

**Sabrina P. Ramet, Vladimir Dordević,
and Christine M. Hassenstab:**

**CIVIC AND UNCIVIC VALUES
IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC:
VALUE TRANSFORMATION,
POLITICS, EDUCATION,
AND GENDER EQUALITY**

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A newly published edited volume might seem a bit obsolete at first sight. There are recent books on Czech politics, such as *Czech Democracy in Crisis*, edited by Astrid Lorenz and Hana Formánková, and *Czech Politics: From West to East and Back Again*, written by a group of authors around Stanislav Balík. Yet this new book is a worthy contribution to our understanding of the state of democracy in Czechia because it focuses on different yet essential issues. The book is a part of a series devoted to civic and uncivic values. After Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, (Northern) Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Poland came the Czech turn. The founding editors of the series, Ramet and Hassenstab, invited a co-editor, Vladimir Dordević, who has a long direct experience with the Czech Republic and its politics. In eleven chapters, including the introduction and concluding summary of the findings, the collective of (mainly but not exclusively) Czech political scientists, sociologists, historians, media and other experts try to go beyond the 'surface' of political institutions to find out what values the Czechs are following and how it matters politically. The book is divided into three parts (Values and the System; Education, Media, and Culture; and Gender and Civil Society).

The first part might be the most interesting for an expert in comparative politics. Sabri-

na Ramet tries to assess the quality of Czech democracy, which she marks as flawed, from a comparative perspective to other post-communist countries. Within this group, Czechia scores comparably well, yet the Czech public is highly dissatisfied with politics and political institutions. Ramet introduces the reader to the most prominent critical voices among the political scientists evaluating Czech politics. Through the critique of Czech political parties, she ends up examining the issue of civic values and attitudes shared by Czech citizens. For a reader from the Czech Republic, the listed critical issues (the stances of the majoritarian population to the Roma and LGBT minorities, the rather conservative approach to the gender agenda) are not new. For the generalist, this intro helps to explain the basic context and offers a useful orientation towards the contents of the following chapters, which elaborate on these issues more in-depth. Although Ramet focuses primarily on critical remarks, we can without any doubt assess her evaluation of the current state of Czech politics as fair.

A useful comparison with post-communist and other European countries is offered in the chapter written by Jaroslava Pospíšilová and Petra Raudenská. They pose the question of whether the values of the Czechs adhere more to post-communist patterns or are closer to Western European trends. They compare data from the 2017 European Values Study and the 8th round of the European Social Survey to answer their question. Although the Czech Republic typically scores the closest to the Western European countries among the former communist states, the civil values of the Czech public conform more to the post-communist pattern of chauvinism and (at least latent) racism. Alarming is the fact that the Czechs are the least interested in politics (p. 33) and have only a lukewarm relationship with democratic values. On the other hand, they detest authoritarian politics, too (p. 41).

Elisabeth Bakke asks whether Czech politics is at a crossroads. The key of the paper is the newcomers to Czech party politics and their patterns of organization that differ significantly from the incumbent parties operating since the 1990s. Besides internal party organization, Bakke examines the changing composition of the members of the Czech Parliament, using an original dataset and presenting original results relevant for further research of Czech party politics. This part constitutes the chapter's most original contribution based on the author's excellent knowledge of Czech party politics. As Bakke demonstrates, even here we can find significant differences in elite composition in terms of age, gender, professional background, and education between the old and new parties.

In the book's second part, the authors examine the broader context in which Czech politics operate. Jaroslav Volek briefly explains the changing media market and the ownership structure of the Czech media since 2012, warning against oligarchization. Oldřich Tůma analyses the history textbooks used in secondary schools, comparing communist-era and contemporary materials. His analysis shows a tendency toward a more Euro-centric approach in the post-1989 textbooks (p. 113), which is a piece of interesting information when related to the aforementioned Czech racism. A positive finding is that the contemporary Czech textbooks are free from any attempts to create an 'official' version of history. Looking at the political interference in history teaching in countries like Hungary and Poland, we know this feature is far from automatic in the region. I agree with Tůma's call for less positivist treatment of history textbooks. Perhaps such a change would have the potential to launch a broader pluralist discussion on the Czech, European, and global past. And, as we know, such an open discussion could contribute to a higher quality of political debate, at least indirectly. In the last chapter of

this section, Herbert Eagle discusses the representation of civic values in the movies of Jan Hřebejk and Petr Jarchovský.

The book's third part returns to topics connected with politics more directly. Vladimír Dordević focuses on the political participation of Czech women since 1989. He analyses members of government, parliament, and party elites, dividing his description at the year 2004, when Czechia entered the EU. Sharon Wolchik studies the development of Czech feminism. After a brief historical-contextual intro, she pays primary attention to the communist legacy, especially the institutionalization of gender equality advocacy organizations and related research after 1989. Her well-balanced account allows the reader to map the tradition and current activities, topics, and discourses of Czech feminism. Jiří Navrátil and Ondřej Císař, in their rather conceptual chapter, offer a typology of the different modes of operation of Czech political activism, presenting general examples of all four types: shareholder, expert, multitude, and avant-garde. Eva Taterová offers a contradictory approach to her topic, Czech antisemitism. Her chapter is a detailed but purely descriptive survey of various demonstrations of antisemitism in the Czech past and present.

To sum up, the reviewed collected volume does not strive to push forward any methodological or theoretical discussions. It is based on excellent empirical knowledge of recent Czech politics and society. As such, it is a perfect springboard for anyone who wants to get accurate and up-to-date information. Even a Czech Republic specialist or enthusiast will find valuable information and inspiration to ask further questions about how Czech politics is impacted by the set of values and attitudes shared by the majority of Czech citizens.