Technocratic populism and political illiberalism in Central Europe: the case of ANO in the Czech Republic

Vlastimil Havlík

Masaryk University
havlik@fss.muni.cz

This paper was elaborated in the framework of the grant project Radicalization of Politics in Central Europe in Times of Crises (GA17-09296S) sponsored by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic.

Presented at the ECPR General Conference in Hamburg, 22 – 25 August 2018.

Abstract:
One of the most common terms used for description of the recent changes of politics in Central and Eastern Europe is backsliding of democracy, most profoundly related to the emergence and electoral success of populist political actors. While established literature has been focused almost exclusively on Hungary and Poland, the most visible examples of recent illiberal turns in Central and Eastern driven by national-conservative populists, the main aim of the paper is to focus on populism of ANO in the Czech Republic. Based on a mixed-method content analysis, the main argument of the paper is that the rise of centrist technocratic populism (perhaps less radical at first sight) ends the era Central European exceptionalism in the Czech Republic in terms of its resistance to populist illiberal challenges. In other words, the analysis shows that populism combined with technocracy (so not necessarily with more radical ideologies such as nativism) presents a vision of a regime alternative to the dominant liberal democratic paradigm based on denial of political pluralism, anti-partyism, resilience to constitutionalism and embracement of majoritarianism.

Word count: 9.315

Introduction
One of the most common terms used for description of the recent changes of politics in Central and Eastern Europe refers to democratic backsliding, most profoundly expressed in the emergence and electoral success of populist political actors (Krastev, 2007; Rupnik, 2007; Dawson and Hanley, 2016). However, scholars dealing with development of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe have mostly focused on the cases of Poland and Hungary (Stanley, 2015; Enyedi, 2016). On one hand, it is completely understandable, given the partly implemented projects of the Fourth Republic pursued by Kaczyński’s Law and Justice in Poland and the vision of illiberal democracy presented by Viktor Orbán in Hungary leading to raised concerns about the quality of democracy in both countries. The seriousness of the threat and the fact that both Kaczyński and Orban already have
had the opportunity to implement their visions and reforms of the political system can be accounted for the fact that the recent development of the Czech Republic remained in the shadow of interest in its Hungarian and Polish fellows.

Moreover, there was another very good reason for this negligence. The Czech Republic has always been considered as a frontrunner of democratic transition and consolidation in the post-communist Europe. Unlike Slovakia, it did not experience years of a hybrid regime in the 1990s in the era of Mečiarism (Hloušek and Kopeček, 2003). Nor the 2000s or the early 2010s, when Poland had the populist coalition (Jasiewicz, 2008; Stanley, 2015) and Orban got the chance to put an illiberal departure into practice (Pappas, 2014), meant for the Czech Republic a turn from a stable polity firmly sticked to liberal democratic principles. Moreover, the Czech Republic seemed to be particularly exceptional in terms of emergence and stability of its party democracy. Instead of notorious fluctuation, Czech party politics was more reminiscent of the established party systems of Western Europe than of the highly volatile party environment in Central and Eastern European countries (Bértoa, 2014; Powell and Tucker, 2014).

Nevertheless, the repeated corruption scandals, government instability and the economic crisis created opportunity for the emergence of new populist challengers culminating with the unprecedented electoral successes of the political party ANO 2011 (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens 2011; “ano” means “yes” in Czech) that became the most successful new political party since the fall of communism (18.7% of votes in the 2013 general election and a victory with 29.6% in the last general election in October 2017. Although the ANO is ideologically blurred and, at first glance, not so radical as the discourse of the governing parties in Poland and Hungary, the aim of this paper is to show that the technocratic or managerial populism of ANO fits in the contemporary illiberal tendencies in Central and Eastern Europe. The main underlying argument of the paper is that the recent surge of populism and consequent political illiberalism in Central and Eastern Europe is by no way limited to nativist conservative (or far right) populist discourses as it is the case of Poland and Hungary.
Populism and democracy

Let me start with a definition of populism. With thousands of pages have been written to define the “slippery concept” of populism, a consensus on the core elements of populism has emerged. To put it simply, populism can be best understood with reference to the three fundamental and tightly connected characteristics: 1) a perception of the people and elites as homogeneous groups (people-centrism), 2) construction of an antagonistic and essentially moralistic (Manichean) divide between the two groups and 3) a view of the people as a moral sovereign and the need to restore the allegedly stolen sovereignty of the people (see Mudde, 2004; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2007; Stanley, 2008; Hawkins, 2009; Rooduijn, 2013). This perception of populism is perhaps best reflected in Mudde’s definition as “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated onto two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004).

The majority of authors agree that populism does not represent an antithesis of democracy as such (Mény and Surel, 2002; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). However, the relationship of populism and democracy is complex and the key here is specification of the “democracy”. More than twenty-five years has passed from publication of the famous book by Francis Fukuyama about the end of history, i.e. basically the victory of political liberalism (Fukuyama, 2006). Despite the fact that the book has not recorded unanimous acclamation, there have been only little doubts about the prevailing “liberal democratic consensus” both in Western world and emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, for understanding of the position of populism towards democracy, the adjective liberal is the key here.

It is not an easy task to define liberal democracy. Nevertheless, it is possible to find a basic agreement on the features making from a liberal democracy a distinctive type of political regime. Following Rawls’s approach to political liberalism, Pappas stresses the idea of the existence of
political pluralism, i.e. contestation of concurrent but largely incompatible ideological doctrines (Pappas, 2014). Even more than the objective existence of ideological competition, the acknowledgment thereof makes one a liberal democrat. Using terminology of comparative party politics research, political pluralism transforms into multiple cleavages dividing society into groups defined by different and mostly contradictory interests based on their socio-demography (class, religion, geography) or political attitudes. These interests are articulated, aggregated and represented by political parties competing on the electoral market. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of largely inconsistent ideologies, liberal democracy is based on so-called overlapping consensus which means that there is a common ground, on which the society and/or political actors can agree and, more importantly, they seek to find a consensus and prefer moderation and deliberation that is based on constitutionalism. Constitutionalism include a set of institutional guarantees and principles against unbalanced power of the people aiming at limitation of concentration of the power and protecting minority rights. In this sense, liberal democracy stems from majority rule but, at the same time, embraces institutions against the possible tyranny of majority at the expanses of position of minorities (Pappas, 2014).

On the contrary, populist vision of democracy stems from what Canovan describes as two faces of democracy. The redemptive face refers to a vision that promises ‘salvation through politics’, and the return to popular power with the people as the only legitimate authority and to the direct exercise of power without institutional constraints. The pragmatic face refers to a peaceful resolution of conflicts in society (as an alternative to violence or even civil war), to preserving the government, institutions and rules (Canovan, 1999). Similarly, Mouffe (2000; see Abts and Rummens, 2007) distinguishes between two pillars of democracy: a liberal (or a constitutional) one which focuses on individual rights and the rule of law, and a democratic one which emphasises participation and popular sovereignty (Mouffe, 2000; Abts and Rummens, 2007).

Hence, in the eyes of populists, democracy is a one-sided phenomenon - it only sticks to the power of the people (Mény and Surel, 2002) and populists ‘have little patience with liberalism’s emphasis
on procedural niceties and protections for individual rights’. For Pappas, illiberalism is the key defining feature of populism (Pappas, 2014). To put it simply, populism is not a threat to contemporary democracies because it is fundamentally undemocratic but because it is illiberal. Populism is democratic only in a majoritarian sense (Plattner, 2010) and it contravenes the principles of constitutional and/or liberal democracy (Abts and Rummens, 2007). Since populism is based on the principle of homogeneity of the people, populist sticking to the democratic or redemptive face of democracy is filled with presumption of the unified will of the people and universal idea of the good expressed by the people and recognized and pursued by the populist leader (Stanley, 2008; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Pappas, 2014). Consequently, there is only little space for political pluralism. Instead, the populist perception of politics counts with only one principle divide: the moral conflict between the good people and the bad elite. As stated by Peter Mair “populist democracy […] assumes no fundamental clash of interests between different sectors of the electorate: voters are citizens first, and only later, if at all, are they workers, employers, farmers, women, immigrants, or whatever. […] It serves as an administrator, seeking the best solutions available on the basis of objective criteria” (Mair, 2002).

In a similar fashion as Mair, Caramani contrasts populism to party democracy which means also to political pluralism: “there are things that are either good or bad for the whole of society and political action can be either good or bad for a society in its entirety. There is a homogenous and organic vision of the people and the nation. It is furthermore possible to “discover” this common or general interest.” (Caramani, 2017).

The morality of the conflict (Hawkins, 2009) also means that populism, unlike other forms of democratic politics, is far more adversarial and has only little sense for compromising. In turn, there is a paradox in the essence of populism. On one hand, it presumes the existence of recognizable (and implicitly consensual) universal good, on the other hand, it usurps the ability to identify and defend the good for itself (monopoly to truth). There is something exclusive in the relationship between the people and the populist actor. The other political actors are not perceived as
competing rivals. Their presence is at most tolerated but more often denigrated. More importantly, this denigration is not based on policy disagreements but on outright rejection. The problem is not what policy is but who proposes it. Therefore, there is no space for policy debates, not for compromise, since the other actors are not considered as legitimate rivals – they are the enemy of the people.

Last, but not least the majoritarian rule disregarding (because not recognizing) minority interests and the need of protection thereof is applied. This point is closely related to the first one. Populism equate the general interest with the will of the people which means from the the majority of voters. In turn, the majority is considered as society as a whole. Consequently, it leaves only little space for the protection of minorities, separation of powers, checks-and-balances and other forms of constitutional constraints (Pappas, 2014, see also Plattner, 2010; Caramani, 2017, see Table 1).

**Table about here**

Although the illiberal nature of populism stems from its general features, its specific content varies depending on “species” of populism or a host ideology to which populism is attached. Populist ideology rarely stands alone (it has an “empty heart” – Taggart, 2000). In other words, the way the people are portrayed, who is presented as the enemy, and what is the solution of the political malaise differ in time and place. As Stanley states, the “thin nature [of populist ideology] means that it […] lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions” (Stanley, 2008). Consequently, the illiberal populist narrative is partly dependent on the content of the host ideology. While exclusionist nativism of populist radical right brings about disrespects towards rights of ethnic or religious minorities, populist radical left is more focused on the economic questions, the “capitalist enemy” and is more prone to violate ownership rights. Therefore, to fully understand the illiberal nature and consequences of a populist actor, it is necessary to focus both on the type of the populist appeal (its host ideology)
and the specific illiberal discourse, its reasoning, proposals and implemented policies. In turn, the empirical section of the paper will combine two interrelated perspectives (besides a short introduction into the history of ANO). First, I will analyze the populist discourse of ANO using the three interrelated elements of populism described about: the people, the anti-elite appeal and restoration of the sovereignty of the people. Second, I will be focused on the illiberalism of ANO using the three elements introduced above: the existence of the universal good, adversarial politics and majoritarianism. However, it would not be either possible, or useful to separate the two concepts.

**Methods and data**

I use both qualitative and quantitative approach here. As for the qualitative part of the analysis, different sources of data were used with “purposive sampling” as a data selection technique. As stated by Elo et al. (2014), “purposive sampling is suitable for qualitative studies where the researcher is interested in informants who have the best knowledge concerning the research topic.” (Elo et al., 2014) In other words, I chose data that are expected to be valuable sources of positions and policy platforms of ANO. Namely, election manifestoes presented before the general elections in 2013 and 2017 were included.

Apart from the election manifestoes, Andrej Babiš’s blog (https://andrejBabiš.blog.idnes.cz/) was added as well as all interviews with representatives of ANO presented on the website of the party (www.anobudelip.cz). A couple of specific sources were also used to create as much accurate picture of ANO’s discourse: namely, a book written by Andrej Babiš What I Dream About When I Happen to Be Sleeping (O čem sním, když náhodou spím) and the founding ANO 2011 Declaration (ANO 2011) published in November 2011. The full list of sources incorporated in the datacorpus is available at the author upon a request.

The method of analysis can be best described as qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012; Elo et al., 2014). More precisely, I opted for a combination of “directed content analysis” and “summative
content analysis”. Directed content analysis is typical by a more structured process than a conventional inductive qualitative content analysis. This approach is based on a priori knowledge of the core concepts and/or categories (in my case elements of both populism and illiberalism). Summative content analysis uses latent content approach that is aimed at discovering of underlying meaning of the content. I proceeded as follows: after the collection of the data, based on the directed content analysis approach I identified content (it could be a sentence or a number of sentences, a paragraph) that referred to elements populism and/or illiberalism. The summative part of the content analysis was based on the following set of questions: How does ANO talk about the people? What are the characteristics of the people attached to them by the political parties? Who is the enemy of the people? What are the characteristics of the enemy? What is the relationship of the enemy to the people? What is the solution provided by the party? How should be the people’s sovereignty restored? What is the attitude of ANO towards political pluralism? What is its relationship to deliberation and compromise? What kind of polity and settings of decision making does it prefer? Furthermore, I tried to identify and systematized the main meanings of the elements concepts and reconstructed the nature of populism (and a more general platforms) and illiberalism of ANO. In sum, the analysis combined both the deductive (the existence of predefined concepts) and the inductive approach (expressed in finding the specific characteristics of the predefined concepts). The analysis is not strictly structure by elements of populism or illiberalism, since – as the theory expects and as it turned out – populism and illiberalism of the party are intertwined.

Moreover, a quantitative approach was employed drawing from two different kinds of data. First, Chapel Hill Expert survey data from 2014 (Bakker et al., 2014) were employed to plot positions parliamentary political parties in political space. defined by the two dimensions generally considered to be most important to capture politics in Europe in general and in the Czech Republic in particular: the economic left-right scale and the scale defined by traditionalism, authoritarianism and nationalism on the one hand and by green politics, alternative politics and libertarianism on
the other hand (TAN-GAL) – see e.g. (Hloušek and Kopeček, 2008; Chytilek and Eibl, 2011). The left-right economic divide is operationalised using the 11-point lrecon variable, the GAL/TAN divide is operationalised using the 11-point galtan variable. The 2014 dataset also offers two new measures of salience pertinent to my analysis: antielite_sal, an 11-point measure of the salience of anti-elite sentiment in party appeals, and corrupt_sal, an 11-point measure of the salience of corruption. The basic unit of analysis is a mean expert coder judgements per party.

Last but not least, original data from the Campaign Dynamics project were used to present the nature of appeal of ANO. The data draw from quantitative manual coding of statements of representatives of political parties during a month before the general elections in 2010 and 2013 elections (only the data from the 2013 are relevant for the purpose of this text; unfortunately, the data for the 2017 election have not been gathered yet). Each country team selected two daily newspapers (Mladá fronta and Právo in the case of the Czech Republic). Based on this, newspaper articles related to national elections from four weeks prior to the election day have been collected and analysed by each country team, composed of a country expert and several undergraduate research assistants (as coders). All front page articles were coded as well as a 5 per cent random sample of the rest of the election-related articles until at least 60 articles per newspaper/election had been coded. Three different types of statements were coded: policy statements, valence statements and issue-related valence statements. Policy statements released by a political party referred to its positions in pre-defined policy areas. Valence statements referred to specific qualities of a political party including its honesty, integrity, competence, performance or internal unity. The last type of statements is a combination of the two previous ones, i.e. it refers to valence characteristics of a political party within a specific issue area. Based on the lack of a host ideology and its suggested replacement by competence as a defining feature of centrist populism (at least in the Czech case), I present an overview of importance of different kinds of statements for the parliamentary parties to capture nature of appeal of the parties (Baumann and Gross, 2016).
History of ANO

In November 2011, a billionaire of Slovak origin and the owner of the biggest agro-chemical company in the Czech Republic, Andrej Babiš, released a declaration entitled “Action of Dissatisfied Citizens,” in which he criticized the existing situation in Czech politics and the politicians, calling on citizens to take part in an initiative towards “a more just society, and a functional state with the rule of law.” (ANO 2011, 2011). Andrej Babiš could hardly be described as an unknown name in Czech politics and in business. Before 1989, he graduated from the University of Economics in Prague and worked as an employee of the Slovak communist-controlled international trade company Petrimex in Morocco. After 1989, he became the managing director of the Agrofert company, focusing on agricultural and fertilizer production. Babiš managed to develop Agrofert into one of the largest companies in the Czech Republic despite rumours suggesting that Babiš had taken over Agrofert in an illegal way. In fact, Babiš can hardly be strictly seen as an outsider (as he consistently has been claiming), for he allegedly had very good relationships with top Czech politicians and his business profited from privatization and state agricultural subsidies (Kaiser, 2013; Pergler, 2014).

Eventually, the initiative ANO became the basis for the ANO party, which was registered by the Ministry of Interior on 11th May 2012. ANO decided to take part in the 2012 Senate elections. However, none of the candidates supported by ANO was able to get to the second round of the elections (a two-round run off electoral system is used). The election disaster eventually turned into a one of the most important drivers of the later success of the party. The party (or, more precisely, its leader Andrej Babiš and his companies) decided to invest extensively into political marketing, the party logo was changed (Jankajová, 2013) and turned the party into a fully professional electoral party (Paleček, 2015, for the concept see Panebianco, 1988 or Lees-Marshalment, 2001) employing one of the best experts on political marketing in the country. Moreover, Agrofert bought two of the most important dailies (including their digital versions), two weeklies and a radio station just before or shortly after the 2013 election. Consequently, ANO rolled out a very intensive election
campaign before the 2013 early election. It finished with 18.65 per cent of the vote and 47 out of 200 seats, and became the most successful genuinely new political party in the Czech Republic since the first free election after the fall of communism. ANO 2011 eventually became a part of the new government alongside social democrats (ČSSD) and the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL). Unlike other populist parties in government, ANO decided not to abandon its populist narrative (only slightly changed its content and put more emphasis on presentation of results of its ministerial work), neither it embraced a clearer ideological profile (see below). After very good results in local, regional and European elections (ANO won the latter two by a small margin), ANO won the 2017 general election with 29.6% of votes and 74 seats out of 200 in the lower chamber of the Parliament. Although no clear majority emerged after the election, the President Miloš Zeman decided to appoint Babiš as the head of a minority cabinet. At the time of writing of this text, government lost its vote of confidence and really slow talks about a minority coalition of ANO and ČSSD supported by the communist have been taking place. The minority position of ANO’s cabinet or coalition is, of course, weaker compared to populist governments in Hungary and Poland but – as the first parliamentary votings indicate – ANO is willing to collaborate also with other illiberal forces: populist radical right Freedom and Direct Democracy and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia.

**Technocratic populism and political illiberalism of ANO**

Figure 1 shows positions of political parties in political space defined by two elements related to the nature of populism: salience of anti-elitism and salience of anti-corruption appeals. The figure shows a very clear distinction between the two populist parties (beside ANO also the radical right Dawn) with both high salience of anti-corruption and high salience of anti-elitism and the rest of political parties with a moderate level of salience of corruption (referring to quite high general importance of the issue in the Czech context) and low level of anti-elitism. The exception here is the radical left KSČM with moderate level of anti-elitism. In other words, the data clearly show the
importance of anti-elitism and anti-corruption rhetoric for the profile of ANO, i.e. shows high present of issues defining populist discourse. The question remains, what was the nature of populist of ANO.

**Figure 1 about here**

Not surprisingly, the core of the populist appeal of the party was construction of the divide between the people and the political elite. Unlike populist radical right parties, the people were not defined strictly in terms of a nation, an ethnic group or religion. Not was it a class approach usually employed by the radical left. Instead, ANO’s people centrism used the traditional notion of the “Czech golden hands”, i.e. a reference both to alleged high level of craftmenship and popularity of do-it-yourself approach in the Czech Republic (Hradecká, 2013). This glorification of the Czech people did not stand alone and was a part of the key element of any populis discourse, the proclaimed division between the people and politicians. It was clearly expressed in one the main slogans of ANO “We are a talented nation but we are governed by cack-handed” used before the 2013 general election. This notion was more elaborated later in Babiš’s book:

> “Bohemians, Moravians and Silesians are an extremely inventive and creative nation. Although our country is not as big as Germany, Italy or Poland, we are a great nation because of our talent to learn things and to be inventive. Even fifty years of suppression of freedom and creativity was not able to knock out the heritage of Baťa [the famous entrepreneur in shoe-business in the inter-war Czechoslovakia], the talent, we have in our genes. Inventiveness, creativity and extraordinary skills. And the Czech resilience. The power of get up again.” (Babiš, 2017)

In turn, the populist heartland (Taggart, 2000) constructed by ANO, almost the mythical notion of Czechs, was not defined in ethnical, racial, religions or class terms, it depicted a land of ordinary people that are exceptional for their diligence, extraordinary manual skills, brightness and wit. What is important, the party rejected to portray itself as an advocate of the interests of narrow part of society. It claimed that it is political party for everyone, effectively crosscutting all of the existing political cleavages and replacing them with a new and supposedly dominating populist divide and more or less explicitly denying the existence of political pluralism.

The “other side” of the divide was determined by a very strong anti-establishment appeal. Its main feature was general denigration of the established political parties regardless of their ideology.
terms “traditional political political” and, later on partly as reaction to criticism of undemocratic nature of ANO, “so-called democratic parties” resembling the discourse of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia before and during the communist rule were employed. These terms include all the older political parties\(^1\) to construct impression of existence of a homogeneous political class (Schedler, 1996). Corruption, incompetency, inexperience, and low morale profile of politicians were presented by Babiš as the main reasons behind the malaise in Czech politics and also as the main reason why Babiš decided to establish his political party:

“My name is Andrej Babiš. I employ thousands of people in my companies in the Czech Republic, I pay hundreds of millions of crowns in taxes, and I’m angry, just like you. I’m angry because since the \([\text{Velvet}\]\ revolution [in November 1989], politicians of our country not only have failed to lead, but they have watched over the embezzlement of the country. I’m angry that we live in a dysfunctional state”. (ANO 2011, 2011)

“The main problems of the Czech Republic are incompetent and unprofessional politicians and primarily breaking the rules which is the result of this incompetence of our so-called elites.” (Babiš, 2013a)

The anti-establishment appeal of ANO 2011 was built upon a set of negative characterizations of the current political elites and the alleged consequences they had on the state of affairs in the Czech Republic. The image of the elites constructed by ANO was quite simple: the elites (representatives of the established parties) were seen as corrupt, power-seeking, pursuing their own (business) interests in politics and generally incompetent to take decisions shaping citizen’s everyday lives and to run the state.

“Politicians do not work to make things better for everybody, but for their own hunger for power and the interests of the influential groups that placed them into office and at the top of their candidate lists” (Babiš, 2013b)

What is important is that the movement’s anti-establishment appeal was not focused on one or more specific parties but against practically every relevant political party which it blamed for the bad situation in the Czech Republic and characterized as a homogeneous entity, often labelling it simply “politicians”, “parliamentary political parties” or “traditional political parties”.

\(^1\) Quite interestingly, when it comes to aiming at individual parties, the communists and the far right Dawn (later Freedom and Direct Democracy) were far less targeted by ANO. To some extent, it is logical, given the fact that nor the communists, or SPD have participated in the government and both parties share anti-establishment or anti-system approach. Nevertheless, a more precise examination needs to be done.
Consequently, it would be false to understand ANO as a usual opposition party aiming its criticism at the government or at just a part of the political spectrum (the “left” or the “right”). The “enemy” is defined more broadly and in the language that goes beyond standard categories of the government-opposition dynamics.

The fierce criticism of the established political parties served as a basis for a more general mixture of anti-political and anti-party sentiment that consisted of two important interrelated elements: a basically moral dichotomy between (partisan) politics and the sphere of “hard work” embodied both in Babiš himself and in the ordinary Czech people (see above), and challenging the ideological perception of political conflicts. The negative picture of politics was not seemingly presented as skepticism about politics per se but rather about how politics is conducted by political elites who have transformed it into a corrupt system (“traditional parties [the pejorative word partaje was used in original] privatized politics for themselves and for their pals” – (Babiš, 2017: 6). The core of the solution proposed by Babiš was not fundamentally political but rather a mixture of anti-politics and anti-partism lying in implementation of practices from business environment strictly based on competence and expertise instead of ideology, party affiliation and also deliberative competition of political parties. Eventually, it lead to construction of the two contrasting environments: the dirty world of party democracy and the effective, allegedly morally cleaner world of business, the world Babiš comes from:

“I was not spoiled by politics, I jumped straight into it with my colleagues, and we did not have time for looking around. It was a completely different world for me. The world full of hypocrisy, animosity, lies and manipulation. A promise or a handshake did not mean anything, one thing is said off-line and something completely different in front of the cameras. For a man from business, it was difficult to imagine something like that. […] Instead, I met completely incompetent people, or on the contrary all-powerful people, allibists, and scammers.” (Babiš, 2017: 7-8)

An important part of this part of the discourse was portrayal of representative of the established political parties as carrer politicians without experience from “ordinary life”, as – probably intentionally using Weber’s typology – people living from politics. The description of the former Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka as a man “who has not been able to build a dog house [although
an ordinary Czech man is able to do it’’ illustrates nicely both the anti-political narrative of the party and the divide between the ordinary people and politicians. When talking about “politicians who have never worked, who only know parties’ secretariats” (Babiš, 2013d), Babiš did not refer to a particular party, nor to the current established parties in general. Instead, politicians are seen rather through a set of negative characteristics, almost a specific useless human species and consequently politics is seen as a realm full of scams, corruption and incompetency. On the other hand, representative of ANO admitted that there are “decent people” in political parties. However, they are exception from the generally rotten world of politics and political parties.

An important part of the populist anti-political narrative of the party was deidelogization or even depolitization was its resilience towards self-presentation in terms of traditional party families or left-right ideological orientation. Although the party was leaning to the right initially (Babiš himself admitted that he used to vote for centre-right ODS in the past), it soon decided to sidestepped from attempts to present a clear ideological profile and sought to target all group of voters by a non-ideological appeal (Paleček, 2015). Both the objective and subjective lack of a clear host ideology could be identified.

Using the data from the 2014 Chapel Hill expert survey, Figure 2 depicts positions of political parties in political space defined by economic left-right dimension and by TAN-GAL dimension. The most important finding is related to the centrist position of ANO. Although it was located slightly on the right on the economic left-right dimension, it significantly differed from the rest of parliamentary parties. All other parties can be characterized quite clearly (the distance from the center is at least + 2 on a 10-points scale) either in terms of their attitudes towards economy or in terms of their position on social-culturally defined TAN-GAL dimension.

**Figure 2 about here**

The objective ideological emptiness can also be illustrated by the high proportion of valence issues (as opposed to positional issues) in ANO 2011’s election platform before the 2013 general election.
The share of valence issues exceeded all other parties’ space in their respective platforms (Eibl 2014). Table 2 shows shares of different types of statements for each political party before the 2013 election, using the data from Comparative Campaign Dynamics Project. On average, approximately two-thirds of all statements were related to a position of a political party to a political issue, while slightly more than one quarter of statements referred to a valence characteric of a party. The rest of statements contained valence statements linked to a political issue. However, the share of issue statements made by ANO is well-bellow the average with only one half of the statements introducing a policy position of a party. On the contrary, two fifths of statements were about valence characteristics of ANO. The only one political party in one year is close to the overall profile of statements made by ANO was ODS. This can be explained by the change of the leadership of the party after the corruption scandal of Prime Minister Petr Nečas shortly before the 2013 general election. The the party tried to persuade voters that the new leadership represents a new, “better” ODS.

Table 2 about here

Besides this objectively measureable but rather implicit lack of a clearer left-right ideological leaning of the party, it was also intentionally ideologically vague. The categories traditionally used to describe (party) politics (i.e. right, left, ideologies etc.) were presented as part of the world of the “traditional political parties” which needed to be replaced by a completely new approach embodied in Babiš and his party. This populist division was presented as by far the most important conflict within the society, making other political and societal divides irrelevant:

“It was not so long ago when all politicians and political scientists freaked out when we said that ANO is neither a clear rightist, nor leftist subject. I would always state that the so-called left and so-called right strung us along before the elections but they make deals with each other in the end. […] I might repeat myself, but it is really neither left, nor right, what is going on in the Czech politics. What is going on in politics now is that the established parties want to remain in office. There is no such thing as right and left. In the Czech Republic we have a completely different division. On one side are the current parties and current politicians, and on the other side are the voters, i.e. we, who can cast our ballots for one of the current parties […]. Now, it is time for voters to say which of the parties from the “other side” is as closest as possible to them. Or they can choose a movement that is not on the “other side” and it will never be.” (Babiš, 2013e)
ANO tried to emphasize the alleged convergence between the established political parties, thus strengthen the already mentioned notion of the political class and give to its anti-establishment appeal another dimension based on the stress on supposedly overcome and harmful ideological politics, explicitly denying the relevance of ideologically different policy proposals. According to ANO, the differences are pretended, the only conflict that matters is the divide between the corrupt political class and non-ideological or non-political solution proposed by Babiš and his party.

“...The division between the left and the right does not matter for a long time, any ideology has evaporated from the traditional ossified political parties over the years. There are still the some people who have been prospering from political loot for more than twenty years. Although they use different slogans, they are united in their solely aim. To remain in politics and if this is not possible then to find another way how to milk the state. They know very well that they could not have such a good living in a normal life. If any. They live from politics. Functions and money from it, this is their ideology.” (Babiš, 2017)

At the first glance, the established political parties are accounted for the failure of the standard ideological politics but Babiš and his party have not offered any revival of ideological politics but a completely different solution. Using Lucardie’s terminology (Lucardie, 2000), the party is not a “purifier” (like the Union of Freedom in 1998 or TOP 09 in 2010 - Hanley, 2012) but a “project of newness” that has been build around a different set of claims that are intended to sound non-political and non-ideological, i.e. different from the way how politics as such (not a specific rightist or leftist political programme) has been approached by the established political parties. The claimed otherness of ANO was also underlined by the fact that ANO was registered as a political movement not a political party, for as stated by one of Babiš´s marketing advisors “people hate new political parties” (Jankajová, 2013).¹ The statements emphasizing that ANO is not a political party but a movement has become a recurrent theme in the narrative of the party. For instance, Babiš claimed that he had founded ANO 2011 as a “Civic Forum for the future” (Česká televize, 2013) referring to the broad movements that emerged at the time communism fell and that was also based on a strong anti-partyism best expressed in the well-known slogan “political parties are for partisans, the Civic Forum is for everyone” (the expressions “political party” or “partisanship” had strong negative connotation referring to the ruling Communist Party and prominent position of members and cadres of the Communist party in the society). Nevertheless, in reality the organization of
ANO 2011 can be best characterized as a business-firm political party. The real operation of the party has been extremely leader-dependent and autocratic, not growing out of the grass-root activities that are generally considered as the essence of movement-type organizations (Kopeček, 2016).

In other words, denial of political pluralism was present at both levels: in definition of the people and in presentation of political rivals and political competition. The main narrative of the ANO was not about a conflict of competing “goods” on the left-right ideological spectrum. Instead, according to ANO, there is only one universal good – to listen to and serve the people.

What was the solution proposed by ANO? The very base of the host ideology of ANO’s populism was a contrast between (positive) practices typical for running companies and a supposedly dysfunctional, spendthrift, and corruption-ridden state run by the current set of politicians and the presented lifestory self-made successful businessman Babiš. The pre-election slogan from 2013 “We’re not like the politicians – we work!” clearly illustrates the first element, the dichotomy constructed in the ANO 2011 discourse between the “incompetent” politicians of the established parties that were detached from and/or unsuccessful in “real life” and the ANO 2011 representatives’ (Babiš’ in particular) experience in running big companies, employing the people and paying taxes:

“After twenty years of experience with governance by our political parties I do not much trust the flowery claims. What I believe in [...] is that a state can be run like a private company, not like a chaotic juggernaut [moloch], where the godfather’s right hand does not know what is the left one doing.” (Babiš, 2013c)

“None of the current parties, none of the politicians who stated that they would solve the most burning problems facing the Czech Republic have been successful. We’re voting for the same people who, because of their own interests, only make promises and lie [...]. Isn’t it about time that someone goes into Czech politics whom you can trust? Isn’t it time that people enter politics who have some experience behind them and know what real work looks like? Isn’t it time that we all have it a little better?” (Babiš, 2013b).

Indeed, an important part of the populist narrative of the party was the story of Andrej Babiš as a hard-working self-made businessman who “had started his business from scratch and who had been working from morning till evening and who was sleeping in an office at Vaclav Square [in the center of Prague] (Babiš, 2017: 8). Creating an efficient, private-sector style approach as the main
solution for politics and public administration was reflected in the slogan “I will run the state like a business,” which ANO took into the election campaign and was later change to “run the state like a family business” (Babiš, 2017). Effectiveness has been a recurring theme in ANO’s discourse. As an alternative to the politics of intrigue and pointless conflict (see above), ANO promised to “run the state simply, effectively – using common sense”. The party promised to make tax collection as well as public spending and state bureaucracy more effective. The slogans “Things will be better off” (which became a part of the logo before the 2013 election campaign) and “[we will run the state more effectively] so that our children want to live here” (Paleček, 2015) illustrate the emphasis put on the proclaimed competence of the party and also show that the discourse of the party was not solely based on negative campaigning against the established political parties. On the contrary, there was a positive message of the party’s populist narrative, based on promises related to better governance guaranteed by Babiš and his party fellows with experience from private business. However, this technocratic managerial approach was combined with populism. Babiš’s alleged managerial skills should be build on careful listening to the people and their common sense. Almost daily meeting with the people in the streets (or least effort to create this image using social networks such as Facebook) and creation of the project “We want a better Czechia” (Chceme lepší Česko) before the regional election in 2016, a website where people were asked to tell Babiš “what they dream about and what they are afraid of” (www.chcemelepsicesko.cz) constructed the image of the leader of party as somehne whose decisions are based on the will of the people.

Managerial like approach concentrated around the notion of effectiveness was also transformed into the proclaimed suggestions how to reform different elements of the Czech constitutional system. Instead of ideologically framed changes that have been put forward by Kaczynski or Orban, ANO’s (or mostly Babiš’s) proposals followed a direction toward supposedly simpler and faster decision-making. The already mentioned contrast between the worlds of business and politics was used again, this time stressing the effectivity of the former and slowness of the latter. According to ANO, this slowness stems from both institutional settings of the Czech political system and from
pointless and, eventually, not necessary discussions. As for the first, the ideal situation for Babiš would be the existence of one party majority governments with very little of restraints for implementation of cabinet policies, for “first of all, coalition quarrels complicate everything” (Babiš, 2017: 125). As Babiš said in one interview, he “enjoys majoritarian system in the USA. When Trump came to power, he went into the office at once and made decision. He did not have coalition meetings, commissions, councils.” (Perknerová, 2017) or at another occasion, “There is a lot of things we can learn in Slovakia, unfortunately. It may be the case because there was a single party government of Robert Fico. It took a decision on something, called to the parliament, they made the law, there was a drive” (Kašpárek, 2017). The existence of political conflicts and deliberation is given into contrast to managerial-style of efficiency and, at the same time, the managerial narrative leads to strong preference of the executive branch of power to the legislative one. As Babiš said once, the parliament is “blatherhouse (žvanírna)” and he “would not be in opposition [in case of losing the election]. […] I will not sit in the blatherhouse where the people like Kalousek [the chairman of right-centre TOP 09] pretend democracy.” (IDnes.cz, 2016)

The picture of ineffective lower chamber (= only with talking but not working MPs) became the main ratio behind ANO’s proposal to limit the time for parliamentary discussion according to the size of parliamentary factions (Perknerová, 2017). This would again restrict the parliamentary control of the government.

Similar to other policy areas, ANO used the argument of supposedly best practice from other countries (regardless the context of the respective political systems) when formulating the how to change the Czech political system. The proposed reforms (as expressed in different interviews, election manifestoes and Babiš’s book) include lowering the number of MPs in the lower chamber to 101 (instead of 200), introduction of the first-past-the-post electoral system for elections to both chambers of the parliament, eventual abolition of the Senate (the upper parliamentary chamber), limitation of parliamentary discussion, reduction of the number of ministries, introduction of
referenda, abolition of regional administration, direct election of mayors, possibly abolition of local councils, and also strengthening of the influence of the state on the public media.

In a similar vein, Babiš criticized\(^2\) the existence of the Senate (the upper parliamentary chamber) because “it hinders the legislation process”. (Kašpárek, 2017) In practice, although the Senate has only limited powers in the ordinary legislative process (its legislative veto can be overridden by a majority vote of the lower chamber) and government is not responsible to the Senate, it has important competencies when it comes to voting on constitutional law, election law, impeachment of the president or appointment of judges of the Constitutional Court. Nevertheless, Babiš has repeatedly downplayed the role of the Senate pointing to low electoral turnout and suggesting in a populist way to delegate its powers to the people or to the president (because of his legitimacy stemming from direct election):

> “What about the Senate? It is claimed to be a safeguard of democracy/ I think that voters have repeatedly given their answer comprehensively. [...] there is no interest in the Senate election. [...] Voters do not want the Senate. Abolishment of the Senate would not be a wild experiment.” (Babiš, 2017)
> “Of course, the Senate has some powers, too, for instance how to prevent anarchy [bezvladí] or violent constitutional changes. So these powers should be delegated to the president, when he is elected directly. The most important changes, the constitutional changes or international treaties should be decided in referenda by everyone.” (Babiš, 2017: 131)

The centralized managerial narrative claiming to increase efficiency of the state is also reflected in ANO’s vision of the substate level of governance. The two major steps included abolition of the regional level of administration that was depicted as a corrupt and too expensive set of institutions. The current powers of the regions would be moved to the state (that use “huge amount of information”) and to bigger municipalities. Mayor would be elected directly with stronger competencies “supported by the service of the effective state” (Babiš, 2017: 128). So the state would have more powers to influence decision making on the local level and consequently the vertical division of power would be weakened. Moreover, it is not clear whether the local councils would remain. If not, the level of centralization and concentration power would be even

\(^2\) Although during the 2016 Senate election campaign, Babiš claimed that the Senate is an important democratic institution. (reference)
higher, if yes, the new system would generate competing centers of power on the local level
similar, for instance, to situation at the regional level in Slovakia or the eventually unsuccessful
experiment with direct election of Prime Minister in Israel in the 1990s.

Although each individual proposal taken separately might sound reasonable to many, when all of
them are taken together, the result is a specific highly centralized strongly majoritarian version of a
democratic polity with little sense for both horizontal and vertical separation of powers, and a
weakened system of checks and balances including the media. In case of preservation of the current
PR electoral system for the lower parliamentary chamber (introduction of FPTP was not a part of
the election manifesto for the 2017 general election), the lower number of MPs and consequently
smaller electoral districts and the d’Hondt divisor would significantly strengthen disproportionality
of the electoral results, thus favorizing the position of the winner of the election. Similarly, FPTP
favors the strongest political party and, indeed, can help to gain a legislative majority. The existence
of single-party majority governments is not problematic per se, the problem is the main framing that
ANO used to justify it, i.e. the stress on effectiveness and speed of decision-making instead of
deliberation. Following the constructed anti-political divide between the “people who has done
something in ordinary life” and “politicians who do not work”, Babiš also proposed to limit the
number of subsequent electoral terms, for which an MP could be elected, to three (the populist
Italian Five Star Movement had a similar claim in its election manifesto). Similarly, weakening and
eventual abolition of the Senate and local council would lead to significant increase of power of
the centre and would strengthen the position of a majority in the lower parliamentary chamber.

**Conclusion**

The aim of the paper was to analyze the discourse of political party ANO in order to examine the
nature of populism of the party and its illiberal consequences. ANO can hardly be described using
standard labels based on traditional party families or ideologies. Moreover, the data showed high
salience of corruption and anti-elitism as defining feature ANO and the data from Comparative
Campaign Dynamics Project indicate that the lack of a coherent host ideology was replaced by emphasis put on valence characteristics. To put it differently, instead of ideology, these parties try to “sell” their qualities related to leadership or competence. All the same, these characteristics make ANO different from the established political parties. The most important discursive characteristic of the party was its populism characterized by fierce criticism of the established political parties, based on the alleged corrupt behaviour of party representatives. Corruption was presented as a major problem in politics in the Czech Republic. Moreover, the accusations expressed by the ANO were not selective, but instead targeted all parliamentary political parties. Another alleged characteristic of the political elites was their incompetence. In fact, being a (career) politician was seen as something disqualifying, having been contrasted with virtù of the Czech people, depicted as a talented nation, and with the leader of the party with experience in managing successful private companies (ANO 2011).

The key element of the populist discourse was the constructed contrast between “standard” politics and business practices, preferring the latter. Populism of ANO was combined with anti-party and anti-political discourse suppressing of what may be called standard ideological politics. The divide between technocratic populism of ANO and politics how it is conducted by the established political parties is moral in its essence, i.e. it describes the former as a clear good and the latter as essentially bad. Therefore, the first one should be preffered an and the second one strongly rejected with not place for compromising. In other words, the political debate – as seen by ANO – shifted from a substantive one which focused on the differences between proposed policies (in terms of standard cleavages) to one which focused on how politics is conducted.

Populism of ANO has, similarly to other populisms elsewhere, its consequences for perception of democracy. The construction of both the people and the political establishment as homogeneous groups doubts the idea of political pluralism as an essential element of politics. Indeed, ANO rejected policy-based differences (the differences between the left and the right) as irrelevant, being dominated by the populist divide. Conflicts between the left and the right do not matter. What
matters, is proper representation of the people as the universal good. According to ANO, the good is not only recognizable but also achievable through the idea of technocratic or expert governance guaranteed by non-party, non-political competent administration. This cannot be put into practice by career politicians. According to ANO, good governance by career politicians curtailed by party apparatus, ideology and senseless bickering is oxymoron, in fact. What people need, ANO claimed, is an experienced manager who can run the state effectively. According to ANO, its leader Babiš, a successful business, was depicted as a guarantee for proper administration of the state. This is not say that ANO’s discourse lacks policy-statements but that valence-statements dominated over issue-statements and, consequently, undermined the idea of pluralistic, deliberative political environment.

The stress put on technocratic supposedly effective governance denying the existence of political pluralism was translated into preference of a strongly majoritarian vision of democracy not disturbed by political quarrels and not blocked by extensive system of checks and balances or separation of powers. This vision incorporates strengthening position of the executive, weakening of the legislative and position of institution with important control function both within horizontal and vertical separation of powers. According to ANO, a system with single party majority government with only little functional constraints. In other words, although based on different type of reasoning (anti-political, anti-party technocratic populism), the discourse of the currently most popular political party in the Czech Republic fits into recent backsliding of liberal democracies in Central and Eastern Europe that has been happening in Poland and Hungary.

Unlike Hungary and Poland, however, it is on the discoursive level, for now. ANO was not able to secure majority in the last general election, neither has been able to form a majority coalition government yet. All the same, the Czech constitutional system is typical by a more complex set of checks and balances and therefore it seems to be more resilient to constitutional changes. There is also a more liberal part of ANO (e.g. represented by the Minister of Justice Robert Pelikán) which means that a systematic effort to change the regime would probably be challenged by internal
opposition in the party. Nevertheless, that fact is that ANO, a party with illiberal political platform won the election while political parties sticking to principles of liberal democracy lost most of their electoral support. Second, principles of liberal democracy can be weakened without implementation of constitutional reforms, sometimes even without passing ordinary laws by using executive orders (moreover, there is an illiberal majority in the parliament including the communists and radical right). As for the internal opposition, it would not be the first case to see members of the party opposing ANO politics – in all cases, the opposition would be forced to leave the party or voluntarily left the party or distances from it (as it was the case of MEPs Telička and Ježek). Moreover, there is a bulk of literature showing the power of elite framing and cueing, i.e. the fact that the public is socialized and eventually tend to adapt stances presented by political elites (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Hooghe, 2007). This is to say that the presence of an illiberal discourse may delegitimaze practice of liberal democracy in the eyes of the public. Although not having tried to change the character of the regime yet, the recent electoral success of ANO shows that the Czech Republic has not been saved from the emergence and governance of illiberal populist actors.

The unprecedented success of ANO also contributes to literature on decline of political parties (Daalder, 1992; Dalton and Weldon, 2005). As it was shown, anti-partyism not limited to rejection of the established political parties but of practices typical for modern representative politics was important part of the technocratic populist discourse of the party. And even importantly, it combines two positions considered as dangerous to party democracy. Populist acknowledgement of the common universal good of the people and technocratic ability to recognize the best solution based on demands of the citizens. Although seemingly incompatible, ANO was able to merge this two approaches and reflected on widespread dissatisfaction with politics as represented by (the established) political parties. Indeed, the party offered a story of an outsider able to restore the popular sovereignty by listening to the people, mingling with them almost on daily basis and at the same time providing the necessary expertise stemming from the experiences in the business.
Although not very common, this discoursive formula is by no way unique. The former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (Bickerton and Accetti, 2014) or Raffael Correa in Ecuador (De la Torre, 2014) have shown that technocratic populism can be highly successful. They also shows that the rise of this kind of populism is not just a sign of political dissatisfaction as usual, it is part of the decline and transformation of party politics *per se.*
Literature

(All electronic sources were checked for access April 12, 2018.)


Elo, S. et al. (2014) ‘Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness’, *Sage Open*. SAGE


Table 1: Elements of liberal and populist democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal democracy</th>
<th>Populist democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plurality of interests</td>
<td>Universal good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlapping consensus</td>
<td>Adversarial politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutionalism</td>
<td>Majoritarianism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on Pappas (2014), updated by the author

Table 2: Type of statements made by political parties (2010 - 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Issue - valence</th>
<th>Valence</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ČSSD</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODS</td>
<td>54.40%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>41.10%</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSČM</td>
<td>78.60%</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>15.70%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDU-ČSL</td>
<td>75.80%</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>17.70%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOP 09</td>
<td>63.90%</td>
<td>15.50%</td>
<td>20.60%</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANO 2011</td>
<td>50.80%</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>40.80%</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>57.10%</td>
<td>14.30%</td>
<td>28.60%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63.90%</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
<td>27.10%</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data source: Comparative Campaign Dynamics Project (2016), N = 1154

**Figure 1:** Position of political parties in political space (anti-elitism salience and corruption salience)

Data source: Bakker et al., 2014, antielite_salience: 0 = not important at all, 10 = extremely important; corrupt_salience: 0 = not important at all, 10 = extremely important

**Figure 2:** Position of political parties in political space (lrecon and galtan)
Although the Law on Political Parties distinguishes between political parties and political movements, there are no real legal differences in terms of participation in the election, organizational requirements or public funding. Explicit mention of “political movements” is a relict of the Velvet Revolution and the existence of the Civic Forum that

---

1 Although the Law on Political Parties distinguishes between political parties and political movements, there are no real legal differences in terms of participation in the election, organizational requirements or public funding. Explicit mention of “political movements” is a relict of the Velvet Revolution and the existence of the Civic Forum that