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(Extreme) political polarization and party patronage

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary literature on political parties has identified their gradual but consistent shift away from civil society and towards the state. As parties are becoming ever increasingly dependent on state resources and exclusively interested in governing, as Mair (*Ruling the void: The hollowing of western democracy* [Verso Books, 2013]) suggested, and patronage is a fundamental to that relationship, the degree and modes of party patronage becomes pivotal to understanding their performance, and the ways they organize and govern. In this paper we argue that party patronage is likely to be structured by the nature of political competition and explore the effects of political polarization, which is a feature of political competition relatively independent from the precise format of a party system, on patronage practices. We advance a theoretical argument which systematically links different types of political polarization with different patterns of party patronage, arguing that extreme polarization incentivizes political parties to develop heavily partisan strategies of party patronage which, in turn, further fuel political polarization. Thus, we also contribute to burgeoning literature on political polarization and its negative effects on the functioning of both political parties and overall political systems.

Introduction

The contemporary literature on political parties has identified their gradual but consistent shift away from civil society and towards the state. As parties are becoming ever increasingly dependent on state resources and exclusively interested in governing, as Mair 2013 suggested, and patronage is a fundamental to that relationship, the degree and modes of party patronage becomes pivotal to understanding their performance, and the ways they organize and govern. In this paper we argue that party patronage is likely to be structured by the nature of political competition and explore the effects of political polarization, which is a feature of political competition relatively

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independent from the precise format of a party system, on patronage practices. We advance a theoretical argument which systematically links different types of political polarization with different patterns of party patronage, arguing that extreme polarization incentivizes political parties to develop heavily partisan strategies of party patronage which, in turn, further fuel political polarization. Thus, we also contribute to burgeoning literature on political polarization and its negative effects on the functioning of both political parties and overall political systems.

The contemporary literature on political parties has identified their gradual but consistent shift away from civil society and towards the state (Katz & Mair, 1995, 2002; Mair, 2013; Van Biezen, 2004). The interpenetration of parties and states has gone so far that nowadays party research must focus much less on their relationships with society 'which have become increasingly loose, contingent, and temporal', and more on 'their relationship with the state, which has assumed an increased importance both in terms of legitimacy and organizational resources' (Van Biezen & Kopecký, 2007, p. 237). For Peter Mair, this trend – parties defined almost exclusively as government and state actors – was a fundamental feature of the void in representative democracy that appeared in the early twenty-first century (Mair, 2013, p. 84).

As a consequence, while parties have lost a lot of their functions as channels of social representation, another function they have traditionally had – 'the recruitment of political leaders and staffing of public offices' – has remained key (Mair, 2013, p. 95). The parties' capacity to deliver patronage, understood as positions in the state administration or related institutions controlled by the state, has long been seen as a fundamental feature of their relationship with the state. But if parties are becoming ever increasingly dependent on state resources and exclusively interested in governing, as Mair suggested, and patronage is fundamental to that relationship, the degree and modes of party patronage become even more pivotal to understanding their performance and the ways they organize and govern. Part of this renewed interest in the study of party patronage was our joint work with Peter Mair (Kopecký, Mair, & Spirova, 2012), in which patronage was conceived of as an organizational resource. Exploring the impact of the political developments of the last ten years on the patronage practices of political parties thus becomes an intrinsic part of appreciating the legacy of Peter Mair in party research.

The precise working of party patronage is dependent on a number of critical variables, such as type of political regime (Hale, 2014), nature of the state (Grindle, 2012; Shefter, 1994), type of electoral systems (Golden, 2003) or organizational characteristics of individual parties (Perkins, 1996). In this paper, we argue that party patronage is also likely to be structured by the nature of political competition. Previous work which links patronage with political competition focused mainly on the type of party systems and its impact

on patronage patterns (see Grzymała-Busse, 2003; Kopecký, 2011; O'Dwyer, 2006). We contribute to this literature by specifically exploring the effects of political polarization, which is a feature of political competition relatively independent from the precise format of a party system. We advance a theoretical argument that systematically links different types of political polarization with different patterns of party patronage, arguing that extreme polarization incentivizes political parties to develop heavily partisan strategies of party patronage, which, in turn, further fuel political polarization (see also Xezonakis, 2012). Thus, we also contribute to burgeoning literature on political polarization and its negative effects on the functioning of both political parties and overall political systems (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019; Casal Bèrtoa & Rama, 2021; McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018).

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, we identify patronage as a party organizational resource and single out four key aspects of party patronage: the scope of patronage, the intra-party control of patronage resources, the underlying motivations for distributing patronage and the characteristics of patronage appointees. The second section of the paper provides a theoretical argument that systematically links two different patterns of political polarization, what we refer to as *normal* and *extreme* polarization, with these four features of party patronage. We hypothesize that when political polarization is extreme, party patronage is likely to be broader in scope and depth, centrally coordinated and controlled within party organizations, strongly motivated by electoral and intra-party organizational needs and based predominantly on recruitment of partisan appointees. In the third section, we use data on party system polarization to identify cases of contemporary European democracies useful to test our hypotheses and, having isolated Hungary as the best case to use as an illustration of our arguments, based on both theoretical and data arguments, we proceed to do so empirically using data on patronage there since 1990, hence covering periods of normal and extreme polarization.

Party patronage and its features

Defined as exchange of public goods for electoral support, patronage is often seen as an *electoral resource* (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Mares & Young, 2019; Piattoni, 2001; Ruth-Lowell & Spirova, 2019). It is assumed to involve a more or less dyadic relationship between a political party (or politician), on the one hand, and a supporter or group of potential supporters, on the other, whereby the parties use their own private resources or resources to which they gain privileged access in state institutions, in order to cement political support within the wider community.

For the purposes of this paper, however, we are more concerned with patronage as an *organisational resource*. As such, party patronage represents

a form of institutional control that operates to the benefit of the party organization. Patronage, in this sense, is less a form of vote gathering or a means of establishing loyal clienteles and more a strategy to build parties' organizational networks within the state. Empirical studies of party patronage as an organizational resource have usually revolved around the distribution of jobs within the state (Bearfield, 2009; Goldston, 1977; Müller, 1989, 2006; Sorauf, 1959); in public administration literature, it is often referred to as politicization of the state and its bureaucracy (Meyer-Sahling, 2006; Peters & Pierre, 2004). We follow this tradition here and define party patronage as the power of political parties to appoint people to positions in state institutions (see also our earlier work Kopecký et al., 2012).

The understanding of patronage as an organizational resource employed by parties (Kopecký et al., 2012; Kopecký & Spirova, 2011; Panizza, Ramos Laraburu, & Scherlis, 2018) requires an analysis along with at least four different key features. They are listed in Table 1 and refer to how far within the state institutions do patronage appointments extend, who within parties is in effect responsible for patronage appointments, why do parties appoint people within the state and whom do they appoint.

The first feature of party patronage, its scope, is an enduring concern of the study of patronage politics; the questions how widespread patronage practices are or, in other words, to what extent are public institutions free from political interference by political parties are common in the literature on the politicization of the state. We do follow others (Müller, 2000; Shefter, 1994) in making a basic distinction between political systems with *limited patronage* on the one hand, and systems with *extensive patronage* on the other. But we also go a step further and see 'scope of patronage' to involve both the range and depth of appointments and estimate the spread of patronage horizontally (across the state institutions), as well as vertically (across levels of these same state institutions).¹ A political system with limited patronage typically involves partisan appointments in a few state institutions and at the top level of the functional hierarchy, whereas patronage affects a very wide range of institutions at all levels of appointments in the system with extensive patronage.²

The second feature concerns the *intra-party control of patronage resources*. The vast majority of appointments to state institutions are officially done by individual politicians (such ministers or directors of state agencies), and, in

Table 1. Four features of party patronage.

Scope of party appointments	Limited patronage <i>versus</i> extensive patronage
Intra-party control of appointments	Diffusely dispersed <i>versus</i> coordinated patronage
Motivations for party appointments	Electoral <i>versus</i> intra-organizational <i>versus</i> governmental motivations
Character of appointees	Nonpartisan <i>versus</i> partisan appointees

formal sense, *party* patronage rarely exists. The key question therefore becomes to what extent is the party involved when party actors in public office make the appointment? Is it the party as some sort of a bureaucratic structure (the party *in central office*, or *party executive* or *parliamentary party groups*) who coordinates and decides or is it those individual party leaders who hold some type of public office that make appointments in the manner relatively unconstrained by their respective party organizations? In a system of diffuse dispersion of patronage, elected politicians possess large autonomy from their parties, which often lack any coordinating mechanisms for making political appointments. In contrast, in coordinated systems of patronage, party organizations are the major players of the patronage games, possessing internal mechanisms of control over political appointments, while politicians in government positions often simply ratify decisions made by the parties' organizational structures.

The third key feature of party patronage concerns its *motivations*. The question here is why do political parties appoint people to state positions, what sort of strategy do they pursue? Most traditional studies of party patronage simply assume that the distribution of jobs is aimed at rewarding activists and other party figures for their services to the party or that state jobs are distributed with electoral goals, that is, as a currency used to obtain votes. However, patronage may also be driven by different motivations and serve a variety of other goals related to parties' roles as governors. We suggest classifying the motivations of patronage into three different types: electoral, organizational and governmental. We summarize these different motivations in [Table 2](#).

It is generally agreed that in contemporary democracies, party patronage is unlikely to be a very useful *electoral strategy*, at least in parliamentary (as opposed to regional or local) elections; no matter how large the number of public employees is in modern states, it seems unlikely that it can secure an electoral advantage in a general election (Hopkin, 2006). Yet, a good number of quantitative studies on patronage show that patronage as an electoral strategy still exists in some systems (for instance, Calvo & Murillo, 2004) and may, in fact, gain momentum in specific circumstances (Mares & Young, 2019). Party patronage may also be targeted to strengthen and cement the party as an organization, in other words, function as an *intra-organizational strategy*. As Alan Ware (1996, p. 349) notes, the government is an obvious resource for strengthening the party itself, allowing the placement of 'party

Table 2. Motivations for party patronage.

Strategy	Goal of the party
Electoral	Votes
Intra-organizational	Cohesion and discipline Activism/Partisan networks
Governmental	Control over decision-making and policy implementation processes

supporters in administrative or quasi-administrative positions over which the government has influence'. Allocating public positions might be a strategy to boost intra-party cohesion, bringing together different blocs within the party into a unified whole (Sorauf, 1959). Public jobs may also be dispensed in order to create and keep active networks of activists, the practice sometimes referred to as 'jobs for the boys', especially when strong ideological motivations for joining parties wane (Bolleyer, 2012; Peters & Pierre, 2004).

Finally, patronage is often part of parties' *governmental strategy*. Patronage may be used to control crucial areas of government in order to secure policy-choices and policy implementation along the lines preferred by the party. Patronage, in this sense, is not conceived as an exchange for electoral support or intra-organizational 'selective incentive' (Panebianco, 1988), but rather as a requisite to guarantee the very existence of party government (Katz, 1986). However, the control of state institutions through partisan appointments may also be understood in a broader sense, not just in the sense of implementing a partisan policy platform but also as a strategy of taking over state institutions and putting them in the service of a political party in a struggle with their opponents. As we shall see later, this is an important distinction.

The fourth and final key feature of party patronage is who exactly is appointed by parties to state institutions and what criteria parties follow in making public appointments. Party membership is the most obvious criterion to select appointees, mainly because it signals political trustworthiness and loyalty (Manow & Wettengel, 2006). In a highly partisan political system, party elites occupy senior positions of government, whereas the parties' rank and file members fill lower-level state jobs. However, the literature on party government has shown that the actual *partyness* of a government may be variable (Blondel & Cotta, 2000; Katz, 1986). Given the growing complexity of policy-making, parties might search for highly qualified appointees outside of the party channels if they are concerned with securing an efficient government. Party politicians can also select the appointees on the basis of their personal linkages. Based on the above, we make a distinction between two groups of appointees: *partisans*, who are either recruited from within the party ranks or have strong, long-standing links to the party, for example, via party affiliated organizations; and *non-partisans*, who are appointed from other than partisan channels, from personal networks of individual ministers and key party politicians, or following the application of bureaucratic recruitment and promotion procedures.

Party patronage and (extreme) political polarization

Having outlined the four features of party patronage, we proceed to link them systematically to political polarization by proposing that patronage

changes profoundly when a political system moves from what we call *normal political polarization* to *extreme political polarization*. In making this distinction between different types of political polarization, we build on recent work of Enyedi (2016), who uses the term populist polarization, and McCoy et al. (2018), and Carothers and O'Donohue (2019), who both use the term severe polarization, to conceptualize a pattern of political competition which is 1. qualitatively different than the high level of ideological or programmatic distance among the parties in the political system (a situation sometimes referred to as 'ideological polarization', see Casal Bèrtoa & Rama, 2021; also Dalton, 2008); 2. universally seen as detrimental to democracy, and associated with democratic backsliding and erosion (Enyedi, 2016). We summarize key differences between these two types of political polarization in Table 3.

Normal political polarization (or 'ideological polarization') refers to a significant divergence of opinions between competing political actors or social groups, which is usually juxtaposed to a situation of a widespread consensus among them. The essence of this type of polarization is the heightened sense of differences among competing parties on programmatic or policy issues. When a democratic political system is polarized, the ideological differences separating parties are highly visible; these differences also tend to be emphasized rather than backpedaled by political actors, for example, during election campaigns or processes of government formation. In that sense, even normal political polarization is not always associated with positive outcomes: it might, for example, make government formation difficult and executive-legislative relations unstable (Binder, 2000) or impact negatively on different aspects of democracy (Casal Bèrtoa & Rama, 2021). Indeed, related to the topic of this paper, Meyer-Sahling (2006) showed that polarization of political competition between former communist parties and anti-communist parties, which resulted in major policy reorientations of successive governments, created pressures for the politicization of the ministerial bureaucracy in post-communist Europe in the 1990s.

However, many observers also associate normal political polarization with positive effects, for example, on voting behavior or political participation. Increased ideological or policy differences between parties are supposed to simplify electoral choices, increase political mobilization and voter turnout,

Table 3. Two types of political polarization.

Normal political polarization	Extreme political polarization
Either elite or mass-based	Involves elites and masses
Conflict about policy positions and issues	Conflict about identity issues and legitimacy of political opponents
Multiple blocks of political actors with cross-cutting ties	Binary division between mutually exclusive blocks

forge long-term attachments between parties and voters or strengthen political parties (Campbell, 2016; Lupu, 2015). It is important to emphasize again that the underlying premise of these types of arguments is that polarized competition focuses on programmatic issues and policy-choices rather than on political and social identities, that it leaves room for multiple identities and cross-cutting ties at a societal level and, importantly, that it does not affect political elites and masses at the same time. Indeed, even in some of the most polarized systems in the past, like European consociational democracies (see Lijphart, 1977), while masses were deeply divided by a number of social cleavages, elites cooperated to overcome these societal divisions.

This is not the case in *extremely polarized political systems*, which are generally seen as producing negative consequences for democracy, leading in some cases to democratic breakdown (e.g. Venezuela). In an extremely polarized system, political conflict no longer revolves only around radically different policy positions or political programs, but rather involves questions of political and social identity, which might, in fact, take precedence over policy issues. As McCoy et al. (2018) emphasize, extreme political polarization includes a significant affective dimension, whereby a multitude of differences and opinions in society become gradually aligned within two political camps with mutually exclusive identities. These camps view each other as morally illegitimate and existentially threatening. In an extremely polarized system, warring parties can thus no longer be seen as legitimate political opponents; instead, they engage in aggressive discourse and behavior, which aims to delegitimize the 'other', and also the entire political system in which they operate. This polarizing discourse between partisan rivals spills over to social life, affecting also nonpolitical associations, neighborhoods, families and other social spaces by forcing their belonging to one of the two camps and hence increasing social distance among them. While it might not always be easy to say whether extreme polarization is, in its origins, strictly mass or elite-driven, it ultimately involves a struggle between mutually exclusive identity-based groups, which is observable at both mass and elite levels.

This last point raises important questions about the general causes of political polarization and particularly about the reasons for the shift from normal to extreme political polarization. As Carothers and O'Donohue show, polarization can have roots in different ascriptive (ethnic, religious or tribal) or ideological (economic left-right or populist right-moderate center) identities, which get mobilized as a result of profound economic or political crisis, institutional change or growing grievances among specific social groups (see Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). However, scholars researching political polarization all emphasize the crucial role of political entrepreneurs in polarizing dynamics, and especially in the process of deepening of political polarization (McCoy et al., 2018). Actions of political parties and individual

politicians profoundly shape the dynamics of political polarization; in some cases, arguably the case of Hungary (Enyedi, 2016; Vegetti, 2019), extreme polarization is primarily an elite-driven process. It is therefore not surprising that, as we shall see later, patronage strategies of politicians may also play a role in the trajectories of political polarization.

No matter the roots of (extreme) political polarization, our contention is that when political systems experience it, this will have an effect on the patronage practices of political parties. Even a minimal presence of patronage practices in the political system centered around the political parties, rather than individual politicians, allows for parties in a situation of extreme polarization to use these practices to solidify their reach into the state and society.³ In other words, our main argument is that extreme polarization reinforces party patronage and provides incentives to broaden and deepen it as an organizational and possibly even electoral resource. We specify this main argument in the form of four empirical expectations:

Our first hypothesis is on the scope of patronage. Earlier on in this paper, we distinguished between political systems with *limited patronage* and systems with *extensive patronage*. In situations of extreme polarization, we expect patronage to move to the more extreme end of the spectrum and impact a very wide range of institutions at all levels of appointments in the political system as parties will be interested in maintaining tight control over both the policy-making process, which itself is seen as a zero-sum game and over the state institutions.

H1: If political polarization becomes extreme, party patronage will become more extensive than in situations of normal polarization.

Our second expectation relates to the coordination of patronage appointments. As we mentioned earlier, both the party and individual politicians might be interested in appointing loyalists to the state administration, and in reality, both do. In situations of extreme polarization, it will be necessary for the party and its leadership, we contend, to limit the role of individual politicians in order for the party and its leaders to maintain tighter control over the distribution for patronage. The latter becomes crucial for the ability of the party to maintain and increase loyalty among its supporters' block. Parties are likely to build, if they don't exist, and to strengthen them if they do exist, the internal mechanisms of control over political appointments.

H2: If political polarization becomes extreme, party patronage will become more intensely coordinated within the party organizations than in situations of normal polarization.

In terms of the third feature of patronage we identify, the motivations for the use of patronage appointments, extreme polarization is likely to change the dominant motivation for patronage. In situations of normal polarization or consensual politics, we argued (and empirically documented, see Kopecký et al., 2012), patronage is used as an organizational strategy and often as governmental strategy, while its electoral purposes are rather limited in contemporary democracies. In situations of extreme polarization, where political parties need to maintain the loyalty of its supporters, we are likely to observe the return of the use of patronage for electoral advantages. In addition, its use as a governmental strategy is likely to increase, particularly in its function as the way for the party to take over state institutions and put them in the service of a political party in a struggle with their opponents. This yields the following two hypotheses:

H3a: If political polarization becomes extreme, party patronage as an electoral resource will become more prominent than in the previous period.

H3b: If political polarization becomes extreme, party patronage as a governmental strategy will intensify in comparison to the previous period.

Finally, and somewhat connected to the second and third hypothesis, we also expect the nature of appointees, the fourth feature of patronage we discussed earlier, to also change in response to the dynamics of extreme polarization. In order to maintain party cohesion, but also the linkages to the supporters and ultimately wield support in society, parties are more likely to appoint people recruited from within the party ranks or who have strong, long-standing links to the party, for example, via party affiliated organizations (partisan appointees). The trend of appointing *non-partisans*, recruited through personal or professional networks rather than party channels that we observed earlier is likely to be reversed.

H4: If political polarization becomes extreme, parties will place more emphasis on the partizanship of appointees rather than on their professional qualifications and individual loyalties.

Empirical analysis

Case selection

In the rest of the paper, we probe the theoretical arguments made by applying them empirically to a case chosen among the 15 European democracies with quite divergent patronage practices included in our previous work on party patronage (Kopecký et al., 2012). We look at the level of polarization using two methods of measuring it in order to isolate one case where a

transition to extreme polarization happened and a baseline indication of patronage as of 2010–2011 exists.

The common measure of normal ('ideological') polarization in the system is the measure created by Dalton (2008). It allows us to observe trends in the development of 'normal' polarization in Europe, expecting that extreme values of normal polarization might be indicators of the qualitatively different *extreme* polarization. The index is based on voter perceptions of party positions and has a value of 0 when all parties occupy the same position on the Left–Right scale and 10 when all the parties are split between the two extremes of the scale. In Figure 1 below, we report the values for the countries in our sample of patronage data (Kopecký et al., 2012) at the time of carrying out our patronage research (2008–2012) and the latest scores as calculated by us.

Potential cases to explore the impact of polarization on patronage are the countries that either display high levels of polarization (values over 5 on the 0–10 scale) or that have experienced a substantive increase in the level of polarization (difference of more than 1 in the index) since the time of our patronage study. Based on the trends displayed in Figure 1, Austria and Hungary emerge as potential cases, with Austria having undergone a substantial rise in its level of ideological division since the early 2000s and Hungary maintaining a value over five since then.

The literature on *extreme* polarization only provides a binary measure of *extreme* polarization. Based on that research, two of the countries in our original sample come into consideration: Greece (Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2019) and Hungary (Enyedi, 2016; Vegetti, 2019). In both of these countries, clearly by the early to mid-2000s, at both elite and mass level, division between the poles was extreme and irreconcilable.

Given these categorizations, Hungary emerges as a logical case for us in which to explore the impact of extreme polarized politics on the extent,

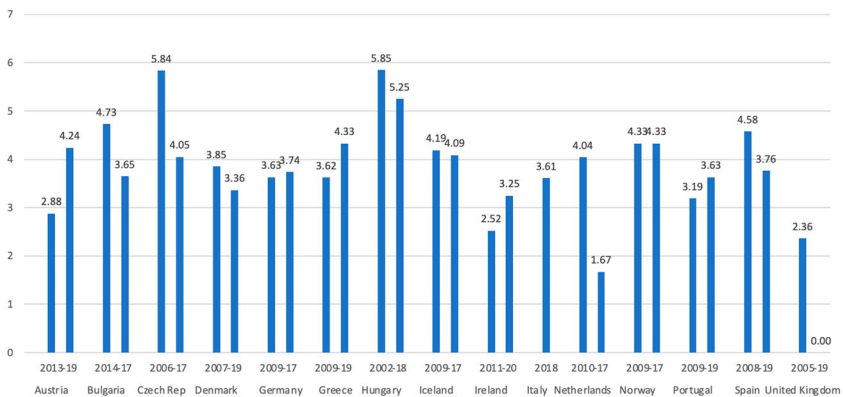


Figure 1. Index of polarization, 15 European countries.

dynamics and goals of political appointments, with the period 2002–2010 as the period during which polarization reached extreme levels. It was during this period that the left and right blocks clearly showed a lack of acceptance of each other as legitimate, intensified their differences on the left–right dimension and engaged in an open us-versus-them rhetoric (Enyedi, 2016; Vegetti, 2019). These trends found electoral representation in extremely competitive elections in 2002 and 2006. By 2010, the transformation to a qualitatively different type of polarization was complete. As of pre-2010, Meyer-Sahling and Jager (2012) observed medium-to-high levels of patronage in the political system with some state sectors captured by parties and some relatively insulated from patronage ('islands of excellence'). In the rest of the empirical section, we will look at developments in the patronage practices in Hungary, comparing patronage practices before and after 2010 and paying particular attention to patronage appointments in 2010 when the first major government alternation occurred after the onset of extreme polarization.

Extreme polarization and party patronage in Hungary

For the illustration of our four hypotheses, we rely on a dataset of 1,633 officials that were appointed to top positions in the Hungarian state administration between 1990 and 2019. The data thus covers 30 years of appointments made by 12 governments shedding light on patronage practices before and since the onset of extreme political polarization in Hungary.⁴

The dataset focuses on appointments to state secretary positions in central government ministries and central offices such as the Prime Minister's Office. Five different types of positions are included: political state secretary (1990–2006 and 2010–), administrative state secretary (1990–2006 and 2010–), state secretary (2006–2010), deputy state secretary (1990–2006 and 2010–) and titular state secretary (1990s). With the exception of the first category, all are civil service appointments and are top-tier positions in the ministries.

The dataset consists of the appointment and dismissal dates of state secretaries, their rank and ministry. It also includes demographic and career pathways, including information related to their political experience and connections. The data was collected from official records provided by government and parliament, government websites, government yearbooks and almanacs and external websites that provide biographical information of public officials. To our knowledge, the dataset includes all the appointments made during the period of study.

We record a person as an appointee whenever he or she was formally nominated to a state secretary position. This means that the same person may appear several times in our dataset. For instance, a person may have been appointed to a deputy state secretary position, he or she may have

then been promoted to an administrative state secretary position, entering the same person for a second time into our dataset. A person may also return after a few years working in different public or private sector roles.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that our dataset of state secretaries presents a narrow perspective on patronage practices. It focuses on central government ministries, is limited to the most senior positions, and, as we will see below, is able to illustrate some of our hypotheses on the relationship between extreme polarization and patronage practices better than others.

Extreme polarization widens and deepens the scope of party patronage

The first hypothesis suggests that extreme polarization leads to the widening and deepening of patronage appointments in the state administration compared to the previous period of normal polarization. In the Hungarian case, the evidence supports this expectation both in relation to the formal opportunities for patronage appointments and the practice of actually making these appointments.

To begin with, the introductory discussion above hinted at an increase in the number of positions that can be filled at the top of the ministerial bureaucracy. Between 1990 and 2006, governments could routinely appoint political, administrative and deputy state secretaries to central government ministries. In 2006, the number of categories was reduced, but both state secretaries and specialist state secretaries were formally kept outside the civil service, signaling a shift towards greater political control of senior-level appointments. When the Orban government revised the structure of positions again, it increased the number of categories available for political appointments.

Most notably, the number of positions that can be filled has increased over time. In 1990, when the first democratically elected government was formed, ministers would usually appoint one political state secretary, one administrative state secretary and between three and five deputy state secretaries per ministry. Occasionally, ministers would further appoint titular state secretaries. By contrast, in 2010, ministries would include one or more parliamentary state secretary, several state secretaries, one administrative state secretaries and up to ten deputy state secretaries.

In the Ministry of Agriculture, to give an example, there were six state secretaries in 1990. By contrast, in 2010, 19 appointments were made to state secretary positions. Looking across the state administration, the mean number of state secretary appointments per ministry was seven in 1990. By 2018 it had increased to 13 and hence an increase by nearly 100 percent.

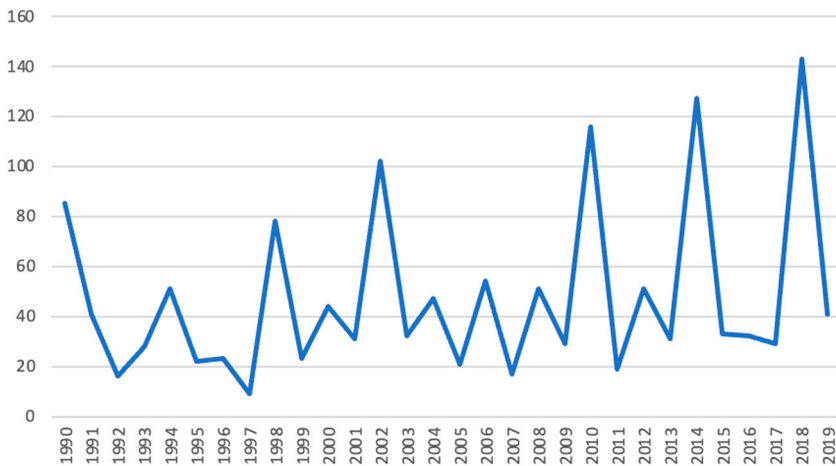


Figure 2. State secretary appointments by year (frequencies).

The increase in the scope of party patronage is most evident when considering the practice of patronage appointments. We illustrate the patronage practices by looking first at the number of appointments that have been made every year on year. Subsequently, we examine the turnover ratio after government alternations, whereby turnover implies the proportion of state secretaries that has been terminated in one way or another by an incoming government.

Figure 2 shows the number of appointments to state secretary positions for every year between 1990 and 2019. It shows that the number of appointments was higher in 2010 than in any previous year, lending support to our first hypothesis. It also shows that the number of appointments increases even further in 2014 and 2018 after the Fidesz-MPP/KDNP coalition won reelection. In accordance with our hypothesis, it suggests that extreme polarization continuously intensifies patronage appointments. The graph also shows that patronage appointments were commonplace before 2010, albeit at a lower rate.

Figure 3 focuses on the turnover in state secretary positions after changes of government. The most important alternations occurred in 1990 when the first democratically elected government took office, in 1994 when the post-socialists returned to power in coalition with a liberal party, in 1998 when Victor Orban led the first government consisting of the Fidesz and the agrarian independent smallholder party, 2002 when the socialist-liberal coalition returned to government, and, finally, when Orban formed his second cabinet after the ‘watershed’ election of 2010. The other alternations implied changes of prime ministers (1993, 2004 and 2009), loss of coalition partners (2008) or reelections (2006, 2014 and 2018).

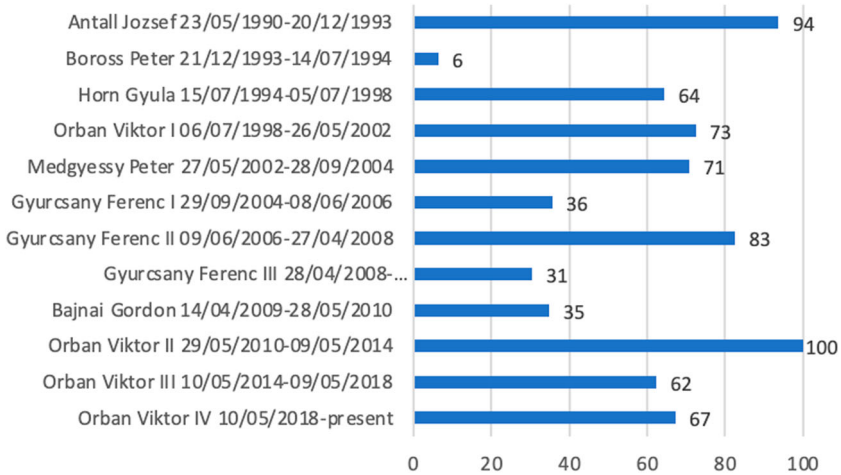


Figure 3. State secretary turnover rates (in %).

Turnover is measured here by focusing on changes of the appointment status of state secretaries. It means, a state secretary might have completely left the state administration, but he or she may have also been appointed to another state secretary position in the same or another ministry. Re-organisations and transfers are hence subsumed under the heading of turnover.

Looking more closely at [Figure 3](#), it is evident that the turnover was higher in 2010 than in any previous year and indeed in any subsequent year. Moreover, the actual turnover ratio stands at 100 per cent, which implies that the Orban government changes the appointment status of all 'inherited' state secretaries in all central government ministries within the first six months after taking office.

The high turnover ratio provides further support for our hypothesis that extreme polarization leads to an increase in the scope of party patronage. Remarkably, in 2010 turnover in state secretary positions was even higher than in 1990 when the first democratically elected government was formed after the transition from communism. At that time, new state secretary positions were established by law. Yet functionally speaking, these positions were broadly comparable to the ones that were newly defined in 1990 as much as the positions that were created in 2010 are functionally similar to the ones that were previously established. Looking at the appointments after the 1990 elections reveals that a small number of former *de facto* state secretaries were taken over by the Antall government.

[Figure 3](#) also indicates that turnover in state secretary positions was high after the 2014 and 2018 elections. At first glance, this may be puzzling because the Orban government won reelection on both occasions. However, the evidence very much corresponds to our hypothesis that

extreme polarization leads to an intensification of patronage appointments regardless of government alternations.

Our data provides limited insight with regards to the depth of party patronage. However, looking across the ranks of state secretaries helps reveal whether patronage appointments have crept down the ministerial hierarchy. Our data suggests that the increase in the number of appointments and the major increase in the turnover after the formation of governments in 2010 and subsequently is primarily the result of changes at the deputy state secretary level. Political/parliamentary state secretaries were also replaced after government changes that occurred before 2010. The so-called state secretary and even administrative state secretaries, despite their formal classification as civil servants, were subject to political turnover ever since the transition to democracy. At the level of deputy state secretary, many new positions were created and turnover increased from around 50–60 per cent before 2010 to more than 70 per cent since 2010 (with a ratio of 100 per cent in 2010). In summary, there is preliminary evidence that in accordance with our first hypothesis, patronage appointments intensified both in breadth and in depth after the 2010 election.

Extreme polarization intensifies the central control and coordination party patronage

The second hypothesis predicts that extreme polarization leads to a strengthening of control and coordination by the governing party and its leadership. It contrasts with a mode of patronage that relies on ministers and other heads of offices and state-owned companies to have wide discretion over the appointment of staff.

The chapter on patronage in Hungary included in the 2012 edited volume (Meyer-Sahling & Jager, 2012) indicated that patronage appointments were, by and large, delegated to ministers and other heads of offices. Most commonly, these senior politicians or senior officials recruited political appointees from their personal entourage, personal and political networks and people well-known in the wider policy sector. Occasionally, the parliamentary faction or the party headquarters would interfere and push for the appointment of someone from their ranks, for instance, to ensure regional representation or the presence of diverse professions at the top of the ministries.

The role of prime ministers also varied over time. Antall, Horn, Orbán and Gyurcsány were leaders of their political parties. They often had an interest in keeping their ministers in check, taking advantage of their role in approving appointments to political and administrative state secretary positions. Their ability to do so tended to be limited for reasons of internal party politics and coalition arithmetic. For instance, the independent smallholder party in

coalition with the Fidesz from 1998 to 2002 was given freedom to make appointments in 'their' ministries.

Looking more closely at the role of the prime minister and the appointment of state secretaries to central offices under prime ministerial control allows us to explore how the central control and coordination of patronage appointments changed in the context of extreme political polarization. Here, we distinguish formal opportunities for central, prime ministerial control and the practices of accumulating appointments in central, prime minister-led offices.

First, during the 1990s, prime ministers were formally responsible for the selection of political and administrative state secretaries who were subsequently formally appointed by the president of the republic. Only deputy state secretaries were selected and appointed by ministers. Since 2010, the power of prime ministers has formally been enhanced because the so-called state secretaries are also formally selected by the prime minister upon the proposal of line ministers.

Second, the role of the prime minister's office is instructive for the central impact on the management of the ministerial bureaucracy. During the first two parliamentary cycles, the prime minister's office was headed by an administrative state secretary. Attempts by the Horn government to appoint a minister in charge of the prime minister's office were blocked by the coalition partner (tacitly supported by socialist politicians) to avoid too much prime ministerial control over policy-making and management.

The first major change was introduced by the first Orban government in 1998 when a minister was appointed at the top of the prime minister's office. Moreover, the office was re-organised based on the model of the German *Bundeskanzleramt* to ensure that units would be able to mirror, coordinate and monitor the activities of ministries and key agencies. Dimitrov, Goetz, and Wollmann (2006) concluded that the changes in 1998 decisively pushed Hungary towards the prime ministerial government.

Since 2010, the Orban governments have taken the prime ministerialisation to a new level. By now, three offices under prime ministerial control exist: a prime minister's office, a cabinet office of the prime minister and a government office of the prime minister. Central control has therefore been significantly expanded, which has had important implications for the number of positions available for party patronage. In 1990, there were nine state secretaries (including five political state secretaries) appointed to positions in the prime minister's office. By contrast, in 2018, the three institutions were the home of 41 state secretaries, including two parliamentary state secretaries, three administrative state secretaries, ten state secretaries and 26 deputy state secretaries.

The data does not allow us to directly observe the extent to which the central party office or the party leadership have increased their control of

patronage appointments in the context of extreme political polarization. However, the growing prominence of central coordinating offices under the control of the prime minister, who also happens to be the leader of the senior governing party and the growing number of patronage appointments to these offices indicates broad support for our second hypothesis.

Extreme polarization increases the motivation to use party patronage as both an organizational and an electoral resource

Our third hypothesis suggests that extreme polarization leads to the return of party patronage as an electoral resource. Under normal polarization, the expectation is that party patronage serves as an organizational resource that enables parties to control policy-making and implementation rather than having to rely primarily on the permanent civil service. Extreme polarization takes the motivation of political control one step further, suggesting that parties capture the state to channel government resources to political supporters for the sake of reward and to ensure their electoral support.

It is generally challenging to observe the motivation of political parties when making patronage decisions. Other than asking decision-makers and close observers directly why and for what purpose they make appointments, the second-best solution is to examine the consequences of party patronage. There is by now plenty of research that shows that political appointments are associated with less government performance and more corruption (Lewis, 2008; Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen, 2016; Schuster, Meyer-Sahling, & Mikkelsen, 2020).

From a principal-agent perspective, political appointees are dependent on their political masters and therefore have a strong incentive to be loyal and act in accordance with the preferences of their political master. If she is 'un-principled' and hence favors – as we expect under conditions of extreme polarization – the channeling of government resources to political supporters and away from political opponents, it is a logical step to expect the party patronage turns into an electoral resource for governing parties.

The corollary of this argument is that an increase in the scope of party patronage is likely to be associated with more corruption in the public sector. The evidence for Hungary suggests that corruption has been on the rise. The World Bank Governance Indicators for Control of Corruption, for instance, indicate a continuous increase in corruption since the early 2000s with major shifts after 2006 and then again in 2013, hence under conditions of extreme polarization. A similar trend is evident when looking at the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index. Between 2000 and 2012, Hungary dropped by more than 20 places, from being ranked 32 in the world to 55th place.

At the micro-level, the association between patronage appointments and corruption has been documented in relation to public procurement practices. Dávid-Barrett and Fazekas (2020) show for Hungary that the number of single-bidding and non-open public procurement procedures increased during the 2010s. Their analysis reveals that the change of government had a major impact on the identity of companies that won public procurement contracts. In particular, it became evident that companies with close connections to the Fidesz party benefited from the award of contracts after the 2010 election victory.

Public procurement is a particularly relevant field for the analysis of the effects of patronage appointments. Parties that are motivated to channel government resources to their supporters can use the political appointment to influence the design of tenders, they can appoint officials who manage the procurement process, determine procedural details, have a major impact on the decision-making process, and they can nominate people who ensure that audits and potential appeals do not lead to unwelcome challenges for the governing parties.

At this point, our data does not allow for the identification of state secretaries who were directly involved in procurement processes to potentially assess the effect of appointments on procurement outcomes. Moreover, for the time being, we cannot refer to qualitative studies that investigate and trace procurement decisions at this level of depth. Balint Magyar's (2016) proposition that Hungary has decayed into a 'mafia state' is perhaps the most drastic evaluation of the motivation of political elites in Hungary to exploit the state and manipulate public policy for its own advantage. Yet further research will be needed to examine our third hypothesis regarding the motivation of political parties to make patronage appointments.

Extreme polarization leads to the appointment of more partisan loyalists

The fourth hypothesis suggests that extreme polarization leads to the appointment of a growing number of staff with close connections to the governing parties. Our data helps illustrate the changing profile of political appointees in Hungary over time. From a conceptual point of view, the analysis of our data is based on Meyer-Sahling's (2008) fourfold typology of modes of politicization: (1) A mode of de-politicised senior personnel policy implies that governments do not interfere with the appointment of top officials after taking office but rely on nonpolitical civil service management. (2) A mode of 'bounded politicisation' means that new governments replace senior staff but recruit new appointees from within the civil service. This practice is common in countries such as Germany and France. (3) A mode of 'open politicisation' refers to the replacement of top officials after a change of government with

new appointees from outside the civil service but from a nonpolitical background, for instance, the private sector. (4) Finally, a mode of ‘partisan politicisation’ refers to both the replacement of top officials in office at the time of government change and the appointment of partisans with clear connections to the governing parties.

In light of our hypothesis, we expect that extreme polarization is associated with a trend towards a mode of partisan politicization. Given the complete turnover in the state secretary ranks in 2010, we can exclude a mode of de-politicised senior personnel policy in Hungary. Figure 4 shows the career background of state secretaries. It focuses on the last job before their appointment. It distinguishes state secretaries who were recruited from within the ministerial bureaucracy (either the same ministry or another ministry) and the wider public sector, both of which indicate bounded politicization. In addition, it shows the proportion of state secretaries whose last job was in the private sector to identify open politicization. Finally, it shows the group of state secretaries with backgrounds that can be classified as political and hence partisan loyalists.

Political backgrounds include state secretaries who were previously in executive or legislative office, for instance, state secretaries who had been elected as a member of parliament. It also includes state secretaries who held political office at the regional and local level. We further include appointees who previously worked as political advisors. Commonly, these are partisans who have worked for the party, parliamentary faction or a candidate, then gained a position in a ministerial cabinet and subsequently moved on to become a state secretary.

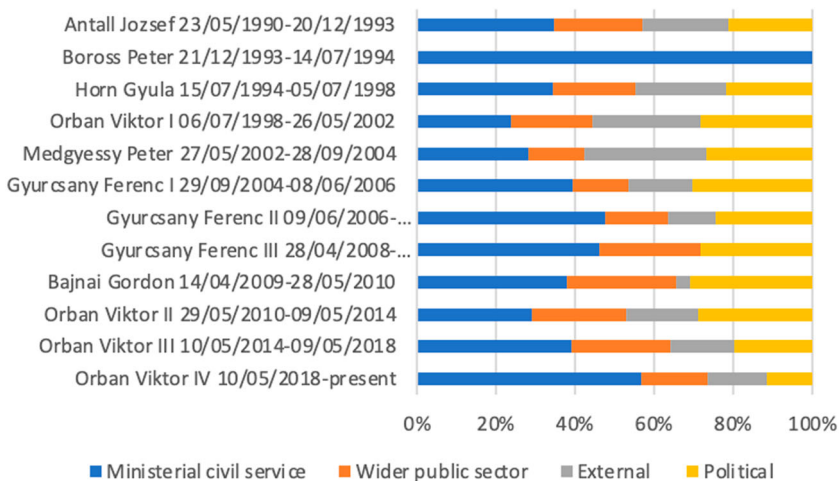


Figure 4. Political backgrounds of state secretaries in Hungary, last job before the appointment (in %).

When looking at [Figure 4](#), it is evident that partisan politicization makes up just under 30 per cent after the second Orban government took office in 2010. At the same time, we observe an equally large proportion of state secretaries with a background in the ministerial bureaucracy. Both the wider public sector and external, nonpolitical backgrounds are slightly less represented. [Figure 4](#) hence suggests that partisan loyalists played an important role in 2010, especially when bearing in mind the complete turnover in the senior ranks at the time, but they did not represent a majority or the prevalent mode of politicization.

Moreover, [Figure 4](#) suggests that partisan politicization did not suddenly increase in 2010. It had been important since 1990, with a notable increase in 1998 when the first Orban government was formed. Subsequent changes of government were followed by similar patterns, with approximately 30 per cent of the state secretaries having a political background. The appointments after the 2010 alternation hence confirmed an existing practice rather than breaking new ground; a finding that contrasts with the turnover ratios and the number of appointments discussed in the first section.

[Figure 4](#) also shows that the proportion of partisan appointments decreased relative to state secretaries whose last job was in the ministerial bureaucracy or in the wider public sector. The trend towards internal recruitment should, however, not surprise. Since the major purge of public administration in 2010 and the influx of new staff at all levels, the Fidesz has effectively captured the state, which has allowed the party to rely on a large pool of committed partisans who can be promoted to higher positions.

In summary, the career backgrounds of state secretaries in Hungary lend some support to our hypothesis that extreme polarization leads to the appointment of more partisan loyalists. However, the origins of this mode of patronage can be well traced back to the 1990s.

Conclusions

Party patronage, Peter Mair argued, or the ability of parties to appoint people to the state administration was one of the last remaining functions parties continued to perform in the age of declining party government (Mair, 2013). Having moved away from society and closer to the state, and linked more to governing than anything else, parties, in the present age, are still in need of loyal people in the institutions of the state who can design and implement their policies. As such, patronage remains an important dimension of party life in contemporary democracies. In this article, we engaged with this proposition made by Peter Mair more than a decade back.

We specifically explored the link between extreme political polarization and party patronage. Extreme polarization, we argued, is likely to impact party patronage in several ways: intensify its scope; move it closer to the party and away from the individual party leaders; patronage is also likely to be used more broadly by parties while the appointees are more likely to be partisans rather than professionals. As such, extreme polarization can have an additional, profoundly negative, effect on the functioning of democracy and its political institutions.

Empirical evidence supports most of our contentions. We focused on the case of Hungary: a political system that has clearly undergone the transition to extreme polarization in the early twentieth century. Using detailed data on one particular segment of the state administration – the state secretaries – we probed into the empirical patterns in patronage practices along with its four features following the 2010 elections. Our evidence allows us to confirm three of our expectations, that of more extensive, more partisan and more coordinated patronage, but we lack the data to explore the motivations behind the political parties' use of appointments.

It is of course, difficult to clearly separate the impact of polarization on patronage from the reverse causal link; patronage, we argue, allows parties to solidify their linkages to the groups of party voters and supporters and strengthens their likelihood to continue to identify affectively with the political party. As such, it is possible that the intensification and centralization of patronage practices that we observe in post-2010 Hungary, at least partially as a result of the extremely polarized politics, might, in its own turn, also intensify polarization in the political system. However, looking at the relationship from a more comparative perspective, we also see a similar story in countries with very low starting levels of party patronage. In the UK, for example, extreme polarization has developed, and at least anecdotally, seems to have worked in a similar way to intensify the scope of party reach in the state administration. This indicates that polarization still seems to lead to more party patronage rather than vice versa, but there is little doubt that the processes of polarization and patronage reinforce each other.

In that sense, party patronage might be seen in negative light not only for its damaging impact on the efficiency of state administration or quality of public policy, effects often emphasized in the public administration literature but also for its potential to further drive political polarization and thus compromise the quality of democratic institutions, effects of patronage that to date had remained largely ignored. In the extreme, making the state and its institutions almost wholly partisan by staffing them with party loyalists, and doing so as part of a concerted political strategy, as happened in Hungary and other (extremely) polarized systems, might become so intrinsic to the process of polarization that the opposition forces would also be

tempted to engage in similar practices if given the opportunity. If this mutually reinforcing dynamic between patronage and polarization ensues, nothing short of the institutional reforms to depoliticize the state and restore intra-party democracy of the extent familiar from the post-communist period are likely to be effective as a remedial strategy to reverse political polarization.

Notes

1. For more details on the method see Kopecký & Spirova, 2019.
2. It should be noted here that the distinction between limited and extensive party patronage in itself is only indicative of the importance of patronage for the functioning of political parties and political system. For example, even limited patronage can be of profound importance for the maintenance of internal party cohesion or for the strategic policy commitments of the party.
3. This is the general trend that we observed as a pattern in the 15 European countries included in Kopecký et al., 2012.
4. Some of this data has appeared earlier in Meyer-Sahling & Toth, 2020.

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