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České republiky**

## **Příloha B**

Teze disertace  
k získání vědeckého titulu "doktor věd"  
ve skupině: vědy sociální a humanitní

Political Knowledge in the Czech Republic

Komise pro obhajoby doktorských disertací v oboru:  
sociologie

Jméno uchazeče: Patrick Martin (Pat) Lyons

Pracoviště uchazeče: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i.

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## 1. Basic Ideas

Individual knowledge has social foundations and is unevenly distributed. These two key insights from the sociology of knowledge are clearly evident in the general sociological theories of Comte, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Pareto, Veblen, Mead, Sorokin, Znaniecki, Merton and Wright-Mills. Berger and Luckmann's (1966) influential argument that knowledge and reality are the product of daily social interaction implies that much of human knowledge is subjective in nature. Currently, political knowledge is measured using objective facts alone. Consequently, the social and individual (pre)conscious nature of knowledge is largely ignored leading to a partial view of citizen competence in contemporary democracies.

### *Sociology of knowledge*

At the risk of over-simplification, there are two broad approaches evident in the sociology of knowledge. In Europe, the focus has traditionally been on how knowledge is produced. In contrast, within the United States (US) the emphasis has been on how knowledge is consumed. In the US, and elsewhere, the use of mass survey research has transformed the study of knowledge into analyses of facts, attitudes, beliefs and values as defined by researchers. Such analyses are grounded in the sociology of knowledge tradition to the extent that group differences are explored in terms of things like class and social status.

Turning now to political sociology, the operationalisation of political knowledge has evolved from examining, in the 1950s, evidence of ideological thinking to the use, from the 1970s onwards, of short factual tests. The main assumption of such work is that democratic systems of governance are grounded in (1) a common, or social, knowledge of political actors and institutions where; (2) the level of political knowledge is unevenly distributed in society. By focussing on factual or objective knowledge, political sociology currently sets to one side the social foundations of political knowledge.

This book (dissertation) aims to redress this imbalance by showing that survey data may be used to explore the social construction of political knowledge. The subjective and interpersonal facets of political knowledge presented in this monograph reveal that citizens' knowledge of politics is broader than the ability to recall facts. More generally, the expectation that all forms of knowledge are strongly linked with intergroup differences, a defining theme of the sociology of knowledge, is a recurring theme within the dissertation.

### *Democracy and knowledge*

Alfred Schutz (1946), an influential phenomenologist and sociology of knowledge theorist, argued that democracy would work best with "well-informed citizens" who are open-minded, curious, and have a good general knowledge. Conversely, democracy was undermined by elevating the influence of (a)

experts whose deep knowledge is too specialised to be useful in solving public policy problems, and (b) “men on the street” whose views expressed in opinion polls are not grounded in knowledge. Later empirical work by Tetlock (2005, 2015) underscored this point by demonstrating the superior predictive abilities of well-informed citizens who have a good general knowledge and who are motivated to learn about things beyond their daily lives and work.

Although political sociology has not been strongly influenced by ideas from the sociology of knowledge, the view that citizen knowledge is important is shared by both streams of scholarship. Most theories of democracy agree that citizens have a duty to be informed about public affairs. For this reason, there is the assumption that citizens are interested in, and possess, factual knowledge about government. The social reality is different.

Achen and Bartels (2016: 1) conclude on the basis of decades of empirical research that “the great majority of citizens pay little attention to politics.” This realist view of democratic politics is not new. In some of the earliest sociological studies of voting the disjunction between democratic theory and political reality was highlighted (e.g. the Columbia studies: Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee 1954: 308).

The history of survey-based political knowledge measurement stretches back eight decades; and reveals that there have frequently been rival definitions of political knowledge. Currently, one of the most influential theories assumes that citizens’

abilities to answer factual questions correctly during survey interviews is a reasonable way of measuring knowledge. This fact-based approach was first used in the US in the late 1930s when national pollsters and government agencies wanted to estimate citizens' familiarity with levels of unemployment and public debt. This quiz-based tradition in knowledge measurement made a strong re-appearance in academic survey research from the 1970s.

Results from survey research over the last half century shows three key patterns: (1) most citizens have little knowledge; (2) a small minority (<5%) have high levels of information yielding a great deal of variation in political knowledge within electorates; and (3) there are large and persistent differences in knowledge across subgroups despite a general increase in level of education among all citizens (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Converse 2000; Althaus 1996, 2003). Individuals who have more schooling, are male, middle class, a member of an ethnic majority, older, and who are interested in public affairs often know most about politics.

This fact-based view of political knowledge has important implications. It suggests that most citizens in contemporary democracies are incompetent; and are unable to fulfil their democratic duty of making informed choices during elections. Consequently, the informational foundations for having a democratic system of governance based on frequent, free, and fair elections, are absent.

This book (dissertation) argues that a fact-based view of citizen knowledge and competence is a

limited one. Human knowledge encompasses more than the ability to successfully recall facts during survey interviews.

*A broader understanding of knowledge*

Within this dissertation the term ‘political knowledge’ encapsulates terms such as ‘sophistication’, ‘awareness’ or ‘expertise’, ‘civic knowledge’, ‘informed or reasoned choice’, ‘attitude constraint’, ‘level of conceptualisation’, or ‘ideological reasoning’. This strategy is adopted in order to avoid using a proliferation of related terms. However, it is important to note that in the many publications on political knowledge these terms often have specific meanings, which relate to how the concepts have been operationalised using survey data (Neuman 1986: 191–193; Luskin 1987).

This monograph is innovative in considering four conceptualisations of political knowledge: objective, subjective, implicit, and interpersonal. These conceptualisations are not viewed as rival forms of political knowledge, but as different facets that are not necessarily strongly correlated with one another. A key reason for this ‘facet perspective’ is that evaluating citizens solely in terms of ability to recall facts in a survey interview is a limited and potentially misleading way of evaluating citizen competence.

*Objective political knowledge* refers to the ability to correctly recall facts during a survey interview. This is currently the most influential conception of political knowledge in political sociology. This form of

knowledge is termed 'objective' because it is experts who decide what is correct.

*Subjective political knowledge* is information shared by people, and refers to a form of collective wisdom. This form of knowledge is 'subjective' as it is defined in terms of what a plurality or majority of citizens (and not experts) think is factually correct.

*Implicit political knowledge* refers to a set of skills that are pre-conscious in nature which allow a person to make choices quickly on the basis of limited factual information and situations of uncertainty. For example, judging an unknown election candidate's competence solely on the basis of their facial appearance.

*Interpersonal knowledge* is the reputation that a person has for being informed. It is measured in survey interviews using an interviewer's evaluation of the respondent immediately after an interview has been completed.

Subjective knowledge can be the same as objective knowledge when citizens and experts agree on what facts are correct. The statistical theory behind the 'wisdom of crowds' effect, and the mathematical underpinnings of Condorcet's Jury Theorem, show that in certain situations subjective knowledge may be superior to objective (expert-defined) knowledge.

Implicit knowledge is distinct from objective knowledge in that it is not based on conscious

thinking or cognitive understanding. This form of knowledge is important because many daily choices are made automatically in a pre-conscious manner (see Lodge and Taber 2013).

Subjective and interpersonal political knowledge are similar in that both are social in nature. However, interpersonal knowledge is unique because it involves influencing others (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Therefore, there is a strong but imperfect association between objective and interpersonal political knowledge. This is because those who have a reputation for being knowledgeable often know lots of political facts.

## **2. Methods, Structure and Content**

The methodology used in this book (dissertation) is based on data gathered using mass surveying, where the resulting data have been analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This book is structured to reflect three main themes: the origins, nature, and impact of political knowledge in the Czech Republic between 1967 and 2014. The content of this book is divided into four sections that start from (1) outlining a theoretical framework for thinking about political knowledge, to (2) considering how political knowledge is measured, and thereafter (3) why some people are more informed than others, to (4) what are the consequences of having low and high levels of knowledge. Summaries of the main findings of the dissertation are outlined in the following subsections.



### *Section 1: Theory*

In the theory section of this book (dissertation), the concept of political knowledge is placed within the larger framework of three philosophical theories of truth, i.e. pragmatism, correspondence, and coherence. Often discussions of political knowledge begin with the assumption that knowledge is like money: more is always better. Chapter 1 argues that different approaches to political knowledge are grounded in contrasting assumptions about the philosophical nature of truth and knowledge. Currently, the correspondence theory of truth (based on observed facts) is the dominant way in which political knowledge is measured. However, evidence from an expert survey of philosophers presented in Chapter 13 reveals that most philosophers do not support a purely factual conception of knowledge.

Within this dissertation the term *objective knowledge* is used to refer to the scores from survey-based quizzes. With objective political knowledge there is the important question of how to statistically model quiz data typically coded as correct, incorrect or don't know / no answer. Often a person's level of political knowledge is based on how many questions they got correct in a quiz; where it is assumed all questions are of equal difficulty, which is rarely the case.

Chapter 2 highlights the advantages of using Item Response Theory (IRT) to model the correct answers to survey-based quiz questions. Specifically, IRT facilitates comparison of knowledge scores across different surveys using different quiz

questions. IRT is a standard approach used in educational testing.

Later chapters that compare and contrast objective, subject, implicit and interpersonal facets of political knowledge extend the theoretical scope of the book. Chapters 7 and 10 reveal that implicit knowledge has different origins to the other three facets of political knowledge. Lodge and Taber (2013) highlight that political decision-making is most often based on pre-conscious processes that may be similar to the implicit knowledge approach presented in this dissertation. In future work, a more comprehensive theory of political knowledge should include pre-conscious foundations.

### *Section 2: Data and measurement*

Chapter 3 provides an overview of patterns and trends in objective political knowledge between 1967 and 2014 in the Czech Republic. Post-election survey data from all lower chamber (general) elections between 2002 and 2013 indicate that the general level of political knowledge has been constant despite a general increase in education levels after 1990. Specific surveys with some knowledge questions fielded in 1967, 1986 and 1992 provide insight into who was an informed citizen at key points in contemporary Czech history, and why it mattered. For example, knowledgeable Czech citizens understood in 1992 that the dissolution of the Czechoslovak federal state was likely if the Civic Democrats (ODS) won the federal election.

How objective (factual) political knowledge questions are answered by survey respondents is explored in Chapter 4 in terms of survey response styles. This chapter argued that analysing the correct answers to survey quiz questions must deal with the propensity of some respondents to guess the answers rather than say 'don't know'. Using a unique Cold War-era survey (Images of the World in the Year 2000, fielded on both sides of the Iron Curtain between 1967 and 1970), this chapter reveals that national cultural differences are also an important correlate of how respondents answered objective political knowledge questions. For example, national cultures characterised by higher levels of 'power difference' and 'uncertainty avoidance' have higher levels of 'don't know' answers to knowledge questions.

The idea that political knowledge may be generated in a collective manner, rather than defined by experts, leads to the concept of *subjective knowledge*. This concept is presented in Chapter 5. Subjective political knowledge is based on the mathematical theory and statistical methods used in Cultural Consensus Theory, which is inspired by Condorcet's Jury Theorem. A comparison of subjective and objective political knowledge in Chapter 5, using the Motivation-Ability-Opportunity (MAO) explanatory framework, reveals that both types of knowledge have distinct origins. Subjective political knowledge may be more important than objective knowledge because many public policy questions do have definitive factual answers. In such

situations, consensus-based subjective knowledge may be the most 'democratic' way to make a choice.

In Chapter 6, two additional types of political knowledge are introduced. As noted above, *implicit knowledge* is a skill used by citizens in their daily life, but is not something that can be easily measured. This is because it is based on a pre-conscious process that cannot be measured directly. In contrast, *interpersonal knowledge* refers to having a reputation for being informed and need not always be strongly associated with actual level of factual knowledge. Implicit knowledge is measured using competence ratings of candidate ballot photos where the 'correct' answer was the candidate who got the most votes in an earlier Irish general election. A key point here is that the Czech respondents could only use the facial ballot photos to make a choice.

A comparison of the determinants of objective, implicit, and interpersonal knowledge using the MAO explanatory framework shows that each of the knowledge types have different foundations. In other words, not all forms of political knowledge are the same. In sum, it is reasonable to think that political knowledge is composed of distinct facets.

### *Section 3: Determinants*

A central question addressed in this book (dissertation) is which Czechs are most informed about politics and why? Chapter 7 reveals how the MAO explanatory framework is used to explain individual differences in objective political knowledge. An extensive use of post-election

surveys with a broad range of questions reveals that motivation is the most important general factor for individual differences in factual knowledge. Using level of education as a proxy for cognitive ability, or intelligence, is problematic. This is because education effects tend to reduce the explanatory power of other explanatory variables. This is because level of education may also reflect a person's social background.

There is good reason to think that objective political knowledge is a continuum that ranges from being *misinformed* with some knowledge that is incorrect; to being *uninformed* with no knowledge at all; to being *informed*. Chapter 8 shows, using the MAO explanatory framework, that the profiles of the uninformed and misinformed are largely the same. Moreover, the profile of those Czechs who give 'don't know' answers to political quiz questions indicates they are uninformed; and not partially informed and unwilling to guess the answer. Consequently, classifying the answers to factual knowledge questions as correct versus all other answers seems appropriate when estimating political knowledge scale scores using Item Response Theory (IRT).

One reason why some Czechs know more facts about politics than others may be due to the personality traits of the person. Chapter 9 shows, using the Big Five personality trait framework, that openness to experience, conscientiousness, and emotional stability all have positive associations with higher levels of objective knowledge. However, only conscientiousness and emotional stability

(neuroticism) remain statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) predictors of objective knowledge even when additional MAO explanatory framework variables are considered.

Chapter 10 brings together themes developed earlier in Chapters 6 through 9 by exploring the impact of personality traits on three facets of political knowledge (objective, implicit, and interpersonal) while controlling for MAO factors and styles of thinking. The fact that a person is motivated, has strong cognitive skills and has access to political news does not mean they will be informed. This is because their minds may be closed to new facts that are inconsistent with their prior beliefs due to motivated reasoning for example (Lodge and Taber 2013). The three facets of political knowledge have different personality trait foundations. Objective knowledge is associated with three of the Big Five personality traits, while implicit and interpersonal knowledge are associated with single traits. As individuals have more than one personality trait, it makes sense to think that (1) different traits may interact with each other, and (2) traits may interact with other non-trait factors to promote higher levels of factual knowledge. This is indeed the case. For example, conscientious and agreeable people are better able to recall political facts during survey interviews.

#### *Section 4: Consequences*

One important reason for having a high level of factual political knowledge is being able to vote for a

party that best represents one's interests. Chapter 11 shows that in the Czech Republic there is a positive relationship between correct voting and higher levels of political knowledge. However, the impact of objective political knowledge on voting correctly is critically influenced by the (initial) decision to turn out to vote. Level of factual knowledge is shown in Chapter 11 to have no statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) impact on correct voting when turnout is included in the explanatory model estimated.

This book (dissertation) shows that among Czech voters the direct impact of objective knowledge on correct voting, taking turnout into account, only has statistically significant effects in polarised elections. When the electoral context is more complicated, with the advent of new parties for example, then objective knowledge is not strongly associated with correct voting. In short, the link between objective (factual) political knowledge and correct voting depends on taking account of both the initial decision to go to the polls and the electoral context.

Another important motivation for having political knowledge is the ability to predict future events, or foresee the consequences of particular political choices. The Images of the World in the Year 2000 survey, fielded in Czechoslovakia in June 1967, is a unique source for studying citizen's long-term predictive ability. Chapter 12 shows that greater forecasting ability for scientific advances was linked at the individual level with being open-minded and

critical of national policy, but was not associated with greater objective knowledge.

In contrast, individual's ability to predict increased *anomie* (i.e. social isolation and a decline in collective values) in the year 2000 was associated with greater objective knowledge plus other factors such as a higher level of education and interest in politics. National context is also important, as the positive association between objective knowledge and predicting greater anomie was only evident in the Czech and West German samples.

One democratic ideal is that all citizens should have high levels of objective knowledge similar to experts. Using expert surveys, Chapter 13 investigates if Czech economists and political scientists share a consensus on (a) policy matters and (b) the left-right position of parties respectively. The expectation here is that experts should show more consensus in their views because of a shared professional knowledge than less informed citizens. This is not the case. Czech economists do not show a strong consensus in support of a free market view of public policy. Czech political scientists' estimates of parties' relative left-right positions do not exhibit higher levels of consensus than all others. This finding suggests that higher levels of objective knowledge among Czech voters would not lead to greater agreement about public policy goals.

### **3. Conclusions**

This book (dissertation) contributes to the study of political knowledge in the following ways.



1. This is the first systematic (and long-term study) of citizens' knowledge of politics in the Czech Republic and the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
2. This dissertation places the survey-based examination of political knowledge in the Czech Republic within broader discussions of knowledge and truth in philosophy (and implicitly within the sociology of knowledge literature) and debates in political sociology where the concept of knowledge has been conceptualised and measured in a number of ways.
3. This monograph shows that institutional factors are not strongly associated with level of objective knowledge, as few differences were observed across the Cold War divide (Chapter 5). However, national culture is linked with how respondents from different countries answer objective (factual) knowledge questions in surveys (Chapter 4).
4. This book is unique in exploring four facets of political knowledge and showing how these facets differ in origin and nature (Chapters 5, 6 and 9).
5. Finally, this monograph reveals that different aspects of knowledge have contrasting foundations within individuals, as revealed through their personality traits (Chapter 9).

One key implication of the results from this dissertation is that the view that high levels of

objective knowledge can only produce benefits is not correct. A society full of citizens with high levels of factual political knowledge could be just as problematic as current societies that are populated by so-called 'know-nothings' (Hyman and Sheatsley 1947; Bennett 1988, 1996). Finally, it is important to highlight that almost everything about political knowledge is paradoxical, as the following five points discussed in this book (dissertation) demonstrate.

- Political knowledge may be objective and factually grounded on experts' consensus conclusion. Alternatively, citizen knowledge may be subjective and based on what the general population currently perceive to be true.
- Political knowledge may be the result of conscious deliberation or it may emerge from implicit skills such as evaluating others on the basis of little information.
- Political knowledge may make decisions better through objective deliberation or may make them worse because of motivated or biased reasoning.
- Political knowledge can be based on private research and deductive thinking or may be a product of society coming from second-hand testimony.
- Political knowledge may be useful for knowing why voting is not rational or for voting correctly having irrationally decided to vote.

The pattern of a mean low level of objective knowledge combined with a high level of variation across individuals is not unique to politics. Other research reveals that citizen knowledge of facts from science, history, economics, health, safety, and personal finance show the same pattern. In different words, citizens are not deliberately deciding to learn little about politics; they lack factual knowledge on many important topics.

Russell Hardin's (2009) key point in this respect is that for everyday life most factual knowledge from areas such as consumer products, investments, history, politics, and science is not especially useful (Chamorro-Premuzic et al. 2006; Burnett and McCubbins 2010). Consequently, most citizens are 'rational' in not having much factual political knowledge. Perhaps the real puzzle then is that citizens know anything at all about politics other than what they learn by accident.

However, if the concept of political knowledge is expanded to cover pre-conscious mental processes, non-cognitive skills, and social relationships, then the view of what constitutes a 'competent citizen' changes from the ideal put forward in normative democratic theory. It is hoped that this dissertation facilitates future research into an expanded repertoire of citizen knowledge of politics and other domains of collective concern.

## Summary

This book consists of 15 chapters and explores political knowledge in the Czech Republic between 1967 and 2014. This is the first study of what Czechs know about politics, and why it matters. This book is divided into four sections.

**Section 1** examines theories of knowledge and truth. The most influential theory equates knowledge with the ability to answer factual questions correctly in a survey interview. This is called *objective knowledge* in this study.

**Section 2** presents three additional theories of political knowledge. *Subjective knowledge* is defined as what people, rather than experts, decide is factually correct. *Implicit knowledge* is based on decision-making skills. Finally, *interpersonal knowledge* refers to having a reputation for being knowledgeable.

**Section 3** shows that political knowledge is not a single thing, but is composed of facets. This section also reveals that there is an association between political knowledge and personality traits.

**Section 4** looks at the links between political knowledge, voting and prediction. Knowledge matters more for participation than the party supported in an election. The ability to predict correctly in 1967 social development in the year 2000 is linked with objective knowledge. However, this association does not exist for predicting scientific advances.

This book argues that evaluating citizen competence only in terms of factual knowledge is

limited. Moreover, factual political knowledge has a 'dark side' where more knowledge leads to biased thinking, polarisation and increased social conflict. Here are some of the key findings of this book.

- There are many forms of political knowledge.
- Citizens make decisions using different forms of political knowledge.
- Czechs' knowledge of politics has remained constant over time.
- How people answer knowledge questions in surveys matters.
- Political knowledge is associated with personality traits.
- Factual knowledge is linked with forecasting social change, but is not always linked with making correct voting.
- Experts with high levels of knowledge do not agree on what is a correct answer.

## **Shrnutí**

Tato kniha sestává z 15 kapitol a odhaluje znalosti politiky v České republice mezi lety 1967 a 2014. Jde o první studii věnující se znalostem Čechů o politice a proč je to důležité. Kniha je rozdělena do čtyř oddílů.

**Část 1.** studuje teorie o znalosti a pravdě. Nejvlivnější teorie srovnává znalosti se schopnostmi správně odpovědět na faktografické otázky při průzkumech. V této studii pro to používáme termín *objektivní znalost* (objective knowledge).

**Část 2.** předkládá tři doplňkové teorie o znalostech politiky. *Subjektivní znalost* (subjective knowledge) je definována jako ta, kdy se lidé rozhodují o tom, co je fakticky správně, ne odborníci. *Implicitní znalost* (implicit knowledge) je založena na rozhodovacích dovednostech. A konečně, mezilidská znalost (interpersonal knowledge) odkazuje na pověst znalého člověka.

**Část 3.** poukazuje na to, že znalost politiky není jedna jediná záležitost, ale že je tvořena mnoha aspekty. Tato část také ukazuje, že existuje spojení mezi znalostí politiky a povahovými vlastnostmi.

**Část 4.** zkoumá spojení mezi znalostmi politiky, volením a předpovědí. Znalosti jsou důležitější ve vztahu k volební účasti než k tomu, jakou stranu daná osoba podporuje. Schopnost předpovědět správně v roce 1967 společenské změny, ke kterým dojde do roku 2000, je svázána s objektivními znalostmi. Nicméně, toto spojení neexistuje pro předpověď vědeckého vývoje.

Tato kniha tvrdí, že hodnotit schopnosti zodpovědného rozhodování občanů pouze na základě znalostí je limitováno. Kromě toho mají znalosti politiky své „temné stránky“, kdy více znalostí vede k předpojatému myšlení, polarizaci a zvýšenému společenskému konfliktu. Zde je uvedeno několik klíčových objevů obsažených v této publikaci:

- Existuje mnoho forem znalostí o politice.
- Občané se rozhodují na základě různých forem znalostí o politice.

- Znalosti o politice Čechů se v průběhu času nemění.
- Způsob, jakým lidé odpovídají na znalostní otázky v průzkumech, hraje roli.
- Znalosti o politice jsou provázány s povahovými vlastnostmi.
- Věcné znalosti souvisejí s předpovídáním společenských změn, ale nejsou vždy spojeny s tzv. správným hlasováním ve volbách (correct voting).
- Odborníci s vysokou úrovní znalostí se neshodnou na tom, co je správná odpověď.

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Note, a complete listing of all literature used is available in the published book (dissertation).

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