Challenging the Odds:

Incumbency Disadvantage, Local Ties, and Electoral Performance in Hungary, 1994–2010

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Most empirical studies of the effect of incumbency conclude that being a defender of the seat is an advantage and that newcomers and challengers alike have increasingly lower probabilities of winning. Yet, the majority of these studies in Eastern Europe have been based on tumultuous political environments in which electoral rules change frequently. A test of the theory of how candidate traits such as legislative and local political experience increase incumbents' electoral performance has not been done in an environment in which the electoral rules are stable. Furthermore, these studies are based in proportional representation (PR) systems, which amplify the role of the party leadership in determining candidate fate through candidate rankings. I examine Hungary's mixed-member system using candidate-level panel data that covers Hungarian national elections from 1994 to 2010, and contains basic information on all candidates running in SMDs. I find that Hungarian SMD incumbents perform worse at the elections than their challengers. However, in the long run, legislative experience in SMDs neutralizes this effect. Additionally, local politicians, such as mayors, manage to increase their vote share at national elections.

Keywords: elections; Hungary; incumbency; local politicians

Introduction

Eastern European transitions to democracy have been accompanied by the reproduction of parliamentary elites.[1] Empirical studies across Central and Eastern Europe find that the percentage of inexperienced legislators—"newcomers"—has dramatically decreased.[2] In fact, five electoral terms after the transitions, only about half of the MPs are newcomers.[3] Turnover can be high in some cases, but the average number of terms spent in parliament increases. Since the early 1990s, incumbents and multi-tenured professional politicians fill party offices, have long and deep experience in local politics,[4] and a high percentage seeks re-election. In the early 2000s, three-quarter of the legislators in post-communist countries have some sort of political experience, including experience in parliament and local politics.[5] All of

this suggests that the parliamentary elite has professionalized throughout Eastern Europe[6] with the consequence that newcomers and challengers alike are a dying political breed.

Yet, the majority of these studies have been based on tumultuous political environments in which electoral rules change frequently. A test of the theory of how legislative and local political experience as candidate traits increase one's electoral performance has not been done in an environment in which the electoral rules are stable. Furthermore, these studies are based in proportional representation (PR) systems, which amplify the role of the party leadership in determining candidate fate through candidate rankings. However, in a system applying single-member districts (SMDs), voters have a greater say in deciding who gets elected, and thus can effectively change the share of newcomers in parliament.

The majority of Eastern European countries that went through a democratic transition in the first half of the 1990s chose to adopt proportional representation as electoral formula. Although some have tried to replace PR with majoritarian electoral rules, none have been completely successful. The main reason is argued to be that institutions of consensus democracy are not compatible with plurality voting systems. Thus, it is consensus democracy itself that hinders electoral reform.[7] In this sense, Hungary with its mixed-member majority electoral system is a unique case in the Eastern European context. Additionally, relatively low levels of turnover makes Hungary a convenient choice to investigate the effect of incumbency in the Eastern European context.[8]

The main question of this study is whether or not *legislative and local political experience as candidate traits better one's electoral performance in single-member districts*. I use candidate-level panel data that cover Hungarian national elections from 1994 to 2010, and contain basic information on all candidates running in SMDs. I investigate the effect of local-level political positions on a data set of all legislators running in SMDs at the five consecutive elections between 1994 and 2010. I find that although the majority of the literature studying the effect of incumbency concludes that being a defender of the seat is an advantage, Hungarian SMD incumbents perform worse at the elections than their challengers.

Framework and Hypotheses

The dramatic increase of experienced legislators in Eastern European parliaments indicate that parties take previous legislative and local experience into account when selecting candidates, and these candidates are increasingly more successful in securing their spots in parliament. Does this indicate that legislative and local political experience serve as Personal Vote-Earning Attributes (PVEA) during election times? In their oft-cited volume, Cain et al. define personal vote as the proportion of votes received by a candidate that cannot be explained by variables like party affiliation,

fixed voter characteristics, and economic trends.[9] Consequently, everything that is related to the candidates' personal characteristics, history, and record can be considered as catalysts to personal vote.

Electoral rules are one of the most important factors that influence the connection between PVEA and electoral performance. When it comes to managing the connection between representatives and voters, the dispute unravels around the effects of majoritarian and proportional electoral formulas. The differences between the two major types of electoral systems come from the distinct philosophical roots (i.e., territorial vs. proportional representation) and the application of single-member versus multi-member constituencies. One of the most frequently cited characteristics of single-member majority systems is that they create a strong *accountability linkage*.[10] Since one district has one single representative, the voters will be able to determine whom to reward or punish for the positive or negative outcomes.[11] As SMD candidates are only dependent on the votes cast for them, gathering extra votes is expected to increase their chances of re-election. The most convenient tool for this is advertising their appealing characteristics and achievements, in other words, personal vote-seeking. In such systems, nominating candidates with PVEA helps increase the chances for parties to bring in the district. Conversely, in multi-member constituencies, where a geographical overlap among legislators confuses the link between voters and MPs the incentive to free-ride increases.[12] The reason for this is that voters have difficulties identifying the representative responsible for the benefits, leaving little room for recognition and reward.[13] In such systems, members are less accountable to the electorate than to the party leadership,[14] that essentially makes the fight for re-election a struggle for higher positions on the party list.[15] Nevertheless, it has also been shown that ballot structure greatly differentiates between party list PR systems. The latter effect of multi-member districts described above is prevalent if the party lists are closed, where voters are not able to change the order of the candidates by casting preference votes. Under these circumstances, the incentive to apply for personal vote is minimal. However, in open or flexible list systems, where voters may change the rank of candidates on the lists, intra-party competition increases the incentives to lean on PVEA.[16]

The case of mixed-member electoral systems is particularly interesting for students of the personal vote, because it offers them to investigate the effects of two vastly different rules under the same political context. In their edited volume, Shugart and Wattenberg define mixed electoral systems as one subset of multiple-tier systems, where two types of votes are cast: a nominal vote to one or more candidates, and a list vote for a—mostly closed—party list.[17] As they put it, mixed-member electoral systems "offer voters a direct role in choosing an elected representative for their localities, but also provide some element of proportional representation."[18] The ability to cast multiple votes allows voters to express their party as well as personal preferences. In case the two do not match—in most cases—voters can always split the ticket: vote for a party list and vote for the candidate of a different party.

Moser and Scheiner investigate whether voters split the ticket owing to strategic considerations or to favourable candidate characteristics in the case of five mixed-member systems.[19] They argue that unlike in Germany, in systems with unlinked tiers (Russia, Lithuania, and Japan),[20] personal vote will be more prominent in determining candidate support than strategic voting. Karp et al. conclude that in the case of New Zealand, candidate effects help explain ticket splitting.[21] The results regarding Germany are mixed. On the one hand, Moser and Scheiner find that by the reason of its party-centeredness, German voters split the ticket strategically rather than casting a personal vote.[22] Bawn also emphasizes that although the system is considered to be rather complex, German voters react strategically.[23] On the other hand, Klingemann and Wessels argue that the grassroots performance of SMD candidates matters in determining electoral success.[24] Scheiner also utilizes the importance of good candidates in Japan's mixed electoral system.[25] Based on various studies on the case of Germany[26] and New Zealand,[27] Shugart concludes that mixed-member systems are more of "a personalization of PR" than "partisanization of SMDs."[28] Therefore, there is reason to believe that the personal attributes of the candidates matter in determining electoral performance in a mixed system.[29]

The main question of this article is whether incumbency and SMD-level legislative experience functions as a PVEA in an Eastern European country that offers its voters to choose between candidates. As noted earlier, more and more legislators in the region have gathered political experience on various arenas of politics. Does this experience help candidates to increase their vote share? Can parties expect that they can better their performance in a given district by nominating the same candidate election after election? One of the dominating hypotheses in the literature of personal vote is that incumbency positively affects candidate vote share, and increases chances of re-election.[30] The incumbency advantage is explained by the campaign value of incumbency,[31] direct office holder benefits,[32] visibility,[33] constituency service,[34] the increasing role of candidate quality,[35] deterring challengers,[36] or simply being better politicians.[37] In a mixed-member setting, Burden[38] emphasized the importance of experienced and incumbent candidates in Japan, Scheiner[39] measures candidate quality with previous office holding experience, Moser and Scheiner[40] confirms the power of incumbency for five countries with mixed electoral systems, while Bawn[41] finds that incumbency has a positive effect on the difference between the SMD and party votes in Germany. Based on the evidence in the literature, I form the following hypotheses.

The SMD incumbency hypothesis: Candidates who are SMD incumbents receive a larger share of votes than their challengers.

The SMD tenure hypothesis: The larger the number of electoral terms in which the candidate served as an SMD MP, the higher the proportion of votes received by the candidate.

A large part of the literature on PVEA focuses on the effect of local roots on national-level electoral performance. Gallagher and Blais et al. emphasize the role of

nativity, while others focus more on local political experience.[42] Shugart et al. argue that nativity is a proxy for local knowledge: those who were born in the constituency may know the needs of the constituents better.[43] On the other hand, Putnam emphasizes the empirical connection between national and local offices by revealing that national-level electoral success is often accompanied by considerable local political experience.[44] Some argue that lower-level political experience bears testimony of whether the candidates have the knowledge on how to reach the designated goals.[45] By lessening the information demand of voting, these characteristics also serve as heuristics that help voters to assess candidate quality.[46] Cox also suggests that voters take the identity of the local representative into account, which draws parties to nominate candidates with a local profile.[47] Heinelt and Hlepas classify the Hungarian local government system as a "strong mayor form" with an "executive mayor."[48] In practice, this does not only mean that the mayor is the administrative leader of the local government, but that in the eye of the citizens he or she appears as the only leader of the municipality. A fairly large percentage of the Hungarian legislators filled in the position of the mayor before and during their legislative mandate.[49]

The mayor hypothesis: Mayors tend to receive a larger share of votes than candidates who did not serve as mayors at the time of the elections.

The Eastern European context

The majority of Eastern European countries that went through a democratic transition in the first half of the 1990s chose to adopt proportional representation as electoral formula. Although some have tried to replace PR with majoritarian electoral rules, none have been completely successful. The main reason is argued to be that institutions of consensus democracy are not compatible with plurality voting systems. Thus, it is consensus democracy itself that hinders electoral reform.[50] Although Romania temporarily[51] managed to switch from PR to mixed-member electoral rules, the system has remained fairly proportional.

In light of this, with its mixed-member majority system,[52] Hungary is a peculiar case within the Eastern European context. Electoral rules adopted in 1990 have been largely unchanged for twenty years after the transition. Although less than half of the legislators (176, 45.6 percent) were elected in single-member districts, the elections created fairly disproportional results favouring large parties. Its success in moving towards a majoritarian political system differentiates Hungary from other Eastern European countries where institutions of consensus democracy successfully prohibited the majoritarian shift with regards to electoral rules.[53] Additionally, the logic of the electoral rules created a two-block system in 2002 that was replaced with one-party hegemony in 2010.[54] The party system became more concentrated and the role of winning in the SMDs is said to become more and more important for winning the elections. Consequently, the importance of candidate characteristics that may attract personal vote increased.

In 1989, one of Europe's most complicated electoral systems was put in place by the Hungarian Parliament. From 1990 to 2014, Hungary had a mixed-member majority system with partial compensation[55] with no seat linkage. A total of 386 representatives were elected on three tiers; 176 MPs came from SMDs (first tier), while 210 members obtained their seats from closed regional (second tier with the 19 counties and the capital city) and national-level (third tier) party lists. Hungarian voters, however, could only cast two votes: one for an SMD candidate and another for a regional party list. The system allowed for ticket splitting, candidacy on multiple tiers as well as multiple office holding. The latter means that legislators were also allowed to hold elected local positions, such as the positions of the mayor or a local council member.

Based on the above, the Hungarian electoral system should fall half-way between being candidate- and party-centred. The SMD tier strengthens personal vote-seeking and personalization, while the closed list tiers emphasize the role of the parties. There are several circumstances that despite the dominance of the SMD tier push the system towards the more party-centred end of the continuum. These factors are hardly unique to Hungary: Several are characteristic to the majority of post-communist and new democracies. First, candidate selection being utterly centralized,[56] the personal vote-seeking incentive of SMD candidates remains at a quite low level. Second, Hungarian voters are demonstrated to hold strong partisan attachments.[57] They are also increasingly polarized,[58] which makes it more difficult for them to switch parties. Third, voter polarization is also accompanied by an adequate level of polarization on the candidate level.[59] With regards to legislators, strengthening party discipline characterizes the twenty-year period after the transition (1989/1990), which expands to parliamentary questioning and interpellations[60] as well as voting in parliament.[61]

The question is whether there is any place for personal vote-seeking in a country with mixed-member electoral rules where party-centeredness prevails with regards to candidate selection as well as voting and elite behaviour. Interestingly, just as it would be expected on the basis of the literature, campaign personalization appears as an important factor in the SMD competition. The research of Chiru and Papp demonstrate that the tier of candidacy and local political background increase the level of personalization during campaign.[62] Early 2015, a series of interviews were conducted with campaign strategists that confirmed that even on the stage of candidate selection, PVEA play an important role.[63] Whenever parties have a considerably large pool of experienced SMD candidates at their disposal, they prefer to nominate candidates from this pool. Candidate data from the elections under investigation support this by showing that a considerable proportion of SMD candidates are rather experienced in campaigning on the first tier.[64] This indicates that parties expect to increase their first-tier vote shares by nominating more experienced candidates. Ilonszki comes to a similar conclusion with regards to candidate selection strategies

Figure 1
The distribution of candidate vote share in single-member districts

SMD vote share

Log of SMD vote share

Percent

Mean = 12.94, SD = 14.13

Mean = 1.95, SD = 1.18
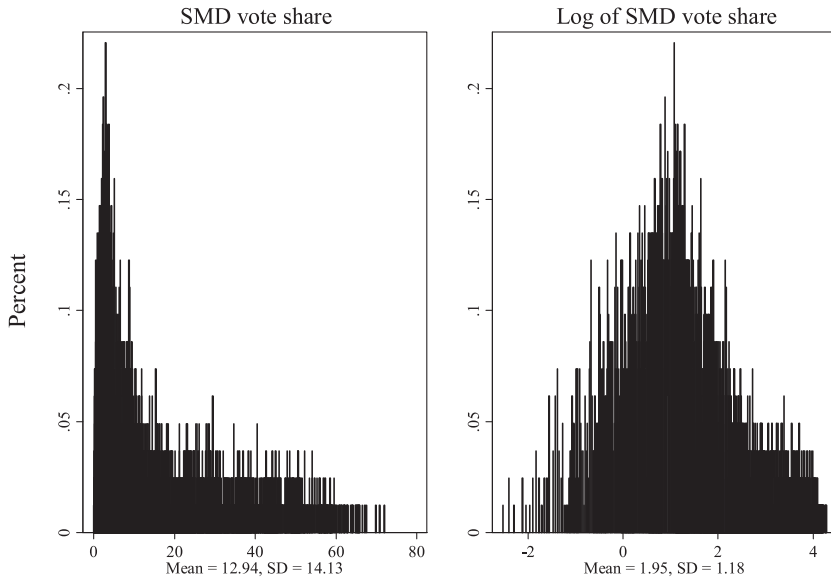
right after the democratic transformation in 1989/1990.[65] She argues that owing to anti-party sentiments in the early nineties, parties tried to select candidates who were able to compete on their own merits. Thus, candidates with more substantial local ties were preferred over party people in the constituencies.

Data and Variables

In the analysis, to model the electoral performance of Hungarian candidates I use the original data compiled by the project Electoral Control in Eastern Europe.[66] Data cover basic candidate information from 1994 to 2010. Additionally, a data set is created to investigate the effect of local political background on the electoral performance of Hungarian MPs who have been serving between 1994 and 2010. Both data sets are organized in long form[67] and contain all candidates and MPs running in SMDs at the respective elections.

The dependent variable of the analysis is the vote share of the SMD candidates in the first round at the five elections held in 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010. In the case of candidates, this variable is fairly skewed to the right (Figure 1); thus I

apply a log-transformation to obtain a more symmetric distribution. There is no need to do the same with regards to MPs; thus, in their case the raw vote share will be explained. Another idea would be to explain the extent of ticket splitting, that is, the difference between candidate and party vote share. However, Hainmueller and Kern show that incumbency does not only bring an advantage on the SMD tier but it also increases party vote share in the district.[68] Consequently, changing the value of incumbency as the main independent variable would change both components of the dependent variable. This way, the true effects on candidate vote share would be masked by the changes in the level of party vote. However, by controlling for party vote share on the right-hand side of the equation (as an independent variable), it is ensured that vote share is kept artificially unchanged when changing the value of incumbency.

The key independent variables are *SMD incumbent*, *SMD tenure*, and *Mayor*. The *SMD incumbent* and the *Mayor* are dummies taking 1 if the SMD candidate was an incumbent in an SMD at the time of the election or a mayor, respectively, and 0 otherwise. *SMD tenure* stands for the number of terms that the candidate has been serving as an SMD MP before the actual election.

Control variables

In order to be able to obtain the net effect of the independent variables, additional factors have to be taken into consideration.[69] The literature makes a great effort in separating the "normal vote" from the personal vote. As Murray puts it, "the key difficulty in measuring candidate success is isolating the impact of the individual candidate from the other factors affecting the election result."[70] Aside from candidate-specific variables, factors that influence the popularity of the candidate's party on the national level have to be taken into account as well as aspects that explain the constituency's deviation from this tendency. In the case of mixed-member electoral systems, however, these effects are easier to capture by controlling for the share of votes cast for the candidate's party on the list tier. This variable should absorb general tendencies in the overall popularity of the party as well as constituency-specific effects. In terms of their statistical distribution, party votes show similar tendencies to SMD vote share. Thus, I apply a log-transformed version of the variable in the case of candidates, and simply control for the vote share of the regional party list within the group of representatives. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that the ability of nominating a regional party list depends on the number of SMD candidates the party was able to nominate.[71] It often happens that some SMD candidates do not have their parties competing on the regional tier. Consequently, only those candidates can be taken into account whose parties successfully nominated party lists in the respective regions.

The hypothesized effect of incumbency (*SMD incumbency*) has already been theorized. However, the group of challengers is not homogeneous in terms of their

parliamentary status: they are either former MPs elected on the party lists (*List MP*), or hold no legislative mandate at the time of the election. As a result of their differing visibility, they may attract personal votes to a different extent. Furthermore, there are candidates that are nominated by more than one party. Joint candidacy (*Joint candidacy*) should be taken into account, because voters of the parties in question are likely to support the same candidates. Also, candidacy on multiple tiers at the same time will be controlled for (*Multiple candidacy*).

Visibility is one of the reasons political experience may influence candidate vote share. However, visibility is not only connected to incumbency or prior political office-holding. Firstly, as the Hungarian electoral system allows for multiple candidacy (i.e., nominating the same candidate on multiple electoral tiers), parties place party prominents and "important" candidates (who are most likely also more visible than "ordinary" candidates) not only in SMDs they are likely to win but also relatively high on the party lists (*Relative regional and national list position*).[72] Thus, the higher the SMD candidate gets on the party list, the larger his or her expected vote share in the SMD competition.[73] Secondly, candidates who ran in the same district (*Same district*) at the previous elections might have the advantage of higher visibility over candidates who were forced to change their constituency of nomination. Thus, district change will also be controlled for as it is very likely to trigger changes in vote share. Thirdly, visibility might help candidates through their positions during the preceding electoral term. I will control for positions like government membership (*Minister*), party leadership (*Party leader*), and key positions in the legislature (*Key position in parliament*). As candidates in these positions are almost exclusively Members of Parliament, these variables will only be controlled for in the case of representatives to avoid multicollinearity. Additionally, membership in local council (*Local council member*) is taken into account to sort out the effect of local-level visibility that may go with these positions.

Most of the studies concerning the personal vote control for the party, saying that there might be systematic differences in how candidates of the different parties exploit their personal vote-seeking attributes. However, in the case of Hungary, the party variable is difficult to control for in a longitudinal fashion—mostly because during the period under investigation, several parties disappeared, while new ones emerged. Additionally, the coalition strategies changed, leading to difficulties measuring the effect of the party variable in the case of joint candidates. Therefore, two variables were generated in the hope that they capture the most important aspects of the party variable's effect. The first variable distinguishes between government and opposition parties (*Government party*). Parties often suffer vote loss at the next election due to the unpopular decisions they have to make while in government. Karácsony shows that Hungarian voters evaluate parties retrospectively based on their performances during the previous electoral terms.[74] Hungarian voters have excessive expectations with regards to what governments can do to improve the economic environment.[75] Thus, voters may even punish governments that execute

successful economic policies. As voters pursued trial-and-error tactics, a substantial share of votes was protest in nature, and at the same time, a proclamation of trust toward the new government.[76]

A further feature of the Hungarian political competition between 1994 and 2006 is that two parties dominated the single-member constituencies: the Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP) and Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz–Magyar Polgári Szövetség). Thus, to control for the dominant party effect, the second variable separates candidates of these parties from that of the less successful ones. Candidates of MSZP and Fidesz (*Dominant party*) are expected to systematically receive a larger share of votes than candidates of other parties. Including this variable into the models comes with further advantages. It has been shown in several instances that in mixed electoral systems, rational voters give their first vote to candidates of large parties, who have a greater chance of winning than those of small ones.[77] Thus, taking the dominant party effect into account, we account for the strategic nature of the vote as well. Consequently, the effects of the key independent variables will indeed be personal in nature.

Some characteristics of the electoral district might also influence how candidates perform. Naturally, the larger the number of competing candidates in the SMD, the smaller the share of votes one candidate can expect (*Electoral competition*). To measure electoral competition in the district, I use the effective number of candidates.[78] Additionally, electoral margin at the previous election was also taken into account to control for the expected fierceness of the competition in the given district (*Electoral margin*). Last but not least, I control for the lagged dependent variable, which is the vote share of SMD candidates at the preceding elections.

Results

To establish the effect of *SMD incumbency* and *SMD tenure*, I use three-level hierarchical regressions. The three levels are (1) candidates at the given election, (2) candidates, and (3) single-member districts. Although the whole population of SMD candidates was observed, and thus no sampling was involved, I base the analysis on standard tests of significance. Table 1 presents the results of random intercepts models explaining the natural log of candidate vote share. In random intercepts models, the intercept of the model is allowed to vary across groups. In this case, all candidates and SMD have different intercepts, whereas the slope coefficients remain unchanged for all observations.[79] All models presented in this analysis have been checked for multicollinearity.[80]

Looking at the results of Model 1 (Table 1), it is clear that the party vote share excessively explains the individual candidates' performance in the SMDs. This supports the claim that Hungarian politics is vastly party-centred, and split ticket voting is not the rule but the exception. The association, however, is not perfect, which

Table 1
Random Intercepts Multilevel Models Explaining Logged Candidate Vote Share

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	DV: Logged Vote Share	DV: Logged Vote Share	DV: Logged Vote Share
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
SMD incumbency	−0.07 (0.02)***	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.13 (0.02)***
SMD tenure	0.06 (0.01)***	0.14 (0.03)***	0.05 (0.01)***
List MP	0.09 (0.01)***	0.08 (0.01)***	0.04 (0.02)**
Party vote share in SMD (logged)	0.81 (0.01)***	0.81 (0.00)***	0.76 (0.01)***
Joint candidacy	0.09 (0.02)***	0.09 (0.02)***	0.08 (0.02)***
Multiple candidacy	−0.04 (0.03)	−0.04 (0.03)	−0.13 (0.07)*
Government party	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.00)*	−0.06 (0.01)***
Dominant party	0.18 (0.01)***	0.18 (0.01)***	0.14 (0.03)***
Electoral competition	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.01)***
Electoral margin $(t-1)$	0.11 (0.03)***	0.12 (0.03)***	−0.16 (0.05)***
Interaction: SMD incumbency * SMD tenure		−0.11 (0.03)***	
Candidate vote share $(t-1)$ (logged)			0.16 (0.01)***
Same district			0.04 (0.02)**
Intercept	0.32 (0.03)***	0.32 (0.03)***	0.21 (0.07)***
SMD: sd(_cons)	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Candidate sd(_cons)	0.16 (0.01)	0.16 (0.01)	0.12 (0.10)
sd(Residual)	0.24 (0.01)	0.24 (0.01)	0.22 (0.06)
Wald χ^2	58,525.4	56,266.13	35,656.24
N	6,050	6,050	2,006
Log pseudo-likelihood	−939.90	−928.30	−31.43

Note: ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1. Entries are regression coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. Estimation method: maximum likelihood.

leaves room for other variables to step in. Starting with the effect of SMD incumbency, interestingly, SMD MPs must face a disadvantage when it comes to defending the seat. This contradicts the majority of the literature discussing the incumbency advantage. It seems that Hungarian voters do not only tend to punish governments retrospectively,[81] but they act similarly with regard to individual candidates. Nevertheless, other MPs do not have to face this disadvantage: party list MPs get a larger share of votes than candidates trying to enter the parliament. The geographical overlap between list MPs in their regions does not diminish their personal potential in the SMD competition. In fact, results indicate that they are the ones with the most

potential. The situation appears even more confusing if we look at the effect of SMD tenure. Candidates who served multiple terms as SMD representatives manage to increase their vote share compared with their competitors with less extensive SMD experience. Looking at these two variables, one could come to the conclusion that incumbency is clearly a disadvantage, but over time, experienced candidates are able to neutralize its negative effects.

However, before moving further with testing this claim, a few more words on this model is in order. Model 1 tested the effects of SMD incumbency and SMD tenure on the natural log of candidate vote share. However, this involves that small fluctuations in the data will have a stronger effect on the dependent variable as it would have if raw candidate vote share was taken into account. According to the random intercept model explaining raw candidate vote share (see Appendix B, Model A1) incumbency and escpecially SMD tenure have slightly larger effects than in the case of the above models.[82] Nevertheless, there is no substantial difference in the magnitudes as well as in the directions of the effects. Incumbency still appears as a burden, whereas tenure helps candidates better their performance in the SMD competition. An additional concern with using the natural logarithm of the raw candidate vote share is that the models mostly engage with explaining variation in the vote share of marginal candidates. Addresssing this concern, I re-ran Model 1, but this time with weigthing the observations by vote share, so that the model would downweight marginal candidates that dominate the data. Results are still not substantially different (see Appendix B, Model A2). Comparing the diagnostic plots of the three models (Appendix C), it seems that all models perform relatively poorly when it comes to estimate medium vote share. However, in the case of the smallest and the largest values they perform surprisingly well. The model with the logged dependent variable appears to produce the most consistent results by fitting both small and high values well. The model with the weighted observations seems to allow for a larger variance in the fitted values in the case of large vote shares, while the model estimating raw vote share performs worse at small values. As to the residuals, Model 1 estimates values closest to the observed data in the cases of medium and large vote shares. Also, compared to Model A2 (weighted model), it does much better in the case of small values too. As the larger values are much more of interest than the lower end of the data, among the presented models, Model 1 appears to best suit the purposes of this article.

Back to the effects of the main independent variables, based on the results of Model 1, namely that SMD incumbency has a negative effect on vote share, which may be compensated by SMD tenure, the question arises whether the effect of SMD tenure is the same across all groups of incumbency. Does experience really help SMD incumbents to overcome the negative effect of incumbency? To answer this question, in Model 2 (Table 1) I account for the interaction between SMD incumbency and tenure. The predictive margins displayed in Figure 2 indicate that although

Figure 2
The predictive margins of incumbency over the different levels of tenure
(CI=95 percent)
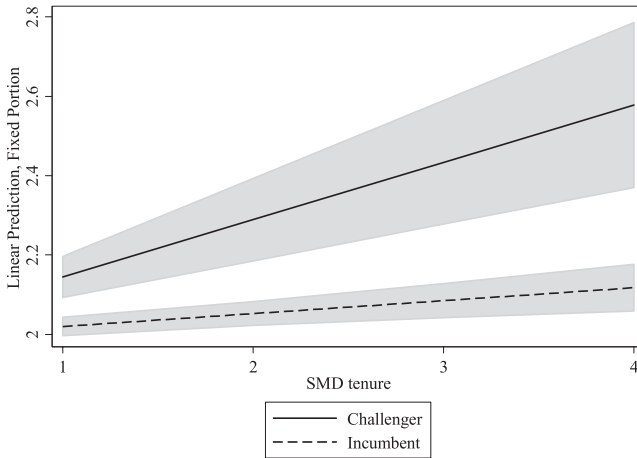
tenure helps incumbents to gain back the votes they lost because of their incumbent status (see the positive slope of the dashed line on Figure 2), this effect is not as substantial as in the case of SMD challengers (see solid line on Figure 2). Thus, the disadvantage of SMD incumbents is twofold. First, they receive a smaller amount of votes than heir challengers, probably because of the punishing nature of Hungarian elections. Second, compared to challengers, they are less likely to profit from SMD experience.

To test the robustness of the results, several other model specifications were tried. The reults of Model 3 (Table 1) show that even when losing two-thirds of the sample size,[83] controlling for candidate vote share at the preceding election does not change the effect of incumbency and tenure. We find similar results when taking into account the relative position of SMD candidates on the regional and national party lists. Models of Table 2 show that incumbency and tenure are still significant, and the magnitude of their effects does not change drastically. Furthermore, list positions appear to matter: as lower values stand for higher positions, the negative coefficients of Table 2 indicate that the higher someone gets on the party list relative to its length, the larger the expected vote share. As there is no considerable relationship between previous electoral performance and the candidates' position on the party lists[84]—as one would assume—we can confirm that the connection exists not because parties place well-performing candidates on the top, but rather because list positions capture

Table 2
Random Intercepts Multilevel Models Explaining Logged Candidate Vote Share

Variables	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	DV: Logged Vote Share	DV: Logged Vote Share	DV: Logged Vote Share
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
SMD incumbency	−0.06 (0.02)***	−0.04 (0.02)**	−0.05 (0.02)***
SMD tenure	0.06 (0.01)***	0.06 (0.01)***	0.07 (0.01)***
Relative regional list position	−0.19 (0.02) ***		−0.12 (0.03)***
Relative national list position		−0.17 (0.02)***	−0.14 (0.02)***
Control variables included			
Intercept	0.34 (0.02)***	0.36 (0.02)***	0.38 (0.02)***
SMD: sd(_cons)	0.04 (0.01)	0.023 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)
Candidate: sd(_cons)	0.17 (0.01)	0.18 (0.01)	0.17 (0.01)
sd(Residual)	0.22 (0.011)	0.20 (0.01)	0.20 (0.01)
Wald χ^2	54,976.83	49,535.6	49,269.85
N	5,599	3,561	3,346
Log pseudo-likelihood	−646.46	−307.67	−252.99

Note: See Table 1.

some kind of visibility (or "prominence") that appeals to voters when picking a candidates in the SMD.

Based on the results of the random intercepts models (see Tables 1 and 2), the different districts do not deviate from the sample mean substantially. The variation in the intercept among candidates is not considerably larger either. The average deviation of candidates around the sample mean is 1.19 percentage points,[85] which indicates that there is a certain (undefined) quality of the candidates that results in their scoring slightly different levels of vote share. The next logical question to ask would be whether there is a difference in the slopes across the different levels of data. With other words, do different qualities affect vote share with different magnitudes? The results of Table 3 demonstrate that the effect of SMD tenure (Model 8) is constant across all candidates. In the case of incumbency, the slope coefficient varies with 1.18 percentage points[86] (Model 7) across individuals.

Earlier I argued that it is important to keep party vote share unchanged when determining the effect of incumbency and tenure. I expressed some doubts about including party vote share on the left-hand side of the equation. However, to verify the findings, the difference between the candidate and the party vote (ticket splitting)

Table 3
Random Slope Multilevel Models Explaining Logged Candidate Vote Share

	Model 7	Model 8
	DV: Logged Vote Share	DV: Logged Vote Share
Variables	B (SE)	B (SE)
SMD incumbency	−0.05 (0.02)***	−0.07 (0.02)***
SMD tenure	0.07 (0.01)***	0.07 (0.01)***
Control variables included		
Intercept	0.33 (0.03)***	0.32 (0.03)***
SMD: sd(_cons)	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)
Candidate: sd(SMD incumbency)	0.17 (0.01)	
Candidate: sd(SMD tenure)		0.00 (0.00)
Candidate: sd(_cons)		0.16 (0.01)
sd(Residual)	0.23 (0.01)	0.24 (0.22)
Wald χ^2	62,466.82	58,525.46
N	6,050	6,050
Log pseudo-likelihood	−937.36	−939.90

Note: see Table 1.

was explained with random intercepts models. Positive values of the dependent variable indicate that the candidate performed better then her party, while negative values reflect the advantage of the party. The models with (Model 10) and without (Model 9) the lagged dependent variable (Ticket splitting [$t − 1$]) in Table 4 confirm the findings presented above. Incumbency decreases candidate performance relative to the performance of the party, which effect may be neutralized by seniority in SMD representation.

Moving on, the effect of local political positions was investigated using the data on all Hungarian MPs who ran in SMDs between 1994 and 2010. The aim of the analysis is to show whether being a mayor at the time of the national elections help MPs to increase their vote shares. Evidence from Table 5 points to the importance of the mayoral positon when competing in the single-member districts. Mayors receive 2.07 percentage points more votes on avergae than their competitors. However, current positions in the local council do not seem to be of any relevance. This difference between mayors and local council members is probably the product of the differing patterns of visibility due to the highlighted role of he mayor within the local government. Heinelt and Hlepas classify the Hungarian local government system as a "strong mayor form" with an "executive mayor."[87] In practice, this does not only mean that the mayor is the administrative leader of the local government, but that in

Table 4
Random intercepts multilevel models explaining ticket splitting

Variables	Model 9	Model 10
	DV: Ticket Splitting	DV: Ticket Splitting
	B (SE)	B (SE)
SMD incumbency	−1.64 (0.27)***	−1.60 (0.35)***
SMD tenure	1.29 (0.16)***	1.26 (0.17)***
List MP	0.54 (0.19)***	0.61 (0.24)**
Joint candidacy	1.12 (0.22)***	0.61 (0.28)**
Multiple candidacy	−0.71 (0.35)**	−1.33 (1.18)
Government party	−0.17 (0.07)**	−0.35 (0.15)**
Dominant party	−1.26 (0.17)***	−1.38 (0.28)***
Electoral competition	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.11 (0.08)
Electoral margin (t - 1)	0.32 (0.35)	−0.74 (0.64)
Ticket splitting (t - 1)		0.25 (0.03)***
Same district		0.48 (0.19)**
Intercept	1.15 (0.34)***	2.13 (1.20)*
SMD: sd(_cons)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Candidate: sd(_cons)	1.19 (0.10)	0.00 (0.00)
sd(Residual)	2.79 (0.13)	3.59 (0.22)
Wald χ^2	185.55	285.55
N	6,051	1,961
Log pseudo-likelihood	−15,272.80	−5,287.85

Note: see Table 1.

the eye of the citizens he or she appears as the only leader of the municipality. On the contrary, local council members appear "faceless" most of the time.[88] The result is that while being a mayor has an immediate and direct effect on visibility and thus electoral results, the visibility of local council members can be neglected when explaining electoral performance.

Other prominent positions like minister, national party leader, and key positions in parliament do not influence candidate vote share. The visibility that goes with holding these positions is not utilized in terms of electoral performance. This finding points to the conclusion that in Hungary, only locally relevant career trajectories matter in increasing vote share, whereas national-level visibility does not add up to the final results. Consequently, parties that want to better their performance in the SMDs should nominate experienced, locally attached candidates to obtain this goal.

Table 5
Random intercepts multilevel models explaining the SMD vote share of MPs

Variables	Model 11
	DV: Vote Share
	B (SE)
SMD incumbency	0.051 (0.31)
SMD tenure	0.78 (0.15)***
Mayor	2.07 (0.56)***
Local council member	0.28 (0.38)
Minister	1.00 (0.46)**
Party leader	0.27 (0.29)
Parliamentary office	0.24 (0.22)
Party vote share in SMD	0.85 (0.02)***
Joint candidacy	1.20 (0.55)**
Multiple candidacy	0.28 (1.76)
Government party	−1.69 (0.24)***
Dominant party	−0.35 (0.29)
Electoral competition	−0.81 (0.12)***
Electoral margin (t - 1)	1.63 (1.32)
Intercept	7.36 (2.14)***
SMD: sd(_cons)	0.00 (0.00)
Candidate: sd(_cons)	1.74 (0.21)
sd(Residual)	3.21 (0.27)
Wald χ^2	24,331.18
N	1,212
Log pseudo-likelihood	−3,275.58

Note: see Table 1.

Conclusions

In this article, I investigated whether incumbency, legislative experience in a single-member district, and the mayoral position act as personal vote-earning attributes and affect the candidate's capacity to achieve a better electoral result. I used random intercepts multilevel models to test the effects of these factors on candidate vote share in Hungary at five consecutive elections between 1994 and 2010. I find that incumbents are at a disadvantage in SMDs, while candidates with substantial legislative experience and mayors can expect larger vote shares.

The first finding is at odds with the literature on the relationship between incumbency and electoral performance. Although there have been no systematic voter surveys in Hungary to answer why voters punish not only government candidates but incumbents as well, I argue that voters pick candidates restrospectively just as they pick parties. Trying out newcomers appears better to voters than sticking with the old-timers. The effects being rather small, these tendencies do not change the fate of candidates. They even manage to make an advantage from the disadvantage in the long run: candidates with more extensive SMD experience are able to increase their vote shares. Interestingly, it was found that candidates are only able to benefit from their experiences as SMD MPs when they are challengers; thus, the positive neutralizing effect of SMD tenure is not constant in their case. Future research could shed light on why voters punish incumbents regardless of their party affiliations and why experience does not help candidates to neutralize the negative effects of incumbency immediately.

Interestingly, national-level positions that would ensure great visibility do not increase vote share. It seems that voters value local attachments—especially those of mayors—more than national-level experience. This finding may anticipate several developments in Hungarian politics. Most importantly, the 2011 law transforming the electoral system prohibits MPs to hold elected positions at the local level. Voters prefer mayors as their MPs, but the two positions are to be separated entirely. Therefore, it is to be expected that the link between the constituency and the legislative seat weakens. This could have severe consequences with regards to the quality of representation in Hungary.

A substantial part of the literature tries to separate personal vote effects and the strategic consideration of voting. In this study, the strategic aspect of voting was captured by whether or not the candidate was affiliated with a dominant party. It was found that the effect of this variable outweights incumbency effects, suggesting that ticket splitting arises more dominantly out of strategic motivations than candidate centredness. Despite this, the findings of the study still point to the importance of electoral rules in shaping voting behaviour. The results are in concordance with the conclusions of previous research: Whenever voters are given the opportunity to choose between persons, they take candidate characteristics into account, which is shown to be a human tendency.[89] Regardless of the party-centeredness of Eastern European politics, personal characteristics of the candidates can influence electoral performance. Of course, selecting locally attached candidates will not change the power relations between parties. However, even if the effects are small in the relative sense, they indicate that voters trust candidates with local attachments more than candidates with national-level visibility. Therefore, giving the opportunity for the voters to choose between individuals and selecting locally embedded candidates might have consequences with regards to the quality of representation and the overall evaluation of democracy.

Appendix A
List of variables in the analysis

Variable	Contents	Comments
SMD vote share	Vote share of the candidate in the SMD	
SMD vote share $(t - 1)$	The lagged SMD vote share: the SMD vote share of the candidate at the preceding elections	
Ticket splitting	Candidate vote share minus party vote share in the SMD	
Ticket splitting $(t - 1)$	Candidate vote share minus party vote share in the SMD at the preceding elections	
Party vote share	Vote share of the candidate's party on the regional party list in the SMD	
SMD incumbency	The candidate/MP was an SMD MP at the time of the actual election	0 = no, 1 = yes
SMD tenure	The number of terms served as an SMD MP before the actual election	
List MP	The candidate was a party list MP at the time of the actual election	0 = no, 1 = yes
Joint candidacy	The candidate was nominated by multiple parties jointly at the actual election	0 = no, 1 = yes
Same district	Candidate is in the same SMD as last time	0 = no, 1 = yes
Government party	The candidate was nominated by a government party	0 = no, 1 = yes
Dominant party	Candidate of Fidesz or MSZP	0 = no, 1 = yes
Electoral competition	The effective number of candidates in the SMD: $$N = \frac{1}{\sum P_i^2}$$	
Electoral margin	Electoral margin in the SMD at the previous elections $$\frac{Votes_{Candidate} - Votes_{Candidate}}{Votes_{Total}}$$	
Multiple candidacy	The candidate was nominated on multiple tiers of the electoral system	0 = no, 1 = yes
Relative regional list position	The candidate's position on the regional party list divided by the number of candidates on that particular regional list	
Relative national list position	The candidate's position on the national party list divided by the number of candidates on that particular national list	
Mayor	The candidate is a mayor during the preceding electoral term	0 = no, 1 = yes
Local council member	The candidate is a member of the local council during the preceding electoral term	0 = no, 1 = yes
Minister	The candidate serves as a minister sometime during the preceding electoral term	0 = no, 1 = yes
Party leader	The candidate is a party leader during the preceding electoral term	0 = no, 1 = yes
Parliamentary position	The candidate holds office in parliament during the preceding electoral term (committee chair, PPG leader, speaker, vice president, clerk)	0 = no, 1 = yes

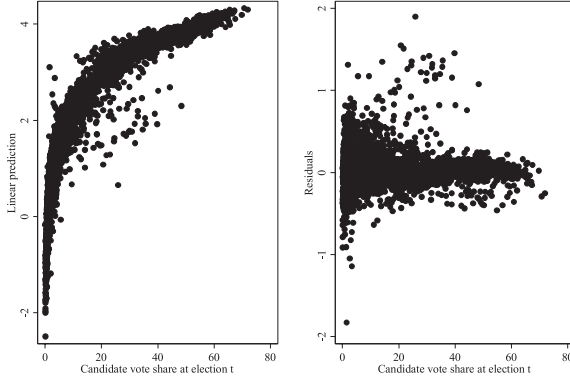**Appendix B**
Random intercepts multilevel models

Variables	Model 1 DV: Logged Vote Share Weights: None B (SE)	Model A1 DV: Vote Share Weights: None B (SE)	Model A2 DV: Logged Vote Share Weights: Vote Share B (SE)
SMD incumbency	−0.07 (0.02)***	−1.14 (0.25)***	−0.05 (0.02)***
SMD tenure	0.06 (0.01)***	1.39 (0.15)***	0.02 (0.01)**
Control variables included			
Intercept	0.32 (0.03)***	1.73 (0.34)	0.89 (0.09)***
SMD: sd(_cons)	0.03 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.04 (0.01)
Candidate: sd(_cons)	0.16 (0.01)	1.29 (0.09)	0.41 (0.00)
sd(Residual)	0.24 (0.01)	2.58 (0.11)	0.11 (0.00)
Wald χ^2	58,525.4	70,910.75	3,211.07
N	6,050	6,051	6,050
Log pseudo-likelihood	−939.90	−14,967.93	55,400.60

Note: see Table 1

Appendix C
Diagnostic plots of Models 1, A1 and A2

Model 1: Logged vote share

Model A1: Raw vote share
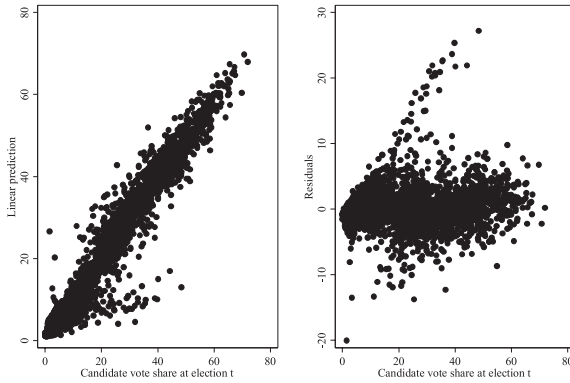
Model A2: Weighted by vote share

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65. G. Ilonszki, "A parlamenti képviselők jelölésének elméleti és pártszervezeti kérdései Magyarországon," *Politikatudományi Szemle* 1996, no. 1 (1996): 43.67.

66. "Electoral Control in Eastern Europe," http://electoralcontrol.org/ (accessed October 3, 2016).

67. Records in the data sets represent individual candidates and MPs at the given election. Every candidate and MP has as many records as the number of elections he or she has participated in. R. E. Weiss, *Modeling Longitudinal Data* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2006), 24.

68. J. Hainmueller and H. L. Kern, "Incumbency as a Source of Spillover Effects in Mixed Electoral Systems: Evidence from a Regression-Discontinuity Design," *Electoral Studies* 27 (2008): 213–27.

69. For a full list of variables, see Appendix A.

70. R. Murray, "The Power of Sex and Incumbency: A Longitudinal Study of Electoral Performance in France," *Party Politics* 14 (2008): 539–54, 542.

71. Parties that were able to nominate candidates in one-fourth of the SMDs in the given county, but in at least two of them, were able to nominate a party list in that county.

72. Relative list positions were obtained by dividing the position of the candidate on the party list by the total number of candidates on the list.

73. It is necessary to mention here that previous electoral performance might influence the position the candidate is placed on the party lists. In the context of the model, it means that the direction of the causality is not straightforward. However, as previous electoral performance is already captured in the model, and there is no serious case of multicollinearity, list positions are likely to proxy overall visibility and party "prominence."

74. G. Karácsony, "Árkok és légvárak. A választói viselkedés stabilizálódása Magyarországon," in *A 2006-os Országgyűlési Választások. Elemzések és Adatok*, ed. Gergely Karácsony (Budapest: DKMKA, 2006), 59–103.

75. Duch argues that in new democracies, voters cannot have established ideas on what to expect from governments. R. M. Duch, "A Developmental Model of Heterogeneous Economic Voting in New Democracies," *American Political Science Review* 95 (2001): 895–910.

76. Karácsony, "Árkok és légvárak"; R. Rose, "Escaping from Absolute Dissatisfaction. A Trial-And-Error Model of Change in Eastern Europe," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4 (1992): 371–93.

77. Bawn, "Voter Responses"; Karp et al., "Strategic Voting"; Klingemann and Wessels, "Political Consequences."

78. I apply the index of Laakso and Taagepera for the effective number of parties to measure the effective number of candidates. $N = \dfrac{1}{\sum p_i^2}$, where p_i is the percentage of votes received by the different candidates in the same SMD. M. Laakso and R. Taagepera, "'Effective' Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 12 (1979): 3–27.

79. J. Deleeuw and E. Meijer, eds., *Handbook of Multilevel Analysis* (New York: Springer, 2007).

80. The cases of government and dominant parties and SMD incumbency and SMD tenure were especially suspicious. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) indicate that the relationship between these variables does not change standard errors to a disturbing extent. VIFs vary between 1.01 and 3.5; thus, no variables were excluded. R. M. O'brien, "A Caution Regarding Rules of Thumb for Variance Inflation Factors," *Quality & Quantity* 41 (2007): 673–90.

81. Karácsony, "Árkok és légvárak."

82. Note that in order to be able to compare the coefficients, one has to take the exponentiated form of coefficients in the case of models explaining the natural logarithm of vote share.

83. Taking electoral performance at the previous elections into account leaves us with SMD candidates who participated at two consecutive elections. Thus, the analysis carried out on this reduced sample is only used to confirm results suggested by the analysis of the whole sample.

84. Pearson r (regional list positions) = −0.24***, Pearson r (national list positions) = −0.07

85. $e^{0.18}$. The coefficients have to be exponentiated because the dependent variable of the analysis is a logarithm.

86. $e^{0.17}$.

87. Heinelt and Hlepas, "Typologies of Local Government Systems."

88. V. Tamás, *Politikai élet a helyi önkormányzatokban. A helyi politika szereplői, mozgásterük és kapcsolataik a helyi politikai rendszerben* (Budapest: MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont, 2014).

89. D. Canache, J. J. Mondak, and E. Cabrera, "Voters and the Personal Vote: A Counterfactual Simulation," *Political Research Quarterly* 53 (2000): 663–76.

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