

IEPS MASTER THESIS OPPONENT REVIEW FORM

STUDENT NAME: Samantha Pštrosová

THESIS TITLE: Abortion as the Driving Force Behind the Christian Right

OPPONENT NAME: Krystof Kozak

OPPONENT GRADE: 1-2, depending on the defense

REVIEW

The thesis by Mrs. Samantha Pštrosová focuses on the role the abortion debate has had on the evolution of the Christian Right as an important pressure group in U.S. politics. In order to provide proper context for the research problem, the author first described how historically conservative Christians shied away from politics, which was considered secondary to (or even corrupting) the more important spiritual pursuits. Then she shifts attention to the debate over legalized abortion in the aftermath of the Roe v. Wade decision of the Supreme Court. Subsequent chapter describes the critical process, in which religious movements opposing legalized gradually transformed themselves to become formidable conservative political organizations with complex agenda as well as clout in Washington, D.C. At the end, the author analyzes various factors that could have contributed to the success of the Christian Right and concludes that the issue of legalized abortion played a crucial role in the formation and continued political salience of the movement. This finding is important as it enables us to better understand the underlying characteristics of this phenomenon. It also raises interesting questions with respect to the implications of this claim.

Methodologically, the thesis is well structured. It relies primarily on chronological description and analysis of main developments relevant for the

thesis. It proceeds systematically, presenting the reader with a complex picture within proper historical as well as political context. Chapter 6, which compares various driving forces behind the Christian Right, could have been even longer, as it contains all the main arguments for the thesis as a whole. Even though it is difficult, the author could have provided more room for the discussion on the criteria chosen to compare the importance of various selected factors. The main argument is thus based primarily on indirect evidence. The author could have spent more time at the end discussing her findings in the context of current literature on the topic - are they more or less an accepted proposition, or do they challenge some of our notions about the functioning of the Christian Right? There are several references in the thesis to interviews with selected scholars, but these should have been more conceptualized with respect to their goals as well as their roles in the thesis.

With regards to the substance of the thesis, it is very well researched and contains detailed information about the issue. The thesis could have maybe focused even more on trying to explain why is it exactly abortion that rallied conservative Christians to become so active politically. It does a very good job in comparing abortion with other factors, but does not analyze the issue on its own grounds. Discussion on the psychology and background of the members of the movement could have further strengthened the main argument, but the scope of the thesis does not allow for such expansive approach. The level of cynicism with which the issue of abortion is used for political gain could have been addressed in greater detail as well, as it would tell us to what extent is the Christian Right manufactured by political strategists from above.

Formally, the thesis is very well written and has been adequately proofread. The author writes in clear style, formulates ideas concisely and coherently. The thesis contains adequate reference material and otherwise complies with formal requirements.

Overall, I think the thesis is a detailed and coherent analysis of a relevant research topic, which offers convincing conclusions. I am suggesting the grade between excellent and very good mainly because I think the author should explain more fully the criteria chosen when comparing various factors motivating the Christian Right during the defense. During the defense, I would also raise the question of the implications of the main findings, how do they change the way we look at Christian Right today?