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## *Welfare State Agenda of Successful Populist Parties in Czechia and Slovakia*

### *Abstract*

Several studies suggest that the welfare state agenda, which has traditionally been a crucial issue for left-wing populist parties (LWP), has become important for all kinds of populist parties: centrist-populist (CP) as well as right-wing populist (RWP). In this paper, we examine the role of the welfare state agenda in the election programmes of the Czech and Slovak populist parties that either won the elections in 2017 in the Czech Republic and 2020 in Slovakia (this was the case for CP parties in both countries) or they won representation in Parliament in these elections (this was the case of RWP

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parties). The findings show that the welfare state agendas of CP and RWP parties regarding the pattern of welfare state objectives and deservingness criteria applied in their policy proposals do not differ so much in some respects. At the same time, the policy proposals of CP in the two countries diverge to some extent. Specific country political contexts such as the political opportunity structure and the manoeuvring of the populist parties may provide some explanation. Comparison with the other countries is a challenge for future research.

**Keywords:** Slovakia, Czechia, welfare state, right-wing populism, centrist populism

## *Introduction*

Several studies suggest that the welfare state agenda, which has traditionally been a crucial issue for left-wing populist (LWP) parties is now becoming important for centrist-populist (CP) parties and right-wing populist (RWP) parties as well (Engler, 2020; Enggist & Pinggera, 2020; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016, 2018; Heinisch & Saxonberg, 2021; Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018; Spruyt et al., 2016). Populist parties are increasing their emphasis on welfare issues either because supporters of populist parties tend to be either the losers of modernisation and globalisation, who demand compensation, or they are members of the middle class, who are exposed to the new social risks and, therefore, are interested in the effective performance of the welfare state (Engler, 2020; Heinisch & Saxonberg, 2021; Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2018).

Populist voters lack trust in the ruling political elites (e.g. Mudde, 2007; Spruyt et al., 2016) and believe there is a political crisis because of the failures of the incompetent elites (e.g. Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). A main reason is the perception that the welfare state does not meet the expectations of the voters (e.g. Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016; Swank & Betz, 2002; Schumacher & van Keersbergen, 2016).

This article examines the role of the welfare state agenda of the Czech and Slovak populist parties. It limits itself to those parties that either won the 2017 Czech elections and in 2020 Slovak elections or won representation in parliament. We focus on the salience and on the profile of the welfare state agenda in the election programmes of these parties. Although we cannot discuss here how the welfare state agenda contributed to the election success of these parties, we can show how welfare state agenda has developed in their election programmes. In the Czech Republic, two populist parties entered the Czech parliament: 1) the centrist-populist party ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens)<sup>2</sup>, which received 18.7% votes in the 2014 elections and joined a coalition government; and 2) the right-wing populist party UPD (Dawn of Direct Democracy, later SPD or Direct Democracy Party), which received 6.9% of the votes. After the 2017 elections, ANO became the leading government coalition party with

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<sup>2</sup> We consider here the populist parties in both countries which Rooduijn et al. (2019) label “populist”. They classify ANO as populist but not radical right or left, while studies exist that classify it as centre-populist (e.g., Heinisch and Saxonberg 2017, forthcoming).

29.6% of the votes. Together with the Social Democrats, it formed the government, with tacit support from the Communist party. Meanwhile SPD has continued as an opposition party, but increased its votes to 10.6%.

In Slovakia, in the 2012 elections, the populist movement Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO) gained 8.6% of votes and RWP Slovak National Party (SNS) did not reach the threshold of 5% (4.6%). After the 2016 elections in Slovakia, two populist parties formed a coalition government: the LWP party *Smer-Social Democracy* (winner with 28.8% of the votes) and the RWP Slovak National Party (SNS) (8.6% of the votes). Two other populist parties, the CP movement Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO)<sup>3</sup> and the RWP party We are family (*Sme rodina*) gained 11% and 6.6%, respectively and entered parliament as opposition parties. In the 2020 elections, however, the CP movement Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO) and the RWP party We are family (*Sme rodina*/SR) won 25% and 8.2%, respectively and formed a coalition government with two other small but non-populist parties (SaS and *Za ľuďi*), with both parties gaining 6% of the votes while RWP SNS did not gain any seats in parliament with only 3.2% of the votes<sup>4</sup>. The former leading government party *Smer-Social Democracy* (LWP party) only received 18% of the votes and joined the opposition group in parliament.

Czech and Slovak populist parties serve as good examples for comparison, because of their political gains and because Czechia and Slovakia previously formed the same country, Czechoslovakia, although they have some political and cultural differences. For example, Slovakia has been less industrialised, is more religious (Catholic) and has had a less stable political system than the Czech Republic. This comparison then enables us to make generalisation on the common and distinct features of welfare state agenda of the CP and RWP parties in different post-communist countries. This comparison represents a novel contribution to this under-researched topic. In the Czech and Slovak cases, the RWP parties are not leading government coalitions. However, they give us the possibility of comparing two relatively strong RWP parties that have stable levels of support in their parliaments. In addition, we have the unique case of two CP parties which have led government coalitions.

We base our findings on the qualitative content analysis of the election manifestos of four Czech and Slovak CP and RWP parties from the years of the elections

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<sup>3</sup> OĽaNO is widely considered to be a centre-right populist movement and the leader Igor Matovič, former member of Christian Democrat Party declares himself to be social conservative. Rooduijn et al. (2019) classify OĽaNO as populist but not radical right or left. We consider it a centrist-populist party because it holds moderate or eclectic attitudes on many political issues (e.g., it is moderately pro-EU, it is not xenophobic nor against ethnic minorities), and it refuses to be defined in accordance with traditional ideological left-right dimensions. Thus, from the more general perspective we label OĽaNO a CP party, from a more narrow perspective it can be classified as a CRP party (centre-right populist party).

<sup>4</sup> In Slovakia, there is also a radical right-wing party, *Ludová strana národne socialistická* / People's National Socialist Party which gained 8% of votes in the elections of 2016 and 2020. Rooduijn et al. (2019), however, classify it as a radical right party but not populist.

in 2013 and 2017 in Czechia and in 2016 and 2020 in Slovakia<sup>5</sup>. Election manifestos represent diagnostic frames of social demands through which the voter can identify with the party (e.g., Vasilopoulou, Haikiopoulou & Exadaktylos, 2014).

We structure the article as follows: in the next section we theorise about the links between populism and the welfare state, and how they may affect welfare state objectives and deservingness criteria applied by the CP and RWP parties. Based on this, we develop hypotheses. Then we explain data and method of analysis, and in the fourth section, we present the findings. In the last section, we conclude and discuss the findings.

### *Welfare state stances of Centre-Populism and Right-Wing Populism*

Based on the literature, we have adopted the most commonly accepted criteria for labelling a party populist (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013): populism is a frame in which various societal problems are portrayed as the symptoms of a serious societal crisis, while the populist leader is an advocate for “the people” (people-centrism), who portrays the elites as being corrupt and antagonistic (anti-elitism).

Previous studies have shown a connection between welfare issues and support for populism. Considering the socio-economic profile of the supporters of populist parties, combined with the impact of recent economic downturns and the ongoing welfare state retrenchment, social policy can become an important political card for all types of populist parties. Such parties can gain support by accusing the political elites of being both incompetent and alienated from the interests of “the people”.

The situation in the CEE post-communist countries seems more favourable for populist parties: trust in political elites is low, confidence in traditional parties received a blow because of political scandals, and there is a general antipathy towards centralised and big governments (van Hauwaert & van Kessel, 2018, p. 70). Pop-Eleches (2010) argues that protest voting is crucial for understanding the post-communist electoral dynamics. In the third-generation elections, which occur after at least two different ideological camps governed in the post-communist era, voters face a shortage of untried mainstream alternatives and turn to populist parties which typically come from centre. In particular, political disaffection coupled with a lack of trust in the traditional political parties predicts support for populist parties (Havlík, 2019). Consequently, the anti-political discourse has become a common feature of the CEE party systems (Bušíková, 2019; Brunnerová, 2019; Havlík, 2019). Meanwhile, the welfare state agenda in the CEE countries has become increasingly significant because the voters have high expectations from the welfare state due to the communist egalitarian legacy (e.g. Dallinger, 2010; Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2017), while there is a generally low level of satisfaction of the public with the actual results of social policies (e.g. Roosma et al., 2012).

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<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, Slovak LWP party *Smer*-Social Democracy barely mentions social policy in its quite short 2020 election programme, which forces us to leave it out and focus on the comparison of CP and RWP parties.

### *CP parties*

Pop-Eleches (2010) argues that the CP parties in post-communist countries are non-ideological. Such a stance helps to address a broader spectrum of voters by advocating generous social policies for distinct groups in different policy fields. Meanwhile, the CP supporters mostly come from the middle class (Heinisch & Saxonberg, 2017), who represent the typical client of public social insurance schemes and public services (e.g. Hill, 2003).

More recent studies suggest that the CP parties combine protest and ideological considerations: they attract voters with lower levels of political trust, but ideology also matters. The Central-East European CP parties have heterogeneous electorates: some CP parties may attract mainly voters from one side of the political spectrum, while others attract voters from the left or right more equally. Thus, most voters of the CP parties in the Central-East European countries do indeed seem to be more heterogeneous in attitudes on the economic dimension (Engler, 2020).

In addition, the CP parties manoeuvre when addressing the voters. The CP leaders might take different spaces on the left-right perspective, depending where the window of opportunity lies. Heinisch and Saxonberg (2021) suggest that the CP Czech ANO party attracted centrist voters because there was a gap when no viable social-liberal parties existed in the country where many voters have social-liberal welfare attitudes that combined support for generous social benefits with a distrust of the state and a desire to keep taxes low. This created an opening in the political opportunity structures, which the CP ANO filled by flexibly positioning themselves in the centre to attract educated, middle-class professionals.

In summary, there are two streams of thinking concerning the CP: one stream suggests they are non-ideological or centrist within the left-right division, attracting the protest voters and manoeuvring in their appeals, depending on how they identify the preferences of the median voters (Pop-Eleches, 2010; Heinisch & Saxonberg, 2017; Heinisch & Saxonberg, forthcoming). The other stream sees the CP parties as guided by ideology, however, all addressing the voters close to the centre. Since their ideological profile depends strongly on the contextual (national) political or societal factors (Engler, 2020; Vachudova, 2019), we consider both streams to be supplementary.

### *RWP parties*

Most studies suggest that supporters of RWP parties tend to belong to those portions of the working class that are the losers of modernisation and globalisation processes (Kriesi, 2014; Swank & Betz, 2002; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). The decline in the demand for lower-skilled workers and the increase in economic uncertainties coincide with significant levels of immigration of culturally diverse people that has taken place in recent decades in Europe. Spruyt, Keppens and van Droogenbroek (2016, p. 337) note that support for populism originates from different types of experienced vulnerability. The losers of modernisation and globalisation are those who face difficulties in finding a positive social identity, irrespective of their actual competencies. This is typical for members of the lower and working classes (who face *identity*

*insecurity*): cultural issues are often more important for the RWP supporters than socio-economic ones. Such views lead to support for *welfare chauvinism*, which aims to exclude immigrants and other outsider groups from welfare rights (e.g., Greve 2019).

Some other studies suggest the RWP parties have a powerful incentive to blur their position on the socio-economic dimension in order to satisfy both traditional working class and petty bourgeoisie, who have contradictory preferences on socio-economic issues (e.g., Rovny, 2013). More recent studies conclude the RWP parties support generous welfare policies in a period in which many mainstream parties advocate austerity measures (e.g., Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2018), although this generosity is typically combined with authoritarian attitudes on socio-cultural issues. The core clientele of the RWP became lower-skilled private sector workers, labour market “insiders” who are typically protected by classic social insurance schemes and who may be afraid to extent these rights to the outsider groups like immigrants and other allegedly undeserving groups. This is consistent with the advocacy of a traditional male breadwinner model of society and welfare support for (traditional) family (Schumacher & van Keersbergen, 2016).

### *Welfare state dimensions*

In our study, we assess the agendas of political parties by analysing the welfare state objectives stated in their policy proposals. In conceptualising the potential welfare state *objectives*, we follow Barr and Whyne (1993), and have elaborated on their classification of welfare state objectives regarding other welfare state theories (Baldwin, 1990; Rawls, 1980; Ringen, 1987). We distinguish the following welfare state objectives: 1) poverty alleviation, 2) risk protection, 3) equal opportunities, 4) reducing inequalities, 5) social integration/risk sharing, 6) social integration/social inclusion, 7) economic efficiency, 8) efficiency-incentives, 9) administrative feasibility. We perceive the economic and administrative objectives (7, 8 and 9) as instrumental ones: they underlie effective achievement of the (main) social objectives.

Our second dimension of our analysis is deservingness. There is a key policy choice between universalism (where welfare is a social right provided to all citizens<sup>6</sup>) and selectivism (where welfare is provided to groups who, for some reason, deserve it) (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990). Similarly, Enggist and Pinggera (2020) assume that universalism and particularism/selectivism comprise an important dimension of welfare attitudes among populist voters. When there is universal access to public goods, services and benefits, there are no deservingness criteria because everyone deserves the services and benefits; when access to services and benefits is selective, the distribution of these is based on deservingness criteria. Based on van Oorschot (2006), we employ the following deservingness criteria: 1) reciprocity: assessing people’s level of contribution and whether they have earned support: the higher the contribution, the more deserving; 2) control: assessing people’s control over their neediness and whether they are

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<sup>6</sup> This may include preferential support in access to welfare targeted at the disadvantaged groups.

responsible for it: the less control, the more deserving; 3) need: the greater the need, the more deserving; 4) identity: the closer welfare claimants are to “us”, the more deserving; 5) attitude: assessing people’s attitude towards support: the more compliant/docile welfare claimants are, the more deserving.

There are complex relationships between the deservingness criteria and social policy objectives, e.g., the objective of equal opportunities implies a universal entitlement with no applicable deservingness criteria. Risk protection and risk sharing objectives in social insurance schemes associate only with a single criterion of reciprocity. In contrast, the objectives to reduce inequalities, alleviate poverty and support social inclusion, involve quite complex deservingness criteria when assessing the eligibility for benefits. This article does not examine these relationships; our contribution is to analyse consistently and systematically the two key dimensions of the welfare state: objectives and deservingness. Some other studies focus on the principles of justice applied in welfare state policies or groups supported (Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2016; Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2018) or on the specific types of policies preferred (Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2019; Engler 2020) corresponding to the tastes of the populist parties and their supporters. Objectives and deservingness criteria are, however, more concrete policy aspects than principles of justice, and these dimensions imply directly the support for the specific target groups and specific types of policies.

## *Hypotheses*

The above discussion leads to several hypotheses. First, the CP parties emphasise economic efficiency and administrative feasibility/smartness objectives more than the RWP parties, because they balance the social liberal demands of generous benefits with low taxes by claiming that they can manage the country more efficiently. However, because the objectives of economic efficiency and administrative feasibility may be associated with anti-elitist critique, we expect the RWP parties may be also interested in emphasising these objectives (*H1 Policy efficiency hypothesis*).

Second, we expect the CP parties to address a broader range of the social objectives than the RWP parties, because they are more centrist, catch-all parties. We also assume that the CP parties would stress other objectives than the RWP parties. Such parties are also likely to advocate poverty alleviation, reducing inequality, equal opportunities and social integration, in order to appeal to a broader spectrum of the voters (*H2: the CP encompassing hypothesis*).

Third, given their centrist position and reliance on social-liberal or social-conservative, middle-class voters, we also expect the welfare agenda of the CP parties to entail some deservingness considerations based on (neo)-liberal and conservative notions of deservingness. Thus, when promoting protection and reducing inequalities, they are likely to base their policies on reciprocity and control criteria because the CP parties turn to the median voter who rejects to support free riders and other undeserving groups. Since they also appeal somewhat to left-wing voters, we expect the CP parties to promote the need criterion and equal/universal access to some welfare provisions (*H3: the CP balanced universalism-deservingness hypothesis*).

Fourth, we assume the RWP parties would emphasise the protection and redistribution in favour of deserving groups/categories, typically traditional working-class and working male breadwinners. In particular, we expect the RWP parties to favour a generous welfare state; however, with use of criteria of identity, control, reciprocity and attitude, this means limiting social benefits to the insider groups like natives, traditional families, and working people while being exclusivist towards outsiders like non-natives/immigrants, ethnic minorities and unemployed who do not genuinely seek a job (*H4 RWP exclusivist protectionism hypothesis*).

### *Method and data*

Our research question is: *what types of social policies do the different types of populist parties propose in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic?* We operationalised the question into categories with appropriately pre-defined subcategories assigned to social policy proposals made by each party in the manifesto. The categories of policy objectives and deservingness criteria were fully predetermined and deductively constructed based on theoretical literature.

We conducted a qualitative content analysis of the election programmes of four political parties, which took part in the Czech elections of 2013 and 2017, and the Slovak elections of 2016 and 2020. The CP parties in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (ANO and OĽaNO) won the elections of 2017 and 2020, while the RWP parties (SPD and *Sme rodina*) were elected to parliament (with *Sme rodina* joining the government coalition in Slovakia as a junior partner). We view political manifestos as diagnostic frames of social demands presented in their complexity, through which the voter can identify with the party (Caiani & Porta, 2012; Vasilopoulou, Haikiopoulou & Exadaktylos, 2014)<sup>7</sup>.

We explore the two key dimensions of the welfare state discussed in literature in depth: objectives and deservingness. We used the dimensions as predetermined categories to investigate their particular expression in the key programme documents addressing the voters<sup>8</sup>. This means that we have analysed eight election programmes and coded all sentences that contain some welfare state/social policy proposals. We conduct the analysis using axial coding guided by the key dimensions and categories of the welfare state combined with open coding. We base the open coding on adapting the grounded theory method and coded 8,376 sentences. During the process, we controlled the attribution of the categories to test the external validity of the coding by engaging a second researcher involved in our project to check the coding of the key sentences. In case of diverging views of the researchers on coding these sentences, we discussed and agreed upon appropriate solutions.

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<sup>7</sup> We focus just on the election manifestos as the types of condensed and complex presentation of the party programme.

<sup>8</sup> This is an increasingly more systematic examination compared to the Party Manifesto Dataset where only three quite general issues are captured: WS expansion or limitation in terms of expenditure on the specified policy fields, equality in terms of protection of underprivileged groups and education expansion or limitation.

## *Findings: The welfare agenda of Czech and Slovak populist parties*

### **Political context of the populist welfare state agenda**

All the populist parties in our study share some common populist appeals like critiques of corruption and the allegedly incompetent elites, but they are different in other respects: the CP parties are more concerned with making the state and economy run efficiently, while the RWP parties are more concerned with supporting the traditional family and fighting against immigration. However, all of the populist parties in our study, are giving an increasingly high priority to social issues and policies.

The Czech CPANO entered the political scene in 2011 with a strong critique of the allegedly incompetent and corrupt politicians, while emphasising the apolitical, competencies of the leader who is a successful entrepreneur who could “run the state as a firm”. In the 2013 elections, the party promised to improve the state’s management and performance by focusing on the government budget, taxation, and pension system. ANO used the slogan “We are not as politicians, we work!”. In 2017, after three years of experiences in the government coalition, the programme was more elaborated and included four priorities: “security, an effective and efficient state, investments in our country, and investments in people”. The program emphasised efficiency in different social policy areas.

Czech RWP UPD, which was not in parliament before the 2013 elections, declared “direct democracy” to be a key issue, and it criticised corruption and Europeanisation, while promising to support job creation by improving conditions for entrepreneurs<sup>9</sup>. The successor the RWP SPD, after three years in opposition, made its priorities in its 2017 electoral platform “money to working families and pensioners” and also emphasised “education to children” and “health to the citizens”. It expressed chauvinism in the anti-immigrant slogan: “no to Islam, no to the terrorists”.

The Slovak CP movement *OLaNO*, which was in opposition that time, claimed in its 2016 election programme that “people need better services, education, health care, better state and the administration, better jobs, better living environment”. In 2020, the election programme had 10 main points, of which three were linked to welfare state: support for the family, support to education and effective social services and health-care. Thus, the focus on social issues was strong and associated with the fight against corruption.

The Slovak RWP *Sme rodina*, which was not in parliament until 2016, claimed in the 2016 election campaign that “Slovakia is poorly managed”, while emphasising the fight against corruption, protection against external threats (immigration), increasing the living standards of people and support for the traditional family. In the 2020 elections, when the party was already in parliament, the focus on the social issues was even more explicit in the election programme labelled “Programme of help for families”, with the three first priorities being family and social services, healthcare, and education. It also took a strong anti-immigrant stance with slogans such as “Against the Islamic invasion of Europe”.

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<sup>9</sup> In 2013 the labour market was only slowly recovering after economic slowdown of 2011 and 2012.

### H1: The policy efficiency hypothesis

The emphasis put on the instrumental (economic and administrative) objectives of the welfare state is apparently high among the CP parties in the Czech Republic and Slovakia – especially in the dimension of administrative feasibility/smartness. This emphasis increased significantly with entrepreneurial CP Czech ANO between elections.

In 2013, Czech ANO’s election programme mentions economic incentives in three sentences (comprising 6.4% of the total of sentences that addressed the social policy objectives) and administrative feasibility in six sentences (12.9% of the sentences addressing social policy objectives).

In 2017, the emphasis on macro-economic efficiency increased from 0 to 16 sentences (11.8% of the sentences on social policy proposals). In this newer programme, the party also mentioned economic incentives in eight sentences (5.9% of social policy proposals). Sentences on administrative feasibility increased also significantly to 35 sentences (26.1%), see Figure 1. In total, there were 19.3% of the sentences

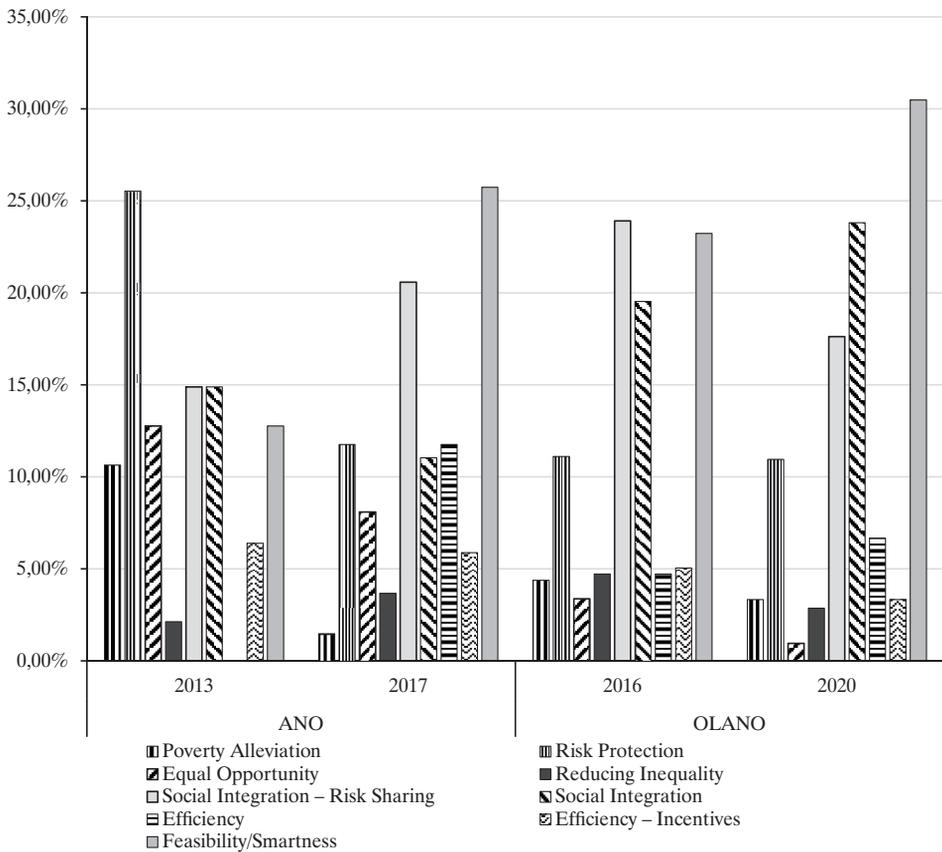


Figure 1. Social policy objectives (ANO and OLANO)

on social policy devoted to instrumental (economic and administrative) objectives of the welfare state in 2013, and 42.8% in 2017, when the party won elections.

Similar to CP ANO in Czechia, Slovak OĽaNO emphasised instrumental objectives strongly in its 2016 election programme: 11 sentences on macro-economic efficiency (3.7% of the total of sentences on social policy proposals), 15 sentences on economic incentives (5.1%), 69 (22.3%) and administrative feasibility. In 2020 the number of sentences on instrumental objectives were even higher: 14 sentences on macro-efficiency (6.7%), seven sentences on incentives (3.3%), 64 (30.5%) sentences on smartness and administrative feasibility, see Figure 1. All in all, there were 32.1% of the sentences on social policy devoted to instrumental objectives of the welfare state (8.8% economic objectives and 23.3% administrative objectives) in 2016, and 40.5% (10% economic objectives and 30.5% administrative objectives) in 2020.

Summed-up, both CP parties emphasise instrumental/efficiency welfare state objectives strongly when ANO doubled the stress on these objectives between elections in 2013 and 2017 while some of the social objectives were less emphasised (see findings on H2 below).

The election programmes of the RWP parties also emphasise instrumental objectives. The Czech UPD/SPD stresses preserving economic incentives, while Slovak *Sme rodina* stresses administrative feasibility/smartness. In the 2013 election programme, Czech UPD/SPD mentioned macro-economic effectiveness in one sentence (3.5%) and incentives in three sentences (10.3%). Administrative feasibility was mentioned in four sentences (13.8%). Similarly, in 2017 the party also mentioned macro-efficiency in one sentence (3.5%), but it increased its attention to incentives, from four sentences to nine sentences, which accounts for an increase in the percentage of policy statements dealing with incentives from 10.3% to 31%, while administrative feasibility was mentioned in four sentences, this is again 13.8% of sentences on social policy, see Figure 2. Compared to Czech CP ANO, UPD/SPD puts more emphasis on the instrumental objectives in total both in 2013 (27.6% against 19.3%) and in 2017 (57.3% against 42.8%), in contrast to our assumptions. The explanation is that RWP party used policy efficiency appeals in connection with anti-elitist critique of the ruling parties (including ANO in 2017 elections), with an emphasis on preserving economic incentives, in accord with the traditional rightest party agenda.

In 2016, Slovak *Sme rodina* mentioned efficiency in three sentences (9.7%) and administrative feasibility in five sentences (16.9%). In 2020, the party still mentions macro-efficiency in three sentences (3.2%). In this latter programme, it now names the incentives in three sentences (3.2%). It also mentions the smartness of the system in 20 sentences (21.3%). Despite this general increase in attention to these issues of efficiency, it actually mentioned administrative feasibility less in 2020 (five sentences, 5.5%), see Figure 2. This means that instrumental objectives were mentioned in 26.6% of the sentences on social policy issues in 2013 and in 33.4% in 2017, while administrative feasibility/smartness objectives prevailed clearly. This is less than it is the case of OĽaNO, where it was 42.1% in 2016 and 41.5% in 2020, although emphasis on administrative feasibility/smartness is similarly strong.

To sum up, the policy efficiency hypothesis holds well with the CP parties in Slovakia, where the CP party over-scores the RWP party in the emphasis put on instrumental

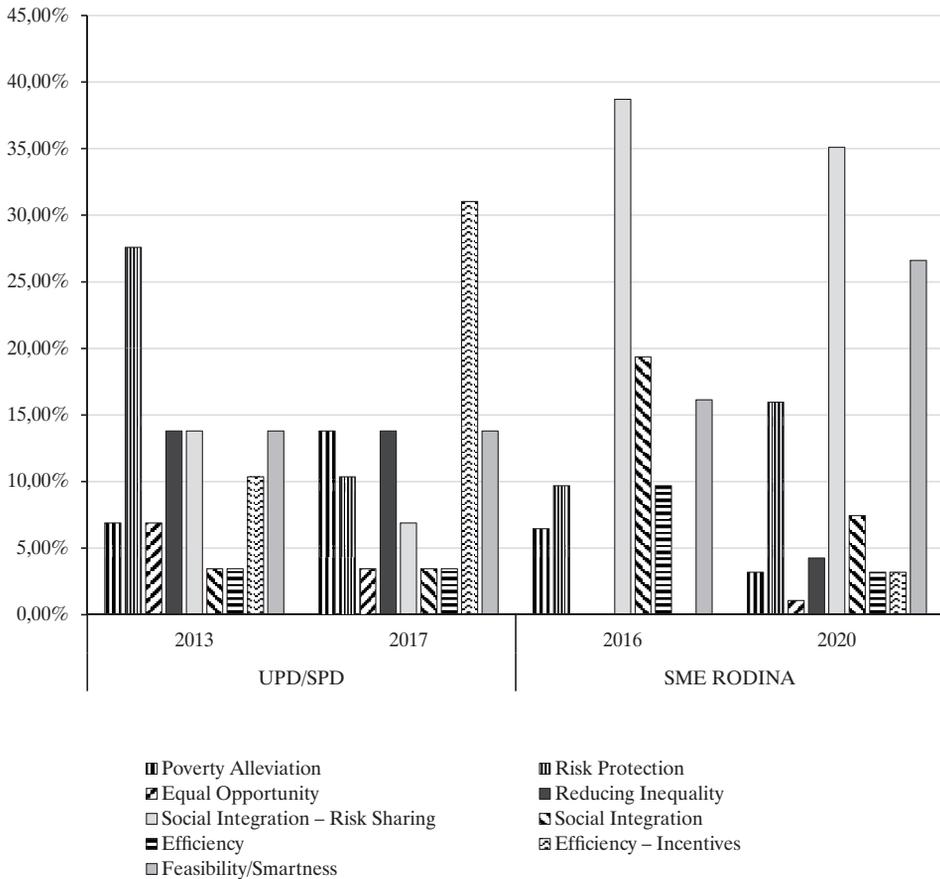


Figure 2. Social policy objectives (UPD/SPD a SME RODINA)

objectives. In Czechia, RWP UPD/SPD stresses economic incentives so much as it over-scores CP ANO in emphasis put on instrumental objectives. We may associate this finding with anti-elitism, and a strong critique of the left-centre government where ANO was a junior partner since 2013.

## H2: CP encompassing hypothesis

The CP parties emphasise a broader range of welfare objectives than the RWP parties. Concerning risk protection, in 2013 ANO emphasised protection over the life-cycle (in nine sentences, amounting to 25.5% of all policy proposals), poverty alleviation (in five sentences, 10.6%). For the equality dimension, the party supports equal opportunity (six sentences, 12.8%) and fewer supports reducing inequalities/redistribution (one sentence, 2.1%). In the social integration dimension, it emphasises risk sharing/collectivity of risk protection (nine sentences 19%) and social inclusion (seven sentences, 14.9%).

In 2017, ANO decreased its advocacy of risk protection over the life-cycle (16 sentences, this is 11.8% compared to 25.5% in 2013). It mentioned poverty alleviation in two sentences (1.5%), which is much less than in 2013 (10.6%). In the equality dimension, the party pursued the objective of equal opportunity (in 11 sentences, 8.1%), which is slightly less than in 2013 (12.8%). Concerning the social integration dimension, the party promoted risk sharing/collectivity of risk (in 28 sentences, 20.6%) and social inclusion (in 15 sentences, 11.9%). The percentage of sentences devoted to social policy proposals mentioning these topics is similar to 2013; see Figure 1. This shift in focus, where some social objectives are less stressed regarding risk protection and inequality reduction, is because of the increased emphasis on the instrumental objectives (see above on Hypothesis 1).

In 2016, Slovak OĽaNO strongly emphasised the dimension of risk protection, mentioning risk protection over the life-cycle in 33 sentences (11.1%). It paid less attention to social equality, mentioning equal opportunity in 10 sentences (3.4%) and reduction of inequality (in 14 sentences, 4.7%). It showed much greater interest in social integration, mentioning risk sharing/collectivity of risk in 61 sentences (23.9%) and the social inclusion of the most vulnerable in 58 sentences (19.5%).

In 2020, the pattern was quite similar, although the party showed less interest in the equality sphere. It now only mentions equal opportunity (in two sentences, 1% compared to 3.4% in 2016). It also mentions redistribution/reduction of inequality less often (in six sentences, 9% compared to 4.7% in 2016). Once again, it mentions risk protection in 23 sentences, making it 11% of total sentences on social policy proposals. Thus, a percentage of sentences devoted to risk protection remained the same as in 2016. For the social integration dimension, it mentions risk sharing in 36 sentences (17.6%) which is less than in 2016 (23.9%). Finally, the party also mentions the social inclusion of the most vulnerable in 50 sentences (23.9%), which is now the most important issue (in 2016 it was 19.5%); see Figure 1. Thus, the party stresses still social inclusion of the most vulnerable and risk sharing in the first place.

The encompassing hypothesis seems to hold for both Czech and Slovak CP parties since they emphasise risk protection over the life-cycle, accompanied by solidaristic proposals on risk sharing and inclusion of the vulnerable. Czech ANO also highlights equal opportunities. Even though there have been some changes in emphasis, the basic pattern has basically been stable through the two electoral periods. Apparently, it wanted to appeal to the middle class and to those traditional working-class members who favour social insurance over redistributive policies.

The RWP parties support some different objectives than the CP parties. In 2013, Czech UPD/SPD stressed risk protection over the life-cycle objective (in eight sentences, 27.6%), poverty alleviation (in two sentences, 6.9%). It mentioned equal opportunity in two sentences (6.9%) and inequality reduction in four sentences (13.8%). Similarly, it mentioned risk sharing in four sentences (13.8%) and social inclusion in one sentence (3.5%).

In 2017, it gave greater emphasis to redistribution and poverty alleviation while downsizing risk protection and equal opportunities objective, when mentioning risk protection in three sentences (10% compared to 27.6% in 2013), poverty alleviation in four sentences (13.8% compared to 6.9% in 2013), equal opportunity in one

sentence (3.5% compared to 6.9% in 2013), reduction of inequalities in four sentences (13.8% similarly to 2013), risk sharing in two sentences (6.9%, similarly to 2013) and social inclusion in one sentence (3.5%, similarly to 2013), see Figure 2.

Slovak *Sme rodina* is more strongly concerned with social integration and risk protection over the life-cycle than other social policy objectives, similar to the Slovak CP party *OLaNO*. In 2016, the party program centred on the following objectives: risk protection across life-cycle (three sentences, 9.7%), poverty alleviation (two sentences, 6.5%). In particular, for the social integration dimension, the program strongly emphasised risk sharing (12 sentences, 38.5%) and social inclusion (six sentences, 19.4%).

In 2020, the electoral program paid increased attention to social policy issues. Thus, risk protection over the life-cycle increased from three (9.7%) to 15 sentences (16%), while poverty alleviation dropped from two sentences (6.5%) to three sentences (3.2%). Concerning the equality dimension, equal opportunity remained rarely mentioned objective with only one sentence (1.1%, while it was not mentioned at all in 2016), although the program now mentioned inequality reduction in four sentences (4.3%) compared to no mention in 2016. Risk sharing remained the most important issue for the party, being mentioned in 33 sentences (35.1%, only slightly less than in 2016). However, it placed less value this time on social inclusion, mentioning it in seven sentences (7.5%) against 19.4% of sentences in 2016, see Figure 2.

The RWP parties place great emphasis on risk protection over the life-cycle and solidaristic risk sharing. These objectives are associated with social insurance compensatory schemes based on the merit principle, corresponding to the preferences of the traditional working-class insiders. This is accompanied by a stronger demand for redistribution and poverty alleviation with Czech RWP UPD/SPD than with Slovak *Sme rodina*. This is probably because of the political opening in Czechia where the social democratic party imploded. This encouraged the RWP party to appeal to the most affected losers of modernisation who do not trust the left-wing parties. In contrast, in Slovakia, the populist LWP party, *Smer-Social Democracy*, is still able to appeal to the losers of modernisation. All in all, the RWP parties in both countries are less encompassing in their social policy objectives than the CP parties.

### H3: CP balanced universalism – deservingness hypothesis

When it comes to social objectives, the CP parties promote catch-all social policy proposals. Either universalism prevails in their proposals over selectivism and use of deservingness criteria, or the criterium of need is the most important of the deservingness criteria, followed by the criterium of reciprocity. Exclusionist criteria only have a supplementary role in order to prevent the misuse of the entitlements.

The proposals of Czech ANO in 2013 are mainly based on universalist principles (in 10 sentences, 43.4% of all sentences on social policy), followed by the reciprocity criterion (in seven sentences 30.5%) and the need criterium (in six sentences, 26.1%). The party program also mentions the control criterium in five sentences (21.7%). In 2017, the pattern is similar, however, the overlap between universalist and selectivist principles is even more apparent. Universalist principles still clearly dominate and become even more important (mentioned in 24 sentences, 52.4% of all the sentences on

social policy proposals compared to 43.4% in 2013). A reason could be that the party tried to appeal more to social democratic voters in 2017, as the social democrats were losing support because of infighting. The need criterium follows and plays a similar role as in 2013, with 12 sentences, thus comprising 28.6% of all social policy focused sentences in 2017. While universalism has become more important for ANO and the need criterium has remained about the same, the reciprocity criterium has become less important, being only mentioned in four sentences. This represents a decline from 30.4% of all social policy sentences in 2013 to 9.5% in 2017. Next comes the control criterium (three sentences, comprising 7.8%) and the attitude criterium two sentences (4.8%), see Figure 3. The decline in the party's stress on control (from 21.7% to 7.8% of sentences) and reciprocity could also be a sign that the party wanted to attract former social democratic voters in 2017.

Similarly, in 2016 Slovak OĽaNO highlights universalist principles (in 93 sentences, 47% of all social policy proposals), followed by the need criterium (in 58 sentences, 29.3%), and the reciprocity criterium (in 11 sentences, 5.6%). In contrast to Czech CP ANO, the party places greater stress on control, mentioning this criterium

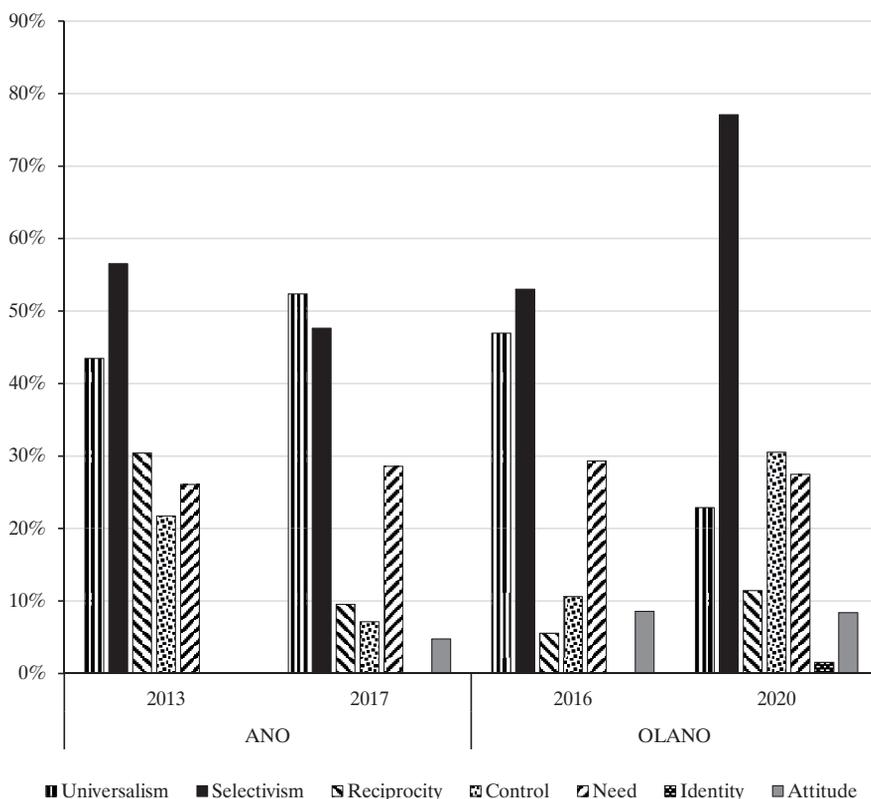


Figure 3. Deservingness in the policy proposals (ANO and OĽaNO)

in 21 sentences (10.6% compared to 18% for ANO in 2013). It also pays more attention to the attitude criterium, mentioning it in 17 sentences (10.6% while ANO did not mention it in 2013). In 2020, the party shifted even more to the right ideologically. “Leftist” views such as support for universalism (in 30 sentences, 22.9%) and need (in 36 sentences, 27.5%) remain the party’s most commonly used arguments, but universalism dropped from 47% of all policy proposals to 23% and need criterium kept nearly the same emphasis.

Reciprocity actually increased being mentioned in 15 sentences, which accounts for 11.5% of all sentences in the program devoted to social policies, compared to 5.6% in 2016. Even though the more “rightist”, exclusionary criteria are less prevalent, their salience has increased in 2020. Thus, the party’s program mentions control in 40 sentences compared to 21 sentences in 2016, accounting for an increase from 10.6% of all sentences to 20.5% of all sentences devoted to social policy. Also, the party mentions the attitude criterium again in 11 sentences (8.6%), which is like in 2016 when it was mentioned in 17 sentences (8.4%). The 2020 program also now mentions identity in two sentences (1.5%), see Figure 3.

We have analysed the specific profile of ANO’s and OLaNO’s universalism in their winning elections using quantitative text analysis. We have identified the most frequent words in sentences coded as associated with universalism in their election programmes (see Annex). Universalism by ANO, which increased in the elections of 2017 with the shift to the left, seems to be all-encompassing. First, ANO stresses the provision of public goods by the state, as shown by frequent words such as “services”, “care”, “healthcare”, and “education”. At the same time, ANO’s universalism is associated with managerial competence promises as shown by words such as “development”, “financing”, “management”, “investment”, “state” and “system”. OLaNO decreased emphasis on universalism in the elections of 2020 with the shift to the right (see above), however, with all-encompassing focus showed by words like “people”, “all”, “citizens”. It also shows a concern with the effective role of the state and with the social system design (“state”, “system”, “public”, “infrastructure(s)”) while much less concerned with the associated managerial competencies. Similarly to ANO, OLaNO emphasises the provision of public goods: “care” above all, and also “services”, “education”, “health” and “work”.

Thus, both centrist populist parties are similar in focusing their universalism on the provision of public goods, while accentuating state responsibility. This appeals to the broad categories of voters, both the middle and working class interested in these provisions. Overall, the hypothesis on the CP inclusiveness holds. Nevertheless, the CP parties have thin ideologies that allow them to manoeuvre in their election programmes. Thus, OLaNO shifted to political right in last elections, putting slightly more emphasis on selectivism. The reason is that political opening was identified on political right: in Slovakia, since 2012, there has not been any strong non-populist rightist party in Slovakia while some of the RWP parties imploded (like SNS) after the 2016 elections. In contrast, the populist left-wing *Smer*-Social Democracy still represents a powerful rival. In Czechia, ANO shifted to the left as the social democrats were imploding by placing more emphasis on universalism and less on the control criterium. This may show that ideological stances of the CP parties conform to the windows of political opportunities, depending on the specific country context.

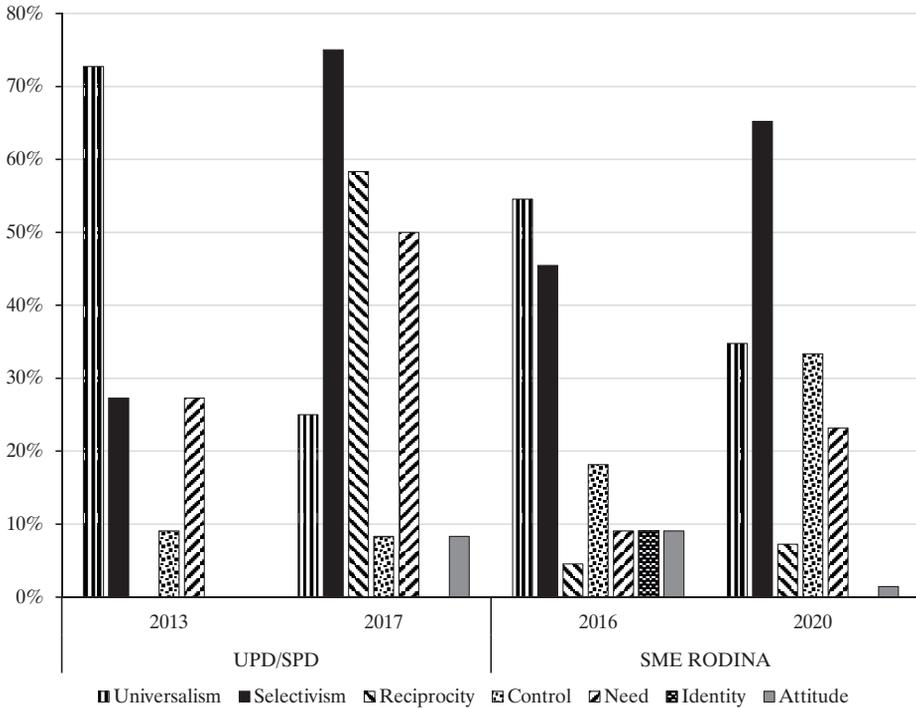
#### H4: RWP exclusivist protection hypothesis

Czech and Slovak RWP parties do not seem to be *exclusivist* or particular towards some specific groups of people in their social policy proposals from the last two elections. Nativism is not a guiding deservingness criterium in their welfare state agenda, although in 2020 in Slovakia the RWP party started to give increasing importance to the demand for greater control. This finding shows that the RWP parties are trying to appeal to the traditional working class and, possibly, to the broader spectrum of the voters, while avoiding exclusivist proposals. In addition, in Slovakia, there are already RW parties that are exclusionary like fascist LSNS and populist SNS, so not much expected gain for *Sme rodina* to compete on this issue. The main explanation is, however, that, in Czechia and Slovakia, refugee immigration is negligible. At the same time, the social rights of immigrants from the third countries are rudimental, so there is no reason to exclude the non-native population in policy proposals.

To be concrete, in 2013 election programme, Czech UPD emphasised universalist principles more than any other social policy principles (in 11 sentences, 72.7%), followed by the need criterium (three sentences, 27.3%), then the control criterium (one sentence – 9.1%). In 2017, the successor SPD party shifted from universalism to selectivism, although reciprocity and need criteria which are not exclusivist in nature prevailed strongly. Thus, universalist principles decreased from 11 to three sentences (a decline from 72.3% to 25% of all social policy proposals). The need criterium grew as a proportion of all sentences in the programme dealing with social policy from 27.5% to 50% (six sentences). The SPD also mentions the reciprocity criterium in seven sentences (58.4%). Control and attitude criteria are only marginal (one sentence, 8% each), see Figure 4.

In the 2016 election programme, Slovak *Sme rodina* gave the greatest weight to universalist principles (12 sentences, 54.6% of all sentences on social policy), followed by the need criterium (two sentences, 9.1%), and reciprocity criterium (one sentence – 4.6%). The party did, however, also employ more exclusivist criteria. This includes the control criterium (four sentences, 18.1%), as well as the attitude and identity criteria (two sentences in both cases sentences, 9.1% each). In 2020, the party stressed the control and need criteria, while downplaying universalist principles. The proportion of sentences promoting universalism decreases from 54.6% (2016) to 34.8% (2020). The need criterium, however, plays a much greater role in the 2020 party program, increasing from two sentences to 16 sentences, bringing an increase in the portion of sentences on social policy devoted to need from 9.1% to 23.2%. In contrast to 2016, the programme mentions the reciprocity criterium more, as a proportion of sentences devoted to social policy (increase from 4.6% to 7.3%). The selectivist/exclusivist criteria comprised the most frequent control criterium (in 23 sentences – 33.3%), and marginally attitude (one sentence – 1.5%), see Figure 4.

In summary, the RWP *exclusivist protection hypothesis* does not hold up for the largest RWP parties. As suggested by Rovny (2013), similar to the CP parties, RWP parties in Czechia and Slovakia seem to blur their positions in this respect by balancing universalist and selectivist proposals. They also spout a thin ideology that allows them to manoeuvre and look for political openings, where they can alter their profile to gain



**Figure 4.** Deservingness in the policy proposals (UPD/SPD and SME RODINA)

support from a broader spectrum of voters. This strategy, however, may be specific only to the two countries in focus, emerging here from a low salience of the agenda of social rights for immigrants due to low immigration of refugees and rudimentary social rights of the third countries immigrants. On the top of that, Czech RWP SPD is strongly against immigration in principle, so there is less reason to be anti-immigrant exclusivist in its social policy proposals. Since Slovakia has two radical right parties, SNS and the fascist LSNS, *Sme rodina* might have seen an opening in the more ethnically tolerant but socially conservative right, as the party emphasised support for the “traditional family” rather than fear of immigrants and minority groups.

### *Conclusions and discussion*

We have examined the welfare state agenda of four leading populist parties (two CP parties and two RWP parties) in Czechia and in Slovakia as presented in their election programmes along the objectives of the policy proposals and universalism–selectivism distinction and deservingness criteria applied.

*H1 policy efficiency hypothesis* holds well with CP party in Slovakia. However, in the Czech Republic, the RWP party emphasises instrumental objectives (economic

efficiency/incentives above all) even more than the CP party. This is a surprising finding since the CP Czech party represents entrepreneurial populism, in which the leader is a successful businessperson who claims to run the country efficiently, like a business. The reason why the RWP: appeals to economic incentives could be because of its anti-elitist critique of the centre-left government which neglected this objective.

*H2 CP encompassing hypothesis* seems to hold, since the CP parties stress risk protection over the life-cycle. They also suggest solidaristic proposals on risk sharing and inclusion of the vulnerable. Czech ANO also highlights equal opportunities. This policy direction appeals to middle class and working-class insiders. Their emphasis on the vulnerable and equal opportunity distinguishes them from the RWP. The RWP parties are less encompassing in policy objectives: They accentuate risk protection rather than the life-cycle objective. Czech RWP UPD/SPD additionally advocates greater redistribution and introducing measures to alleviate poverty.

Similarly, *H3 CP the balanced universalism-deservingness hypothesis* holds. Both centrist populist parties emphasise universalism on the provision of public goods, combined with state responsibility, while also stressing deservingness criteria: need, control, and reciprocity. At the same time, CP parties are flexible and manoeuvre in their election programmes when they see changes in the political opportunity structure. Thus, OĽaNO seems to have seen an opening on the right in the 2020 and became less universalist, while ANO saw an opening more to the left in 2017 and stressed universalism more in an attempt to lure former social democratic voters.

The *H4 exclusivist protection hypothesis* holds for RWP parties partly: Similar to the CP parties, RWP parties in Czechia and Slovakia seem to blur their issue positions regarding welfare state issues and manoeuvre in order to gain support from a broader spectrum of voters. They both avoid exclusivist and nativist proposals. This strategy, however, may be specific, emerging from the specific immigration context and connected poor welfare state rights of the immigrants.

This study shows that the differences in the welfare state agenda of CP parties and RWP parties are not as significant as previous studies would have expected: in particular, in Czechia, the RWP party emphasises instrumental policy objectives more than the CP party. Second, RWP parties are not exclusionist in their welfare protectionism. Specific country contexts may help to explain this finding.

This backs the notion that populist parties have thin ideologies, which makes them flexible. It also supports the claim (Heinisch & Saxonberg, forthcoming) that populist parties adapt their policies based on where they see the openings in the political opportunity structures. Thus, specific country political contexts may provide some explanation for these shifts and divergencies, as some studies suggest (e.g., Engler, 2020; Heinisch & Saxonberg, forthcoming). Comparison with the welfare state agenda of the populist parties in other countries is a challenge for future research.

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### *Election programmes of the selected political parties*

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## ANNEX

**Table 1.** Occurrence of 20 most frequent words associated with the category “universalism” (absolute and relative count of words in sentences associated with universalism, weighted percentage)

ANO 2017	Count	Weighted percentage (%)	OLaNO 2020	Count	Weighted percentage (%)
Development	47	0.31	People (genitive or accusative case)	99	0.26
Services (genitive case)	46	0.30	State	86	0.22
State	43	0.28	State (genitive case)	86	0.22
Care (genitive case)	40	0.27	System	80	0.21
All (genitive case)	36	0.24	Care (genitive case)	79	0.20
Financing	34	0.23	Services	69	0.18
State (genitive case)	34	0.23	Care	56	0.15
System (genitive case)	29	0.19	Services (genitive case)	52	0.13
Healthcare	28	0.19	All (genitive or accusative case)	44	0.11
Services	27	0.18	Health (adjective, genitive case)	44	0.11
All (accusative case)	27	0.18	Environment	44	0.11
Work	25	0.17	Public (adjective, genitive case)	43	0.11
System	25	0.17	Citizens (accusative case)	41	0.11
Management	25	0.17	Work	41	0.11
Children	23	0.15	Education (genitive case)	41	0.11
State (adjective)	23	0.15	Education	41	0.11
Investments	23	0.15	Infrastructure (genitive case) or Infrastructures	40	0.10
Education	22	0.15	Problems	40	0.10
Culture	20	0.13	System (genitive case)	39	0.10
Citizens (accusative case)	20	0.13	Public (adjective, plural)	39	0.10

Source: election programmes, own coding and computations

