

MUNI  
FSS

# **Anti-populism as a communication style**

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# Outline

1. What is anti-populism
2. The empirical case of Czechia
3. Discussion - implications

# What is anti-populism

# Populist/anti-populist divide

- “populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004)
- Populism as „(democratic) illiberalism“ (Pappas 2014)
- Antipopulism - strategic stances presented in opposition to populism (Moffit, 2018)
- Creating its own and the enemy`s identities

# Populist/anti-populist divide

- the *ideational* (Stavrakakis et al. 2017) and *performative dimensions* (Ostiguy 2017) of (anti)-populism

**IDEATIONAL:** discursive construction of ideas and political identities

**PERFORMATIVE:** stylistic and behavioral characteristics

- the context of discursive opportunities (Koopmans, Olzak 2004)

# Populist/anti-populist divide

- **Socio-cultural approach:** going beyond but related to populism as an ideology and organization
- *high* and *low* in politics: orthogonal to the left-right axis
- Acting and being in politics – performative element (accent, language, body language, ways of dressing)
- Important part of creating identities („being one of us“)
- Linked to style, but also connected to the country`s history, group identities
- Social-cultural and political-cultural elements

News > World > Europe

# Czech Republic's 'answer to Donald Trump' Andrej Babis election

The businessma story could be c

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# Politics and the 2021



The Populist Vs Anti-Populist Divide in the Time of Pandemic. The 2021 Czech National Election and its Consequences for European Politics. JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies.



# Data and method

- Qualitative content analysis
- Data: FB profiles of leaders of anti-populist parties (year before the election) + mainstream media presentation + official documents of the parties
- The meaning of *populism* and *populist political actors* AND *construction of anti-populist identities* in ideational and performative dimensions



# The ideational dimension of anti-populism

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(and extremism) a

- „democratic politician
- Suppression of „prima

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- Czechia as ‘an insign
- ‘democracy, prosperity, security, and stability



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# The ideational dimension of anti-populism

## Populist polarization vs anti-populist unification

- the populists 'widen the abysses in our country' and 'pit people against each other'

## Lying amoral populism vs truthful and moral anti-populism - populists' alleged absence of morality and democrats' strong principles

- 'lies and empty promises' vs decency/'top independent experts'

# The performative dimension of anti-populism

## Incivil populism vs civil anti-populism

- low vs high politics
  - 'bringing normal decency back into politics'

**Populist political theatre vs effective politics of anti-populists** - empty, simple solutions aiming to arouse emotions, anti-populists supposedly crafted their policies through rational and reasonable decision-making

# Implications

- Discursive emergence of populist/anti-populist divide replacing old (ideological) political identities
- anti-populist reaction as a the highly polarising ‘confrontation by design’ – increased polarization (populist as „agents of Russia“, „Sins of populism“)
- Highly moralizing discourse + suppression of policy positions – unrealistic (?) expectations and possible disappointment (electoral mobilization)
- Durability of the antipopulist „glue“ + the context of the lack of mainstream opposition
- Reinforcing of pro-Western orientation + weakening of the Visegrad Four (HUN)

# Conclusions

- A major change in the logic of party system competition
- Emergence of populist – anti/populist divide
- Polarization of politics
- The Czech Republic as a case of „full“ anti-populism going beyond a mere negative campaigning
- Usefulness of distinguishing between ideational and performative dimensions of anti-populism