

IMESS DISSERTATION



Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator (jiri.vykoukal@post.cz)

Please note that IMESS students are not required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

Student:	Giada Malugani
Dissertation title:	Technocratic populism in the context of contemporary Europe: Silvio Berlusconi and Andrej Babiš

	70+	69-65	64-60	59-55	54-50	<50
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Knowledge <i>Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.</i>		X				
Analysis & Interpretation <i>Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.</i>				X		
Structure & Argument <i>Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an argument limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.</i>				X		
Presentation & Documentation <i>Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.</i>	X					
Methodology <i>Understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.</i>			X			

ECTS Mark:	C	UCL Mark:	63	Marker:	Seán Hanley
<i>Deducted for late submission:</i>			0	Signed:	
<i>Deducted for inadequate referencing:</i>			0	Date:	17 August 2024

MARKING GUIDELINES

A (UCL mark 70+): Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.

Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

B (UCL mark 65-69):

A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

C (UCL mark 60-64):

Some evidence of critical analysis, knowledgeable interpretation. Wide range of sources used to develop a logic and coherent argument. Good

understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, the extent of independent research could have improved.

D (UCL mark 59-55):

Employ relevant sources and show ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Little critical analysis of the material. It demonstrate methodological awareness but the standard and rigor of the analysis can improve.

E (UCL mark 54-50):

Mostly descriptive argument. Employ relevant but limited sources. The structure, logic and overall quality of the argument needs improvement.

F (UCL mark less than 50):

Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (at least 300 words):

This dissertation comparing the technocratic populism of Andrej Babis and Silvio Berlusconi shows evidence of wide-reading and research and demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the two politicians' careers and political appeals and of the contents of Czech and Italian politics in which they emerged. It also shows familiarity and understanding of literature on populism and technocracy and of the more limited literature on "technocratic populism". It also shows an awareness of the requirements of research design. It seeks to identify a gap in the literature; to assess Berlusconi and Babis against a set of theoretically-based criteria; to point out that empirical cases do not always fit them; and to bring in methodological literature on comparison and case studies. Academic presentation is good and the standard of academic English is high.

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here are, however, a number of significant areas for improvement and weaknesses

1. The research question needs to be justified more clearly and convincingly.

While it may be true that there are few studies doing paired comparisons Babis and Berlusconi as populists, they have often been compared as creators of "business firm" parties to "entrepreneurial parties", sometimes with the inclusion of other politicians/parties. It is also common to classify both as populists.

Why does it make sense (what might we learn) by comparing them as "technocratic populists"? And why would we have reason to think Berlusconi is a *technocratic* populist at all? The dissertation hints in a couple of places that Berlusconi was (like Babis) making an appeal to managerial competence like Babis based on his business background, but evidence needs to be provided that he uses similar rhetoric to Babis to make the set of the dissertation plausible to the reader. It is also not clear why it is necessary to show the dissertation that Babis is a "technocratic populist" since Buřtíková developed her whole idea of "technocratic populism" based on the case of Babis (unless there might be reason to think Babiř wasn't really technocratic? But this needs explaining to the reader.

2. Discussion of literature could be better structured

The dissertation covers much of the right literature. The discussion of literature could explain (show understanding) better and be better structured - key ideas such as populism and technocracy are only clearly defined late and when second literature is discussed and it is also often the case that the arguments of authors are not clearly explained (we are told they think X, but not why they think X - for example why is technocracy considered by some a threat to democracy?). The reader also does not gain a clear sense of academic debates and if and how authors differ: is Buřtíková's idea of "technocratic populism" the same as Bickerton's "technopolism"?

3. Analysis focuses on the two politicians' populism and anti-establishment politics, but not on *technocratic* elements of their populism.

The analysis shows only that the two politicians are populist or anti-establishment, but not that they are (to some extent) technocratic. The five criteria chosen largely tap in to populism, but not into anything that clearly look technocratic (rule of experts, neutral managerial politics). The dissertation does highlight important commonalities between the two such as the claiming of outsider/non-politician status and hostility to traditional parties, but this is really a form of anti-politics and this type of appeal can be made on a variety of grounds - e.g. being a celebrity, intellectual, moral/religious figure as well as being a businessperson or technocrat.

4. There is limited systematic comparison

The two cases are largely presented as parallel narratives. The comparative section is short and the comparative and case methods discussed in textbook fashion in the Methodology section are not really applied

in practice. The comparative section does note some important commonalities between the two cases and the use of table based on the five criteria is an potentially effective technique for comparing the two cases, but (due to problems noted in point 3.) we learn only that the two cases have some similarities and dissimilarities.

5. The conclusion is not effective and largely summarises what has already been said and, in part, repeats the introduction

It is difficult for the writer to reach conclusions because of the problems noted in points 1-4.

Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (at least 2 questions):

- What does it mean to be a technocrat? Can you provide a succinct one sentence definition of technocracy?
- Why would we consider Berlusconi a *technocratic* populist? What did he say to voters that was technocratic or managerial? Did he say anything that paralleled Babis's "run the country like a firm"? The dissertation only mentions his right-wing stances.
- Do we need to make a case that Babis was a "technocratic populist"? Surely, we already know from the published literature (Bustikova) that he was?
- Is there any difference between Bustikova's concept of "technocratic populism" and Bickerton's idea "technopopulism"? Which is better or more useful?
- Most of you five criteria relate to populism, not to technocracy? Can you think of any improved criteria for assessing the technocratic appeal (or lack of)? Could you drop or change any of the existing criteria?
- What we really learn from the comparison of the two politicians/parties beyond the fact that they had some similarities and differences? What are the wider lessons that we might draw from the contrast that might be relevant for other settings/countries?
- Is technocratic populism dangerous for democracy and why? Is it less dangerous than other forms of populism?
- Please identify some other "technocratic populists" as you understand the term. Is Donald Trump a "technocratic populist" (many of your criteria seem apply to him)?

