

# Anti-corruption rhetoric within contemporary Czech politics

The analysis of anti-corruption rhetoric of the  
Czech anti-establishment parties

**Vladimír Naxera**

University of West Bohemia

[vnaxera@kap.zcu.cz](mailto:vnaxera@kap.zcu.cz)

# Corruption as a political issue

- Corruption is one of the key topics of political and social discussion not only in the Czech Republic.
- The discursive power of the subject of corruption is such that defining oneself as being anti-corruption oriented can, at least in part, dominate the public debate.
- Corruption is perceived as such a negative phenomenon and a "public enemy" that will serve to delegitimize political opponents, even to stigmatize and criminalize them. Thus, anti-corruption rhetoric does not have to be innocent and apolitical in any way.
- Many of new political actors explain their entry into politics in response to "political corruption that simply could no longer be looked at". In many cases, anti-corruption rhetoric is becoming a major issue articulated to voters by new parties seeking political power.

# About my research

3

- In 2017, the Czech Pirate Party acquired nearly 11% of votes during the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, thus becoming the third strongest party in the country.
- Pirate parties draw from sources of support that are similar to the ones of populist parties and movements. In any case, there are different views on whether pirate parties can be considered populist.
- → question: *Regarding their communication, is it possible to classify the Czech Pirates as a populist party?*
- The Pirates' communication is contextualized in the comparative perspective with the Freedom and Direct Democracy party (right-wing populism) and the ANO movement (centrist/technocratic populism)

# What does populism mean?

- C. Mudde: populism is an ideology that understands society as divided in a Manichean way between two homogeneous and mutually antagonistic groups (pure people, corrupt elite), and which argues that politics should reflect the will of the sovereign people.
- Other possibilities: P as political style, discourse, strategy, etc.
- My approach: populism is a specific communication using the order of the populist communication, which predetermines the choice of methodological approach. Although the research deals with communication, it uses an *ideational approach*; within the communication of the studied actors, it reveals sets of statements corresponding to the ideas that are the basis of the theoretical concept of populism.

# Czech context

5

- Until the 2010 parliamentary election, the Czech party system was relatively stable compared to other Central and Eastern European countries.
- In the 2010 elections, two newly formed parties immediately succeeded – the Public Affairs party and TOP09.
- The success of Public Affairs in 2010 (centrist populists), together with the success of the ANO movement (centrist populists) and the Dawn of Direct Democracy (right wing populists) in 2013 – these new actors with strong anti-establishment and anti-corruption rhetoric delimited themselves from the entire existing party spectrum.
- The success of these parties showed a gradual change in the patterns of party support, the system structure, and the previous dominance of socio-economic issues.
- This trend was particularly strong in the 2017 elections when parties with a clear anti-establishment and anti-corruption appeal (Pirates, ANO, and SPD) won a total of over 50% of the vote.

# Why compare mentions of corruption?

SPD refers to the existence of a “corrupt political mafia” in its manifesto for the 2017 parliamentary elections, as well as to the corruptness of the political elite as such.

ANO based its first candidature in 2013 on a self-identification as an “anti-corruption movement” fighting against established politicians, because “they all steal”.

For the 2017 elections, the Pirates launched a campaign also aimed at “corrupt politicians”. This was obvious, for example, from a stylized election bus with painted representatives of the established parties wearing prison uniforms and the motto “Let us blow them down!”.

The anti-corruption appeal was not directed against the left-wing or the right-wing parties, but rather at the system of established parties as such.

# Input data

- The input data for the main part of the analysis contain the posts on three Facebook pages – the official pages of Tomio Okamura, Andrej Babiš, and the Czech Pirate Party.

	Overall number of posts	Overall number of words
<b>Babiš</b>	6512	561.204
<b>Pirates</b>	3306	309.398
<b>Okamura</b>	5949	2.272.975
<b>Total</b>	15767	3.143.577

# Creation of empirical corpus for analysis

- Machine reading of texts realized by via MaxQda software: tracking words *corruption, bribery, kick-back, embezzlement, collusion, favouritism, nepotism, clientelism, familism*
- The empirical corpus prepared in this manner, containing a total of 466 posts that mention corruption, was the basis for the following analysis.

	Overall number	Percentual share
<b>Babiš</b>	109	1.67%
<b>Pirates</b>	157	4.75%
<b>Okamura</b>	200	3.36%



# Order of populist communication

The order of populist communication consists of the interconnected meanings of several triplets:

- (1) “the people are good”;
- (2) “the elites are bad”;
- (3) “the actor is speaking for the people and/or is one of them”.

# Example

Tomio Okamura:

- *“My friends, I have to tell you I am getting really upset with the treacherous corrupt politicians kicking you, the normal people, betraying you and making – forgive me – morons out of you. How? For them, you are perhaps incompetent beings who do not have the right to decide for themselves, so they refuse to support the referendum bill. They have deprived you of your right to decide for yourself, so that they do not lose their power and money.”*
- ✓ “the people are good” (their decision cannot be criticized)
- ✓ “the elites are bad” (because they are corrupt, they betray the people, they want money and power)
- ✓ and “the actor is speaking for the people and/or is one of them” (which is evident from the way of addressing the people as “friends”, as well as from Okamura’s promotion of direct democracy “in the people’s interest”)

# Is the communication of the Pirates populist?

11

- Based on the determination of context, I divided the individual occurrences into “populist” (corresponding to the meanings of the order of populist communication; see above) and “non-populist” (other meanings) sets.
- **Results: Okamura uses populist communication, and on the contrary, the communication of Babiš is dominantly non-populist. In case of the Pirates, statements corresponding to the order of the populist communication do occur, but only in a measure that is nearly negligible.**

	Populist (Np)	Non-populist (Nnp)	Proportion (in numbers and percentages)
Babiš	38	71	Np (38) < Nnp (71) Np (35%) < Nnp (65%)
Pirates	5	152	Np (5) < Nnp (152) Np (3%) < Nnp (97%)
Okamura	109	91	Np (109) > Nnp (91) Np (55%) > Nnp (45%)

# Conclusion

- Despite the indications associated with the 2017 elections campaign, the communication of the Czech Pirate Party related to the topic of corruption shows a negligible level of populism.
- Pirates' communication transformed significantly after the 2017 elections, when they became a parliamentary party.
- The rhetoric of all these parties seems to be the same, because all three parties say all politicians are corrupt. However, based on my analysis, we can see the important differences.



**THANKS FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION**