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**Refugee Interest Groups in the Czech Republic and Issue Framing
in Light of the War in Ukraine**

Master's Thesis



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Abstract

This thesis project seeks to examine refugee interest group formation rates in the Czech Republic through both standard and novel methods. Utilizing data collected regarding refugee interest groups formations from the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia up until the onset of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, this thesis tests refugee interest groups along the traditional lines of studying interest group formation rates, such as density-dependence, political opportunity structure, and incentive theory. However, this study also utilizes critical discourse analysis to understand how issue framing by mainstream Czech politicians surrounding refugee interest groups also impacts refugee interest group formation rates, in particular amidst the Syrian and Ukrainian refugee crises.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se snaží prozkoumat míru vytváření zájmových skupin uprchlíků v České republice prostřednictvím standardních i nových metod. S využitím dat shromážděných o formování zájmových skupin uprchlíků od pádu komunismu v Československu až do vypuknutí ukrajinské uprchlické krize tato práce testuje zájmové skupiny uprchlíků podle tradičních linií studia míry vytváření zájmových skupin, jako je závislost na hustotě, politické příležitosti, struktura a teorie pobídek. Tato studie však také využívá kritickou diskurzivní analýzu, aby pochopila, jak rámování problémů mainstreamovými českými politiky kolem uprchlických zájmových skupin také ovlivňuje míru vytváření uprchlických zájmových skupin, zejména během syrské a ukrajinské uprchlické krize.

Keywords

Interest groups, refugees, migration, Ukrainian refugee crisis, European migration crisis Czech Republic, Central Europe, issue framing

Klíčová slova

Zájmové skupiny, uprchlíci, migrace, ukrajinská uprchlická krize, evropská migrační krize, Česká republika, střední Evropa, problematika rámce

Název práce

Zájmové skupiny věnující se uprchlíkům a rámování tohoto tématu v České republice ve světle války na Ukrajině

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Introduction

Since the commencement of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, Central and Eastern Europe have borne the brunt of those fleeing for their lives from violence and war. With the influx of millions of Ukrainian refugees into the region in the past year and half, countries that have previously been unresponsive to the demands of refugee crises, such as those in 2015 following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, have found themselves at the center of the next major refugee crisis in Europe. While in the former refugee crises, Central European states, such as those belonging to the Visegrád Group (comprising the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary), shirked their duties in terms of refugee resettlement within their borders, they no longer find themselves capable of doing so due to their proximity to conflict and these new refugee populations reaching their borders. Arguably, the reaction from the Central European leaders and civic activists in supporting the settlement of Ukrainians into their territory is surprising and at the very least, without precedent. This study will provide particular attention to the Czech Republic in its understanding of refugee interest group formation and shifting public policy framing in light of the war in Ukraine.

Through the surveying of refugee interest group formations in the Czech Republic in the post-communist time period, we can begin to understand when and how exactly Czech society responds to these “focusing events” or these points in time when particular demand is made upon their society to respond to major crises or migration events. This is of particular interest in light of the current Ukrainian refugee crisis due to the fact that while in previous refugee populations have reportedly struggled to attain legal residency, education, housing and other essential aspects of resettlement in the Czech Republic, the country has been quite successful in passing policies

that have aimed to provide these needs to those arriving from Ukraine.¹ For example, in the Czech Republic, most Ukrainian refugees have attained employment (in comparison to Germany where Ukrainian refugees have struggled to find a steady job).²

Due to the massive shift in refugee responsibility within Europe for resettling refugees, a study of the current state of refugee interest groups within the region and how they have framed the issue of supporting Ukrainian refugees is of the utmost importance. This study will first conduct a population ecology of refugee interest groups within the Czech Republic. Through the use of data provided by public institutions in the Czech Republic, this population ecology will first and foremost establish the strength of these interest groups within their ability to influence support of refugees within the country. Then this study will investigate how the shifting discourses regarding refugees amongst leading Czech politicians have impacted refugee interest group formation rhetoric and in general, an improvement in the conditions of those fleeing the war in Ukraine upon their arrival to the Czech Republic.

It should be noted that this thesis project has shifted focus beyond its original proposal due to my participation in Charles University's double-degree program with the Politics and Public Administration at the University of Konstanz. As a result, changes from the original research proposal are evident in the final product in order to match the expectations and research goals set by both institutions that this project seeks to fulfill.

¹Tara Kolar Bryan, Monica Lea, and Vladimír Hyánek. "Resilience, Ambiguous Governance, and the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis: Perspectives from NGO Leaders in the Czech Republic." *Central European Economic Journal* 10, no. 57 (2023): 35-49.

² Lubos Palata, "Well Integrated: Ukrainian Refugees in the Czech Republic," *dw.com*, March 19, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukrainian-refugees-in-the-czech-republic-the-integration-miracle/a-65002494>.

Caleb Larson, "Ukrainians Face Poor Job Prospects in Germany," *dw.com*, July 27, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukrainian-refugees-face-poor-job-prospects-in-germany/a-62600360>.

Literature Review

While there has been significant scholarly interest in the studying of interest group formations, most studies have been confined to the American or EU context. While most recently there have been significant contributions to our understanding of interest groups and civil society in post-communist Central Europe (including the Czech Republic), this study is the first to address those interest groups that have the goal of pushing for policies in support of refugees.³

Beyond the study of the organizational ecologies of interest groups, particularly those in the post-communist context, this study builds upon an existing literature on discourse relating to refugees in the Czech Republic. As the Ukrainian refugee crisis is a newer and ongoing phenomenon, there has been little peer-reviewed research on the topic specifically, this study builds upon a group of literature that mainly stems from Czech discourse regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. This serves as a strong basis for understanding what exactly is *different* about this refugee crisis. However, it is worth noting that scholarship regarding Ukrainian refugees and their treatment in some countries *vis a vis* other refugee populations from different regions has also begun to be introduced into the relevant scholarship.

Foundations of Organizational Ecology and Interest Group Formation in the Post-Communist Context

Originating in the 1970s, the organizational ecology approach differs from other streams of scholarship in organizational behavior. Scholars of organizational ecology contend that organizations themselves tend to not be able to transform in light of changes to their political environment. Therefore what these scholars seek to understand is the “births” and “deaths” of

³ Michael Dobbins and Rafa Riedel, *Exploring Organized Interests in Post-Communist Policy-Making: “The Missing Link”* (London: Routledge, 2021).

organizations in light of these environmental changes. With that being said, the organizational ecology approach is a population-level approach rather than looking at the impact of individual organizations. Hannan and Freeman characterize an organizational population as a group of organizations that share a “common dependence on the material and social environment” in which their activities function.⁴ From this standpoint then, this study assumes that populations of interest groups, in particular refugee interest groups, seek to work together rather than against one another.

As mentioned before, a robust literature exists on the organizational ecology of interest groups in a diverse array of interest groups in the American and EU contexts, so far, organizational ecologies in the post-communist spaces is limited. Questions on how the transition to democracy and accession into the European Union have affected the interest group landscape in post-communist states such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia in areas such as higher education, healthcare, and environmental groups.⁵ However, the area of refugee interest group formation has yet to be meaningfully studied in the post-communist context in the Czech Republic specifically.

Following the collapse of communism in Europe, scholars such as Olson suggest that few organized interest groups survived and there was a “clean slate” in these states in terms of interest groups.⁶ However, studies done by those such as Dobbins et al suggest that this “clean slate” notion proposed by Olson does not necessarily hold in the post-communist context. These scholars suggest that under communism there did in fact exist a civil society in which operations

⁴ Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman, ‘Density Dependence in the Growth of Organizational Populations,’ in Carrol ed., *Ecological Models of Organizations*, pp 7-31.

⁵ Michael Dobbins and Rafa Riedel, *Exploring Organized Interests in Post-Communist Policy-Making: “The Missing Link”* (London: Routledge, 2021).

⁶ Ibid.

extended out of the state party apparatus.⁷ Dobbins et al note that “civic organizations” were frequent within totalitarian communist regimes.⁸ These civic organizations could range from sports organizations to labor unions.⁹ The authors note however, that in the communist context, these organizations were more often than not had mandatory participation within the venues in which they existed and enacted strict regulations on the activities conducted within said civic organizations.

The authors go on to note that any “civic organization” that was independently founded and gave the appearance of being what would appear to a modern observer as resembling what an interest group looks like today in the current political context, were outlawed and quickly disbanded.¹⁰ However, following the logic of POS theory, the relative weakness of interest groups in the communist setting suggests that after communism’s collapse, the opportunity to create genuine and specific interest groups in the post-communist Czech Republic occurs. Dobbins et al’s research into the higher education, healthcare, and energy suggest that this holds true.¹¹ However, as the findings that are reported in the ensuing section detail, for refugee interest groups, there is a gap in the literature and that in the pre-transition context, my findings report no existence of refugee interest groups within the Czech Republic. However, some report activity in pre-communist Czechoslovakia in, for instance the 1920s, but being forced to close their operations upon the onset of the Second World War. What the literature (and my own research that is detailed later) reports is that in the immediate post-communist context, specifically in the very politically significant year of 1989, is where we see the largest “births” of

⁷ Michael Dobbins and Rafa Riedel, *Exploring Organized Interests in Post-Communist Policy-Making: “The Missing Link”* (London: Routledge, 2021).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

interest groups and the creation of a robust civil society in not just the Czech context, but also in other former communist states.

Refugee Issue Framing since the Fall of Communism

As this research combines the notions of interest group formations with refugee issue framing as a mechanism that hinders or helps formation rates in the Czech Republic, an assessment of the relevant literature pertaining to refugees in the Czech, but also the overall context of refugees amidst various crises that have impacted the whole continent (therefore the Czech Republic as well).

As this study conducts an organizational ecology of refugee interest groups from 1989-2023, the first event of interest is the refugee crisis that came as a result of the Yugoslav Wars. One point of interest is that this refugee crisis, despite resulting in one of the largest movements of asylum-seeking people since the Second World War, is relatively understudied. However studies conducted by scholars such as Barutciski have shed light on a Europe-wide understanding of how refugee issues were framed at the time of this crisis.¹² Barutciski argues that initial reactions across the European continent to the flight of refugees from the Balkans in light of the Yugoslav War was one of general disinterest.¹³ Border security was quite tight and it was hard for many Yugoslav's to get further than states within the immediate vicinity of Yugoslavia such as Italy, if they were lucky.¹⁴

However, Barutciski contends that after mainstream broadcasting of the fighting in Yugoslavia, this strictness and Europe-wide resistance to allowing Yugoslav refugees into their

¹² Michael Barutciski, "EU States and the Refugee Crisis in Former Yugoslavia." *Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees*. Vol 14, No 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

borders, melted as images of the horrors of war and violence filled the homes of their citizens.¹⁵ This elicitation of sympathy around Europe led to a general relaxing of borders that saw tens of thousands of Yugoslav refugees enter mainly the United Kingdom and Germany, but also notably thousands into the then-Czechoslovakia.¹⁶ This represents a significant gap in the literature regarding refugee issue framing, as the largest concentration of the scholarship focuses on the debates of the Syrian refugee crisis, but it could be suggested that such particular attention is paid to that event due to the intense politicization that occurred between the European states that were willing to take in refugees and migrants amidst the crisis and those (such as the Czech Republic) that were wholly opposed. What Barutciski contends is that following the release of images and footages detailing the horrors of war on the European continent, the issue of taking in Yugoslav refugees became a generally de-politicized issue.¹⁷

However, the literature surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis (a major contributor to the European migrant crisis) is very much focused on the politicization of refugee framing and the various factors that influence different stances that politicians across Europe have taken on the issue. Scholars such as Bhambra are quick to point out that especially in the build-up to the refugee crisis that Europe faced at its most intense period of 2015-2017, the continent took the least amount of refugees than any other continent.¹⁸ Arguments could be made that proximity to conflict zones is the main factor impacting this, however, what cannot be contended is that when a refugee crisis reached the doorstep of Europe, the continent found itself unprepared from an organizational and political standpoint as this issue of integrating new populations into the

¹⁵Michael Barutciski, "EU States and the Refugee Crisis in Former Yugoslavia."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gurminder K. Bhambra, "The Current Crisis of Europe: Refugees, Colonialism, and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism." *European Law Journal* 23, no. 5 (2017): 395-405.

continent. Bhambra contends that despite the cosmopolitan aspirations of the European integration project, the Syrian refugee crisis/European migrant crisis pushed the European Union to the “limits of cosmopolitanism,” as populations with distinctly different languages, cultures, and religions entered the continent, sparking fierce debate about whether or not refugee intake was acceptable amongst the different European states.¹⁹ Bhambra scholarship also points out that often the terms “refugee” and “migrant” are used nearly interchangeably in the political arena during the crisis, but without giving respect to the difference in the terms.²⁰ Bhambra and also Dragostinova note that often in the political spaces where debates about refugee intake occurred, the term migrant would often be used in replacement of refugee, with the difference being as a refugee you are fleeing the threat of violence or persecution and a migrant, could for example, be an “economic migrant,” seeking better economic and financial conditions for themselves.²¹ However, refugees have a legal right to seek asylum and protection under international law, while migrants do not. Bhambra and Dragostinova contend that this difference is often ignored in order to dissuade publics from being supportive of refugee entry into the country.²²

In particular, the scholarship on the Syrian refugee crisis and the European migrant crisis focuses on the failures of European policies in not only managing the crisis, but also the failure of individual states in terms of their treatment of incoming refugees and migrants. With the overwhelming amount of refugees and migrants reaching states such as Italy, Greece, and

¹⁹ Gurminder K. Bhambra, "The Current Crisis of Europe: Refugees, Colonialism, and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism."

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Theodora Dragostinova, "Refugees or Immigrants? The Migration Crisis in Europe in Historical Perspective." *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective* 9, no. 4 (2016): 1-16.

Gurminder K. Bhambra, "The Current Crisis of Europe: Refugees, Colonialism, and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism."

²² Theodora Dragostinova, "Refugees or Immigrants? The Migration Crisis in Europe in Historical Perspective." Gurminder K. Bhambra, "The Current Crisis of Europe: Refugees, Colonialism, and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism."

Turkey through the Mediterranean passage, policies such as introducing refugee intake quotas across the European Union gained traction in order to alleviate the burden placed upon these Mediterranean states. However, as noted previously, states such as those in Central and Eastern Europe were particularly resistant to accepting any refugees into their borders. Scholars such as Damoc, Hafez, Jelínková, Klaus et al, Kluknavská et al, Kotišová, Krastev, Naxera and Krčál, and Pachocka, have highlighted that within the Czech and greater Central and Eastern European context, resistance to refugee resettlement from countries such as Syria was met with enormous resistance.²³ Through studies of resistance to policies that would allow refugees as well as a study of both the media and political discourse surrounding refugees and migrants during this period, these scholars create a foundation of understanding of which impulses motivated this

²³ Adrian-Ioan Damoc, "Fortress Europe breached: political and economic impact of the recent refugee crisis on European states." *Annals of the University of Oradea* 25, no. 1 (2016): 20-29.

Farid Hafez, "The Refugee Crisis and Islamophobia." *Insight Turkey* 17, no. 4 (2015): 19-26.

Marie Jelínková, "A Refugee Crisis without Refugees: Policy and Media Discourse on Refugees in the Czech Republic and Its Implications." *Central European Journal of Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2019): 33–45. <https://doi.org/10.2478/cejpp-2019-0003>.

Witold Klaus, Miklós Lévay, Irena Rzeplińska, and Miroslav Scheinost. "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Central European Countries: Reality, Politics and the Creation of Fear in Societies." *Refugees and Migrants in Law and Policy: Challenges and Opportunities for Global Civic Education* (2018): 457-494.

Alena Kluknavská, Jana Bernhard, and Hajo G. Boomgaarden. "Claiming the Crisis: Mediated Public Debates about the Refugee Crisis in Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 1 (2019): 241–63. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez022>.

Johana Kotišová, "Cynicism Ex Machina: The Emotionality of Reporting the 'Refugee Crisis' and Paris Terrorist Attacks in Czech Television." *European Journal of Communication* 32, no. 3 (2017): 242–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323117695737>.

Ivan Krastev, "The Refugee Crisis and the Return of the East-West Divide in Europe." *Slavic Review* 76, no. 2 (2017): 291-296.

Vladimír Naxera and Krčál, Petr, "'This is a Controlled Invasion': The Czech President Miloš Zeman's Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats." *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12, no.2 (2018): 192-215. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0008>

Marta Pachocka, "The Eastern Partnership in Times of the Migrant and Refugee Crisis in the European Union." *EuroTimes* 22 (2017): 17-31.

resistance to refugee resettlement in the Czech Republic and the region as a whole during this period. From studies into Islamophobic rhetoric, security concerns due to terrorist activities in Europe and the Middle East at the time, and also cultural integration concerns have been topics of study in the current literature that focuses on Czech Republic reaction and actions amidst the Syrian refugee crisis.

While eventually the Czech Republic did acquiesce and accept a relatively small amount of refugees amidst the Syrian refugee crisis, studies conducted by those such as Burnett, Kugiel, and Pfortmueller et al have all produced scholarship that support the notion that even upon being resettled in the Czech Republic or the Central European region, there have been failures in terms of effectively integrating these populations within the receiving nation's society.²⁴ Burnett's scholarship in particular is interesting in terms of this study's interest in refugee issue framing as it concludes that most refugees in the Czech Republic would agree that they are provided with inadequate opportunities to be instructed in the Czech language, finding schools in which to enroll their children, and have been provided limited training in order to enter the workforce.²⁵ With this study detecting significant discourse from leading Czech politicians during the Syrian refugee crisis as citing refugees from Syria and the Middle East being unlikely to learn the language or integrate themselves properly into Czech society, studies such as this provide interesting context for this studies discourse analysis.

²⁴ Kari Burnett, "Policy vs. Practice: The Effectiveness of Refugee Integration Policies in the Czech Republic." *European Spatial Research and Policy* 22, no. 1 (2015): 121–33. <https://doi.org/10.1515/esrp-2015-0020>.

Patryk. Kugiel, "The Refugee Crisis in Europe: True Causes, False Solutions." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 25, no. 4 (2016): 41-59.

Carmen Andrea Pfortmueller, Miriam Schwetlick, Thomas Mueller, Beat Lehmann, and Aristomenis Konstantinos Exadaktylos. "Adult Asylum Seekers from the Middle East including Syria in Central Europe: What are Their Health Care Problems?." *PloS one* 11, no. 2 (2016).

²⁵ Kari Burnett, "Policy vs. Practice: The Effectiveness of Refugee Integration Policies in the Czech Republic."

Overall the literature surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis and the framing of refugees in the Czech Republic and in Europe as a whole portrays a very bleak outlook and investigates mainly the shortcomings of policies and people during this period. A noticeable gap in the literature is any sort of updated research on these refugee populations who are likely still within Europe as the Syrian Civil War is still an ongoing conflict. The bulk of this research was conducted amidst the crisis itself and as the years have passed, it is possible that integration has become easier (or worse).

With regards to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the ongoing nature of the crisis has limited the amount of scholarship available on the subject. However, early studies by Bryan et al, Jaroszewicz et al, and Morrice on the Ukrainian refugee crisis detail the immediate needs of these refugees as well as the structure of the crisis as these refugees flee Ukraine out of mostly its western borders into Central Europe.²⁶

An interesting and what is likely to become a growing body of scholarship focuses on the difference of treatment that Ukrainian refugees have received compared to those refugees affected by other refugee crises outside of Europe has commenced with studies by scholars such as Shmidt and De Coninck.²⁷ While De Coninck's research looks at Europe-wide context, Shmidt's study configures into the understanding of refugee framing in the Central European context, in particular in the Austrian and Czech political environment.²⁸ This study builds upon

²⁶ Tara Kolar Bryan, Monica Lea, and Vladimír Hyánek. "Resilience, Ambiguous Governance, and the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis: Perspectives from NGO Leaders in the Czech Republic." *Central European Economic Journal* 10, no. 57 (2023): 35-49.

Marta Jaroszewicz, Jan Grzymski, and Mateusz Krępa. "The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis Demands New Solutions." *Nature Human Behaviour* 6, no. 6 (2022): 750-750.

²⁷ Victoria Shmidt, "The Ukrainian Refugee "Crisis" and the (Re) production of Whiteness in Austrian and Czech Public Politics." *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 16, no. 02 (2022): 104-130.

David De Coninck, "The Refugee Paradox During Wartime in Europe: How Ukrainian and Afghan Refugees Are (Not) Alike." *International Migration Review* 57, no. 2 (2023): 578-586.

²⁸ Ibid.

this gap in the literature in its contributions to the shifting discourses between the two crises and how it has impacted refugee interest group formation within the Czech Republic.²⁹

Overall, this study situates itself in the literature by linking interest group formation scholarship (particularly within the Czech/Central European post-communist context) with the issue of refugee framing in the Czech political context. Through first understanding the organizational ecology of refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic, this study adopts a novel approach of suggesting that the formation rates of these refugee interest groups have been impacted through the Czech Republic's political discourse.

²⁸ Victoria Shmidt, "The Ukrainian Refugee "Crisis" and the (Re) production of Whiteness in Austrian and Czech Public Politics."

²⁹ Ibid.

Research Question

This work seeks to investigate the mechanisms through which refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic form. Firstly, this work applies the foundational theories of interest group formations investigate how these theories explain refugee interest group formations in the Czech Republic such as incentive theory, political opportunity structure theory, and density dependence theory. However, in light of the commencement of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the Ukrainian refugee crisis and the Czech Republic's support of those incoming to their country (when in recent times this has not quite been the case, as with the Syrian refugee crisis), novel theoretical explanations are also utilized. These novel techniques investigate how political discourses shape the norms surrounding support for refugee issues and how the shifting of these discourses/norms impact refugee interest group formation rates. Additionally, by investigating shifting discourses, this technique allows for an understanding of how international dynamics and concerns can play in to incentivizing or de-incentivizing refugee support in the mainstream political discourse, and therefore impact refugee interest group formation rates.

Theoretical Background

The first section of this work that assesses the current organizational ecology of refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic is rooted in testing for three main theories of how organizations form: political opportunity, incentive structures, and density dependence. While all of these theories offer various explanations about organization/interest group formation, scholars such as Nownes, argue that they are not necessarily mutually independent.³⁰ This work holds this assumption in regards to refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic and therefore will test how all three of these theories hold in this context.

In the second portion, the main theoretical principle at play is how shifting discourses impact interest group formation rates. As this study argues that a shift in the political rhetoric of mainstream Czech politicians have shifted the norms surrounding helping refugees in the Czech Republic, a critical discourse analysis approach will be utilized. This approach is rooted in constructivist assumptions, the focus is on how in particular these interest groups construct the norms that they are trying to support regarding refugees.³¹

Theories of Interest Group Formation

The field of interest group formation has been of particular interest to political scientists for decades. Over the years, two main schools of thought have emerged in the study of how interest groups form. The most dominant, incentive theory, seeks to understand the internal context that drives interest group formation. While less popular, the political opportunity structure theories still contribute valuable insight into the field and seek to determine how

³⁰ Anthony J. Nownes, "The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950–98."

³¹ Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2017.

external factors impact interest group formation within particular political contexts.³²

Additionally, density dependence theory has been utilized within the context of understanding interest group formation in the post-communist context, as is seen in this study.

Political Opportunity Structure (POS) Theory

A major theoretical school for interest group formation lies in political opportunity structure (POS). While incentive theory remains the primary area of research interest group formation, it is focused on the internal context of interest group formation. However, POS theory seeks to explain interest group formation through an examination of the external context of a given country's political setting. Scholars have broadly defined POS as “the institutional features or informal political alignments of a given political system.”³³ POS scholars argue that interest group formation is reliant upon the external political conditions of a given political environment.³⁴ Within the context of examining refugee interest groups, as is the case in this study, one could argue that an external condition for successful formations of refugee interest groups would occur on the onset of a refugee crisis itself. Therefore, those in support of refugee rights are activated into forming interest groups when, for instance, a refugee crisis occurs that has an impact on their own political environment (for instance in 2015 with the Syrian refugee crisis or, the more recent, 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis).

While incentive theory is dominant in studies of interest group formation in comparison to POS theories, one could argue that they are not mutually exclusive from one another.

³² Anthony J. Nownes, “The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950–98.”

³³Verta Taylor and Mark Traugott, “Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action.,” *Contemporary Sociology* 25, no. 4 (1996): 485, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2077086>.

³⁴David S. Meyer and Douglas R Imig, “Political Opportunity and the Rise and Decline of Interest Group Sectors,” *The Social Science Journal* 30, no. 3 (1993): 253–70, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0362-3319\(93\)90021-m](https://doi.org/10.1016/0362-3319(93)90021-m).

Scholars, such as Nownes, in his study of gay rights interest group formation in the United States, seeks to reconcile the two approaches in order to understand how both the internal and external contexts can trigger interest group formation.³⁵

Building upon the works of Dobbins et al's studies into post-communist interest group formation, this study supposes that the findings relating to interest groups in Central Europe (including the Czech Republic), will also be seen in interest group formations relating to refugee issues. Generally, this is expected to be seen in the Czech Republic with a high "birth rate" of refugee interest groups emerging after the collapse of communism which leads to the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Transition from communism has a positive impact upon refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia).

Incentive Theory

Foundational texts on incentive theory, such as Mancur Olson's *Logic of Collective Action*, suggest that individuals are disinclined from joining interest groups when their interests are threatened.³⁶ While this logic may seem counterintuitive to collective action, Olson suggests that it is in fact when there is a "mutually satisfactory exchange" between the organizers of interest groups and their followers that allow interest group formation on a given subject to

³⁵ Anthony J. Nownes, "The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950–98."

³⁶ Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1977). Glenn R. Carroll, *Organizations in Industry: Strategy, Structure, and Selection* (New York: Oxford University Press, n.d.).

occur.³⁷ Research stemming from these foundations of incentive theory in interest group formation suggest that this “mutually satisfactory exchange” can be reached through “extra-rational incentives.”³⁸ These extra-rational incentives can include those that can trigger a sense of civic duty or call into question the morality of a particular potential follower.³⁹ These interest groups that focus less on the actual exchange of mutual benefaction and on these questions of moral values are of particular interest.⁴⁰ These interest groups that rely upon fulfilling a given follower’s sense of morality or call upon their followers’ sense of civic duty are of particular interest, as arguably refugee interest groups belong in this category of providing extra-rational incentives.

While refugee interest groups do certainly have a population of their followers who receive tangible benefits from their successes, this being refugees themselves, their followers who are non-refugees receive little in tangible benefits from these interest groups. Instead, followers and supporters of refugee interest groups instead are incentivized to form or support these organizations in order to satisfy their own moral satisfaction or civic duty. One would expect that when the incentive to create a refugee interest group is highest, such as in the midst of a refugee crisis, formation rates increase. With this in mind comes the second hypothesis for this organizational ecology:

Hypothesis 2: Formation rates of refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic increase during ongoing refugee crises.

³⁷ Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1977).

³⁸Anthony J. Nownes, “The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950–98.”

³⁹Harvey Leibenstein, *Beyond Economic Man: A New Foundation for Microeconomics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁴⁰ Anthony J. Nownes, “The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950–98.”

Density Dependence Theory

While there are various theoretical streams from which scholars approach an organizational ecology of interest groups, one of the most popular and one that will also be conducted in this study is that of density dependence. Density dependence theory takes particular interest in how many of a given organization are found in a given area (in terms of this study, refugee interest groups operating within the Czech Republic). Density dependence scholars suggest that within a given space within which organizations work, there is a negative relationship between competition and organization foundation rates. Therefore, density dependence theorists take a great interest in studying the foundation and mortality rates of the organization in which they are studying.

Based on the findings of other scholars in the post-communist CEE, one would expect that refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic is density dependent. Density-dependence theory suggests that the initial “formation” periods of interest groups is difficult as these groups must legitimize their existence within the organizational environment. Density dependence also suggests that after interest groups in a given sector have in fact legitimized their existence, patrons and capital become much more readily available to new groups within the same sector, leading to a spike in growth.⁴¹ However, as more of these groups begin to form, resources begin to deplete and a plateau develops and sharp decrease in formations and even “deaths” of organizations. Generally, what is seen in data that supports density-dependent formations, there is a reverse “U” shape in the graphs of the data.⁴² As there have been positive

⁴¹ Michael Dobbins, Brigitte Horváth, and Rafael Pablo Labanino, “Are Post-Communist Interest Organizations Learning to Lobby? Exploring the ‘Coming-of-Age’ of Central and Eastern European Interest Groups,” *Democratization* 29, no. 7 (2022): 1268–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2046558>.

⁴² Michael Dobbins and Rafał Riedel, *Exploring Organized Interests in Post-Communist Policy-Making: The “Missing Link”* (London: Routledge, 2021).

findings in density dependence hypotheses relating to interest group formations within Central Europe and the Czech Republic, logic suggests that refugee interest groups are not an exception, therefore the third hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic is density-dependent, characterized by gradual growth, a plateau, and decline.

Shifting Norms and Discourses' Impact on Interest Group Formation Rates

The novel theoretical approach taken in this work is to investigate how shifting discourses can impact interest group formation rates. Building out of incentive theory, this study posits that when discourses from leading political figures (those who have the most power to shift political norms), frame a subject relating to an interest group, in this case refugee issues, they are capable of incentivizing or de-incentivizing interest group formation rates. Therefore, after testing the traditional theoretical roots of interest group formation rates, this work will test how shifting discourses impacts refugee interest group formation rates.

This theoretical framework is rooted in the massive differences in discourses on refugee framing during the Syrian refugee crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis that existed in particular, within the Czech Republic. While in the Syrian refugee crisis (and the surrounding European migrant crisis), there was a negative discourse surrounding the issue of helping these refugees, arguably causing a drop off in refugee interest group formation rates as it no longer incentivized civic activists from forming these groups. Therefore our next hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Widespread negative discourse amongst mainstream politicians and political groups in the Czech Republic stunted refugee interest group formation rates within the country amidst the Syrian refugee crisis/European migrant crisis.

Due to the reversal in support generally seen, especially at the onset, of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, this work then contends that the “positive discourses” seen in the mainstream Czech political spectrum had a positive impact upon incentivizing civic activists into forming refugee interest groups. Therefore, the final hypothesis of this study is as follow:

Hypothesis 5: Widespread positive discourse amongst mainstream politicians and political groups in the Czech Republic contribute to positive refugee interest group formations within the country amidst the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

As this approach analyzes how shifting discourses on the framing of refugee issues from a matter of, for example a national security threat to supporting an international or humanitarian cause, and the norms that then surround supporting refugees, a constructivist lens is adopted. While in the sense that other theoretical approaches in the realm of international relations could explain maximizing security and keeping refugees out of the country (as one arguing that the issue of bringing in refugees had been securitized), or that cooperating together with other countries to support refugees could be beneficial to all of those involved (as a cooperation theorist may argue), this approach is rooted in the shift of *norms*, and therefore a constructivist lens in this novel approach is decidedly most useful.

As this work argues that shifting discourse surrounding the framing of refugee issues in the Czech Republic has led to new norms surrounding helping refugees in the country, a critical discourse analysis method will be utilized in order to approach this discourse from a constructivist lens. Unlike other qualitative approaches to analyzing bodies of discourse, such as qualitative content analysis (which has realist assumptions relating to the relationship between discourse and the world), critical discourse analysis approaches analysis from a constructivist perspective.⁴³

Therefore, this theoretical lens and methodological approach work hand-in-hand. A critical discourse approach seeks to evaluate what is said but also what is left unsaid. In trying to understand how the public discourse seeks to discuss and support policies that would help refugees, it is relevant to consider what aspects of the refugee population they are highlighting, as well as what aspects of the refugee population they are disinclined to discuss. Beyond this, a constructivist approach to understanding how public rhetoric is employed allows us to understand how norms surrounding supporting refugees are, at least, attempting to be shifted. It has already been noted that the reaction by Central European states to supporting Ukrainian refugees is quite extraordinary, especially in contrast to what has been seen during previous refugee crises. This work supposes that the public rhetoric on refugees has shifted in terms of its ability to shape the norms of the Czech Republic to helping refugees and that their discourse relating to them, exists a causal link to a shift in norms.

⁴³ Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2017.

Case Selection and Data Collection

Data collection (i.e. the registration of interest groups related to refugees and migrants in the Czech Republic) for this study came primarily through the Czech Statistical Office and from the Czech Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Asylum and Migration Policy. For this study, we work with the definition of an interest group as one proposed by James Yoho as “interest groups are actual organizations, they are private in nature, they attempt to influence public policy, and they are not political parties—i.e., they do not nominate candidates for public office.”⁴⁴

For refugee interest group data collected from the Czech Statistical Office, this data was collected manually from the registration of all businesses from 1991 (when data first became available) and 2022.⁴⁵ From this list of data, key word searches utilizing words such as “refugee”, “migrant”, “asylum”, “humanitarian” or “immigrant” (as well as their Czech translations) were used to determine an interest group related to refugees and migrant issues. This data is particularly important in being able to identify organizations that are no longer in operation. By first identifying refugee interest groups that have been registered within the Czech Statistical Office’s database, we can identify their level of activity through assessing their website and social media pages that may suggest that they have not been active for some time or by directly announcing their closure.

For data collected from the Czech Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Asylum and Migration Policy, this data was provided through direct contact between myself and their Public

⁴⁴ James Yoho, “The Evolution of a Better Definition of ‘Interest Group’ and Its Synonyms,” *The Social Science Journal*, June 20, 2002, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0362331998900428>.

⁴⁵ “Business Register,” Czech Statistical Office, accessed June 27, 2023, https://www.czso.cz/csu/res/business_register.

Relations Unit.⁴⁶ The bulk of this organizational ecology is based on the data provided from the Ministry of the Interior as it is the most accurate in terms of also assessing those groups that would not be registered within the Czech Statistical Office's data, such as international organizations or student initiatives. This data is also the most current as these are interest groups actively working with the Ministry of the Interior to assist with ongoing refugee issues.

While this data suffices for application of the foundational theories of interest group formations, the novel techniques in investigating how shifting discourses can impact interest group formation rates call for a collection of discourses. As this study seeks to understand how the mainstream discourse impacts the framing of refugee issues and the norms surrounding supporting refugees, only discourses created by leading political figures are included (rather than those on the political periphery, as these would arguably have less impact). Additionally, only discourses and statements recorded by major news sources or organizations (such as press releases by United Nations), are included in the analysis, as these sources would arguably reach the widest audience and have a larger impact on Czech society overall.

⁴⁶ "Dočasná Ochrana," frs.gov.cz, July 13, 2023, <https://frs.gov.cz/docasna-ochrana/>.

Methodological Framework

This work includes two empirical sections. The first empirical section is an organizational ecology of interest group formations as they relate to refugee interest group formations in the Czech Republic. In this section, traditional theories of interest group formations are applied to these formation rates and then discussed in terms of how conclusive the various hypotheses have been found.

The second section, in which a novel attempt to understand interest group formation rates, conducts a critical discourse analysis. Scholars of critical discourse analysis such as Blommaert and Bulcaen argue that for an analysis of political discourse, as is the case in this approach, this methodology is quite useful as an understanding of how recurrent themes and the “hegemony” of certain discourses can occur.⁴⁷ Therefore, the discourses analyzed in this study seek to encompass the trending discourse in the political mainstream rather than those that run against such discourse. Through this analysis of the recurrent themes of the discourses, we can then see how the hypotheses tested in the second empirical section hold.

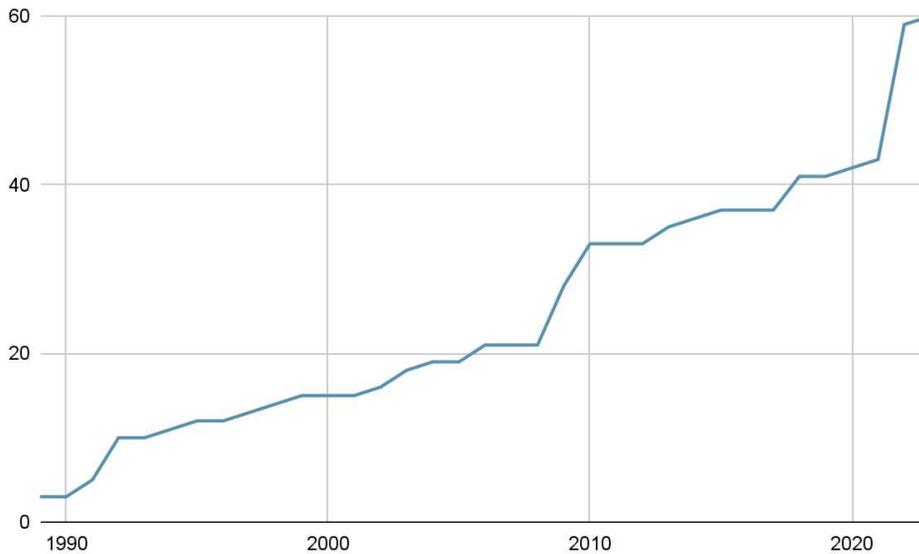
⁴⁷ Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 29:447-466 (2000). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.447>.

Organizational Ecology of Refugee Interest Groups in the Czech Republic

Beginning with an overall analysis of when refugee interest group formations are at their highest we can see immediately that formations of refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia) did not begin until the fall of communism in the country in 1989. While some interest groups formed immediately, the first spike in refugee interest group formation did not begin until 1991. While there has been steady growth of refugee interest groups at a time, generally about one or two groups every year or every other year, there were significant spikes in refugee interest group formation in 2009 and the largest spike being in 2022.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, that the transition from communism has a positive impact on refugee interest group formation, we can argue that this is supported. Under communism, there is no record of the refugee interest groups existing within then-Czechoslovakia. Organizations that formed during this time in particular frequently cite their ability to form in relation to the fall of communism specifically. Therefore, we can generally say that Hypothesis 1 has a positive finding. This is concurrent with existing literature on post-communist interest group formation that have also found that it is in the transition period from communism that states will have a growth in interest groups in a range of sectors.

Figure 1. Number of Czech Refugee Interest Groups Over Time, 1989-2023

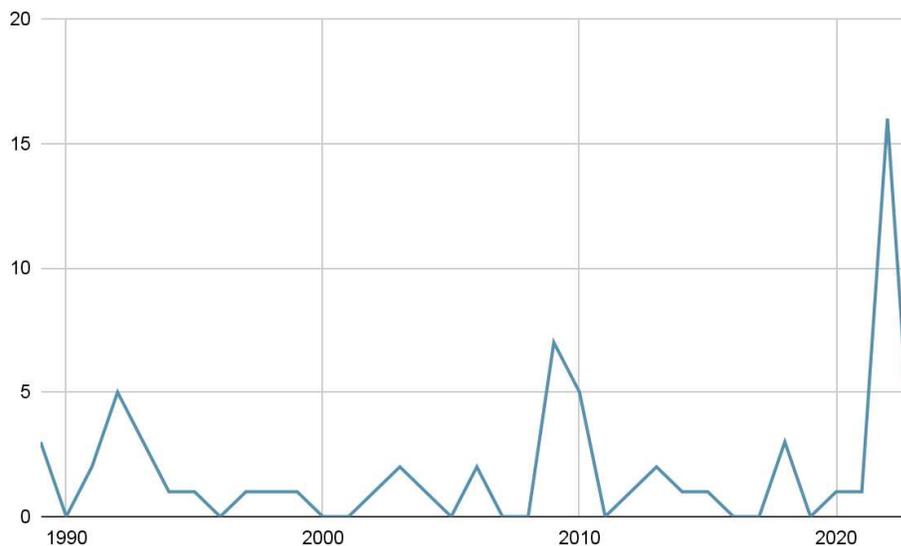


With regards to the Hypothesis 2, that following incentive theory, refugee interest groups would form most around times of refugee crises, the data has intriguing implications. In Figure 2, we can see clearly that Hypothesis 2 is supported during the Ukrainian refugee crisis, beginning in 2022. In fact, during the period studied, it is in 2022 that there were the most formations of refugee interest groups (sixteen). This follows the logic that with the sudden influx of Ukrainian refugees within the country (approximately 520,000 at the time of writing), there had not before been as significant of a refugee crisis as the one the country is currently facing. Therefore, extra-rational/moral responses to wanting to help refugees is logical and explains this spike in refugee interest group formation.

However, Hypothesis 2 can only be partially supported. While refugee interest group formation spiked around 2022 during the Ukrainian refugee crisis, there is not a similar spike during the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. In fact in 2015, during the influx of Syrian refugees into

Europe only one refugee interest group was formed. During the next two years, as millions of Syrian refugees fled their country and one of the largest refugee crises in modern history took place, 2016 and 2017 saw zero refugee interest groups form in the Czech Republic. Following Hypothesis 2, that there would be a positive relationship between refugee crises and refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic, we cannot reasonably argue that there was a significant enough number of formations for the hypothesis to be fully supported.

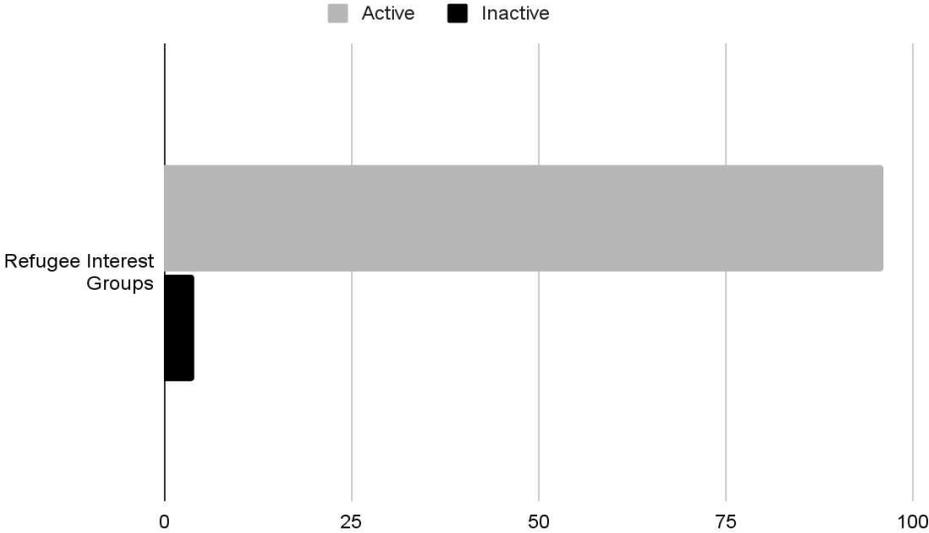
Figure 2. Formation Rates (per Year) of Czech Refugee Interest Groups, 1989-2023



Finally with regards to density dependence, we can argue that there is in fact, a partial, if not clear support for density-dependence within this model. Density-dependence theory suggests that in the initial formation periods of interest groups, these groups struggle to legitimize their existence, but when they do, this leads to a spike in formation. Within our period of study (beginning in 1989), we see only one formation in the first two years. However, by 1991 there were three new refugee interest groups formed with another five following in 1992. After this,

we see a decline in refugee interest group formation, with only one or so groups being formed every few years. We see the common U-shape found in density-dependence models with the spike of interest group formations in 2009 and 2010, with seven and then five formations respectively. This was then seen with a sharp decrease in formations with once again, only one formation of a refugee interest group a year (or none at all), even amidst the Syrian refugee crisis. It is then in 2022 that we see the sharpest increase in refugee interest group formation with sixteen formations during the Ukrainian refugee crisis, and we once again see the indicative “U” shape in our model.

Figure 3. Percent of dissolved and inactive organizations, 1989-2023



However, as stated earlier, there are some critiques suggesting that refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic is density-dependent. This is mostly due to the fact that despite there being a downturn in refugee interest group formations after a spike and then plateau in growth (seen in 1991-1992, 2009-2010, and 2022), there is a significantly low “mortality” rate

amongst refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic. So while we see declines in formation rates, we do not see any spikes in “mortality” rates. What can be shown in Figure 3 is that essentially, when refugee interest groups have been formed since the collapse of communism in the Czech Republic (or previously Czechoslovakia), they tend to stick around with only a few exceptions. Generally within density-dependence theory, we see during the trough of the reverse “U” shape, not only a decrease in formation rates due to factors such as a stretching of resources that does not allow for additional formations, also an increase in the folding of interest groups within that given sector.

Discussion

This organizational ecology of refugee interest groups has interesting implications for our understanding of not only the “birth” and “death” rates of these interest groups, but also how the Czech public has responded to refugee crises over time.

Beginning with the implications of Hypothesis 1, that transition from communism has a positive impact upon refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic, we see that this hypothesis holds. While the literature on post-communist interest group formation has disagreement on whether or not a robust civil society and interest group population legitimately existed in communist society (as most of organizations that could be described as interest groups were highly state-regulated), we see that, in regards to refugee interest groups, they were nonexistent in the Czech Republic. With this in mind, studies by Olson suggest that as states emerge from communism, states begin to “collect” interest groups at a near exponential rate.⁴⁸ This is not unsupported by the findings above relating to refugee interest group formations and

⁴⁸Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1977).

could also be an explanatory factor in why there is such a low “mortality” rates amongst these groups as well.

With regards to Hypothesis 2, that formation rates of refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic increase during ongoing refugee crises, the findings are arguably the most intriguing and serve as a bridge to the second part of this work that seeks to investigate how these refugee interest groups have framed with the issue of helping refugees in light of the war in Ukraine. This is mostly due to the fact that Hypothesis 2 is only partially supported. While in 2022, individuals or groups seeking to form refugee interest groups were able to form by wooing potential patrons and securing funding, this was not the case in 2015 and the years after during the Syrian refugee crisis. This leads to a need for further exploration as to why suddenly more funding and support came about in 2022. In particular the ensuing section is curious as to how these political leaders have been able to frame the issue of supporting or not supporting refugees amidst various refugee crises that impacted the Czech Republic.

As with Hypothesis 3, that refugee interest group formation in the Czech Republic is density-dependent, we see that while there are spikes in formation, ensuing plateaus, and then a decrease in formation rates, refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic are remarkably durable. One potential reason for this is that outside of Prague, most regions of the Czech Republic only have one or two refugee interest groups and that therefore there is not too much competition for resources between interest groups outside of the capital. Therefore, it is in Prague where one would expect to see competition between interest groups. And though it is true that the small number of refugee interest groups that have “died” have been headquartered in Prague, it is still remarkable how durable these groups have proven. Numerous suggestions on why these groups have endured is that there is a good number of these groups that work in

collaboration with each other and could be sharing resources, or that just in general, there is still more room for the refugee interest group population in the Czech Republic to grow and that it may not be until the cessation of the Ukrainian refugee crisis that we will see the “death” of a number of these organizations. As many have had to expand significantly to suddenly accommodate the needs of this new crisis, it would not be an illogical assumption to propose that there could be a contraction of the refugee interest group population in the Czech Republic. Especially since a significant number of these refugee interest groups have been specifically formed to accommodate the Ukrainian refugee population (and not a general refugee population), it would not be surprising to predict a rise in the mortality rate of these groups if or when the current refugee crisis abates.

Framing of Refugee Interest Groups Following the War in Ukraine

What this population ecology of refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic suggests is that there is not a clear understanding of why during some refugee crises, refugee formation rates jumped while during others (such as the Syrian refugee crisis), there were zero refugee interest group formations. As Hypothesis 2 had mixed results with the supposition that following incentive theory, refugee crises would create an incentive to support refugees, this section argues that the shifting discourse amongst leading politicians and political groups in the Czech Republic from being arguably anti-refugee or neutral regarding refugee issues has shifted in favor of being supportive of those fleeing the war in Ukraine has shifted the norms surrounding refugee support and therefore caused a positive formation rate of refugee interest groups within the country. This study traces focusing events in which refugee interest group formation arguably should have been the most impacted and that the causal link to actual positive formation rates is linked to mainstream politicians and political groups producing positive discourse on the refugees themselves. This study then also assumes that when negative discourse regarding refugees during an ongoing refugee crisis or “focusing event” amongst mainstream politicians and political groups, that will deter refugee interest group formations rates.

This hypothesis supposes that “negative discourse” amongst mainstream politicians and political groups is that the norm amongst politicians during these times where refugee crises occur but refugee interest group formations do not occur in the Czech Republic (or previously as Czechoslovakia), it is because the prevailing discourse does not include highlighting aspects such as having a multicultural or cosmopolitan society in favor of populist one of a distinctly *Czech* culture. The negative discourse aspect of this is derived from an expectation that populist rhetoric will also be paired with rhetoric describing refugees that could potentially arrive within

the country in a way that paints them in a negative light. This could range from presenting them as an actual physical and legal danger to the Czech public by arguing that these potential refugees could be criminals or even terrorists, which is a common tactic amongst those not in favor of refugee resettlement within their country around the world.⁴⁹

This study contends that “positive discourses” amongst the mainstream political figures could go in two directions. The first being support for an open and multicultural society. This discourse was dominant in the immediate post-communist period of the 1990s where the Czech Republic notably housed thousands of Yugoslav refugees while also preparing to enter the European Union. I also contend that (especially in light of the Ukrainian refugee crisis), discourse that draws on cultural similarities between the Czech Republic and those of the refugees home countries could contribute to a positive discourse surrounding the framing of refugee issues within the country. This study argues that these discourses in particular contributed to the shifting of norms that sparked the open arms with which the Czechs (at least initially) received Ukrainian refugees. Similar cultural components could include similar language, outlooks, and even historical experiences. This is could especially be noticeable in relation to the shared suffering that both nations have experienced under Russian/Soviet treatment, ranging from the suppression of liberalization during the Prague Spring to the launching of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This section first examines the discourse amongst the Czech political mainstream regarding the first refugee crisis in the post-communist context with the influx of refugees from Yugoslavia and provides the initial context used to then test Hypotheses 4 and 5. The second

⁴⁹ Naxera, Vladimír and Krčál, Petr. ““This is a Controlled Invasion”: The Czech President Miloš Zeman’s Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats.” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12, no.2 (2018): 192-215. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0008>

section will then test Hypothesis 4 by examining political discourse surrounding refugee issues during the Syrian refugee crisis, where refugee interest group formations stagnated, despite large refugee populations entering the region and therefore a larger impetus for refugee interest groups to form. However, as these formations did not occur, this section explores the norms created by such a negative discourse and their causal relationship with refugee interest group formation rates. The final portion of this section then examines the political discourse surrounding refugee issues during the ongoing Ukrainian refugee crisis and tests the hypothesis that positive political discourses during this period has led a shift in norms surrounding supporting of refugees and in turn has caused the jump in refugee interest group formations in the Czech Republic.

Refugee Issue Framing in the Post-Communist Context

In the years following the collapse of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, we see the birth of refugee interest groups (see Figure 1) and a more robust civil society in Czechoslovakia (and the surrounding post-communist Central and Eastern European states as well).⁵⁰ This context in which civil liberties and Western liberalism began to become a popular part of the political discourse after being excluded from the political sphere under communist rule, is an interesting departure point for our understanding of how shifting discourses can have a causal relationship with refugee interest group formations.

It was during the 1990s that the rhetoric of multiculturalism and opening a previously closed society was a dominant stream of discourse within then-Czechoslovakia. In a deep irony of the ensuing discourse analyses, it was Miloš Zeman who said "... today's membership of the Czech Republic in the Council of Europe and our future integration into the European Union will

⁵⁰ Michael Dobbins and Rafał Riedel, *Exploring Organized Interests in Post-Communist Policy-Making: The "Missing Link"* (London: Routledge, 2021).

aid Czech society with overcoming some of its negative attitudes toward people who speak, look and live differently, attitudes suffered by any isolated society. The government will do all it can so that Czech society opens up, to the most acceptable extent, to Europe and the world and transforms itself into a multicultural society.”⁵¹ This rhetoric, coming from a politician who decades later would swap out this multicultural, cosmopolitan rhetoric for more populist discourse in his later career is paired with a time in which refugee interest group formations were generally growing throughout the 1990s as a more robust civil society formed in the post-communist state.

It was also during this time that the Czechs were first navigating support for a refugee crisis. While the refugee crisis sparked by the Yugoslav wars remains a generally understudied topic, it cannot go without noting that this was the first major refugee crisis that the then-Czechoslovaks faced in a post-communist era. While the Yugoslav refugees were initially ignored and turned away by the surrounding European states, the growing visuals of the atrocities of war that were displayed across European televisions led to a softening of visa and entry requirements for these refugees.⁵² During this time, the Czechoslovaks, with their growing ideals of a multicultural society, spurred by it being a newly opened one, took in thousands of refugees from Yugoslavia alongside numerous other European states.⁵³ This context allows us two understandings of the initial Czech response to refugees. The first being that at a time when cosmopolitan, multicultural, pro-Europe discourse was the mainstream, taking in refugees was the immediate norm and that this period of liberalization was also accompanied by generally high refugee interest group formation rates. However, what this support for Yugoslav refugees

⁵¹ Adéla Jurečková, “Czechs and Migration: Solidarity Lost in Transformation,” Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, October 12, 2020, <https://cz.boell.org/en/2020/10/12/czechs-and-migration-why-cant-we-get-any-solidarity>.

⁵² Michael Barutciski, “EU States and the Refugee Crisis in Former Yugoslavia.”

⁵³ Ibid.

begins is the trend of Czech support for refugees from communist/post-communist states, a trend that has persisted till today and provides an interesting departure point for the rest of this study.

Refugee Issue Framing During the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Moving beyond initial Czech/Czechoslovak framings of refugee issues, where in the immediate post-communist context, discourses surrounding multiculturalism and wanting to create a society with Western values was the norm and the intake of Yugoslav refugees appeared to be an issue of little controversy, the Syrian refugee crisis appears as a point in which our understanding of how shifting discourses can impact refugee interest group formation by changing the norms around the framing of refugee issues. Generally, in the analyzing of the discourse by Czech politicians surrounding the acceptance of refugees amidst the European migrant crisis, of which those coming fleeing the Syrian Civil War made up a large percentage of those entering Europe at the time, there appear three main points of concern that the discourse against allowing refugees to enter the Czech Republic at this time generally rely upon. The first being the aspect of security and the threat these refugees pose to the Czech public's safety, the second being their ability to integrate within Czech society due to their cultural differences, and lastly, calling into question how many of these refugees and migrants were arriving in the Czech Republic due to their desire to flee violence.

The European migrant crisis was sparked a few years following the commencement of the Syrian Civil War. This multi-sided civil war has seen the long-time dictator of Syria's forces pitted against the Syrian Democratic Forces, Kurdish forces, and the emergence of ISIS/ISIL.⁵⁴ While this conflict has been ongoing for over twelve years at this point, the fighting and violence

⁵⁴ Daniel Corstange and Erin A. York. "Sectarian Framing in the Syrian Civil War." *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 2 (2018): 441-455.

between the various warring factions reached their peak in between the years of 2012 and 2017.⁵⁵ So while the Syrian Civil War, beginning in 2012, served as the catalyst for the Syrian refugee crisis, the true European migrant crisis did not begin in full until 2015 as the routes to Europe and to safety often involved long-term travel.⁵⁶ It was in 2015 when a rapidly increasing number of refugees, primarily from Syria but from other Middle Eastern or North African countries as well, began to seek asylum in Europe. These refugees came along routes that frequently involved treacherous routes across the Mediterranean, that have notably killed thousands of refugees who have drowned due to unsafe transportation options across the sea, or arduous journeys across Turkey or Russia before reaching EU borders.⁵⁷ A majority of these refugees in the midst of the crisis landed in Italy or Greece, the EU states closest to the conflicts from which these refugees were fleeing.⁵⁸ During this period, the Dublin Regulation, that generally states that the first EU country an asylum-seeker arrives at is the country responsible for processing said asylum-seeker.⁵⁹ However, as EU countries on the Mediterranean Sea, such as Italy and Greece became increasingly overwhelmed by the sheer number of refugees entering their borders, the Dublin Regulation was reconsidered.

What this sparked was a massive shift in refugee policy and responsibility within the European Union's borders. With the suspension of the Dublin Regulation, it was now possible for the processing of asylum-seekers in countries other than their original country of entry. While this sparked popular movements to welcome the refugees in countries such as Germany, who

⁵⁵ Daniel Corstange and Erin A. York. "Sectarian Framing in the Syrian Civil War." *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 2 (2018): 441-455.

⁵⁶ Adrian-Ioan Damoc, "Fortress Europe breached: political and economic impact of the recent refugee crisis on European states." *Annals of the University of Oradea* 25, no. 1 (2016): 20-29.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Kimara Davis, "The European Union's Dublin Regulation and the Migrant Crisis." *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.* 19 (2020): 261.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

from 2015-2017 (the peak years of the crisis) processed approximately 1.4 million asylum applications, other countries, particularly those within the Visegrad Group, made up of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary did not follow suit.⁶⁰ During this period of an intense number of arrivals of asylum seekers, the Czech Republic only processed just under 4,000 asylum applications despite approximations of many more refugees passing through their borders on their way to Germany or other EU destinations.⁶¹ Not only is this number noticeably low, but it is also the lowest amongst the Visegrad Group.⁶² It should also be noted the asylum seekers that were processed during this time came from the communist/post-communist states such as Ukraine, Vietnam, and the Balkan states and not from the major sources of the refugee crisis.

During this period as well, only one documented formation of a refugee interest group is recorded in this study. While incentive theory supposes that it would be during this moment that refugee interest groups would form in order to meet the rising demand of refugee needs, this study argues that the norms surrounding support of refugees, shaped by the political discourse of the time led to a lack of formations.

To begin our analysis of the political discourse shaping and framing the issues and norms regarding support of refugee resettlement with the Czech Republic, it is best to engage with the rhetoric of the politician from whom this study pointed to as a producer of multicultural discourse in the immediate post-communist era of the Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia): Miloš Zeman. While Zeman espoused ideals surrounding the Czechs joining in the European project and belonging to a European society based on these cosmopolitan ideas during his time

⁶⁰ “First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data,” accessed September 26, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asydcfst/default/table?lang=en.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

as Czech Prime Minister, his tune, along with many other Czech politicians had shifted by the time of the Syrian refugee crisis.

In the midst of the Syrian refugee crisis and its peak in Europe, Zeman was serving as the Czech President and a leading populist figure in the country. Zeman's platform as President, while not as significant as the one he had while serving as Prime Minister, is still significant in terms of his rhetoric's ability to frame refugee issues. From here we can note that from the Czech President during this crisis, Zeman adopted a posture of producing negative discourse relating to refugees entering the Czech Republic during this period of 2015-2017.

Since the early stages of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, Zeman had been quite public with expressing concerns that the refugees arriving from Syria and the Middle East/North Africa posed a security threat to the Czech Republic as these refugees could potentially be more likely be terrorists than legitimate asylum-seekers avoiding conflict.⁶³ In an interview with *Frekvence 1* in August 2015, Zeman detailed the potential risks of bringing in refugees and highlighted the risk that they could be "sleeper cells sent by Islamic State that would develop into terrorist organizations."⁶⁴ Throughout the Syrian refugee crisis, this particular point of expressing the generally baseless concerns of terrorist danger by refugees was a major talking point of Zeman's with later assertions on his part that "Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims" and that the incoming refugees were "an invasion organized by the Muslim Brotherhood."⁶⁵ From this we can see that Zeman frames this issue of incoming refugees not as a humanitarian cause, but as a security threat to the Czech Republic. Scholars such as

⁶³ "Zeman: Refugees Should Be Promptly Returned," Prague Post, April 3, 2017, <https://www.praguepost.com/czech-news/49528-zeman-refugees-should-be-promptly-returned>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Adéla Jurečková, "Refugees in the Czech Republic? Not a Trace – but Still a Problem:," Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, May 24, 2016, <https://eu.boell.org/en/2016/05/24/refugees-czech-republic-not-trace-still-problem>.

Naxera and Krčál derive from Zeman's speeches that there is an implicit link that the former Czech President made amidst the refugee crisis linking Islamophobia, immigration (of refugees from the Middle East/North Africa), and state security.⁶⁶ By posing these refugees and asylum-seekers as threats to the safety of Czech citizens, we can contend that Zeman's discourse as the head of state of the Czech Republic had a large impact on the norms surrounding helping refugees arriving and potentially arriving into the country.

Along with Zeman's discourse, other leading politicians in the Czech political arena echoed the concerns that by allowing refugees amidst the European migrant crisis, the Czech Republic would be exposing itself to security risks. While serving as then Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister (but would soon be taking over the reins from Bohuslav Sobotka as Prime Minister), Andrej Babiš, leader of the populist ANO Party was vehemently against the Czech Republic participating in the refugee quota system that sought to alleviate the pressure on Mediterranean states such as Italy, Greece, and Turkey by stating in 2017 (towards the conclusion of the most intense periods of the European migrant crisis) that the Czech Republic would "...not accept refugee quotas. We must react to the needs and fears of the citizens of our country. We must guarantee the security of Czech citizens."⁶⁷ Here Babiš asserts that not only will the government make their own stand against the introduction of refugee populations into the Czech Republic, but that he is also upholding the norms of Czech society by doing so. In saying "...we must react to the needs and fears of the citizens of our country" Babiš demonstrates at least the belief that the norms around bringing in refugees to the Czech Republic

⁶⁶ Vladimír Naxera and Petr Krčál, "'This is a Controlled Invasion': The Czech President Miloš Zeman's Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats."

⁶⁷ Dave Patterson, Babiš: "I reject the EU refugee quotas," August 4, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171103090234/http://blog.praguemorning.cz/babis-reject-eu-refugee-quotas/>. "Právo: Babiš would reject refugee quotas despite sanctions," August 4, 2016, <https://praguemonitor.com/2016/08/04/pr%C3%A1vo-babi%C5%A1-would-reject-refugee-quotas-despite-sanctions>.

at the time is *against* the wishes of the its citizenry.⁶⁸ Through statements such as these, we can see that the discourse by a Czech politician in Babiš, who at that moment was poised to reach a higher level in the country's politics, is one that continued to push and reinforce the norms against bringing in refugees by citing the popular demand of the Czech people. Furthermore, citations of guaranteeing "...the security of Czech citizens" similarly emphasizes that throughout the crisis, the framing of the refugees is perennially one as a threat throughout the refugee crisis.⁶⁹

While discourse surrounding the issue of security and refugees amidst the Syrian refugee crisis frequently drew criticism linked to Islamophobia or arguments that the crisis was the result of an "organized invasion" (as infamously argued by Miloš Zeman), there are notable exceptions where the negative discourse relating to the framing of refugee issues stems from incidents of actual violence committed by migrants within Europe amidst the migrant crisis.⁷⁰ Acts of violence, such as the 2016 Berlin truck attack demonstrated for many of those opposed to refugee resettlement within their countries as proof of the security threat it posed. The Berlin truck attack, which was committed in December 2016, saw twelve people killed (one of which was a Czech citizen) and more than fifty others injured from an attack that saw the perpetrator of the attacks, Anis Amri, drive a hijacked semi-trailer truck into a crowd at the Berlin Christmas markets. Amri, who was a Tunisian national had unsuccessfully applied for asylum in Germany but was denied said asylum. Czech politicians such as Babiš utilized this attack as concrete example of their discourse to highlight the danger that was presented by allowing refugees into the country and to criticize those who pushed against such framing of refugees in Europe, in

⁶⁸ Dave Patterson, Babiš: "I reject the EU refugee quotas," August 4, 2016,

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Vladimír Naxera and Petr Krčál, "'This is a Controlled Invasion': The Czech President Miloš Zeman's Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats."

particular, German Chancellor Angela Merkel. While in countries such those that make up the Visegrad group, where refugee quotas were rejected and closed borders to asylum seekers became the norm amongst the refugee crisis, it was in Germany where Merkel instilled what has been described as an “open-door migration policy” where generally many migrants and refugees were able to resettle. In the wake of the Berlin truck attack, Babiš decried such a policy by stating that “...this policy is responsible for this dreadful act. It was she who let migrants enter Germany and the whole of Europe in uncontrolled waves, without papers, therefore without knowing who they really are.”⁷¹ Here we can see a demonstration from Babiš, a politician on the cusp of winning the top seat in Czech politics, that not only do such policies such as the one being espoused by Merkel as a danger to the German people, but that by avoiding such policies as he suggests, the Czechs have remained safe from such security threats.

Beyond security concerns, discourse put forth by Zeman and other Czech politicians at the time pushed against refugee resettlement in the country by suggesting that many refugees, particularly those contributing so heavily to the European migrant crisis would fail to adequately resettle in the Czech Republic and integrate themselves successfully in Czech society. In the same radio interview referenced previously, Zeman highlighted his concern that if the Czech Republic allowed refugees from Middle Eastern or North African states by predicting that there would then be the “creation of excluded zones, ghettos, as these people would not be able to assimilate due to their cultural differences” with Babiš going on record saying “there is no place for them in Europe.”⁷² This aspect of integrating refugees into societies is often a talking point of

⁷¹ “Czech Finance Minister Says ‘no place’ for Migrants in Europe,” Yahoo! News, accessed September 26, 2023, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/czech-finance-minister-says-no-place-migrants-europe-164357785.html>

⁷² “Zeman: Refugees Should Be Promptly Returned,” Prague Post, April 3, 2017, <https://www.praguepost.com/czech-news/49528-zeman-refugees-should-be-promptly-returned>.
“Czech Finance Minister Says ‘no Place’ for Migrants in Europe,” Yahoo! News, accessed September 26, 2023,

those in opposition to such policies. In particular, this aspect builds upon the previous discussion of security concerns relating to the resettlement of refugees in the Czech Republic amidst the Syrian refugee crisis. While arguments at the time abounded that the allowance of Muslim refugees into the country posed a risk to national security, especially in light of the rise of ISIS/ISIL in Syria and Iraq, as well as numerous terrorist attacks in Europe linked to radical Islamic factions, this point of struggling to integrate themselves into Czech society builds upon the fear of allowing Muslims into a country that was itself without a significant Muslim population.⁷³

While we can demonstrate a general understanding of the apprehension in the ability of Muslim refugees to integrate themselves fully into Czech society at this time, we can see even before the onset of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022 that numerous Czech politicians preferred accepting refugees or at least appearing to support refugees that they deemed more likely to be able to assimilate themselves into Czech society. These refugees frequently cited were those coming from Eastern Europe and former communist areas such as the states that made up former Yugoslavia.⁷⁴

Even beyond those who did not as strongly oppose the settlement of refugees within their borders were often whether through personal reservations or political pressure, were quite mild in terms of their support of resettlement throughout this process, further demonstrating that the discourse surrounding refugees had reached a point where it only continued to reinforce the norms that led to low refugee interest group formation rates. For this example we turn to then-Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka who was in office in the midst of the most intense periods of

⁷³ Vladimír Naxera and Petr Krčál, "'This is a Controlled Invasion': The Czech President Miloš Zeman's Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats."

⁷⁴ "Migrants, Terrorism and Risk of Breakup Are Straining Europe, Czech Prime Minister Says," Los Angeles Times, April 7, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-global-czech-qa-20160407-story.html>.

the European migrant crisis. Sobotka in many ways represents what one would consider to be the most likely candidate to be a producer of a positive discourse on refugees from Syria and elsewhere in the region at the time. As a social democrat and a supporter of the EU's cosmopolitan and multicultural outlook, there have been those that have suggested that the dominance of anti-refugee, anti-migrant rhetoric at the time in the Czech political discourse tied his hands from being more supportive of resettlement from both a policy and even discursive standpoint.⁷⁵ In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Sobotka, while commenting on a deal struck to allow a less than two thousand refugees enter the Czech Republic, highlighted concerns that mirrored those representing the dominant discourse at the time on refugees. In this interview, Sobotka reinforces the discourse on the threat of Muslim refugees in the country, while not from a security standpoint but from a cultural integration standpoint as he contends that “the integration of Muslims is an objective problem and we are in need of positive examples.”⁷⁶

It is in this final example where we can see clearly the discourse surrounding refugees issues at the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis as a catalyst to a dominant discourse of those arriving from this conflict and the surrounding areas into the Czech Republic and Europe as a whole. While politicians such as Sobotka who were more supportive of refugee resettlement than many of his counterparts in the Czech political spectrum, the dominance of a negative dialogue on this issue only further pushed the norm towards doing less for the refugees arriving into the region.⁷⁷ Linking this to our understanding of how incentive theory impacts interest group formation, we can conclude that Hypothesis 2 is only partially supported due to the fact that the

⁷⁵ Adéla Jurečková, “Czechs and Migration: Solidarity Lost in Transformation,” Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, October 12, 2020, <https://cz.boell.org/en/2020/10/12/czechs-and-migration-why-cant-we-get-any-solidarity>.

⁷⁶ “Migrants, Terrorism and Risk of Breakup Are Straining Europe, Czech Prime Minister Says,” Los Angeles Times, April 7, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-global-czech-qa-20160407-story.html>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Czech public had little incentive within its society at the time to help refugees.⁷⁸ With the dominant discourse and the norms surrounding support for refugees and their resettlement within the Czech Republic being against such a notion, Czech society and those that would normally be incentivized to help, whether through concerns of doing “the right thing” on the individual or societal level, were de-incentivized from doing so. Through the dominance of absolutist rhetoric on not allowing refugees from the Middle East and North Africa at the time into the Czech Republic from Zeman and other leading Czech politicians, as well as a softer rhetoric that, while only an echo of Zeman’s rhetoric, reinforced the framing of the refugees in the country in a negative light that highlighted security concerns relating to terrorist activities, those entering the country that were not fleeing the war but were arriving in pursuit of economic or alternative motives, and that those arriving amidst the Syrian refugee crisis would fail to integrate themselves successfully into Czech society.

Refugee Issue Framing During the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

The question that must be asked after such an evaluation of the discourse and the way this discourse has framed and shaped the norms surrounding refugees in the Czech Republic is did a shift in the discourse occur that re-incentivized helping and supporting refugees in the country upon the commencement of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. With a massive amount of refugee interest group formations following the Ukrainian refugee crisis, Hypothesis 2 proved supported at this point of the study and that Czech society was in fact incentivized to form refugee interest groups.

⁷⁸ Anthony J. Nownes, “The Population Ecology of Interest Group Formation: Mobilizing for Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States, 1950–98.”

In the previous section it is highlighted that Czech politicians along the political spectrum created discourse around three central ideas that framed the issue of taking in refugees and the norms surrounding supporting these refugees that arguably explains the lack of refugee interest group formations in the midst of the Syrian refugee crisis/European migrant crisis. However, what this portion of the study now seeks to understand and examine is how this discourse has shifted in a way that explains such a massive shift in refugee interest group formation, not just around such focusing events, such as refugee crises, but in the whole timeframe that is being studied (since the fall of communism and the foundation of a democratic then-Czechoslovakia).

The previous section contends that refugee interest group formations was de-incentivized by discourse from leading Czech politicians that called into question the security of the Czech Republic if such refugees/migrants were allowed into the country, their ability (or their predicted inability) to successfully integrate themselves within Czech communities, and also the reliability that these arriving populations were legitimately fleeing violence and persecution. In the case of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, this study argues that there is a reversal of these attitudes and discourses amongst many Czech politicians. Surrounding the Ukrainian refugee crisis, there abounds discourse that frames a strong responsibility on the part of the Czech state to take in these refugees against Russian aggression and argumentations that Ukrainians are better equipped to integrate themselves into Czech society than many other potential refugee populations due to similarities in culture, religion, and language, amongst other factors. This latter in particular has been cited amongst Ukrainian migrants to the Czech Republic before Ukrainian refugee crisis.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ “Migrants, Terrorism and Risk of Breakup Are Straining Europe, Czech Prime Minister Says,” Los Angeles Times, April 7, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-global-czech-qa-20160407-story.html>.

The 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis began in February of that year upon the commencement of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. While the refugee crisis did not begin in full until February 2022, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine had led to over two million refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of such conflicts.⁸⁰ However, beginning with a military build-up in 2021, Russia launched its full-scale invasion with the sending of troops into the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic (both had been existing for numerous years as quasi-unrecognized states largely dependent upon Russia) and then with Putin's announcement of a "special military operation" in Ukraine to "demilitarize" and "denazify" Ukraine.⁸¹

What the commencement of this invasion (under claims rooted in disinformation) caused was one of the largest refugee crises that the European continent has thus far faced. Thus far, estimates range that approximately six million refugees have fled from Ukraine, mainly into countries beyond their western borders and that eight million have been displaced within the country. It should also be of note that approximations place around 90% of Ukrainian refugees that have left Ukraine are women and children due to the fact that currently, most Ukrainian men from the ages of 18 to 60 are banned from leaving the country, in case of the need to be conscripted into the military forces. Amongst the countries where Ukrainian refugees have fled to, the Czech Republic ranks third behind Poland and then Germany for refugee intake. A startling shift from its refugee intake during the Syrian refugee crisis less than a decade earlier.

However, the findings of this discourse analysis surprisingly do not match up with the expectations laid out in Hypothesis 5 that positive discourse relating to the framing of refugee

⁸⁰ Irina Kuznetsova, "To Help 'Brotherly People'? Russian Policy towards Ukrainian Refugees," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 3 (2020): 505–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1719044>.

⁸¹ Anton Troianovski, "Why Vladimir Putin Invokes Nazis to Justify His Invasion of Ukraine," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/17/world/europe/ukraine-putin-nazis.html>.

issues would shape the norms surrounding refugee support and therefore refugee interest group formation within the Czech Republic at the onset of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. What is generally seen is not in fact a reversal or flip-flop of the negative discourse from leading Czech politicians to a positive discourse about the refugees themselves. Instead, what is seen is the call to help the refugees in the face of Russian aggression against a sovereign Ukraine.

Beginning with the discourse of Petr Fiala, current Czech Prime Minister and a turn away from populist politics for the top spots in Czech politics, we see a stern condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a stance of solidarity with the Ukrainian government and people. In an article Fiala authored himself in *Politico* in the wake of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Czech Prime Minister declared “Ukraine’s fight is our fight too. The Czech Republic’s fight, the European Union’s fight, the whole of Europe’s fight. Our own geopolitical prospects depend on the outcome of this war. The fate of Ukraine is directly linked to the international order in which we must live, and it will decide what the aggressors of the world will be allowed to do in the future. Therefore, without a free Ukraine, there is no free Europe.”⁸² Here Fiala demonstrates that the norms of the international system of respect to sovereignty need to be upheld and that it is of the utmost importance to defend Ukraine from violations of said sovereignty.

While Fiala in this article goes on to suggest that continued military aid, in the form of military equipment such as tanks is crucial to supporting Ukraine, he links the issue to supporting Ukrainian refugees to supporting the country as well. After commending Czech military support for Ukraine he goes on to state “Furthermore, the Czech Republic has aided Ukrainian women, children and the elderly who fled the war to save their lives. We have taken in more than 400,000

⁸² Petr Fiala, “Czech PM: Ukraine’s Fight Is Our Fight Too,” *POLITICO*, October 31, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-russia-war-czech-pm/>.

refugees — an enormous number for our country of just 10 million.”⁸³ This is a massive shift in the discourse from what was previously stated regarding refugee intake numbers amidst the Syrian refugee crisis, with Zeman at the time declaring that after the Czech government accept a refugee quota of a little over a thousand individuals that the rest of those within the Czech borders that were not apart of the quota were now “illegal” and therefore unwelcome.⁸⁴ Even the wake of the launching of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Fiala promised to intake Ukrainian refugees despite that “...the speed and size of the refugee wave is incomparable with past waves, but the Czech Republic can handle it... We do not want the EU to introduce quotas, but to have financial solidarity with the countries most affected by the refugee wave.”⁸⁵ This shift in the discourse also perpetuates the framing of refugee intake and assisting of refugees to that of a positive action rather than a negative one. Certainly, one could argue that this only serves to incentivize refugee interest group formations as discourse such as this perpetuates the belief that in supporting Ukrainian refugees, you are not just supporting these individuals, but also supporting a free Ukraine and, as Fiala states himself, the Czech Republic as well.

While discourse surrounding the ability of Ukrainian refugees’ ability to integrate is not as dominant in the discourse as to why they should be supported within the Czech Republic, Fiala also commends their ability to integrate by stating, “Many of those who have decided to stay in the Czech Republic have been able to find jobs here as well, and they are successfully integrating into our society, with children enrolling in schools. All this, without any significant issues or conflicts.”⁸⁶ This discourse serves as foil to previous discourses than perpetuated a

⁸³ Petr Fiala, “Czech PM: Ukraine’s Fight Is Our Fight Too,” POLITICO, October 31, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-russia-war-czech-pm/>.

⁸⁴ “Zeman: Refugees Should Be Promptly Returned,” Prague Post, April 3, 2017, <https://www.praguepost.com/czech-news/49528-zeman-refugees-should-be-promptly-returned>.

⁸⁵ “PM Promises Czechs Will Take Care of Ukrainian Women, Children Fleeing Russian Invasion,” *Radio Free Europe*, March 21, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/czech-fiala-ukraine-wives-children/31761096.html>.

⁸⁶ Petr Fiala, “Czech PM: Ukraine’s Fight Is Our Fight Too,” POLITICO, October 31, 2022.

framing of refugee issues that created anti-refugee sentiment amidst the Syrian refugee crisis, as leading Czech politicians such as Zeman and Babiš contended that such populations were unlikely to successfully integrate into Czech society. Now the discourse supports the idea that while the Ukrainian refugees were in the Czech Republic, they would successfully assimilate, learn the language, and add to the economy. This only serves to further frame refugees in a positive light and can highlight the work of refugee interest groups who help these refugee populations and present their work in a positive light, arguably incentivizing more formations.

With the case of the Czech Republic's new President, Petr Pavel (an independent and retired general), we see more strict rhetoric against Russia and Russian citizens in preference of those from Ukraine. Pavel has been known for even controversial calls to monitor Russian citizens within the Czech Republic, stating that it is simply "the cost of war" and warning against the possibility of Russian incursions into other sovereign states such as Moldova and Georgia.⁸⁷ This flip from the notoriously pro-Russian presidency of Miloš Zeman, Pavel has been on record boasting to the United Nations regarding his country's support of Ukrainian refugees, stating that "...per capita, [the Czech Republic] has received more Ukrainian refugees than anybody else."⁸⁸ These consistent statements from the leading Czech politicians against Russia and supporting Ukraine continue to frame the issue of helping Ukrainian refugees as a part of the fight against Russian aggression.

Other politicians in the Czech political scene have also leaned into a shared history of being on the receiving end of Russian/Soviet aggression when arguing for Czech support of Ukrainian refugees. With the Czechs facing a similar invasion by Soviet forces in light of the

⁸⁷ Nicolas Camut, "We Should Monitor All Russians Living in the West, Czech Leader Says," POLITICO, June 15, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/petr-pavel-russia-czech-republic-surveillance/>.

⁸⁸ "Czech Republic | General Assembly," United Nations, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://gadebate.un.org/en/78/czech-republic>.

Prague Spring and liberalizing of their communist government, the memories of the Soviet occupation still exist within Czech political discourse and society. This can be demonstrated by left-wing Pirate Party Leader and Minister of Regional Development, Ivan Bartoš' statement, "In August, the Czech Republic commemorated the anniversary of the 1968 Soviet occupation in light of the war in Ukraine. We should continue to support the invaded country in its efforts to preserve peace."⁸⁹ One could argue that discourse such as this from leading politicians creates a stronger bond between the country receiving refugees and those arriving within the country. By framing the issue of supporting Ukraine and those fleeing the violence occurring within its borders, Czech politicians demonstrate that they are shifting the norms surrounding supporting refugees by shifting the discourse that abounded amidst the Syrian refugee crisis and European migrant crisis that promoted the opposite.

What can be best summarized with this analysis of discourse amongst leading Czech politicians amidst the Ukrainian refugee crisis is that the framing of supporting refugees within the country had shifted massively. From discourse during the previous refugee crisis that suggested that refugees were arriving for dubious reasons, posed a threat to national security, and would not integrate themselves within Czech society arguably contributed to the norms surrounding helping these newcomers and therefore stunted the formation of refugee interest groups that would be assisting these populations. However, once the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was commenced by Russia in February 2022, we see leading Czech politicians standing up for Ukraine defiantly against Russian aggression. While this study expected to see more connections between a shared culture and history (though there can be seen evidence of such

⁸⁹ "European Committee of the Regions Discussed Options for Dealing with Current Crises and the Consequences of the War in Ukraine," Web MMR, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://www.mmr.cz/en/microsites/pres/novinky/evropsky-vybor-regionu-projednal-moznosti-reseni-s>.

linkages), it is put forth that by supporting the Ukrainian refugees that had fled to the Czech Republic is a way to support Ukraine in its war against Russia and the violation of its sovereignty. Therefore, this study contends that this discourse contributed to the shift in norms that then supported assistance to refugees and can be a contributing factor to the massive spike in refugee interest group formations seen following the outbreak of war.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that in the various refugee crises that have faced Europe and therefore the Czech Republic as a whole as well, there have been various discourses generated amongst leading Czech political figures that have arguably impacted refugee interest group rates. While in the post-communist context, refugee interest group formations spiked as a civil society formed in the Czech Republic and these refugee interest groups have proven to be quite resilient over time with very low “death” rates amongst these groups. However, the question of when Czech society is incentivized to create these groups is a question that was raised in the organization ecology. This study puts forward that the discourse of leading politicians and the ways in which they have framed refugee issues has impacted the refugee interest group formation rates within the country. From negative discourses surrounding refugee issues amidst the Syrian refugee crisis to a more positive discourse and a framing that supporting Ukrainian refugees is also supporting Ukraine’s fight against Russian infringements upon their sovereignty, this study argues that these shift in discourses have served to de-incentivize and incentivize refugee interest group formations.

However, this study is not without its limitations. While domestic political discourses can influence refugee interest group formation rates, these crises have impacted the whole region and discourses outside of the Czech mainstream can certainly have impacted refugee interest group formation rates and merit further study. Furthermore, myriad factors such as available recourses for refugee interest group formation or support from international organizations and their concurrent impact upon formation rates is also gap in the research that could warrant continued research.

Additionally, as the war in Ukraine carries on, further research should be conducted to see how these refugee interest groups are able to hold up over time and demonstrate the resiliency of other refugee interest groups in the Czech Republic. As time goes on, it remains to be seen if the Czech Republic's commitment to supporting Ukrainian refugees will continue to be so determined, one could argue that it is even faltering now. Future research beckons study of how this society will adapt its discourse towards refugees and civic activism towards supporting them as the war continues.

Summary

Tato studie ukazuje, že v různých uprchlických krizích, kterým čelila Evropa, a tedy i Česká republika jako celek, se mezi předními českými politickými osobnostmi vytvořily různé diskurzy, které prokazatelně ovlivnily míru uprchlických zájmových skupin. Zatímco v postkomunistickém kontextu formace zájmových skupin uprchlíků vyvrcholily jako občanská společnost formovaná v České republice a tyto zájmové skupiny uprchlíků se postupem času ukázaly jako poměrně odolné s velmi nízkou „úmrtností“ mezi těmito skupinami. Otázka, kdy je česká společnost motivována k vytváření těchto skupin, je však otázkou, která byla nastolena v ekologii organizace. Tato studie uvádí, že diskurs předních politiků a způsoby, jakými formulovali uprchlickou problematiku, ovlivnily míru vytváření uprchlických zájmových skupin v zemi. Od negativních diskurzů o otázkách uprchlíků uprostřed syrské uprchlické krize k pozitivnějším diskursům a rámování, že podpora ukrajinských uprchlíků také podporuje boj Ukrajiny proti ruskému porušování jejich suverenity, tato studie tvrdí, že tyto posuny v diskurzech sloužily k demotivaci a motivovat k vytváření zájmových skupin uprchlíků.

Tato studie však není bez omezení. Zatímco domácí politické diskurzy mohou ovlivnit míru utváření uprchlických zájmových skupin, tyto krize zasáhly celý region a diskurzy mimo český mainstream jistě mohly ovlivnit míru utváření uprchlických zájmových skupin a zasloužily by si další studium. Kromě toho nesčetné množství faktorů, jako jsou dostupné prostředky pro vytváření zájmových skupin uprchlíků nebo podpora ze strany mezinárodních organizací a jejich souběžný dopad na míru formace, jsou také mezerou ve výzkumu, která by mohla zaručit pokračování výzkumu.

Navíc, jak válka na Ukrajině pokračuje, měl by být proveden další výzkum, aby se zjistilo, jak jsou tyto zájmové skupiny uprchlíků schopny obstát v průběhu času a prokázat

odolnost jiných zájmových skupin uprchlíků v České republice. Jak plyne čas, se teprve uvidí, zda závazek České republiky podporovat ukrajinské uprchlíky bude i nadále tak rozhodný, dalo by se namítnout, že nyní dokonce pokulhává. Budoucí výzkum láká ke studiu toho, jak tato společnost přizpůsobí svůj diskurz vůči uprchlíkům a občanský aktivismus směrem k jejich podpoře v průběhu války.

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Appendix: Refugee Interest Group Formations

Refugee Interest Group	Foundation Year	Active/Inactive Status
Amnesty International	1989	Active
Diakonie	1989	Active
Charita Czech Republic	1989	Active
UNICEF	1991	Active
OPU	1991	Active
UNHRC	1992	Active
SIMI	1992	Active
Clovek v tisni	1992	Active
Soze	1992	Inactive since 2022
Diecezni Charita Ceske Budejovice	1994	Active
La Strada	1995	Active
PPI	1997	Active
IOM UN Migration	1998	Active

Poradna pro obvanstvi (PPO)	1999	Active
Multikulturalni Centrum Praha	2002	Active
Centro Pro Integraci Cizincu	2003	Active
Konsorcium Nevladnich Organization Pracujicich s Migranty	2003	Active
META	2004	Active
InBaze	2006	Active
Mostpro	2006	Active
Poradna Pro Integraci, z.u.	2009	Active
CPIC Plzensky kraj	2009	Active
CPIC Pardubicky kraj	2009	Active
Jihomoravsky kraj	2009	Active
CPIC Moravskoslezsky kraj	2009	Active
CPIC Zlinsky kraj	2009	Active
In IUSTITIA, o.p.s.	2009	Active

CPIC Karlovarsky kraj	2010	Active
CPIC Jihocesky kraj	2010	Active
CPIC Liberecky	2010	Active
CPIC Olomoucky kraj	2010	Active
AMIGA	2010	Active
Integracni centrum Praha	2012	Active
Diecezni Katolicka Charita	2013	Active
CPIC Kraj Vysocina	2013	Active
Diecezni charita Plzen	2014	Active
Dignity	2015	Active
CPIC Stredocesky	2018	Active
Spolek pro integraci menšin	2018	Inactive since 2020
Christian Refugee Service	2018	Active
Young Caritas	2020	Active
Slovo21	2021	Active
Link LIA	2022	Active

Dum Dobra	2022	Active
Kroky Dobra	2022	Active
Mriya UA	2022	Active
O Nas	2022	Active
Ukrajinska Iniciativa v Ceske Republic	2022	Active
Mezinardni Organizace Ukrajinsko Evropska Perspektiva	2022	Active
Ukrajinske Kulturne Vzdelavci Centrum KROK	2022	Active
Ukrajinsky Nardoni Dum	2022	Active
RUTA z.s.	2022	Active
Amatersky Tenecni a Divadelni Soubour Dzerlo	2022	Active
Sdruzeni Ukraj v Cr Berehyna	2022	Active

Ukrajinska Sobotni Skola Erudyt	2022	Active
Ceska Asociace Ukrajinstu	2022	Active
Spolek my a Ukrajina	2022	Active
Ukrajinsky Memorial, z.s.	2022	Active
Cizinec Neni Otrok z.s.	2022	Active
Centrum Nasledne Podpory Uprchliku z Ukrajiny	2023	Active