

# The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism

Lenka Bušíková

*Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA*

Petra Guasti

*Goethe-Universität, Faculty of Social Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany;*

*Ash Centre for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, USA*

Why, when, and how does populism emerge in a stable democracy? This article investigates the political logic and ideological appeal of a rarely explored form of populism: *technocratic* populism. Technocratic populism uses the appeal of technical expertise to connect directly with the people, promising to run the state as a firm, while at the same time delegitimizing political opponents and demobilizing the electorate by instilling civic apathy. Technocratic populism is an anti-elite ideology that exploits competence to create the appearance of authenticity and proximity to ordinary people. It is less exclusionary than nativist or economic forms of populisms and its broad appeal is therefore arguably more threatening to representative democracy. In order to understand the appeal of technocratic populism, as well as why it arises at critical junctures when dominant ideologies are in turmoil, we argue that one must not ignore its historical roots, which shows that it transcends both regime changes and the traditional left–right divide. The article develops and examines these points using evidence from communist-era populist campaigns against “elitist” dissidents (from Charter 77) in the Czech Republic, and demonstrates how post-1989 politicians have exploited and also adapted ideas and strategies from the authoritarian past for the new democratic setting. The article highlights the adaptive character of technocratic populism across political regimes.

**Keywords:** *technocratic populism; legacies; political parties; dissidents; Czech Republic*

Truth and Love . . . They can go fuck themselves.

Andrej Babiš (June 2017)<sup>1</sup>

In June 2017, a secret recording was leaked to the media in which Andrej Babiš, the leader of the political party ANO, revealed his belief that the 1989 Velvet Revolution was orchestrated by the communist secret police in coordination with the Charter 77 dissidents. Babiš, a member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and a secret police (Státní bezpečnost) collaborator, then derided the entire dissident

movement and the Velvet Revolution, saying: “Truth and Love . . . they can go fuck themselves.” The ‘Truth and Love’ motto, associated with Václav Havel’s post-1989 presidency, represents the legacy of the Charter 77 movement. By contrast, the businessman Andrej Babiř represents the “ordinary man” who can get things done by running the state as an “efficient” political firm, doing away with democratic deliberation, pluralism, and compromise.

Today, Havel is gone and Babiř is the new Prime Minister, thanks to the silent support of the (unreformed) communist party.<sup>2</sup> When the legitimacy of the liberal democratic project imploded due to corruption scandals, Babiř filled the vacuum with technocratic populism. His electoral promise was to “make everything better for the ordinary people” by adopting an “expert and business-like” governance style—running “the state as a firm.” He won the 2017 parliamentary elections on this platform with 30 percent popular support for his party, ANO, which simply means “yes.” The party is neither clientelistic nor programmatic, neither left nor right. ANO declares that it is “above politics,” a “movement of dissatisfied citizens,” but it has almost no members, and depends financially and administratively on its founder and “owner.” “The party is me,” Babiř declared in a 2016 interview with the *Financial Times*.<sup>3</sup>

ANO campaigned on change, but offered no specifics, aside from the campaign motto “We will do it.”<sup>4</sup> The electoral support for the “movement” is diffuse, since voters have no discernible socio-economic or regional profiles. The only issue that ANO voters embrace is the desire for “different politics.”<sup>5</sup> In his 2013 campaign, Babiř attacked traditional political parties as corrupt, incompetent, and inefficient and asked voters to trust his expertise. In 2017, he asked voters to continue their support for ANO’s competent leadership. It comes as no surprise that the first cabinet that Babiř attempted, after winning the election in October 2017, was not a governing coalition with other parties as junior partners backed by a parliamentary majority but rather a handpicked minority government of ANO ministers and non-partisan experts directly under his leadership.

The Czech Republic has been something of a poster child for democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe. After 1989, voters connected with parties based on their socio-economic profiles, and the party system has aligned along the “western” left–right issues of economic redistribution. It seemed stable and immune to populist callings.<sup>6</sup> Why and how did technocratic populism (re)emerge in the Czech Republic, a relatively prosperous, egalitarian democracy with the lowest unemployment rate in Europe (2.7 percent),<sup>7</sup> limited public debt, good social service provision and health care, accessible education, and limited immigration? The Czech Republic is arguably one of the “least-likely cases” for populism to succeed. In order to understand the attractiveness and appeal of populism, despite these unfavorable conditions for its success, we develop an argument that emphasizes the autocratic historical roots of contemporary populism.

We focus empirically on the Czech Republic over time, but believe that the populist politics of “ordinary people” is not a uniquely Czech phenomenon. Rather, it is

one of the three major strands of populism, alongside its nativist and economic forms. Most recently, for example, the former Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło drew on the populist politics of “ordinary people” in a speech delivered in May 2017 in the Polish Parliament. “We want to help the people, not the political elites.” When Szydło was confronted with the fact that, as a prime minister, she *is* the elite, she replied: “*We are the good elite.*” In India, the Aam Admi Party (The Party of the Common Man) has also successfully mobilized voters using the populist appeal of “ordinary people” since its establishment in 2012.

Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, Donald Trump in the United States, Bidzina Ivanishvili in Georgia, and Emanuel Macron in France have invoked the idea that the state should be run as a firm. What unites them is that they are all businessmen, and have positioned themselves as outsiders “taking on” the political establishment, making government more efficient, less regulated, and more business-like. What divides them is the degree to which they use populism to delegitimize opponents and to avoid criminal prosecution.<sup>8</sup>

The appeal of the technocratic populism of ordinary people is not its promise to return power to “the people.” Instead, it offers a technocratic vision of politics that relieves “the people” of the responsibility to lead active civic lives and to hold politicians accountable. Populist technocrats, or businessmen, ask voters to renounce politics and political parties. As a growing challenge to more pluralistic forms of representative democracy, there is an increasing need for historical and comparative perspectives to reveal why technocratic populism is alluring.

To fully appreciate and understand the implications of this recent development, we argue that it is essential to take a historical perspective. “So much commentary on contemporary populism,” according to Cas Mudde, “overlooks its deep historical sources.”<sup>9</sup> During communism, populism was used to demobilize people and strip politics of ethical accountability: “research on post-communist civil society suggests the reductive impact of totalitarian projects on generalized trust and civic engagement.”<sup>10</sup> The literature on legacies tracks mechanisms through which Leninism,<sup>11</sup> communist socialization,<sup>12</sup> schools,<sup>13</sup> churches,<sup>14</sup> or bureaucracies<sup>15</sup> shape democratic consolidation and regime outcomes. Populism is a living legacy in Eastern Europe. As an anti-elite frame it survived in the new democratic environment, and has proven effective in maintaining the division between “us” and “them” for almost half a century. By focusing on the historical origins of populism and its entrenchment under the surface of party politics, we can explain why populist frames resonate with the electorate.

Technocratic populism is a “thin” ideology that rejects the traditional political parties on the left and on the right and promises a-political expert solutions that will benefit the “ordinary people.” It emerges, we suggest, at critical junctures as an alternative to the ideology of liberal democratic pluralism. Technocratic populism strategically uses the appeal of technocratic competence and weaponizes numbers to deliver a populist message. It combines the ideology of expertise with a populist political appeal to ordinary people.

Technocratic and populist forms of governments are alternatives to the mediated representation of citizens by political parties.<sup>16</sup> According to Caramani, both of these anti-political forms of representation are based on a “unitary, non-pluralist, unmediated, and unaccountable vision of society’s general interest.”<sup>17</sup> A study of Dutch voters demonstrates the synergies between populism and technocratic rule. It found that support for being ruled by expert elites is compatible with the perception that politics is a struggle between good and evil, and that voters of populist parties support the idea of being governed by experts.<sup>18</sup> Populism and technocracy are both opposed to the liberal concept of representative “party democracy” and its principles of parliamentary deliberation and electoral competition.<sup>19</sup>

Technocratic populism does not necessarily equal technocratic rule and performance-oriented governing efficiency of either temporary appointed technocrats in democracies or autocrats with policy-driven technocratic platforms.<sup>20</sup> Instead, technocratic populism uses the ideology of numbers and the ideology of expert knowledge to appeal directly to the voters using an anti-elite, populist rhetoric. Political elites today are exploiting the legacy of the communist regime’s emotionally charged populist campaigns on behalf of the “ordinary people.” The populist distinction between “the people” and “the elite” was perfected, we show in the Czech case, during the communist campaigns against dissidents and intelligentsia.<sup>21</sup> The communist establishment portrayed dissidents as elitist moral impostors, while at the same time imprisoning them, forcing them to perform manual jobs or to emigrate. The distinction between the ordinary people and dissidents or, as the communist leadership and secret police called them, “the self-proclaimed elite” was used to discredit a relatively small group of regime opponents, and to delegitimize their criticisms of the communist state’s transgressions and human rights violations.

The strategic objective of the populist message was to ensure regime survival by preserving civic apathy, inhibiting mobilization, and legitimizing the “scientific” approach towards governance by the communist nomenklatura. The communist regime perfected the art of fake numbers, misleading statistics, and dubious balance sheets. Its technocratic propaganda legitimized an oppressive autocratic regime that ruled *in the name of the people*. Today, the shared experience of living in the communist grey zone and an admiration for an apolitical technocratic expertise is a bond between Andrej Babiš and his voters.<sup>22</sup> As a “thin” ideology, populism is easy to combine with other ideologies.<sup>23</sup> Populists exploit political corruption and diminished sovereignty when they appeal to voters. Thus, aspiring populist leaders have a variety of populisms to choose from. To explain the success and appeal of technocratic populism in an unlikely place—the Czech Republic—we focus on populism’s historical roots, and show how it morphs into mainstream politics within a democratic polity.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. In the first two sections, we outline the historical sources of populism and situate the politics of the “ordinary people” within a broader theoretical framework. We discuss the impact of the Charter 77 dissident movement in Czechoslovakia on the transition to power in 1989 and afterward. Next,

we describe the emergence of technocratic populism in a nascent democracy with a focus on the early transition years associated with Václav Klaus. In the fourth section, we describe the re-emergence of technocratic populism in a weakening democracy and the rise of the populist Andrej Babiš and his party ANO. We conclude with thoughts on the consequences of technocratic populism for democratic backsliding in new democracies.

## **Populism of the Ordinary People**

The literature on populism rarely explores its historical origins. We focus on the persistence of populism over time and across political regimes, highlighting its adaptive character. Populism promises redemption and articulates neglected grievances using the language of the people.<sup>24</sup> As such, it offers hope: “what distinguishes the support for populism from simple political discontent and frustrations is that populism remains a politics of hope, that is, the hope that where established parties and elites have failed, ordinary folks, common sense, and the politicians who give them a voice can find solutions.”<sup>25</sup> This may explain why traditionally egalitarian countries in Northern and Central Europe are just as prone to populist appeals as societies that experience economic divisions.<sup>26</sup> In the era of globalization, all advanced industrial democracies are subject to uncertainty, which transforms fear into resentment against the “other,” often drawing on negative emotions linked to historical stereotypes.<sup>27</sup>

Populism, in our view, is both an ideology and a strategy. As an ideology, populism is an articulation of neglected grievances using the language of “the people.” According to Margaret Canovan, this includes the discursive frames of three groups: the nation, the underdog, and the ordinary people.<sup>28</sup> The language of the people as a “nation” is hostile to migrants and ethnic minorities. The populist rhetoric of the “underdog” is expressed by an intense hostility to economic differences. Finally, the language of the “ordinary people” reflects a romanticized craving for a simpler life.<sup>29</sup>

While much attention has been paid to understanding and defining “the people” in ethnic terms (the people as a “nation”) or in economic terms (the people as an “underdog”), the historical origin and the meaning of the “ordinary people” and the “elite” needs to be further unpacked and specified in each context. In the Czech case, the category of the people as a nation has limited relevance. It has been invoked only in specific contexts: during the campaigns against Roma discrimination and during the refugee crisis.<sup>30</sup> The category of the underdog has even more limited relevance, because of the egalitarian nature of the communist regime, low levels of inequality, and strong economic performance.<sup>31</sup> The most relevant and successful discursive populist frame in the Czech Republic is the one that revolves around the “ordinary people.” Populist targeting of ordinary people is less polarizing than its nativist and economic forms and has a broader, centrist, appeal.

Populism as an ideology adopts a discursive approach and focuses on the Manichean antagonism between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elite.”<sup>32</sup> As an

anti-establishment ideology, populism is neither right nor left.<sup>33</sup> Current scholarship often equates the elite with the establishment and current power holders. However, populists target the establishment and the elites selectively. Populists themselves can *be* or *become* the elite, and populist politicians reelected to office continue to use anti-elite populist appeals to demobilize and delegitimize opponents, even after they have come to represent the very establishment they attacked. The view of populism as a political strategy focuses on its agency; that is, the ability of populist movements to instrumentally appeal to followers, to maintain a direct relationship between the leader and the followers and to exploit existing institutional weaknesses.<sup>34</sup> We combine the two strands and treat populism both as an ideology and a political strategy.

The “elite” versus “ordinary people” framing that builds, in the Czech case, on the historical “dissident–anti-dissident” construction connects populism over time. Prior to 1989, the dissidents pressed the state to respect its own laws, and urged all citizens to undergo a moral renewal, to “live in truth,” and actively participate in civic life. The dissident movement, Charter 77, challenged communist technocrats on competence and truth telling: exposing both its expertise and the numbers as “fake.”<sup>35</sup> During communism, the sacrifices of the dissidents—as a result of taking a moral stance against an oppressive state—were “rewarded” with political persecution. In the post-1989 era, populist politics minimalized and even ridiculed their suffering. Mainstream democratic politicians, even those who ran on anti-communist platforms, used populist rhetoric about the “ordinary people” to marginalize dissidents and their supporters.

In the words of prime minister and later president Klaus: “Civil society is in dispute with free society, and it’s the duty of every democrat, with all his force and to his dying day, to fight against it!”<sup>36</sup> Klaus positioned himself as a “real” expert in the new democratic era, since he was in an “internal exile” during communism, as an employee of the Czechoslovak national bank, where he gained expertise by immersing himself in the study of Hayek and Keynes. After 1989, in this telling, the new experts replaced “incompetent communists” and then the “impractical dissidents” who harbored “dangerous” civic sentiments.<sup>37</sup> Technocratic populism prevailed over the new political elite, recruited from the dissident movement, by diminishing their moral capital and emphasizing technocratic competence. Twenty or so years later, the template that attacks the elite’s “moral superiority complex” and their distance from “ordinary citizens” has re-surfaced to discredit political opponents and to inculcate complicity between citizens and their technocratic leadership again.<sup>38</sup>

### **Historical Roots of Populism**

“Populism of ordinary people” has a long tradition in Czech politics. Historically, the self-perception of a nation of “common, ordinary, and unexceptional people”<sup>39</sup>

can be traced back to late nineteenth-century nation-building efforts. Populism is not the same as nationalism, however. The ideology of nationalism is thicker, and draws lines between the nation and ethnic minorities or immigrants. Populism, on the contrary, separates “the people” from “the corrupt elite.”<sup>40</sup> As a “thin ideology,” populism is symbiotic and can effortlessly co-exist with other ideologies, such as nationalism or anti-globalism.<sup>41</sup>

According to a prominent study of Czech national identity, the ordinary people are epitomized by the concept of the “little Czech men” and the “great Czech nation.”<sup>42</sup> This particular conception of ordinary people is rooted in a national identity that underscores the common, egalitarian origin of all its members.<sup>43</sup> In Holy’s view, heroes have to transcend individual differences and practice “different values from those to which Czechs pragmatically subscribe” in order to live up to the ideal of the democratic, cultured, and well-educated great Czech nation.<sup>44</sup> Members of the “great” Czech nation “relieve[s] others from the necessity to live up to the ideals . . . that would be otherwise challenged by the historical experience of the masses.”<sup>45</sup> The extraordinary lives of dissidents offered ordinary Czechs hope under communism and legitimized the subsequent democratization. But the dissidents’ heroic status eroded quickly once the new regime was legitimized. Their sacrifice was no longer needed, and redemption through active citizenship had little appeal to ordinary people.<sup>46</sup>

The ideological roots of the political appeal to “live in truth,” Havel’s anti-populist message, was grounded in the moral philosophy of Jan Patočka, who died after a series of police interrogations in 1977.<sup>47</sup> Havel returned to Patočka’s politics of moral appeals in order to expand the audience of the dissident movement: “Havel wanted all his readers to think about their own participation in the system, and hence their own ability to change it.”<sup>48</sup> Although the social structure of Charter 77 changed within the first two years of its existence and attracted more workers and young people, the group remained closely knit, Prague-centric, and mostly detached from the general public.<sup>49</sup> Communist propaganda used the fact that Charter 77 was not highly representative of the broad Czech (and Czechoslovak) population, and called them “losers and self-proclaimed leaders” as well as “isolated asocial pseudo-intellectuals,” detached from the true needs and interests of ordinary men.<sup>50</sup> The secret police did not shy away from using secret recordings of private conversations to demonstrate that the cultural elite was out of touch with the ordinary people and to show that the elite even ridiculed the intellect and habits of “ordinary people” even before Charter 77 was formed.<sup>51</sup>

Havel’s *Power of the Powerless* rested on a rejection of complacency in daily, ordinary life and the recognition that the power of the oppressive state is not legitimate. The communists felt so threatened by the mobilization appeal of Charter 77 that the propaganda machine immediately organized an “Anti-Charter Initiative,” a petition against Charter 77, signed by leading cultural figures during a ceremony in the National Theater that was broadcast on live TV (28 January 1977). One of the key Anti-Charter statements, later published in communist newspapers, avowed, “[We]

renounce those who separate themselves and isolate themselves from their larger people due to their pride, superiority complex, selfishness or because they sink so low as to accept foreign payments.”

The anti-Charter campaign was clearly positioned as a populist, anti-elitist campaign against the dissidents.<sup>52</sup> But dissidents did not remain at the margins. In the post-1989 transitional era, the dissidents’ stock of moral capital secured them seats in both the federal and the Czech national parliaments.<sup>53</sup> Charter 77 signatories were decidedly overrepresented among the Members of the first, freely elected, Parliaments. After the first free elections in 1990, dissidents represented 12–14 percent of the newly elected MPs in the Federal Assembly and the Czech National Council.<sup>54</sup>

Newcomers won roughly 95 percent of the seats in the two chambers of the Federal Assembly and the Czech National Council. Table 1 shows the number of MPs from the First Parliament re-elected in subsequent terms. Over time, support for the dissidents faded away. After successfully entering politics and parliament and providing the new regime with moral legitimacy, symbolized by the election of Václav Havel as the president, the dissidents underestimated the appeal of pragmatic politics and lost spectacularly in subsequent elections in 1992. In this election, Klaus emerged as the first technocratic populist in the new democratic setting.<sup>55</sup> He adopted many of the communist tropes about the “ordinary people” and emphasized technical expertise strategically to delegitimize the dissidents as political rivals.

### **Technocratic Populism in a Nascent Democracy**

In the ideological fluidity of the transition turmoil, the dissidents managed to defeat the technocrats by converting their moral capital into political capital in the first free elections. However, they failed to create a stable political platform, and lost popular support once the brief era of “extraordinary politics” had morphed into regularized democratic competition between political parties. Václav Klaus seized the appeal of technocratic populism to gain support for his wide-reaching neo-liberal economic reforms from the “ordinary people.” He used it as a weapon to delegitimize his old and new rivals by claiming to have expertise superior both to the inept communist apparatchiks and the bohemian dissidents.

The effort to delegitimize the dissidents wasted no time, and was launched already in the spring of 1990. It used the populist anti-elitist part of the well-rehearsed communist Anti-Charter narrative.<sup>56</sup> In a defamatory article entitled “Sensational Discovery about the Background of November 17, 1989,” published by Miroslav Dolejší in *Středočeský Expres*, on 26 October 1990,<sup>57</sup> Charter 77 members were alleged to have been secret police confidants and, at the same time, collaborators of Western foreign intelligence agencies.<sup>58</sup> Dolejší’s tabloid article was the first post-revolutionary attempt to smear Charter 77 signatories, and “was received positively by a significant fraction of domestic journalists.”<sup>59</sup> Consistent with this portrayal of dissidents as disloyal and



**Table 1**  
**The Survival Rate of the First Parliament's Political Elites, 1992–2002**

Legislatures	New Elite Survival Rate: Dissidents	New Elite Survival Rate: Non-dissident	Old Elite Survival Rate <sup>a</sup>	Engineers (Technocrats) Survival Rate <sup>b</sup>
1992–1992 (Federal Assembly, CNR)	.343	.303	.260	.395
1996–1998 (Parliament, Lower Chamber)	.151	.087	.043	.112
1998–2002 (Parliament, Lower Chamber)	.055	.051	.000	.059
2002– (Parliament, Lower Chamber)	.041	.034	.000	.033

Source: Calculations of the authors based on parliamentary lists and lists of signatories of Charter 77.

a. N = total number of deputies in the first Parliament (1990–1992) = 532.

b. N = total number of deputies with an engineering degree in the first Parliament (1990–1992) = 152/532 = 28.6%.

opportunistic, property restitution was put on the agenda and some dissidents, including Havel's family, benefited significantly from the new legislation.

The campaign succeeded and the second parliamentary elections in 1992 brought a bitter disappointment to the dissidents and their supporters. The Civic Forum split into several factions. The Civic Party (ODS) led by Klaus became the dominant faction, and the so-called dissident party, Civic Movement (OH), did not win a single seat in the Parliament or the Czech National Council.<sup>60</sup> As individuals, some dissidents were co-opted by mainstream parties. But as a group, dissidents no longer posed a political threat and were roundly defeated by a new cohort of populist technocrats led by Václav Klaus.<sup>61</sup> Klaus made it crystal clear that the moral capital of the dissidents had served its purpose in providing legitimacy to the newly democratizing state, but that the dissidents should now retreat and let “real” politicians with technocratic expertise govern.

In the eyes of the public, the moral image of Charter 77 signatories continued to suffer over time. A representative survey conducted in 1993 and 2004 asked random Czech citizens for the reasons that the dissidents signed the Charter 77 petition (Table 2). The most commonly picked answers in 1993 were “for the general welfare,” “to criticize the regime” or “to overthrow it.” Yet by 2004, the number of people who replied “do not know” responses increased four-and-a-half-fold, and the number that ascribed more altruistic motives declined noticeably, indicating that Charter 77's reputation had taken a hit.

On the basis of a representative public opinion poll conducted in 2017, Figure 1 similarly reveals that trust in Charter 77 and Charter 77 signatories eroded over time. It shows a gap in perception of the dissidents during communism, during the

**Table 2**  
**Reasons for Signing Charter 77 (in percentages)**

Reasons for Signing Charter 77 Petition in the Eyes of the General Public	03/1993	02/2004
To criticize the “normalization” regime, attempt to improve general conditions	46	41
To overthrow communism, to fight against communism	27	21
To gain access to material advantages offered by Western countries	15	9
To open one’s way to emigration	2	4
To express solidarity with friends	4	6
Done on the order of secret police	2	1
I do not know	4	18
Total (N=1,045)	100	100

Source: CVVM, *Názory na Chartu 77* (2004), <http://www.cvvm.cz/index.php?disp=zpravy&r=1&s=1&offset=&shw=100335>.

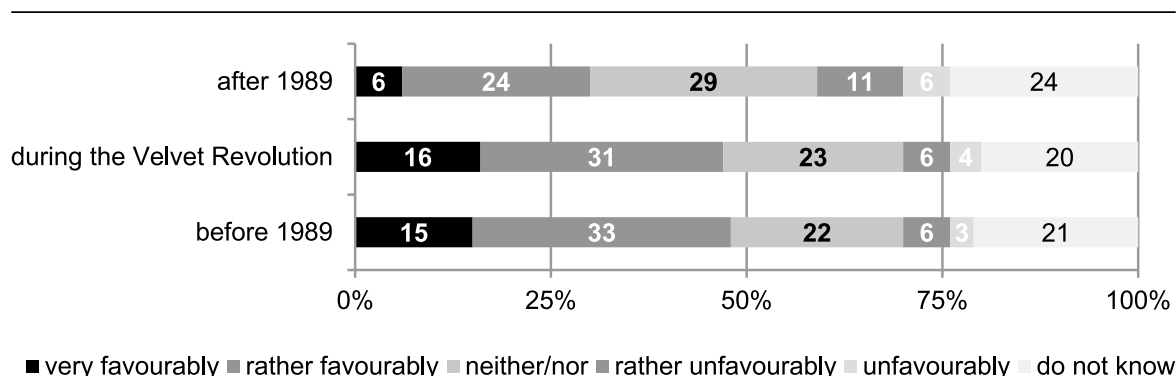
transition period and afterwards. By 2017, only 30 percent of the respondents viewed the role that Charter 77 personalities played in the post-1989 era as positive. As Figure 1 shows, dissidents lost much of their credibility soon after 1989.

The political platform that the dissidents offered was politically unappealing to the masses. President Havel and the dissidents advocated moral reconciliation with the past and encouraged citizens to be actively engaged in political and civic life. This was exemplified in the dissident’s emphasis on transitional justice, such as the lustration process, which excluded the communist political elite and security apparatus from holding political power, on restitutions and the return of property nationalized by communists to the former owners, and on a renewal of civil society and the culture of philanthropy.

The decline in the proportion of dissidents in the legislature is mirrored in the decline of public support for the most outspoken dissident, President Havel, and the increase in support for his most forceful opponent, Václav Klaus,<sup>62</sup> the leader of the “prognostic technocrats.” Trust in Havel declined consistently after 1990 (Figure 2). At the same time, support for Prime Minister Klaus was surging.

Klaus and his technocratic populists initially sold the “Czech” way of privatization to the voters as economically efficient and as a defense of ordinary people against selling off state assets to “outsiders.” Klaus’s “Czech way” in economic privatization limited the involvement of foreign companies in the privatization process, a strategy supported by some prominent dissidents, and opposed attempts to revisit the issue of the “transferred” German population, Sudeten Germans, in the border regions after World War II. In defending these positions, Klaus systematically portrayed himself as defending the “ordinary people” and the Czech national interest. He also justified the lack of oversight by arguing that “the lights had to be

**Figure 1**  
**Evaluation of the role of Charter 77 and Charter 77 signatories in**  
**Czechoslovak history (in percentages)**



Source: CVVM, “Tisková zpráva,” *Občané o Chartě 77* (2017).

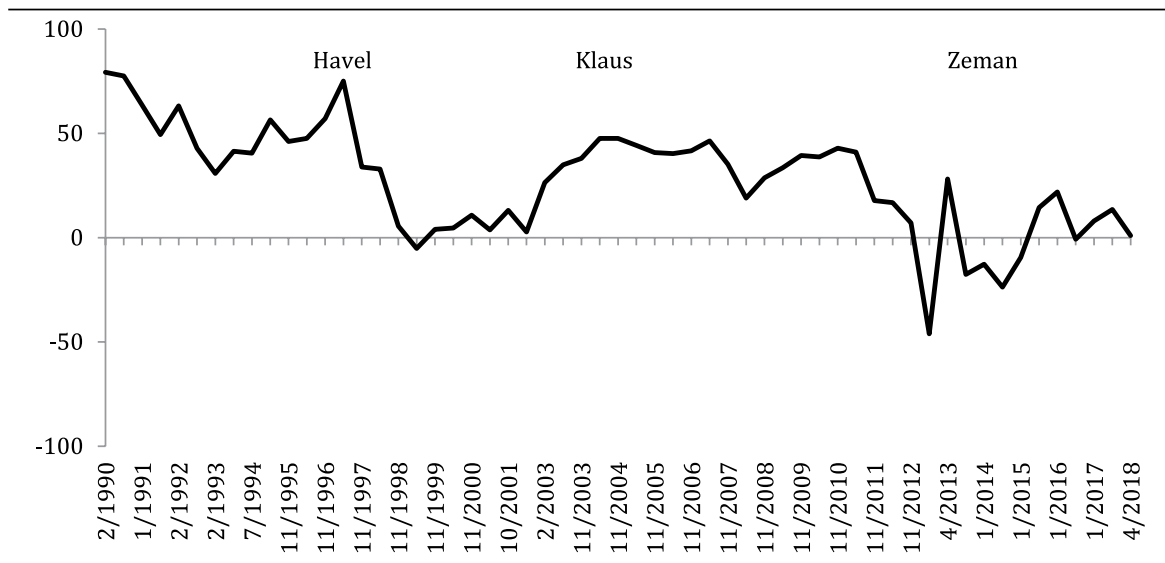
switched off” momentarily in order to move ahead with reforms and to lock in the new regime of property rights.<sup>63</sup>

The dissidents who advocated for the rule of law, minority rights, and transitional justice were portrayed as disruptive and disloyal. Their insistence was seen as undermining economic issues, on which Klaus and his allies were focused. It took some time for the voters to realize that the “Czech way” of privatization enabled massive political corruption. Ordinary citizens, mostly acting as small shareholders in the so-called voucher privatization, were intentionally defrauded. Voters, eventually, punished mainstream parties involved in the process of economic transformation.

Almost two decades later, however, Klaus remained unrepentant and blamed the ensuing weakness of traditional parties and the implosion of the left–right cleavage not on political corruption but on the civil society and (then deceased) Václav Havel: “this strengthening [of parties that have no ideological basis] is without a doubt a consequence of the activities of one person only . . . Václav Havel, with his ‘non-political politics,’ with his civil society and with his permanent attack on political parties.”<sup>64</sup> After revelations of privatization scandals linked to Klaus’s right-wing party ODS, left-wing social democrats rose to power and other prime ministers followed. But the appeal of technocracy lived on and re-surfaced during the tenure of apolitical, technocratic governments.<sup>65</sup>

As Figure 3 shows, using data from 238 public opinion surveys collected by the Center for Public Opinion Research between 1990 and 2018, governments where ministers had no political allegiances were among the most trusted in the post-1989 era. Over the last twenty-seven years, the Czech public has enthusiastically supported technocratic governments. The 2009–2010 technocratic government of Jan Fischer was especially popular (Figure 3).<sup>66</sup> A major source of the caretaker government’s popularity was a combination of technocratic neutrality with Fischer’s ability

**Figure 2**  
**Trust in presidents: 1990–2018**



Source: CVVM.

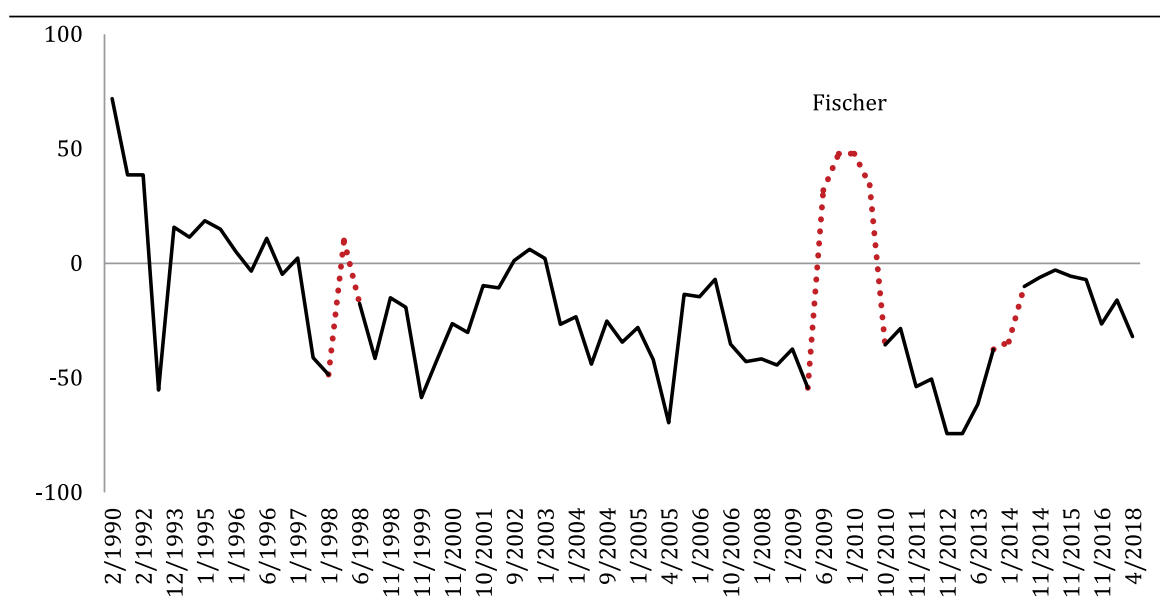
Note: The authors combined 238 data points—one per survey. Each point represents one public opinion survey from 1990 to 2018. The average N per survey is 1,000. The line shows trust minus distrust. The presidential periods are as follows: Havel, 1990–2003; Klaus, 2003–2013; Zeman, 2013–2018.

to mirror “ordinary Czechs”: “[He] was . . . depicted as a modest figure, close in lifestyle and values to ordinary people who had triumphed as an anti-politician against the odds.”<sup>67</sup> Fischer was a perfect technocrat, but he was not a technocratic *populist*, which became clear during his failed presidential campaign.

The 2013 unsuccessful presidential bid of Jan Fischer, the head of the 2009–2010 technocratic government and the former president of the Czech Statistical Office, demonstrates the limited political appeal of pure technocratic expertise. Hoping to capitalize on his immense popularity, Fischer ran in the 2013 presidential election as an independent candidate. His platform was apolitical expert governance. His dry campaign made no populist appeals. Competing against experienced politicians—the dissident Prince (Schwarzenberg) who campaigned on Havel’s legacy<sup>68</sup> and the economic populist (Zeman)—Jan Fischer received 16.35 percent votes and finished third in the first round of the 2013 presidential elections. The apolitical technocrat underestimated the appeal of ideology, and paid the political price.

A populist eventually seized the presidency. In order to win, Miloř Zeman revived the narrative of the communist Anti-Charter initiative against Karel Schwarzenberg in the second round. Zeman’s campaign described Schwarzenberg, who financially supported dissent under communism from abroad, as an elitist with cosmopolitan financial ties, removed from the woes of ordinary Czechs.<sup>69</sup> The attack on Schwarzenberg epitomized the clash between the “ordinary people” and the moralistic, cosmopolitan dissident elite.<sup>70</sup> The dissident era in politics had officially ended with Schwarzenberg’s 2013 loss to Zeman and coincided with the implosion of the

**Figure 3**  
**Popularity of technocratic and political governments, 1990–2018**



Source: CVVM. Trust in governments.

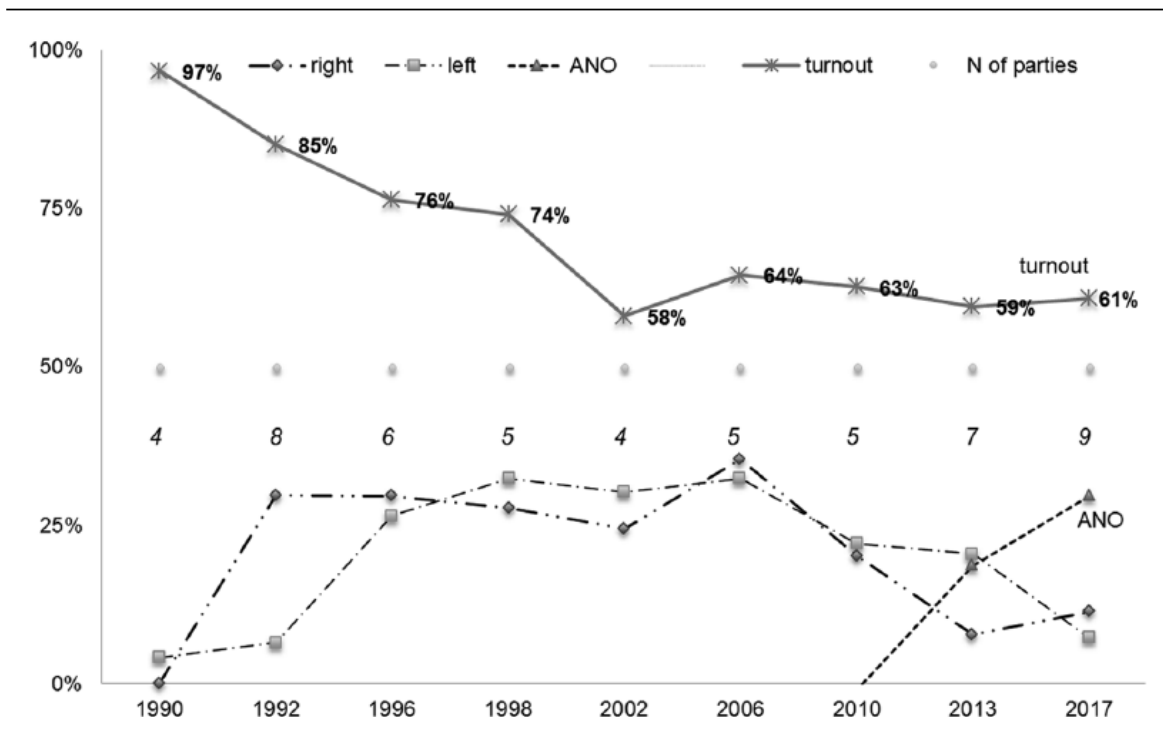
Note: The authors combined data from 238 data points, which cover public opinion surveys from 1990 to 2018. The average N per survey is 1,000. The line shows trust minus distrust. At zero, the number of respondents who trust the government equals to the number of respondents who do not trust it. As the figure shows, most governments are not trusted (below zero). The three technocratic governments are marked with a dotted line.

Czech party system, as corruption scandals tainted all existing mainstream political parties. Figure 4 shows a steady decline in voter turnout over this period, as well as a decline in the support for mainstream parties, and an increase in support for Andrej Babiš's ANO, which represents the next era in technocratic populism.

Zeman encouraged the entrepreneurial Andrej Babiš, to enter politics.<sup>71</sup> In 2018, Zeman was reelected president and became the kingmaker on the fragmented political landscape. An unlikely couple capitalized on the unfulfilled promises of the liberal democracy: the populist president, whose favorite holiday, widely covered by the media, entails floating in a rubber raft on a small Czech pond, and the populist billionaire who fashions himself as an ordinary man.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when parties made efforts to enact reforms and to fulfill the European conditionality criteria, technocratic populism went dormant. The first technocratic populist, Klaus, followed the end of communism<sup>72</sup> but Klaus's political career had two acts. The first was in the early 1990s as prime minister and the second was from 2003 to 2013 as president.<sup>73</sup> As prime minister, Klaus was rhetorically a neoliberal and a big admirer of Margaret Thatcher. Yet the record of his right-wing government exhibits strong populist elements. He rejected rent deregulation, for example, arguing that his retired mother would be unable to keep her apartment in Prague. His economic views were often inconsistent, and his cultural views shifted, it appears,

**Figure 4**  
**Party system implosion and decline in turnout (1990–2017)**



Source: Electoral data from the Czech Statistical Office.

Note: The upper line depicts turnout. The number with a dot depicts the number of political parties present in the legislature in a given election. Right: vote shares for the right-wing party ODS (1992–2017). Left: vote shares for the Social Democrats (1990–2017). ANO: Populist party of A. Babiš (2010–2017).

for strategic reasons.<sup>74</sup> One of Klaus's political traits that remained stable over time was his anti-elitism and almost visceral hatred of the dissidents, in particular of Havel.

In 2013, during the last days of his presidency, Klaus's complicity with oligarchs was revealed in a scandalous presidential amnesty. The amnesty customarily terminated shorter sentences for minor offenses. But it also granted far-reaching exonerations to numerous high-profile economic criminals involved in privatization trials and interrupted ongoing judicial proceedings related to privatization and economic criminality. This highly unpopular amnesty reaffirmed the perception among the public that established political parties were rotten. It also prepared the ground for Andrej Babiš, the second technocratic populist. In less than five years, Babiš rose from a businessman to the minister of finance and then to the prime minister (July 2018). The ideology of technocratic populism resurfaced, but this time in a weakening democracy.

### Technocratic Populism in a Weakening Democracy

A general disaffection with political corruption facilitated the rise of the Association of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011).<sup>75</sup> Andrej Babiš, the populist billionaire, has suc-

cessfully cast himself as the defender of “ordinary people,” despite being the second most affluent person in the country.<sup>76</sup> In 2013, Babiš’s party became the second strongest political party, joined the government as junior partner with social democrats, and Babiš became the minister of finance and the deputy prime minister. In 2017, he won the elections, and as of July 2018, he is the prime minister. After winning the 2017 elections, Andrej Babiš originally sought to form a technocratic minority government combining ANO ministers and non-partisan experts, rather than to build a pluralistic governing coalition.<sup>77</sup> After this attempt failed to win the vote of confidence, he reverted to forming a minority government with social democrats, and silent support of the communists. The coalition agreement with the social democrats is public, the agreement about the support of the communists is not. Only Andrej Babiš and his closest political allies know the price he paid for power.

The ascendancy of Babiš was also enabled by the lack of regulation and the departure of Western media owners from the Czech Republic. Babiš took advantage of this opening in the media market, as well as legal loopholes in campaign and party finance laws, to purchase a music channel, two radio channels, and two daily newspapers. In 2017, just as in 2013, Babiš’s media reinforced ANO’s campaign message. Babiš describes himself as apolitical and non-ideological, willing to form political coalitions with any of the political parties. He also presents himself as a successful entrepreneur, who stands with his both feet on the ground and remains close to the people. To prove his commitment to regular folks, he personally distributed doughnuts in the Prague subway in rush hour during the election campaign of 2013.<sup>78</sup>

Babiš donated more than one million Euro to his (own) party in 2012 alone. In the 2013 election, he purchased the highest number of billboards in Czech history and violated the law on party finance and campaign with impunity.<sup>79</sup> Babiš attacked mainstream politicians for having an elitist agenda, when they accused him of being a ruthless oligarch under police investigation by both the Czech and European anti-fraud authorities. Babiš portrayed himself as a victim of moralistic elites who despise his past as an agent of the secret police and pass judgment on an ordinary hard-working guy who cut some corners to survive and thrive under communism and democracy.

The main platform of ANO, we suggest, is best understood in terms of technocratic populism. ANO re-interprets the anti-Charter narrative and directs it against the elites of the right and the left.<sup>80</sup> Babiš portrays right-wing parties as corrupt and criminal, and left-wing parties as corrupt and incompetent. Both hurt the ordinary people: “Do not put obstacles in front of those who are doing well in order to help those in need. Our politicians do not know a single thing. The right and the left are just labels.”<sup>81</sup> Babiš offers a way forward, devoid of any details, epitomized by his favorite song that evokes the normalization nostalgia of the 1980s in a landlocked country:

“I want to be your lighthouse when you lose direction,  
be a dream whenever you sleep, your sun and a hideout.”<sup>82</sup>

Babiš's populist rhetoric of redemption has updated and transformed the anti-dissident rhetoric of the twentieth century for the twenty-first century, campaigning on an anti-establishment platform that has decimated the left and fragmented the right. Despite the fact that the incumbent social democrats, with support from ANO as a junior partner, fulfilled every single electoral promise and had by all counts a stellar performance, ANO dominated the 2017 election. Babiš did not run exclusively on technocratic performance, which would have required giving credit to the 2014–2017 coalition government, led by PM Sobotka, but rather ran on a technocratic *populist* platform, mixing performance with an anti-establishment appeal.<sup>83</sup>

A prominent investigative journalist, Jaroslav Kmenta, recently published a best-selling book, *Boss Babiš*, which has significantly undermined Babiš's credibility.<sup>84</sup> Kmenta tore apart a well-cultivated image of Babiš as a hardworking, self-made billionaire and offered a compelling counter-narrative of a smooth political operator-turned populist politician. The book provides a detailed account of the dark origin of Babiš's wealth, his deep links to President Miloš Zeman, and most importantly, his symbiotic, even parasitic, relationship with the state.

Babiš, the former representative of a chemical company, used the lawlessness of the 1990s to take over his former company. At the same time, he made secret campaign donations to the social democrats, during Zeman's reign, using Caribbean tax havens. As a reward, his political benefactors provided state guarantees for his loans, state subsidies, and turned the Czech state into the most important client of Babiš's company. Without the state and the EU subsidies, Andrej Babiš would have been just another entrepreneur selling fertilizers and fuel additives. Instead, thanks to the state, he is one of the richest men in Europe, presiding over a business empire worth US\$4 billion.

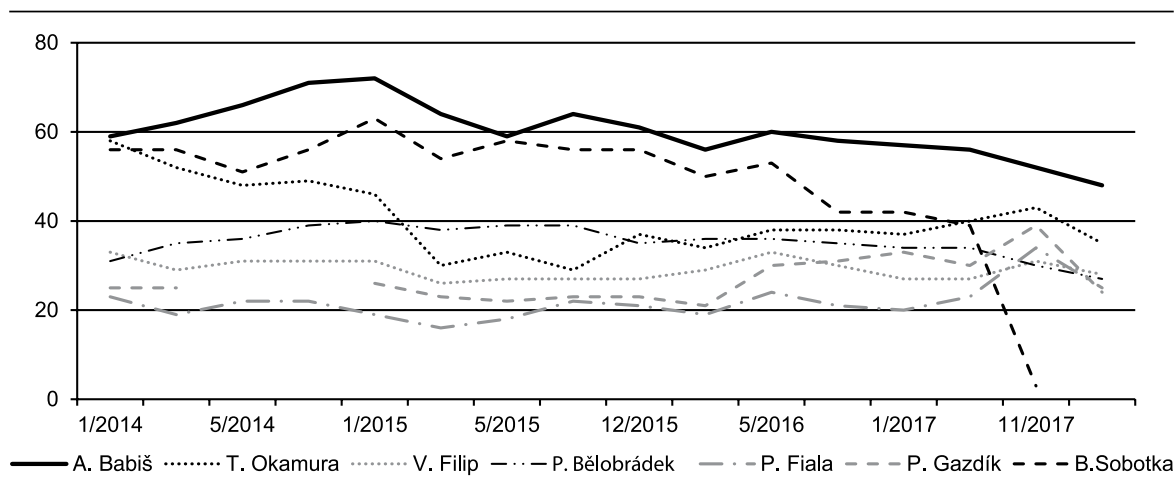
Kmenta also discuss Babiš's long-term ties with police and the secret service, mafia, and corrupt politicians on the left (former PM Stanislav Gross) and on the right (former minister of interior Ivan Langer). When Babiš called most politicians on the right and on the left corrupt, his diagnosis was spot on, since he was actively involved and would know firsthand. As a politician, he offered this experience to help instill transparency and root out the very corruption that he had helped to create.

Yet, none of these damning facts, from the shadowy origin of his money, evidence of his predatory business practices, even an indictment on embezzlement charges related to the use of state and European Union funds, has diminished his appeal. His supporters see him as a successful businessman—an outsider with a mission to “drain the swamp.” Because Babiš never plays the moral card, he has been largely insulated from charges of hypocrisy.

Corruption destroys the legitimacy of representative democracy, since it destroys the credibility of parties. While populist appeals benefit from dissatisfaction with political corruption, corrupt leaders can and have remained in power and “untainted” by campaigning on an “anti-elite” platform. Corrupt leaders under investigation can cast themselves as part of the “ordinary people,” prosecuted and mocked by the elites. The communist leadership perfected this art, and it is the same strategy that brought Andrej Babiš to the forefront of the 2017 Czech parliamentary elections.



**Figure 5**  
**Popularity of Party Leaders (2014–2017)**



Source: STEM, Popularita politických osobností, <https://www.stem.cz/popularita-politicky-ch-osobnosti-v-dubnu-2017/>; <https://www.stem.cz/popularita-predsedu-parlamentnich-stran-v-unoru-2018/>.

By persuading voters that political deliberation is a waste of time, Babiš has effectively reduced politics to a technocratic exercise on behalf of the people, devoid of any ethical considerations. This has enabled him to delegitimize the “Stork’s nest affair,” which threatened to derail his political rise, as a witch-hunt.<sup>85</sup> He describes himself as “an ordinary businessman, a political outsider,” and refers to his wife, brother-in-law, and two adult children, who are all under investigation for fraud, as victims of his political success.

The preliminary report by the European Anti Fraud Office (OLAF) that investigated EU subsidy fraud was leaked before the parliamentary elections in October 2017. The finding was in line with the earlier findings of the Czech police—Andrej Babiš defrauded EU subsidies and the Czech state. His family remains under investigation, and Babiš himself has been stripped of parliamentary immunity twice. These scandals might have ended most political careers, but Babiš received 48,645 preferential votes, the highest number obtained by any of the candidates in 2017 elections. He continues to be the most popular politician. Even if his popularity has declined a bit since he entered politics, he maintains a commanding lead (Figure 5).<sup>86</sup>

Hannah Arendt explains the paradox of totalitarian propaganda, which leads people to “believe everything and nothing; think that everything was possible and that nothing was true.”<sup>87</sup> For Arendt, such conditions lead to cynicism, and when citizens are faced with proof of a leader’s lie “they would protest that they had known all along that the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness.” With two daily newspapers, two radio stations, and one TV channel, Babiš has demonstrated that Arendt’s paradox applies even outside totalitarian regimes. In 2017, the ANO voters believed that Andrej Babiš is “so rich he does not need to steal.” When

confronted with the evidence of his fraud in the OLAF report, they praised his tactical cleverness in defrauding the state since “everybody would, if they could.”

An apolitical, apathetic citizenry was key to maintaining the status quo during the communist “normalization era” when nobody believed the regime ideology anymore, and it is equally important in the post-authoritarian era of technocratic populism. Martin Škabraha and Stanislav Komárek<sup>88</sup> use the term “neo-normalization,” to describe everyday life in the twenty-first-century Czech Republic, which is plagued by nostalgia for music and TV shows from the normalization era of the 1970s and 1980s. In politics, neo-normalization is an effort to demobilize civic activism and subjugate public life to technocratic bureaucratization. It emphasizes the everyday and “normal life,” demonizes the opposition, uses anti-intellectualism, and promotes the use of technocratic expertise.<sup>89</sup> Idealism is inimical to neo-normalization. Technocratic populism feeds on cynicism among ordinary people and diminishes the optimism inherent in civic engagement

Babiš evokes normalization nostalgia on Twitter and elsewhere when he appeals to the ordinary people by reminiscing about owning a second-hand Wartburg (East-German car), and about constructing his apartment during communism. He also relates to ordinary people by documenting his struggle with weight gain. At the same time, he emphasizes the success of his company, which he presents as the result of his own hard work. Analyzing Babiš’s statements (Table 3), we find an abundance of technocratic language, which is most evident in his emphasis on “numbers,” especially on his signature project EET (electronic registration of sales), and on improvements in tax collection.<sup>90</sup>

The defining feature of Andrej Babiš’s communication is the combination of technocratic language, focused on economic policy, with the language of ordinary people. This is most evident in his comments on lowering the price of beer. The technocrat tweets: “Decreasing the VAT on barreled bier is support for the entrepreneurs—pub owners. Lowering the VAT on beer would only support breweries.”<sup>91</sup> The populist tweets: “And of course we thought of all those who like to go out for a beer.”<sup>92</sup> This tweeting embodies technocratic populism—the expert in efficiency delivers on behalf of the people—and shows Andrej Babiš using his “normal” experience of living under communism to cultivate a relatable and egalitarian public persona. “My living standard under communism [was] an apartment in Petržalka [a large bloc of

**Table 3**  
**Data Sources for the Discursive Analysis of Babiš’s Statements**

Source	Time Frame	No. of Documents
Andrej Babiš’s Twitter feeds	14 January 2013 to 14 March 2018	1,518
Andrej Babiš’s blog posts	14 September 2012 to 20 July 2017	89
Secret recordings of the Šuman group	Released: 15 September 2017	6
Book by Andrej Babiš <sup>a</sup>	Published in the summer of 2017	1

a. A. Babiš, *O čem sním, když náhodou spím. Vize 2035 pro Českou republiku, pro naše děti* [What I dream about when I happen to sleep. Vision for the Czech Republic, for our children], 2017; self-published in print and as a pdf online.

pre-fabricated apartments on the outskirts of Bratislava, Slovakia], and a used Wartburg for fifteen years—[which] I bought second-hand.”<sup>93</sup>

In all his statements, the language of numbers and spreadsheets plays a key role. He emphasizes the exact amount of tax revenues that he has collected. He also reports the cost of his apartment during communism and the number of kilograms that he had recently gained and lost. The technocratic language is presented in an informal fashion, creating an illusion of competence, authenticity and proximity to the ordinary people. It also conveniently obscures the fact that Babiš used state and EU subsidies to build his company, and utilized his position as the minister of finance to weaken his business opponents.<sup>94</sup> His fortune increased from 1 billion CZK (US\$49 million) in 2010 to 88 billion CZK (US\$4.27 billion) in 2017.<sup>95</sup>

The issues of the past and transitional justice are marginal in his tweets. They comprise approximately 1 percent of the analyzed corpus (Table 3). As a second-generation technocratic populist, he does not mock the sacrifice of the dissidents, but politely tweeted about the deceased President Havel: “I respected President Havel. We met only twice, but I go back to it and remember it. Even today.”<sup>96</sup> The reason is that dissident activists no longer endanger the careers of their former tormentors—primary evidence for this being that Babiš, a former agent, was allowed to serve as a minister of finance despite lacking the required “lustration certificate.”

For Babiš, the sacrifices of the dissidents belong to the history books—their moral high ground has no place in today’s politics. In January 2018, he attacked a young journalist, Emma Smetana, who questioned him aggressively over his past statements about President Zeman. To push back, Babiš claimed that Smetana’s mother conveniently “turned her coat” in 1989 from being a conformist communist youth to a dissident figure. A day later, he apologized for the personal attack, but he also signaled that the moral stock of dissidents, or their descendants, has no value in his world; and if invoked, he will aggressively fight against it.

The corruption of the established political parties dominates Babiš’s statements. He is extremely critical of the era when “the lights were switched off” in the transition period. To counteract widespread corruption, Babiš seeks to turn “the lights on” and shine it brightly on the sins of Klaus and his successors: “I’m watching the [presidential] ceremony at the [Prague] Castle; they did not invite me. I know a lot of people from the Zeman/Klaus gang, whom we thank for the state of our country.<sup>97</sup> . . . The greatest evil [is] Professor Klaus, who introduced mafia capitalism and other disasters. Why don’t they go hide in the gutters, and stop talking to the people?”<sup>98</sup>

In the world of technocratic populism, the distinction between the left and right is not only outdated, but also associated with collusion of the elites against the ordinary people: “The division on the left and the right has long been invalid, during the era of traditional, atrophied parties, any ideology has long since vanished. It’s the same people who have been looting the country for twenty years.”<sup>99</sup> Babiš offers to “drain the political swamp”<sup>100</sup> by replacing the old political elite with efficient technocrats and to fulfill his vision of the “state as a firm.”

The ideology of technocratic populism is an answer—one that is evidently popular—to the mass disillusionment with two decades of liberal democracy.<sup>101</sup> In Babiř’s vision, the Czech Republic will be an efficient firm. The citizens—shareholders who in regular meetings (i.e., elections) appoint the most qualified expert as the CEO (i.e., the prime minister). Yet it is not a competition of the most apt experts, since the opposition, including active citizenry, is no longer viewed as a legitimate political adversary, but as the enemy of ordinary people. This is precisely the frame invoked in communist propaganda, which elevated the “masses” and delegitimized regime critics as enemies of the people. Ultimately, the goal of the communist social engineers was not to serve the people but to suppress civic protests, avoid accountability, and remain in power. The only difference between the social engineers of the past and today is the form of suppression of civic protest - the propaganda remains, but police today does not use force against the protesters.

## Conclusion

Populism serves three main purposes. First, it mobilizes broad political support based on a catchall appeal that cuts across the left and right policy dimensions. Second, since “ordinary people” are contrasted with “moralizing elitists,” the ethical and deliberative dimension of politics is delegitimized and reduced to short-term calculations. Third, it diverts strength from nativism and nationalistic parties, because the category of the “ordinary people” has more fluid boundaries and a broader electoral appeal than a more narrowly defined people as an ethnic category.

The past is a historical reservoir for populist politicians to use strategically as a veneer of authenticity, and when expedient to delegitimize political opponents as the enemies of the people. In a nascent democracy, the ideology of technocratic populism can be successfully evoked. Drawing on detailed evidence from the Czech Republic, the article shows how, why, and when it was used. Both times occurred during critical junctures characterized by the disruption of dominant ideologies: first, when Czech democracy was in its nascent stage, and second, when Czech democracy was weakening.

In the vacuum created immediately after the collapse of communism, Vaclav Klaus adapted technocratic populism to the new democratic setting in order to delegitimize his major political and ideological opponents, the dissidents, and to gauge support for his neo-liberal reform agenda. The second time technocratic populism emerged was in the vacuum created by the implosion of the left–right cleavage in the post-EU accession era. The second rising marked the end of the ideological hegemony of the liberal democratic project, which had been delegitimized by persistent corruption of the major political parties. Andrej Babiř has utilized technocratic populism as both an ideology and a political strategy to emerge as a dominant political force in the Czech Republic.

The analysis shows that post-1989 Czech populism can be traced back even further, at least to the communist nomenclature's anti-elitism, which pitted the "ordinary people" against a small group of Charter 77 dissidents, and emphasized a more technocratic and less moralistic approach to governance. Almost three decades after the fall of communism, there is a new party (ANO) on the Czech political scene that has emerged by successfully drawing on populist, anti-elitist, practices developed during the communist-era.

Technocratic populism commodifies citizens; however, it can collapse if the myth of expert competence is exposed. Technocratic populists often seek to insulate themselves from accountability by manipulating the electoral system. Klaus's 1998 effort to lock in a collusive two-party system with majoritarian features failed in 2001. Babiš's book outlines his political agenda: elimination of the Senate and a plan to decrease the number of the seats in the Lower Chamber, which would strengthen the party that wins elections. This proposal would diminish political pluralism and undermine the system of checks and balances. Babiš's call for a more "efficient" political system masks his desire to concentrate executive power as well as his fear of losing elections, which would force him and his family, already charged with financial crimes, to face the prosecutors and courts.

Technocratic populists worship numbers and redeem the polity through balance sheets. As a legacy of communism, technocratic populism has been invoked repeatedly in the ideological vacuum of the post-1989 era. As a thin ideology, technocratic populism is compatible with different ideologies and regimes, including democracy. As Nancy Bermeo notes: "forms of democratic backsliding . . . legitimated through the very institutions that democracy promoters have prioritized, mostly threaten democracies today."<sup>102</sup> Threats of democratic deaths are rare,<sup>103</sup> but technocratic populism enables democratic decay, since it releases citizens from their obligations to actively participate in the polity and to expect moral conduct from their leaders.<sup>104</sup> It rests on a social contract between the leaders and citizens that bypasses intermediary institutions of accountability, such as parties and civic associations, and reduces the complexity of representation to balance sheets.

Technocratic populism is an understudied form of populism. It offers the ideology of the economic efficiency and technocratic solutions, regardless of the traditional political left and right. We define it as an ideology that uses the pretext of technocratic expertise to rule in the name of the people. As an art perfected by the communist nomenklatura, it aims to demobilize civic engagement,<sup>105</sup> to discourage expectations of ethical merits from public representatives and to refashion the polity following a technocratic vision. Similarly, in a democracy, technocratic populism is not rule by efficient technocrats, but a strategy to delegitimize traditional political parties and civil society.<sup>106</sup> Civic apathy, nurtured by a populist technocratic approach to politics, loosens the constraints on elected officials and creates an opportunity for politicians to concentrate power. Technocratic populism is a sophisticated threat to liberal democracy in many places around the world and therefore merits further attention and comparative analysis.

## Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities World Convention, The Harriman Institute, Columbia University, 2018; the Multiculturalism in Europe Workshop at the University of Texas at Austin, 2018, and at the 24th International Conference of Europeanists in 2017 (Glasgow, UK). We are thankful to Krzysztof Jasiewicz for comments as well as to the participants of the panel: Left, Right, or Wrong? The (Ir)Relevance of the Left–Right Continuum in Analysis of Party Politics in Europe Today. We thank Milada Anna Vachudova and Sean Hanley for inspiring discussions about ANO and we thank Grzegorz Ekiert for very helpful comments on a much earlier version of this article. We also thank the anonymous reviewer, Michael Kraus, Raymond Taras, Amy Liu, Colette Mazzucelli, John Ishiyama, Ana Bracic, Johanna Birnir, William Mishler, Rahsaan Maxwell, Claire Adida, Roman Hlatky, Alena Miltová, Zdenka Mansfeldová, and David Siroky for comments. The project has received funding from the Project “Changes in the Perception of the Role of Government after the Crisis. The Czech Republic in Comparative Perspective” (no. 16-04885S [2016 e 2018]) supported by the Czech Science Foundation. Research was also funded by Davis Center, Harvard University, as part of one of the author’s thesis on the rise and fall of moral capital of Charta 77 dissidents, and by the Melikian Center, Arizona State University. We are very grateful to Simona Patkova and Chirasree Mukherjee for excellent research assistance.

## Notes

1. Source: Neovlivni.cz, 29 June 2017, <http://neovlivni.cz/kleslova-byla-rozvedce-skupina-suman-zverejnila-dalsi-babisovu-nahravku/>.

2. A PM designate, coalition agreement with social democrats and silent support by the unreformed Communist Party.

3. Source: *The Financial Times*, 16 February 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/83908fd2-d4a5-11e5-829b-8564e7528e54>.

4. ANO motto was: “Nejsme jako politici. Makáme.”

5. CVVM, 2018, <https://www.info.cz/cesko/volici-ocenuji-kompetenci-a-chteji-zaruku-kontinuity-oboji-ztelesnuje-babis-rika-sociolog-29354.html>.

6. H. Kitschelt, Z. Mansfeldová, R. Markowski, and G. Toka, *Post-communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

7. Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics)

8. These particular technocratic populists are political figures who were, at some point, on the economic left and/or who benefited from the subsidies of left-wing governments. We thank the reviewer for this comment.

9. C. Mudde, “Europe’s Populist Surge: A Long Time in the Making,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2016): 25.

10. J. Kopstein and M. Bernhard, “Post-Communist, the Civilizing Process, and the Mixed Impact of Leninist Violence,” *East European Politics and Societies & Cultures* 29 (2015): 379–90.

11. Ibid.; J. Kopstein, “Postcommunist Democracy: Legacies and Outcomes,” *Comparative Politics* 35 (2003): 231–50; J. Ishiyama, “Historical Legacies and the Size of the Red-Brown Vote in Post-communist Politics,” *Communist and Post-communist Studies* 42 (2009): 485–504; D. Ost, “Down with 1989! The Peculiar Right-Wing Backlash against 1968 in Poland,” in *1968 in 2018: Memory in Development*, ed. Donatella Della Porta (Milan: Fetrinelli, forthcoming, 2018).

12. G. Pop-Eleches and J. Tucker, *Communism’s Shadow: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Political Attitudes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

13. K. Darden and A. Grzymala-Busse, “The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communism Collapse,” *World Politics* 59 (2006): 83–115.

14. J. Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church, Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
15. Kitschelt et al., *Post-communist Party Systems*.
16. C. Bickerton and C. I. Accetti, "Populism and Technocracy: Opposites or Complements?" *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20 (2015): 186–206.
17. D. Caramani, "Will vs. Reason": The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government," *American Political Science Review* 111 (2017): 54–67, 54. Also: Bickerton and Accetti, "Populism and Technocracy."
18. A. Akkerman, C. Mudde, and A. Zaslove. "How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters," *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (2014): 1324–53.
19. Bickerton and Accetti, "Populism and Technocracy."
20. F. Marangoni and L. Verzichelli, "From a Technocratic Solution to a Fragile Grand Coalition: The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Parliamentary Government in Italy," *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 21 (2015): 35–53.
21. C. Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39 (2004): 541–63.
22. The populist message obscures the fact that Andrej Babiš is anything but ordinary. His communist experience could not have been more extraordinary: as a son of a prominent Slovak communist, Andrej Babiš studied and traveled in Western Europe, while the borders were tightly shut.
23. B. Stanley, "The Thin Ideology of Populism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13 (2008): 95–110.
24. The redemption can be the purity of the nation, the victory of the underdog, or freeing the people from the "establishment." M. Canovan, "'People,' Politicians and Populism," *Government and Opposition* 19 (1984): 312–27; M. Canovan, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy," *Political Studies* 47 (1999): 2–16; Stanley, "The Thin Ideology of Populism"; B. Ardit, "Populism as a Spectre of Democracy: A Response to Canovan," *Political Studies* 52 (2004): 135–43.
25. B. Spruyt, G. Keppens, and F. Van Droogenbroeck, "Who Supports Populism and What Attracts People to It?" *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (2016): 335–46, 336.
26. M. Salmela and Ch. von Scheve, "Emotional Roots of Right-Wing Political Populism," *Social Science Information* 56 (2017): 567–95.
27. *Ibid.*, 585.
28. Canovan, "'People,' Politicians and Populism"; M. Canovan, "Trust the People!"
29. For the roots of some of these populist ideas in European thinkers such as Rousseau, see D. Siroky and H. J. Sigwart, "Principle and Prudence: Rousseau on Private Property and Inequality," *Polity* 46 (2014): 381–406.
30. Nationalist populism portrayed Roma as "welfare parasites," Muslims as a "security threat" and those advocating on behalf of minorities as elitist traitors. On Roma, see P. Barša, *Politická teorie multikulturalismu* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 1999).
31. It was nevertheless deployed in Zeman's 2012–2013 presidential campaign to denounce his liberal opponent.
32. Ideational theories of populism highlight the importance of ideas activated by populist leaders that become salient when existing policy processes fail. K. Hawkins, M. Read and T. Pauwels, "Populism and Its Causes," in *Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. C. R. Kaltwasser, P. A. Taggart, P. O. Espejo, and P. Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
33. Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist"; Hawkins et al., "Populism and Its Causes."
34. K. Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics," *Comparative Politics* 34 (2001): 1–22.
35. Initially signed by 243 people in 1976/77, Charter 77 "generated a vibrant response in a country still deep in a slough of despondency resulting from the invasion in August 1968." G. Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe, Part III: Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989). An important source of funding for Charter 77 came from abroad from "The Charta 77 Foundation." Source: J. Uhdeová, ed., *Nadace Charty 1977* [Charter 77 Foundation] (Brno: Atlantis, 1998), 57.

36. V. Klaus, *Rok druhý: Václav Klaus 2004: projevy, články, eseje* (Prague: Knižní klub, 2005).

37. The Czech dissident movement, Charter 77, a short petition of 1,764 words, highlighted the discrepancies between the internationally declared legal commitments of the communist Czechoslovak state to protect civil and political rights, and the reality—political persecution of its own citizens.

38. A. Ágh, ed., *The Emergence of East Central European Parliaments: The First Steps* (Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democracy Studies, 1994); L. Brokl and Z. Mansfeldová, “Czech and Slovak Political and Parliamentary Elites,” in *Postcommunist Elites and Democracy in Eastern Europe*, ed. J. Highley, J. Pakulski, and W. Wesolowski (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); G. Ekiert, *The State against Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); G. Ekiert and J. Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); G. Skilling, *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981); Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society*.

39. L. Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

40. T. S. Pappas. “How to Tell Nativists from Populists,” *Journal of Democracy* 29 (2018): 148–52. Also: J. Rydgren. “Radical Right-wing Parties in Europe: What’s Populism Got to Do With It?” *Journal of Language and Politics* 16 (2017): 485–96.

41. For liberal scholars, populism is a threat and a democratic pathology: a backlash against modernization, representative politics, and democratic pluralism. G. Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism, and National Populism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1978); P. Oxhorn, “The Social Foundations of Latin America’s Recurrent Populism: Problems of Popular Sector Class Formation and Collective Action,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 11 (1998): 212–46; P. Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 62–80. For scholars of radical democracy, populism is an integral part of democracy. E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005); C. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000); C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge Psychology Press, 2005). Scholars of the minimalist approach see populism as an ambivalent “thin ideology”: Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”; B. Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism.” Instrumentalists view populism it as a political strategy: K. Weyland, “Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31 (1996): 3–31; Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept.”

42. “An individual member of the nation is spoken of not simply as a Czech but more often as *malý český člověk*, ‘the little Czech man.’ . . . The Czech nation survived three hundred years of oppression not because of its heroes but because of the little Czechs who were the nation. . . . The little Czech, the representative of the everyday and the ordinary, is the role model, and what is important about him as a role model is that he lacks individuation.” Source: Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, 62.

43. The ordinary Czech also possesses “common sense” (*selský rozum*). This historical peasant origin of Czech people excludes ethnic groups, such as the landed (Germans) and merchant (Jews) classes, from the ordinary people. The emphasis on shared customs and traditions further excludes Czech Gypsies. Ordinary (Czech) people cannot be those who left the country, were forced to emigrate, or engage in uncommon, extraordinary and even heroic activities. See: A. Nedomová and T. Kostecký, “The Czech National Identity: Basic Results of the 1995 National Survey,” *Czech Sociological Review* 5 (1997): 79–92. Cf K. Vlachová and B. Řeháková, “Identity of Non-self-evident Nation: Czech National Identity after the Break-up of Czechoslovakia and before Accession to the European Union,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15 (2009): 254–79; and K. Vlachová, “Significant Others and the Importance of Ancestry for Czech National Identity,” *National Identities*, online (2017): 1–16.

44. Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, 164.

45. *Ibid.*, 167.

46. The distinction between the moral and the corrupt, between the “life in truth” and “life in a lie,” is famously depicted in Havel’s essay *Power of the Powerless*, in which he describes the moral atrophy of the ordinary man during communism. For Havel, the complicity with the regime was a symptom of the moral decay, and the book asks ordinary people to seek a higher moral ground. V. Havel, *Power of the*



*Powerless* (1978). The ideological roots of the political appeal to “live in truth” can be traced back to president Masaryk. Masaryk revived the historical traditions of Jan Hus and Jan Komenský.

47. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

48. J. Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 226. Living in truth also resonates with the idealized legacy of the interwar era and with the first Czechoslovak president, T. G. Masaryk. Havel revived Masaryk’s legacy—it was Masaryk who argued for high ethical standards in everyday life as a prerequisite for a functioning democratic state. T. G. Masaryk, *Česká otázka—Naše nynější krize—Jan Hus* (ÚTGM, Praha 2000; Česká otázka 8. Vyd., Naše nynější krize 7. Vyd., Jan Hus 9. Vyd.).

49. P. Tigríd, *Vývoj Charty* (Koln: Index, 1981); J. Kubik, “Between the State and Networks of ‘Cousins’: The Role of Society and Civil Associations in the Democratization of Poland,” in *Civil Society before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. N. Bermeo and P. Nord (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); K. Jechová, *Lidé Charty 77* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2003); H. Klímová, “Kdo ta práva naplní?,” in *Charta 77 Očima Současníků. Po dvaceti letech*, ed. B. Císařovská, M. Drápala, V. Prečan, and J. Vančura (Brno: Doplněk, 1997), 83; L. Šilhánová, “Nad Chartou 77,” in Císařovská et al., *Charta 77 Očima Současníků*, 161; J. Vančura. “Poslední léta Charty,” in Císařovská et al., *Charta 77 Očima Současníků*. Also see the special issue of the *East European Politics and Societies*, “The Power of the Powerless at Forty” (2018).

50. J. Železný, “Mediální kampaň Proti Chartě 77 jako vrcholný příklad komplexní komunistické propagandy období tzv. Normalizace” (Prague: Fakulta sociálních věd. Univerzita Karlova, 2011).

51. See the propaganda TV documentary from the 1970s in which the secret police aired segments of secretly taped interview with writer Jan Procházka. Source: Svědectví od Seiny – STB propaganda #2 (secret police propaganda), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l66vC4\\_tM2o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l66vC4_tM2o). The same propaganda documentary also attacked Václav Černý for his foreign ties with émigré Pavel Tigríd and implied monetary benefits accrued by having contacts in the West. Černý would later become one of the founding fathers of Charter 77. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnqGwaGKstQ&t=13s>.

52. Železný, “Mediální kampaň Proti Chartě 77.”

53. The Federal Assembly (FS) was composed of two chambers: Chamber of People (FS-SL) and a Chamber of Nations (FS-SN). The Czech National Council (CNR) was a separate legislature. Brokl and Mansfeldová, “Czech and Slovak Political and Parliamentary Elites”; Z. Mansfeldová, “Privatisierungsstrategie, institutionelle Konfliktregelung und Symbolisierung im tschechischen ökonomischen Diskurs,” in *Öffentliche Konfliktdiskurse um Restitution von Gerechtigkeit, politische Verantwortung und nationale Identität*, ed. G. Kiss and K. Mánické-Gyöngyösi (Frankfurt nad Mohanem: Peter Lang, 1996), 241–57.

54. An “old elite” is defined as an MP in the last Communist Parliament (during 1986–1990) and a “new elite” as a new MP who did not serve in the previous Communist Parliament. In the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly, the overall degree of reproduction was between 4 and 6 percent; in the Czech National Council (CNR), it was about 3 percent.

55. Dissidents are defined here as Charter 77 signatories (n = 1,886) because they represent the most vocal opposition in communist Czechoslovakia.

56. On a conspiracy theory that Charter 77 was completely penetrated by secret police, see M. Kraus, “Did the Charter 77 Movement Bring an End to Communism?” *New England Review* 28 (2007): 134–46, 143.

57. J. Vančura, “Poslední léta Charty,” in Císařovská et al., *Charta 77 Očima Současníků*. Also: [https://www.lidovky.cz/spustili-to-zidi-zednari-a-estebaci-d6j-/noviny.aspx?c=A091114\\_000091\\_in\\_noviny\\_sko&klic=234218&mes=091114\\_0](https://www.lidovky.cz/spustili-to-zidi-zednari-a-estebaci-d6j-/noviny.aspx?c=A091114_000091_in_noviny_sko&klic=234218&mes=091114_0).

58. Dolejší was a political prisoner in the 1950s. His article argued that many Charter 77 members were secret police confidants. Had Charter 77 not been a tool of the secret police, he argued, it would have been crushed and could not have survived for thirteen years. He further asserted that Charter 77 was directed, financed, and promoted by the Soviet, American, and Israeli secret services, together with Freemasons and international Zionists. As an activist for the Confederation of Political Prisoners, Dolejší’s story had prima facie credibility. Charter 77 did not take legal action against him out of a respect for his imprisonment under communism. Císařovská et al., *Charta 77 Očima Současníků*.

59. J. Šiklová, “What Did We Lose after 1989?,” *Social Research* 63 (1996): 531–42.

60. Although the vast majority of the dissidents ran on the Civic Movement list, there were a few exceptions. Some dissidents survived by joining mainstream parties (Social Democrats on the left, Christian Democrats in the center-right, and even Klaus’s Civic Democrats on the right).

61. The dissidents made two strategic mistakes that led to their demise. First, their universalistic humanist platform that advocated for moral reconciliation and minority rights generated populist pushback on behalf of “ordinary Czechs.” The politicization of these demands decreased the value of their moral capital. Second, they focused their efforts on the Federal Assembly rather than on the Czech National Council (CNR). During the 1992 Velvet Divorce, PM Klaus determined that the new 1996 Parliament of the independent Czech Republic would not incorporate the deputies from the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly and that the Czech National Council would serve its full term in the new state. This proved an effective strategy to consolidate his power and to conveniently eliminate remaining dissidents entrenched in the Federal institutions that were no longer relevant. The first Czech parliamentary elections took place in June 1996.

62. CVVM, *Popularita politiků*, 2003.

63. P. Kopecký and M. Spirova, “Jobs for the Boys? Patterns of Party Patronage in Post-communist Europe,” *West European Politics* 34 (2011): 897–921; K. Basta and L. Buštková, “Concession and Secession: Constitutional Bargaining Failure in Post-communist Czechoslovakia,” *Swiss Political Science Review* 22 (2016): 470–90; P. Guasti, “Development of Citizen Participation in Central and Eastern Europe after the EU Enlargement and Economic Crises,” *Communist and Post-communist Studies* 49 (2016): 219–31.

64. Source: Klaus, <https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/3259>. In a similar vein, according to President Zeman, civic organizations are [merely] “leeches on the state budget.” Source: *Echo 24*. *Neziskovky jsou pijavice státu, myslí si Zeman*, 6 June 2016, <https://echo24.cz/a/wFDxx/neziskovky-jsou-pijavice-statu-mysli-si-zeman>.

65. *A-political* governments rely on a managerial rule that is more effective than “politicking” and, as temporary solutions to political gridlocks, have limited legitimacy. Purely technocratic governments promise temporary expert efficiency without the populist appeal.

66. S. Hanley, “Legitimacy and the Paradox of Technocratic Government in Newer European Democracies: The Fischer Administration in the Czech Republic Revisited,” *East European Politics and Societies: & Cultures* 32 (2018): 78–100, 84.

67. *Ibid.*, 92.

68. Prince Schwarzenberg is an aristocrat with assets in the Czech Republic, Germany, and Austria. Schwarzenberg actively supported Czech dissent both financially and by establishing an archive of Charter 77 and samizdat literature in his family residence in Bavaria in the 1980s and financially supporting the families of imprisoned dissidents.

69. Prince Schwarzenberg benefited from the 1990–1991 restitutions in which his vast family property, including several castles, was returned. The smear campaign argued that because of Schwarzenberg’s foreign business interests and international family ties, he would not have been able to be a true public servant. The placement of an ad denouncing Schwarzenberg and published on the eve of election was later fined CZK850,000 (US\$40,000) by the Court for the breach of the campaign rules. More on Schwarzenberg’s campaign here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/25/world/europe/czech-prince-schwarzenberg-runs-a-punk-campaign.html>.

70. Zeman’s campaign invoked the historical struggle of the little Czech man during Habsburg rule and by highlighting the “tainted,” foreign origins of the Schwarzenberg family’s fortune.

71. J. Kmenta, *Boss Babiš* (Nymburk: JKM–Jaroslav Kmenta, 2017).

72. On deconsolidation, see T. Houghton and K. Deegan-Krause, “Hurricane Season Systems of Instability in Central and East European Party Politics,” *East European Politics and Societies* 29 (2015): 61–80.

73. In his post-presidential public life, Klaus’s populism has shifted significantly toward the radical right. He gave speeches at the rallies of the “Alternative for Germany” party in 2016 and 2017.

74. As president, Václav Klaus became the main defender of “national sovereignty” and the staunchest opponent of the Lisbon Treaty and the process of European integration.

75. ANO, in addition to meaning “yes,” stands for Asociace nespokojených občanů (Association of Dissatisfied Citizens).

76. Source: *Foreign Policy*, 10 April 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/10/now-the-czechs-have-anoligarchproblem-too-andrej-babis/>. Also: Čapí hnízdo investigation by the European anti-fraud office: <http://forum24.cz/lide-z-olafu-navstivili-capi-hnizdo-vyslychali-osoby-spojene-s-podezrelou-dotaci/>.

77. His first attempt however failed. Nevertheless, President Zeman tasked him with negotiating support for a governing coalition for the second time.

78. “We are distributing doughnuts since the morning in the Dejvická metro station. The most pissed off people come around seven o’clock” (A. Babiš, Twitter, 4 October 2013). “The artfully perfect doughnut is an unforgettable symbol of our movement [ANO]. It reminds me of the very first meeting with the citizens of 2013, great memories” (A. Babiš, Twitter, 11 July 2017).

79. P. Guasti, Z. Mansfeldová, M. Myant, and F. Bönker, *Sustainable Governance Indicators 2016: Czech Republic Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016).

80. Babiš also attacks other anti-establishment parties, such as “Public Affairs” party that preceded ANO. He depicted the short-lived “Public Affairs” of the entrepreneur Vít Bárta as the embodiment of the opportunistic political swamp: “Our nation was deceived 100 times, from voucher [coupon privatization], credit unions, junk, usury to ‘Public Affairs.’ I believe that this time we will bring change” (A. Babiš, Twitter, 16 October 2013).

81. A. Babiš, Twitter, 25 March 2013.

82. Original: “Že chci být tvým majákem, když směr ztratíš, být snem vždy když spíš, tvé slunce i skryš.” Source: <https://www.victorie.cz/babisova-nejoblíbenější-kapela-oslavila-25-narozeniny-scene/>

83. Babiš forced the social democrat Sobotka out of politics.

84. J. Kmenta, *Boss Babiš*.

85. The Stork’s Nest Affair is a criminal case concerning the Andrej Babiš, his family, and close political associate Jaroslav Faltýnek related to an 2008 EU subsidy awarded to a daughter company of Agrofert—a recreational facility Stork’s Nest. The case blew up in 2016, as Babiš’s political rise increased media and watchdog scrutiny of his economic activities. Babiš, then minister of finance, was forced to reveal the people behind the bearer instrument (anonymní akcie). In a special session of the Chamber of Deputies, and to concede a significant breach of EU and Czech law. Subsequently, both Babiš and Faltýnek were stripped of their parliamentary immunity in 2017, and again in January 2018 (new parliamentary immunity after the 2017 elections). The European anticorruption office OLAF established a breach of EU rules and the Czech law and referred the case to the Czech police as a subsidy fraud.

86. Because of the fraud charges against him, and Babiš’s past as a willing secret police collaborator, forming a government has proven difficult. After he failed to secure the first vote of investiture on 16 January, President Zeman granted him a second opportunity to further negotiate. This can be considered a reward for Babiš’s prior endorsement of Zeman’s presidential re-election bid in January 2018. Importantly, Zeman holds the key to the impunity of Babiš and his family, because presidential amnesty can pardon convicted crimes. Zeman is even at liberty to terminate ongoing investigations of the Stork’s Nest fraud. Zeman’s preferred option is a minority coalition government between ANO and the Social Democrats, with silent support from the Communists.

87. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, vol. 244 (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973).

88. Komárek, 2006, <https://vesmir.cz/cz/casopis/archiv-casopisu/2006/cislo-9/neonormalizace.html>

89. M. Škabraha, “(Neo)normalizace,” in *Kritika depolitizovaného rozumu: Úvahy (nejen) o nové normalizaci*, ed. V. Bělohorský a kol (Praha: Grimmus, 2010), 131–46.

90. While he was the minister of finance, source: <https://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-politika/312855/babis-obhajuje-registracni-pokladny-ja-vam-to-spocitam-vybereme-miliardy.html>

91. A. Babiš, Twitter, 29 January 2016.

92. Ibid., 29 January 2016.

93. Ibid., 2 August 2013.

94. Source: 27 August 2017; iDNES.cz, Naši klekli na FAU, říká Babiš na nahrávce o firmě, která skončila v konkurzu, [https://zpravy.idnes.cz/babis-nahravka-fau-prerov-agrofert-dtg-/domaci.aspx?c=A170827\\_172114\\_domaci\\_fka](https://zpravy.idnes.cz/babis-nahravka-fau-prerov-agrofert-dtg-/domaci.aspx?c=A170827_172114_domaci_fka).

95. Source: <https://www.denik.cz/ekonomika/babis-v-zavesu-za-kellnerem-vysel-zebricek-nejbohat-sich-cechu-20171005.html>; [https://ekonomika.idnes.cz/na-zebricku-bohacu-casopisu-forbes-jsou-krome-kellnera-i-bakala-a-babis-lev-/ekonomika.aspx?c=A100310\\_211725\\_ekonomika\\_abr](https://ekonomika.idnes.cz/na-zebricku-bohacu-casopisu-forbes-jsou-krome-kellnera-i-bakala-a-babis-lev-/ekonomika.aspx?c=A100310_211725_ekonomika_abr). Data according to *Forbes Magazine* 2010 and 2017. We thank Michael Kraus for drawing our attention to this matter.

96. A. Babiš, Twitter, 18 December 2017.

97. Ibid., 28 October 2013.

98. Ibid., 26 August 2013.

99. A. Babiš, *O čem sním, když náhodou spím*, 9.

100. Babiš does not use the term “drain the swamp,” but he is familiar with the US context of the term. On 13 March 2018, he re-tweeted Donald Trump: “When Mike Pompeo and I met just a few years ago, we were both new in the politics. We came from the business world, wanting to bring more common sense and resolve to fix things in our countries.” In his tweets and in his book, Babiš gives specific references to various corruption scandals and corrupt politicians and he considers political parties to be deeply unaccountable to citizens: “when [ANO] came out second in the 2013 elections, I suddenly realized that voters are extremely frustrated with traditional political parties who ‘privatized’ politics for themselves and for their ‘friends.’” A. Babiš, *O čem sním, když náhodou spím*, p. 9 (translated by the authors).

101. On weakness of the democratic consolidation in the Czech Republic, see M. Kraus, “The Czech Republic’s First Decade,” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (2003): 50–64; S. Hanley and M. A. Vachudova, “A Side Door to Backsliding in Postcommunist Europe? Concentrating Power and Subduing Democracy in the Czech Republic,” *East European Politics* (2018), forthcoming; M. A. Vachudova, “From Competition to Polarization in Central Europe: How Populists Erode Democracy and Change the EU” (paper presented at the conference “Global Populisms: A Threat to Democracy?” Stanford University, October 2017).

102. N. Bermeo, “On Democratic Backsliding,” *Journal of Democracy* 27 (2016): 5–19, 6. Also S. Levitsky and D. Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, Penguin Random House, 2018); N. Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); L. Buščíková and P. Guasti, “The Illiberal Turn or Swerve in Central Europe?,” *Politics and Governance* 5 (2017): 166–76.

103. S. Levitsky and D. Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

104. Definitions of populism vary according to the author’s views of democratic politics. C. R. Kaltwasser, “The Ambivalence of Populism: Threat and Corrective for Democracy,” *Democratization* 19 (2012): 184–208.

105. On moral capital, see A. Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

106. On political consequences of organized civil society, see M. A. Vachudova, “Centre-Right Parties and Political Outcomes in East Central Europe,” *Party Politics* 14 (2008): 387–405.

**Lenka Buščíková** grew up in Prague and holds a PhD in political science from Duke University and MA degrees from Charles University, Central European University, and Harvard University. She is an assistant professor in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on party politics, voting behaviour, clientelism, and state capacity, with special reference to Eastern Europe, and appears in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*, *Swiss Political Science Review*, and *World Politics*. She is the recipient of the 2015 Best Article Prize, awarded by the American Political Science Association’s European Politics and Society Section, for her article “Revenge of the Radical Right,” and also the recipient of the 2017 Best Paper Prize, awarded by the American Political Science

Association's Comparative Democratization Section, for her article co-authored with Cristina Corduneanu-Huci "Patronage, Trust and State Capacity: The Historical Trajectories of Clientelism."

**Petra Guasti** is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Institute of Political Science, Goethe University Frankfurt (Democratic Innovations Unit) and Democracy Visiting Fellow at the Ash Centre for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School. She holds a PhD in political sociology from Charles University, a PhD in political science from the University of Bremen, and an MA in politics and society from Lancaster University and Center for Social Studies Warsaw. She previously held research and teaching positions at the University of Bremen, University of Wurzburg, and University of Mainz, visiting research positions at the University of Belfast, Arizona State University, and long-term research affiliation at the Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences. Her research focus is on democracy, human rights, civil society, and new social movements, with particular focus on Central and Eastern Europe. Her research appears among others in *Democratization*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, and *European Political Science*.