

Report on Bachelor / Master Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Student:	Natália Dusková
Advisor:	Barbara Pertold-Gebicka
Title of the thesis:	The geography of the populist vote in Slovakia

OVERALL ASSESSMENT (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):

Please provide a short summary of the thesis, your assessment of each of the four key categories, and an overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion. The minimum length of the report is 300 words.

Short summary

The thesis of Natalia Duskova is among the best I have ever supervised. This is driven by Natalia's regular, goal-oriented hardwork combined with deep interest in the studied topic and willingness to present as robust as possible evidence.

Natalia is studying the relationship between regions' characteristics and support for populist parties in parliamentary elections. This is the topic she has already explored in her Bachelor's thesis, what is well acknowledged in the text. In the presented Master thesis Natalia extends the analysis in several ways. First, and most important, she applies spatial analysis. Second, she adds the recent Census data, which allow for detailed comparison between 2016 and 2020 elections. Finally, she analyses not only district-level data, but also more detailed municipality-level data.

Spatial analysis reveals that on top of own-districts characteristics, also neighboring districts have effect on election results. Natalia identifies high degree of spatial autocorrelation in district-level support for SMĚR and LSNS. Among the interesting findings, let me stress that the average wage in neighbouring districts appears to have a positive and statistically significant effect on the share of votes given to SMĚR, while own-district wage does not correlate with vote share. This might be driven by envy?

Contribution

The contribution of this thesis lies in careful identification of interconnections between Slovak regions when it comes to support for populist parties. This is the first analysis of this type performed on Slovak data, even though populist support has been on the rise in this country in recent years.

Methods

The analysis presented in this thesis is based on simple OLS (to compare with the bachelor thesis defended two years ago) and advanced spatial econometric methods. Spatial econometrics is especially useful in this type of analysis as it allows capturing interdependencies between neighboring regions that might be responsible for election results. Natalia did not stop at applying the most commonly used (but necessarily simplified) spatial econometric methods, but she studies this topic in depth and decided to consciously choose the best specification that might account for all existing spacial relationship. This meant comparing multi-factor spatial models, i.e. models allowing for different sources of spatial correlation (spatial correlation and spillovers, sometimes referred to as spatial interdependence) that might come from outcomes, observable or unobservable characteristics of neighboring districts. After careful evaluation of different approaches – which involved not only blind comparison of statistical indicators, but also intuitive analysis of potential interrelations and their manifestation in different econometric models – Natalia decided to apply spatial autocorrelation modeling (SAC), which allows for spatially autocorrelated errors and spillovers from outcomes in neighboring districts, and spatial Durbin modeling (SDM), allowing for spillovers coming both from outcomes and observable characteristics in the neighboring districts. Choice of these methods was extensively discussed not only with me as the supervisor, but also with other faculty members.

Literature

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Literature review is extensive and well organized. It proves that Natalia has studied the topic in depth.

Manuscript form

The whole thesis is nicely written. Chapter organization, clear description of tables and figures and concise discussion at the end make this thesis easy to follow. The reader can choose whether to read details of methodological issues or jump directly to results presentation and this will not affect understanding of the thesis.

Overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion during the defense

Overall, the presented thesis of Natalia Duskova is one of the best I have ever supervised. It was a pleasure to supervise Natalia, observe her progress and learn spatial econometrics together with her. I believe this thesis could be published as a journal article after some rewriting to change the style from a thesis to an article.

The thesis definitely fulfills the requirements for a bachelor thesis at IES, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, I recommend it for the defense and suggest a grade A.

The results of the Turnitin analysis do not indicate significant text similarity with other available sources.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution</i> (max. 30 points)	29
<i>Methods</i> (max. 30 points)	30
<i>Literature</i> (max. 20 points)	20
<i>Manuscript Form</i> (max. 20 points)	19
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	98
GRADE (A – B – C – D – E – F)	A

NAME OF THE REFEREE: *Barbara Pertold-Gebicka*

DATE OF EVALUATION: 15.6.2023

Digitálně podepsáno (15.6.2023)
Barbara Pertold-Gebicka

Referee Signature

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EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

CONTRIBUTION: *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

METHODS: *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

Overall grading:

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 – 70	D
51 – 60	E
0 – 50	F