

What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know about Mass-Elite Linkages in the Czech Republic?¹

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Abstract:

This paper reviews the literature on democratic quality in the Czech Republic where quality is conceptualized as the strength of links between citizens and governments. The review reveals both positive and negative signs. Some linkages – particularly electoral accountability – work reasonably well, while others – especially mandate responsiveness – do not. In some areas, like policy responsiveness, our knowledge is relatively meagre. Surprisingly, time trends are also diverse, with improvement in some areas but decline in others. Given that much of our knowledge of linkages is fragmentary, the paper thus suggests a number of areas where scholars should conduct additional research.

Keywords:

Quality of Democracy, Czech Republic, Representation

Most Czechs are convinced that their democracy is not working well. Public opinion poll after public opinion poll has shown that they are disenchanted with the functioning of their democracy. But are their assessments correct? Is the quality of Czech democracy in fact very low? And has it gotten worse over time?

In this paper, I survey what we know about mass-elite linkages in the Czech Republic and what we still need to know. The paper follows the conception laid out in Roberts (2010) which equates democratic quality with the strength of links between citizens and governments.² In particular, the paper considers whether Czech citizens exert control over their politicians in three different ways: through retrospective accountability, through proactive mandates, and over the course of a government's rule.

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² This of course is not the only possible conception of democratic quality. See Munck (2013) for a survey and Diamond and Morlino (2005) for a prominent alternative. Other conceptions include such dimensions as participation, horizontal accountability, tolerance, and corruption.

This paper does not present new research. Instead it draws on extant literature to paint a picture of both the current state of Czech democracy and trends over the past two and a half decades.³ The results are both positive and negative. Citizens have some means of control but lack others, and in many areas we simply do not know very much. Due to these gaps in our knowledge, the paper makes a number of suggestions for future research.

1. The Quality of Democracy

Scholars have put forward a number of ways of conceptualizing democratic quality. An adequate conception of democratic quality should arguably fulfil two criteria: it should go beyond democracy itself and it should relate specifically to politics in a democracy. Some existing conceptions do not fulfil the first criterion: they stop with democracy and only provide better measures of how democratic a country is. Others do not fulfil the second criterion: they present standards of good governance or the causes of good governance that could apply to non-democracies as well as democracies; to China as well as Sweden.

A conception of quality as linkages which focuses on the degree to which citizens rule or control their government fulfils these criteria (Roberts 2010). Such a conception gets at the fundamental idea of democracy as government by the people but goes beyond definitions of democracy in terms of elections and rights. Democratic institutions provide the potential for citizen rule, but it is not clear that this potential is realized. Indeed, most Czechs would acknowledge that their country has free and fair elections, but few believe that they genuinely give power to the people.

The conception of quality as linkages distinguishes three ways that citizens can influence their government. The first is electoral accountability: at election time, citizens can punish or reward politicians for their past performance and so give them an incentive to behave well. The second is mandate responsiveness: by choosing parties, citizens endow them with a mandate to pursue particular policies. This gives citizens prospective control over politicians. The third is policy responsiveness: citizens can keep politicians responsive to their changing preferences even between elections through the use of voice. This might be the most fundamental linkage. If citizens are ruling, politicians should be continuously listening to what the people want. In a high-quality democracy, we might expect all these linkages to be strong, but there may also be trade-offs between them and some may substitute for others (Powell 2000).

The conception of quality as linkages can be criticized in a number of ways (Munck 2013). One important problem with citizen rule is that it may not be normatively desirable. Citizens may not be capable of ruling well

³ Though I have attempted to cover the main empirical studies on the subject, I have likely overlooked many important works. I apologise in advance for any omissions.

because they are ill-informed, manipulable, or prone to passions. It is important then to supplement this conception with an assessment of the quality of citizens – how capable they are of ruling. More generally, one might argue that the key standard of democratic quality is not citizen rule but good governance – whether politicians are acting in the best interests of citizens. I will discuss the relevance of these alternative criteria in the conclusion of the paper.

2. Electoral Accountability

The first topic which I consider is electoral accountability. To what degree are Czech governments and officeholders held accountable for their actions? Ideally, voters would punish politicians and governments for poor performance and reward them for good performance. This would both rid the polity of bad politicians and provide governments with an incentive to perform well.

Of course, this raises questions. What standards should voters use to judge politicians? Is this simple retrospective evaluation enough to keep politicians performing well? How should voters choose between parties not in government or even not in parliament? Nevertheless, this evaluation is something that voters should be capable of – they simply need to assess whether the government or their representative has done a good job – and the incentive it provides can be surprisingly powerful.

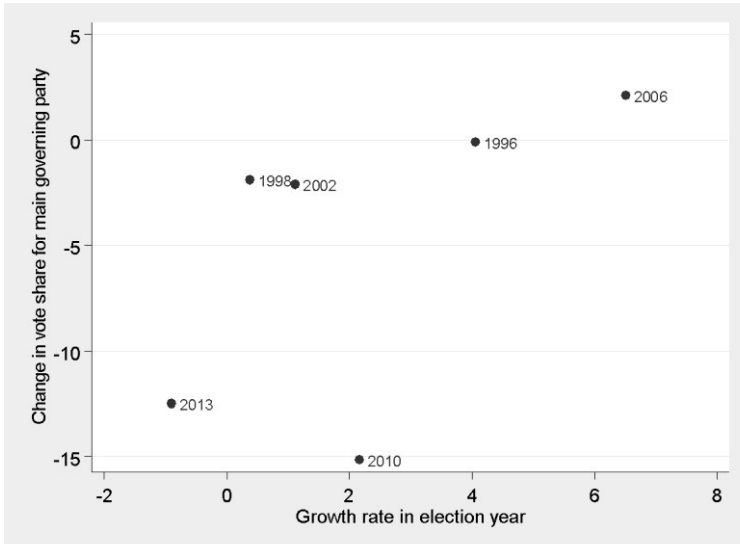
Czech citizens are relatively pessimistic on this score. The standard view is that Czech politicians escape accountability. Politicians are seen as pursuing their own interests and frequently breaking the law while maintaining their influential positions. The ability of politicians and parties to survive corruption scandals may be the most cited evidence of this lack of accountability. Is this assessment correct?

2.1. What we know

What do we know about electoral accountability in the Czech Republic? The basic idea is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, which show the relation between the change in vote share for incumbent parties and coalitions and the growth rate during the election year.⁴ A positive relation between economic conditions and voting for incumbents is the most frequently used indicator of accountability because of the importance of the economy to voters. This relationship is relatively clear in the figures. In periods of high growth, such as in 1996 and 2006, the incumbents do relatively well, and in times of low growth, such as in 2013, they do poorly.

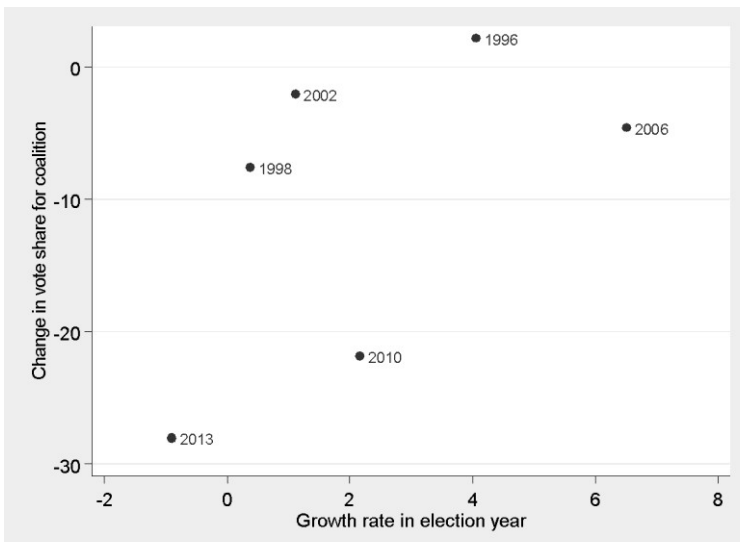
⁴ For the elections of 1998, 2010, and 2013, I considered the centre-right Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana – ODS) along with its coalition partners as the incumbents even though in these cases a technocratic government held power for a short period prior to elections.

Figure 1: Change in Vote Share for Main Incumbent Party and Growth



Source: Czech Statistical Office, https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/hmu_ts

Figure 2: Change in Vote Share for Incumbent Coalition and Growth



Source: Czech Statistical Office, https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/hmu_ts

These figures, however, reveal a number of problems with a simple view of accountability. Even the most successful incumbents were not particularly successful. Rarely did they improve their position. This weakens the

accountability relationship because incumbents know that they are going to lose – no matter what. The small number of elections and lack of controls obviously stands in the way of drawing strong conclusions from this data, which is why most studies have turned to survey data or subnational comparisons.

Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier (2000) have surveyed studies using these methods in the post-communist region. They find that “*evidence from various studies, with but few exceptions, demonstrates statistically and substantively significant effects*” of the economy on voting. These countries “*function like established democracies*” (Lewis-Beck, Stegmeier 2000: 320). Tworzecki (2003) similarly documents a significant effect of perceptions of economic performance on support for the incumbent in the Czech Republic between 1992 and 1995, but it is not always the strongest effect.

Other works put a number of twists on this relationship. Coffey (2013) finds some effects of the economy on the popularity of governments, but they are weaker and more heterogeneous than she expects. Coffey instead proposes a theory of pain tolerance. When the economy performs within expectations, it has little effect on popularity. But when the economy performs much better or much worse than average, it will have substantial effects. She finds that a headline unemployment rate of greater than 8.82% and a nominal inflation rate of greater than 13.44% are the breaking point for voters.

There is also evidence that this relationship has changed over time. Looking at 11 opinion surveys over the first eight years of the transition, Fidrmuc and Doyle (2003) find that the economic status of individuals only affected their political support in the late 1990s. This confirms the theory that it takes time for voters to learn how to hold governments accountable (Duch 2001).

Tucker (2006) argues that the Czech Republic features transitional economic voting in addition to standard accountability. Economic conditions have different effects on parties formed after the fall of communism compared to those associated with the communist regime. For new regime parties, the standard association of a bad economy and punishment prevails. For old regime parties, by contrast, worse performance leads to greater support. Similar findings emerge in Fidrmuc (2000a) and Pacek (1994) using regional data from several countries, including the Czech Republic. This can lead to perverse incentives for new regime parties.

Recently scholars have begun to study accountability in second-order elections at the European, regional, and local level. Pink (2016), for example, finds that voters typically use these elections to punish parties who hold power at the national level. While this is a sort of accountability for national parties, it is less effective for holding accountable officials at other levels.

In short, a rough sort of accountability appears to exist in the Czech Republic but with a number of specificities, such as the high rate of

punishment of incumbents, threshold effects, changes over time, and different treatment of old regime parties and non-national elections.

2.2. What we need to know

Despite a fair amount of research on electoral accountability in the Czech Republic and the region as a whole, a number of issues still remain to be resolved. One of the recent touchstones in work on electoral accountability is Duch and Stevenson's (2008) *The Economic Vote*. Their innovation is to produce comparable cross-national and temporal estimates of the role of economic perceptions on vote choice by applying standard methods to national election surveys. While their study encompasses 163 elections in 18 countries, they leave out the entire post-communist region, including the Czech Republic. It would be interesting to know how Czech voters compare to those in the established democracies by replicating their methods. Duch and Stevenson's major finding is that economic voting is widespread with variations according to clarity of responsibility.

There are worries, however, in using public opinion data to test theories of accountability because voters' perceptions of the economy or other outcomes may be biased. In fact, much of the recent work on voting considers precisely whether citizens view politics through partisan and ideological glasses. Achen and Bartels (2016) have produced the definitive work in this area. For example, they document how voters are myopic – they tend to look only at the recent achievements of politicians; how voters engage in blind retrospection – they hold politicians accountable for events over which they have little control, like shark attacks and influenza outbreaks; and how voters use motivated reasoning – they perceive the state of the economy differently according to their ideological attachments.

There has to date been little study of these biases in the Czech Republic. Are Czech voters myopic? It does appear that they focus on recent economic conditions rather than the government's entire term, but we do not know much more than that. Do they engage in blind retrospection? Here researchers might explore the effect of periodic floods (a prototypical "act of God") on voting. Do Czech voters succumb to motivated reasoning, evaluating politics through partisan lenses? Given that partisan attachments are not strong, perhaps Czechs would be less prone to this bias. Nevertheless, these are all serious threats to electoral accountability, which has typically been held up as the one task that voters are capable of performing well.

Finally, most studies of electoral accountability focus on the economy, and this is a natural choice as citizens typically care deeply about the state of the economy and the economy matters for human welfare. Yet voters could plausibly hold politicians accountable for other actions, such as corruption or policy choices. Roberts (2010), for example, finds that elections where corruption was a major issue saw larger incumbent vote losses, but his measures of corruption are less than perfect (see also Klačnja et al. 2016). It

would also be good to know how well accountability functions outside of elections, for example, through resignations or removals from office.

3. Mandate Responsiveness

The idea of mandate responsiveness is that voters use elections prospectively rather than retrospectively. Voters select parties according to their ideologies and competence, and this allows them to influence the future course of policy rather than merely reacting to what has already happened. This form of influence, however, comes at a price. It demands a lot of both citizens and parties.

Mandate responsiveness can be seen as a three-step process. The first step is that parties or candidates present clear and distinctive programmes so that voters have real choices. The next step is that voters understand these choices and vote based on the programmes of the parties or candidates – a phenomenon known as spatial or issue voting. The final step is that parties follow through on their programmes – they fulfil their election promises. So not only does this form of control demand more of voters and parties, it can also fail at different stages. Nevertheless, it does offer the potential for stronger control.

3.1. What we know

It is best to look separately at each of the three steps in the chain of mandate responsiveness.

Programmatic Parties

Considerable research has been undertaken on the first stage – the question of whether parties offer clear and distinctive programmes. Kitschelt et al's (1999) work is the standard. Their survey of party functionaries allowed them to evaluate the programmatic positions of all the major parties in the Czech Republic (along with Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland) early in the post-communist transition.

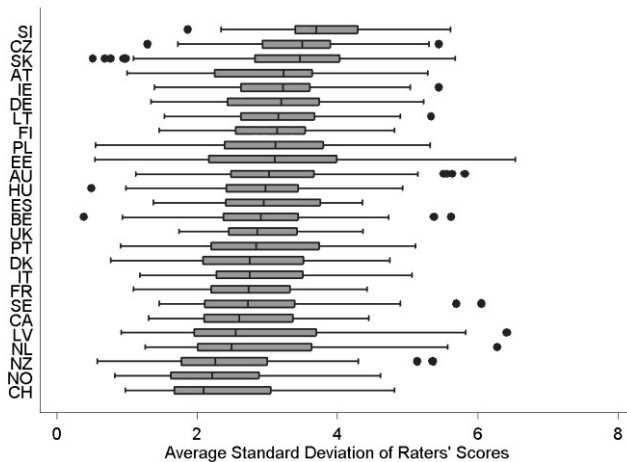
The results are something of a surprise. Even at this early date (the survey was conducted in 1994), parties displayed clear and distinct positions more or less arrayed along a single left-right axis that encompassed the main issues of politics. Indeed, the Czech Republic exhibited the highest degree of programmatic crystallization, the most spread, and the most internal cohesion of the four countries in the sample. In this sense, party politics was working as one would hope. Tworzecki (2003) confirmed this finding and added that parties remained in more or less the same positions over the four years from 1992 to 1995.

Benoit and Laver (2006), however, argue that party competition in post-communist Europe has been more complicated, at least in the early part of the new millennium. Using an expert survey of party positions on a large number of issues, they find that parties in the region do not cluster along as clear a left-right dimension as in the established democracies, making

choices for voters more difficult. A re-analysis of their data also found that post-communist countries had less clear positions and less choice than in established democracies and even in other relatively new democracies (Roberts 2010).

These analyses did not isolate the Czech Republic, but it is relatively simple to compare the clarity of party positions with those of other countries. Clarity can be measured as the standard deviation of expert ratings of the parties' positions. Higher standard deviations indicate that experts are less in agreement on the parties' positions. Figure 3 shows a box plot of the clarity of party positions for the main countries in Western and Eastern Europe, focusing only on parties that received greater than 3% of the vote.⁵ The Czech Republic is one of the poorest performers, as experts had a relatively difficult time agreeing on parties' positions. It is not atypical for the region, however, as Slovenia, Estonia, and Slovakia occupy the neighbouring positions, but it does indicate a problem. Arguably the situation has worsened since this survey. More recent research has focused on the rise of populist and business firm parties in the Czech Republic: for example, Public Affairs (Věci veřejné – VV) and ANO 2011, both types which should have lower levels of programmaticness (Havlík 2015).

Figure 3: Clarity of Party Positions



Source: Benoit and Laver (2006)

Electoral volatility presents another window on the type of choices which voters face (Rose, Munro 2003; Birch 2003). Particularly important is what Powell and Tucker (2014) call volatility A – that is, the emergence of brand-

⁵ The numbers represent the unweighted average of the standard deviation of expert ratings for all the dimensions on which they were asked to rate the parties. Isolating only the left-right or other salient dimensions yields similar results.

new parties and the disappearance of old ones. (Volatility B is the transfer of votes between existing parties and is a more normal part of representative democracy.) High levels of this sort of volatility mean that voters are constantly faced with a new set of choices which to at least some degree will be shots in the dark. Though levels of such volatility are quite high in post-communist Europe, the Czech Republic has the second lowest levels in the region (behind only Hungary) according to Powell and Tucker's measures. This result, however, does not take into account the most recent elections, which featured the rise of multiple new parties.

Strangely enough, then, the Czech Republic appears to be moving backwards from relatively good results to relatively poor ones. Perhaps as the big issues of reform and transition recede, competition has become more complicated. Alternatively, the problem may be the decline of older parties and their replacement by new ones with less history.

Issue Voting

The next step in mandate responsiveness is issue voting. Are voters aware of the positions of parties, and do they vote on this basis? Linek and Lyons (2013) have provided the most comprehensive analysis of the determinants of Czech voting behaviour. Analysing the seven parliamentary elections between 1990 and 2010, their main conclusion is that *"electoral competition in the Czech Republic is strongly programmatically focused. The greatest part of the decision whom to vote for is determined by three cleavages and one ideological orientation"* (Linek, Lyons 2013: 167). These cleavages are social class, religiosity, and age, and the ideological orientation is a basic left-right axis.⁶ Importantly, these effects are largely stable over time, though there has been some recent weakening of the effect of religiosity and age.

Other work looks at the relation between the ideologies of parties and those of voters. This is not exactly issue voting, but it does suggest that voters are able to choose the right party. Kitschelt et al. (1999) thus find that party supporters do have a clear picture of where their party stands. In their analysis, the Czech electorate possesses a high degree of ideological constraint, though their study cannot distinguish whether this is because citizens choose their party on the basis of its positions or because their chosen party influences their views. Another twist in Kitschelt's findings is that parties exaggerate the positions of their voters: even though parties and their voters line up in the same order on a left-right scale, parties are more spaced out than voters. They call this sort of relationship trusteeship, and it makes sense given the informational constraints on voters.

Tworzecki (2003) meanwhile took advantage of a unique survey that asked voters in the Czech Republic (as well as Hungary and Poland) to answer an open-ended question of what they liked and disliked about parties. Among Czech voters, domestic policy considerations trumped

⁶ These cleavages are not exactly issue positions, though arguably they are related to specific policy or ideological beliefs.

leadership and a variety of other factors. Again, Czech voters appeared to be more willing issue voters than their neighbours. Tworzecki also considered the individual-level determinants of voting. Though he did not measure issue voting per se, he did find that the choices of Czech voters were grounded in ideology, programmatic goals, past voting, and national economic performance. In conclusion, he characterizes politics in the region as “issue-driven”.

Looking at a later date, Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012) similarly find a relatively high degree of correlation between party ideologies (as rated by experts) and the ideologies of their supporters. Indeed, the Czech Republic is one of the best performers of the 24 countries in their dataset and in general the post-communist countries have closer associations than the more established democracies.⁷

On issue voting, the results are thus relatively positive. Voters do seem to know where parties stand and vote at least in part based on their beliefs. As in the previous section, however, there are some indications of negative trends as the positions of parties have become less clear and voting based on cleavages has weakened somewhat. The 2013 election may have represented another blow.

Fulfilment

The third and final link in the chain is promise fulfilment – whether parties follow through on their promises. There is a widespread belief that Czech parties do particularly poorly on this measure, but to date there are relatively few studies which definitively show this.

One could conceive of this follow-through in general terms: do left-wing governments pursue left-wing policies and right-wing governments right-wing policies? One of the main worries in the region was that these states were under greater pressures to pursue economic reforms but that voters disliked reforms (Przeworski 1991). As a result, parties would campaign on an anti-reform platform, but then reverse themselves as soon as they took office when they found that any other path would be suicidal (Stokes 2001).

Tavits and Letki (2009) find strong evidence for such reversals in the region. They claim that in post-communist Europe “*left is right*”. Left-wing parties tend to pursue more austerity while right-wing governments tend to spend more in general and on health and education. The reason goes beyond Przeworski’s mechanism. The problem is that left-wing parties have to prove their non-communist credentials to markets by engaging in liberal reforms; conversely, right-wing parties have less stable support and thus have to keep voters happy by providing social security. Roberts (2010) meanwhile discovered in a statistical analysis of 10 countries the absence of any relationship between a party’s stance on reform (for, against, or

⁷ They attribute this to the more complex issue space in the richer democracies, although this contradicts Benoit and Laver’s finding that the issue space is more complex in post-communist democracies.

ambiguous) and the degree of actual reforms. Lipsmeyer (2009), however, reached the opposite conclusion from a similar analysis using manifesto data.

While these studies used cross-national data, including from the Czech Republic, it would be an exaggeration to say that Czech parties are the worst offenders. Nevertheless, some of these effects may be present here as well (Lipsmeyer 2002; Cook et al. 1999). On the one hand, Václav Klaus's strident free market rhetoric was often belied by more conciliatory policies that Orenstein (2001) calls social liberal. Conversely, Miloš Zeman's scorched earth campaign against reforms was contradicted by his relatively reformist period in government. Later governments present a more ambiguous picture. The studies cited earlier on the lack of clarity in party programmes may be relevant here as well. One of the reasons that experts perceive less clear ideologies may be that parties' actions contradict their public proclamations.

Another technique isolates concrete promises from election manifestoes (for example, a promise to establish an anti-corruption agency or raise the retirement age) and asks whether the promises were fulfilled during the subsequent government. As Naurin (2011) points out, citizens believe that politicians rarely fulfil their promises, but in most studies of Western Europe and North America fulfilment rates are relatively high – typically 60-70% of government party promises are carried out within four years (Pétry, Collette 2009). An equivalent study was carried out by Škvřňák (2014) for the Czech Republic over the 2010–2013 term. He found substantially lower levels of fulfilment – closer to 30% – and smaller differences between governing and opposition parties. The Czech public's cynicism about promise fulfilment may be justified.

The picture of fulfilment is mostly negative. Governments may not reverse themselves as frequently as their peers in neighbouring countries, but they do not appear to be rushing to fulfil their programmes.

3.2. What we need to know

While there has been substantial work on mandate responsiveness, a number of areas remain fuzzy. It would be useful to use consistent methods to learn more about trends in programmatic politics. While Kitschelt et al. (1999) find high levels, Benoit and Laver's (2006) expert survey casts some doubt on this. It seems that party competition in the Czech Republic has become more opaque with the addition of new parties whose ideologies are uncertain, and it is possible that even the positions of existing parties have become less clear. With the end of economic reform and accession to the EU, many of the dividing lines between parties have disappeared. The Chapel

Hill Expert Survey⁸, which has been conducted in five waves from 1999 to 2014, may be a way to assess these trends in a standard way.

There have also been relatively few studies that link the ideology of governments with policies and outcomes. Many scholars of Western European politics have used data from the Comparative Manifestoes Project to determine how well emphases in policy programmes are followed by the corresponding changes in government expenditures. Application of this method to the Czech Republic would be relatively straightforward (Budge, Hofferbert 1990; Klingemann et al. 1994; but see the methodological criticisms of King et al. 1993).

Finally, scholars have only begun to consider the degree to which election promises are fulfilled. A more systematic examination of the promises made by each party in each election and the determinants of their fulfilment would tell us more about the who, what, and when of promise fulfilment. This would also help us determine whether promise fulfilment is getting worse or better.

4. Policy Responsiveness

The last element of linkages is policy responsiveness, the degree to which politicians follow public opinion in their policy choices. This might be considered the most fundamental linkage because it directly measures the degree of public control. Does policy change as citizen preferences change? One could also view this as a different pathway of influence that depends on public opinion, petitioning, protests and other forms of voice rather than elections (though elections also have an effect in promoting policy responsiveness if citizens punish governments for not listening).

4.1. What we know

This is the area where we have seen the least amount of research on Czech democracy. To what extent do Czech governments and politicians follow the lead of the public? It is hard to say that we have a systematic answer to this question.

The policy area that has seen the most research is economic reform. The major studies of reform, however, do not give a particularly large role to public opinion. Indeed, Przeworski's (1991) classic study introduced the assumption that the public would react negatively to reform, and so if reform took place it would necessarily be in opposition to the public. We would only see policy responsiveness where there was little to no reform. However, as Bunce (2001) has shown, the public in the post-communist region was relatively supportive of reform and so, as opposed to in Latin America, democracy and reform could coexist.

⁸ The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2016). *Chapel Hill Expert Survey*. [online; cit. 2016-04-24]. Available at WWW: <<http://chesdata.eu/>>.

Explanations of reform in the Czech Republic do not directly contradict this assumption. Two of the major studies of the causes of reform in the Czech Republic are Orenstein (2001) and Appel (2004), and both put causal impetus on parties and ideologies rather than on the public. For Orenstein, reform comes when reformist parties are in power, and reforms are consolidated when the opposition comes to power. For Appel, ideas are important, and particularly the capture of governments by neo-liberal ideologues. Extending these links back in time, however, might implicate the public. Who is electing reformist (or non-reformist) parties if not voters? And as the previous section discussed, voters appear to understand what they are doing.

There are several studies of social policymaking that follow a similar line of reasoning. Lipsmeyer (2003, 2002), for example, argues that the public has nuanced beliefs on welfare and that some welfare policy changes are affected by party control of government. Roberts (2010) meanwhile finds evidence for policy responsiveness in housing and pension privatization in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, many austerity measures, such as healthcare co-payments or increasing the retirement age, went against public opinion. Other interesting cases include church restitution, where governments heeded public opposition until recently, and missile defence, where governments attempted to defy the public but failed.

One might include studies of EU influence as providing evidence on this issue – if the EU is causing policy change, this limits policy responsiveness (Vachudova 2005). Jacoby (2004) argues that the EU's influence in the Czech Republic is quite varied. Moreover, in most cases, policy outcomes are not the result of the EU dictating policies to publics who resist them. Rather there is an interaction between the domestic and international arena with domestic actors playing a role as key catalysts for reform. One could also take a step back from specific examples of influence and note that since a majority of Czechs desired entrance into the EU, by extension they should approve of specific policy decisions that facilitated accession, even if they would not have supported these policies on their own terms.

I should note that despite these results, which mostly show responsiveness, there is a general belief that Czech politicians are unresponsive – that they pursue their own interests or the interests of their wealthy backers, regardless of what the public wants. This may be the case, but there are still not enough studies to prove the point. It is likewise interesting to link this criticism with recent lamentations over populism where populism is sometimes defined as the direct translation of public opinion into policy.

4.2. What we need to know

Given the relatively small number of studies on this topic, there is still much to do. One might construct a dataset of public opinion on a variety of policies to determine whether the majority usually gets its way. This follows

the work of Monroe (1995) and Brooks (1990). One could also link spending preferences with actual spending trends (Canes-Wrone 2005) or, to capture causality, look at areas where public opinion has changed and ask whether policy change follows these changes (Page, Shapiro 1983).

Turning to qualitative approaches, few areas of public policy have been studied in an in-depth way to see whether politicians reacted to public preferences. One could name industrial, regulatory, transportation, tax, and foreign policy as areas where we still need to understand the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes.⁹ A qualitative study would consider not just the relation between public opinion and policy, but the pathways through which public attitudes are translated into policy. Are politicians worried about electoral retribution or the threat of protest, or do they simply share the beliefs of their voters?

There are two additional aspects of the subject that deserve particular attention. The first is inequality. There is a widespread belief that Czech public policy is controlled by the well-off and possibly even by the superrich. A number of recent studies in the US and Western Europe have documented such biases in public policy (Gilens 2012; Bartels 2008; Adams, Ezrow 2009). Politicians in these countries appear to be most responsive to the wealthy and educated and to ignore the views of the poor and uneducated.¹⁰

We know little about the degree to which these findings apply to the Czech Republic. The research designs mentioned earlier could easily be adapted to answer these questions – it would simply be a matter of disaggregating public opinion by income or education. One study by Roberts and Kim (2011) found that responsiveness over time in the post-communist region was more equal than unequal across income groups, but rich and poor did have substantially different beliefs. There are also new attempts to capture the policy preferences of groups that might not show up in standard opinion surveys – this includes both the very rich and the socially marginalized. Again, little is known about the opinions of these groups in the Czech Republic. In particular, the very wealthy are known for rarely speaking about politics. Page, Bartels, and Seawright (2013) describe a number of ways of measuring their opinions such as donations, specialized surveys, and media analysis. Berinsky (2004) meanwhile discusses ways of assessing the opinions of the socially marginalized.

A second area that deserves attention is the possibility of reverse causation. An association between public preferences and policy outcomes could imply that the politicians are listening to the public. Alternatively, it could mean that politicians are manipulating the public. A number of studies of established democracies argue that such manipulation is common whether in the long-run as a product of indoctrination by the schools and

⁹ Studies of all these areas of course exist, but few test that hypothesis that public opinion is a cause of policy change.

¹⁰ Though note that in many areas the rich and poor have similar policy beliefs (Soroka, Wlezien 2008).

the media or in the short-run by politicians and associated interest groups concerned with specific policies (Jacobs, Shapiro 2000). Again, little is known about the extent to which this takes place in the Czech Republic, but there is considerable suspicion of media bias.

5. Conclusion

How strong are mass-elite linkages in the Czech Republic? Based on the admittedly narrow conception of democratic quality considered here, citizens do maintain some control over their rulers, though not in all respects and numerous blind spots in our understanding mean that control may be less than it appears at first glance.

Most positively, citizens do appear to hold governments accountable for their economic performance. Electoral punishment is swift and severe, as politicians are no doubt aware. This finding comes with some caveats. Popularity may only change when performance exceeds certain bounds. Punishment may also be too consistent, which deprives politicians of any incentive to work hard. And there continues to be a belief that politicians get away with corruption, which may explain the consistency of punishment.

The ability of citizens to control their government prospectively, however, is not quite so strong and surprisingly appears to be getting worse over time. While vote choices were relatively clear and distinct early in the transition, the loss of stability in the party system and the entrance of new, ambiguous formations have made this sort of control more difficult. Moreover, throughout the transition, the connection between government promises or ideologies and policy choices have been less than adequate.

Finally, our knowledge is thinnest on the question of policy responsiveness. Though we have suggestive evidence that politicians mostly follow public opinion, few works have tried to nail down these connections. Indeed, this hypothesis is rarely tested, perhaps because so many observers believe that Czech politicians ignore the public and pursue their own material and ideological interests.

These conclusions, however, are far from definitive. There are many areas where we know little. On accountability, there is much we need to learn about the relative degree of economic voting across elections and, compared to other countries, about the degree to which voters suffer from myopia, blind retrospection, and motivated reasoning, and whether politicians are held accountable for factors besides the economy. On mandates, we still need to create better assessments of trends and the relationship between promises and policies. Policy responsiveness meanwhile requires investigation of many basic facts, not to mention inequalities in representation, and the degree to which citizens' preferences are manipulated by politicians.

Even these analyses get us only halfway to the goal. As mentioned in the introduction, citizen rule can easily lead to poor outcomes if citizens are uninformed, misinformed, inconstant, and intolerant, to mention only a few

flaws. Indeed, worries about populism are inspired by precisely this sort of scenario – politicians pandering to a public which desires manifestly bad policies. In short, what is needed is more study of the quality of Czech citizens.

Finally, one might argue that it is not the quality of democracy we ultimately care about but the quality of governance. While some might advocate democracy for its own sake – there is a fundamental right to self-government or democracy is the path to human fulfilment – others would see democracy instead as an instrument to produce greater human welfare. That would mean that we need to produce an evaluation of what is called substantive representation – the degree to which governments act in the best interests of citizens. Only then would we learn whether citizen rule also leads to good rule.

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