione excludes both the U.K. and France. I should find very advisable to make this point explicit in the thesis, though. Did you consider, at some point, including these two counties (after all you use the U.K. as an example in the text), or either of them in your research? If yes, why did you eventually decide against?

On p. 18 you explain your decision not to include instances of inter-electoral government formation processes (by mistake called "inter-electoral elections" at one point) into your dataset. Substantive reasons (which I do find perfectly relevant) aside, do you think that a hypothetical decision to include them would be in principle compatible with the specific methodology you opted for?

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

The present thesis investigates, by testing a set of alternative explanations, the causes of extended duration of post-electoral government formation processes in Western European parliamentary systems in the decade since the eruption of the 2008 financial crisis. In surveying the existing scholarship, the author has identified a significant gap of systemic importance which he set out to fill, mostly in terms of availability of new data that have not yet been analysed in comparative perspective, but also in the analytical perspectives employed by authors of (the very few) earlier studies on the topic.

Overall, the thesis is very strong on all the above-mentioned points.

Assessment: very good   **Weighing:** n/a

Application knowledge and insight

To sum up, the thesis is very strong on all the above-mentioned points. The author carefully and in much detail accompanies the reader through his methodological reasoning and choices, and he proves his excellent command of use (both in abstract and practical sense) of advanced statistical methods in political science research. Operationalization of concepts is convincing and chosen research methods are employed effectively.

A single variable appears somewhat under-defined to me: on p. 18 the author states that the variable of duration is defined as "the number of days it takes for a government to be to be formally accepted (…)". What is miss is an explanation of how the author treats cases when the vote of investiture was lost, and the various subsequent scenarios, namely when an early election is called (such as in the aftermath of 2015 elections in Spain).

Assessment: very good   **Weighing:** n/a

Reaching conclusions

The reasoning presented in this thesis is perfectly logical, conclusions (which turn our attention to the position of formateur parties in the government formation processes) are fully based on evidence presented. I have no objections concerning the interpretation of results, either. Final discussion, which covers all mandatory aspects including the prospects for further research, is fairly concise (due to the author's writing style, largely) but very efficient and well-connected to the existing body of literature.

The research question, on the empirical level (p. 2) has been answered, and all four hypotheses (p. 17) duly assessed and verified or falsified, respectively.

Assessment: very good   **Weighing:** n/a

Communication

The thesis is very well written. The authors' style is clear and compact (with a notable exception of the acknowledgment section, which feels rather inflated), his command of professional language and terminology (as far as I can tell as non-native speaker) impeccable. The structure of the thesis serves the purpose. Citations and references are used correctly, including pagination where appropriate.

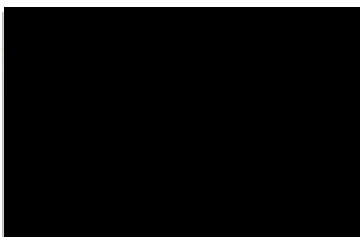**Assessment:** very good   **Weighing:** n/a

Formal requirements

All met. Technically, the word count is lower than required but given the specific character of the text (quantitative-oriented, presentation of results via graphs and charts) as well as the compactness of the author's style I consider this criterion to be met.

Final assessment

This thesis is graded with a 9

Signatures

J. Váška