

Assessment of Master Thesis – Opponent



Study programme: **International Economic Relations**

Field of study: **International and Diplomatic Studies**

Academic year: **2015/2016**

Master Thesis Topic: **US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN: the role of polling in primary elections**

Author's name: **Alessandro Da Rold**

Ac. Consultant's Name: **prof. PhDr. Vladimíra Dvořáková, CSc.**

Opponent: **Ing. Mgr. Jan Němec, Ph.D.**

	Criterion	Mark (1–4)
1.	Overall objective achievement	2
2.	Logical structure	1
3.	Using of literature, citations	2
4.	Adequacy of methods used	2
5.	Depth of analysis	1
6.	Self-reliance of author	1
7.	Formal requirements: text, graphs, tables	2
8.	Language and stylistics	1

Comments and Questions:

The MT submitted by Alessandro Da Rold deals with extremely interesting and important topic. The influence of opinion polls on pre/electoral campaigns cannot be neglected; moreover, especially when used in primary elections as a "viability test" of candidates by sponsors, they can dramatically affect the outcome of whole electoral process.

A problem which makes the topic even more relevant is a high rate of fallacy of predictions based of electoral preferences polls vis-à-vis the course of primary elections and the result of final electoral race. Thus, the starting point of this MT is very promising. The hypothesis of the author is that "early-polls are little predictive when forecasting elections because, on average, they do not take into consideration the little decisiveness of respondents" (p. 12).

The author took an advantage of his semester study stay in the U.S. (North Carolina State University) where he got involved in a poll focusing on a wide range of opinions of the NCSU students (the data are annexed). Also thank to this experience, the introductory description of functioning of American politics is very insightful.

Nevertheless, I have several objections regarding the research design:

First of all, and the author mentions it also several times, opinion polls are not predictions; they just provide information about the preferences in given time. Thus, it is not "fair" to blame them for little capacity to predict. Fallacy of prediction is matter of predictive models built upon opinion polls, not of polls themselves. Different issue is the influence polls have on the reality – they not only reflect it, they also shape it – but this is not what the author discusses.

Secondly, the "three level schema" of analysis contradicts the main conclusions of the author: the three indicators (voter turnout, level of attention about political news and level of decisiveness) are all connected with the respondents, the input data. However, the author criticizes the way how output data are handled and interpreted; he does not analyse the methodology of the criticized polls in adequate profoundness.

Regarding the formal part of the MT, the text shows little willingness to follow citation standards: in the text, the author combines two styles of referencing (in footnotes and within text); when using direct quotations he rarely provides the exact page number from the cited source, and the final bibliography also has several shortcomings (journals listed in a section of books, wrong and changing style of referencing etc.). The figures has usually double titles which looks distracting.

Despite the all above mentioned criticism (which is, however, expected from an opponent) I recommend the thesis for a defence without hesitation and, under condition of an outstanding and convincing argumentation of the author, I suggest evaluation "excellent".

As additional questions for the defence I offer the following:

1. In Figure 5 (p. 47) we can observe two-years cycles of lower and higher voter turnout. What is the cause of such variation?
2. On p. 49, the author argues that low voter turnout is a clear indicator that Americans care little about politics in general. Is it really that clear? Aren't there other options for being involved in politics than elections?

Conclusion: The Master Thesis is recommended for the defence.

Suggested Grade: **1**

Date: 05/26/2016

Ing. Mgr. Jan Němec, Ph.D.
Opponent