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Millionaires and the public in Czech politics

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Pages 353-366 | Received 29 Nov 2017, Accepted 19 Apr 2018, Published online: 02 Jul 2018

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1484031 Check for updates

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ABSTRACT

This article relies on a unique survey of Czech millionaires and the general public to probe the nature and extent of the differences in opinions between these two groups and their correspondence with public policy. Its main finding is that millionaires are substantially more right-wing than the public on economic issues and somewhat more internationalist on foreign affairs, though a number of areas of agreement can be found as well, particularly assessments of the problems facing the country. Most surprisingly, the opinions of the public appear more likely to correspond with policy than those of millionaires. These findings have important implications for the rise of populism and the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic.

KEYWORDS:

Inequality millionaires public opinion representation

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Jason Seawright, Tim Frye, and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments.

Notes

1. Studies of Europe with similar results include Peters and Ensink (2015) and Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer (2012). But see Bartels (2016) for a case of responsiveness to the less well-off.

2. The communist regime did have elites, but space for the accumulation of capital was very limited. On the privileges of the elite and the so-called “new class” under communism, see Szelenyi (1978).

3. Several of the surveys also included Slovak millionaires, though there were fewer (50–70 versus 150–200 Czech millionaires), and sometimes the parallel survey of the Slovak public is lacking. For these reasons, we did not consider them here. Overall, opinion differences between Slovak millionaires and the public were of a similar magnitude to the Czech Republic.

4. Data are available at Roberts (2018).

5. The survey also asked about support for direct democracy and creating a long-term development plan for the country, which did not fit in these categories. The public was considerably more supportive than millionaires of direct democracy and the development plan elicited similar levels of support.

6. We did not code these items as left or right.

7. Page, Bartels, and Seawright (2013) find the reverse in the United States, where indebtedness was the most pressing problem for US millionaires.

8. Gilens used a four-year window, which means that time remains for many of the issues considered here.

9. A handful of policies were repeated twice. We included both items separately as a gauge of the salience of the issue. Results were similar when we averaged the two items.

Additional information

Funding

This work was supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic under the auspices of the project “The Quality of Democracy: The Czech Republic in Comparative Perspective” [GA 15-2274S)].

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