Pork Barrel Politics in a Coalition Government Environment and the Effect of Grants on the Reelection of Local Incumbents: Evidence from Slovakia*

Peter Spáč**

Abstract

Distribution of resources is an essential part of politics and vast research has been done in this field. While the allocation of public money is primarily of an economic nature, the literature shows that political representatives tend to use it for rewarding their allies while punishing their rivals. In addition, allocated grants have the potential to increase the prospects of incumbents when seeking reelection. This paper elaborates on these expectations and it studies a governmental program of local grants in Slovakia in the period between 2004 and 2014. The results show that better access to resources is given to towns led by mayors with closer ties to the central cabinet. In coalition governments, however, this advantage is provided primarily to municipalities with mayors supported by the ruling party that directly controls the distribution. What is more, the subsidies are beneficial for mayors when seeking reelection. A greater number of grants awarded during one term or grants distributed at the end of the electoral cycle help local incumbents to an even greater extent. Hence the paper demonstrates that a program paid for by all taxpayers may operate as a mechanism fueled by political and partisan interests with an impact in the electoral arena.

Keywords: distributive politics; pork barrel politics; incumbents; local elections; Slovakia

1. Introduction

The distribution of resources is one of the most important issues in politics and there has been vast research done in this field (Ames 1995; Denemark 2000; Milligan, Smart 2005;

Sciara 2012). Many authors use the term 'pork barrel'. Some understand it in a more negative fashion as a subset of distributive politics which lacks efficiency, while others take a more neutral stance (cf. Gaunt 1999; Limosani, Navarra 2001; Evans 2004; Schwartz 1994). Regardless, the character of the distribution remains the same. By definition, distributive politics promotes projects that concentrate benefits in specific geographic areas but their costs are spread all throughout taxation (Shepsle, Weingast 1981). Apart from the distribution itself, its consequences are of equal importance. Awards provide an opportunity for local incumbents to demonstrate their abilities to the voters and thus increase the likelihood of their reelection (cf. Bickers, Stein 1996). Based on this, resources gathered as taxes may unfoundedly serve as an effective electoral campaign tool for selected local representatives.

This paper investigates a governmental funding program aimed at helping municipalities with local infrastructure projects in Slovakia in 2004–2014. The grants are awarded every year by the Ministry of Finance and are under its full discretion. For several reasons, the country provides a suitable environment for analytical purposes. The local grants are distributed to towns led by mayors with clear partisan affiliation which allows estimating a political bias in the allocation process. Second, as a parliamentary democracy Slovakia has developed a prevailing trend of coalition governments. Under such circumstances only one of the ruling parties directly controls distribution. Hence, unlike many countries, the Slovak case allows internal governmental dynamics in the distribution strategies to be uncovered. Finally, the allocation of grants on a yearly basis provides the opportunity to inspect how various patterns of distribution affect the electoral prospects of incumbents.

The paper brings several relevant findings. The results show that the distribution of local grants in Slovakia rewards towns with closer ties to the government at the expense of their rivals from the opposition. In coalition governments, however, this advantage is primarily provided to municipalities led by mayors supported by the party of the Minister of Finance, who controls the distribution, while local leaders from other governmental parties do not enjoy these benefits to such a large extent. Finally, based on the analysis of three local elections (2006, 2010 and 2014), local grants increase the odds of mayoral reelection. Multiple subsidies awarded during one term or grants distributed shortly before the actual election are even more beneficial for incumbents. The paper thus shows that certain patterns of the distribution of resources may substantially assist local partisans in reelection.

The paper is organized as follows: The next section focuses on the literature dealing with pork barrel politics, its motives and its consequences. Then the program of local grants in Slovakia is introduced. Following this, the methods used and the data are presented. The subsequent two sections show the results of the analysis, and this is followed by the final conclusions.

2. Research of Pork Barrel Politics

In the literature, the term pork barrel is used in connection with the allocation of public resources. Being understood as either a synonym for distributive politics or only as its inefficient subset, its meaning is prevailingly unchallenged. As a political instrument, pork bar-

rel distribution is a mechanism which provides benefits for selected districts while its costs are spread among the whole society, typically in the form of taxation (cf. Shepsle, Weingast 1981; Del Rossi 1995; Evans 2004). Based on the existing research, pork barrel politics may take various forms, fueled by different motives and leading to various outcomes.

In his paper analyzing the case of New Zealand, Hoare (1992) provided a useful typology. According to him, pork barrel distribution may be realized either individually or in a centralized way. Individual distribution refers to a process where individual political representatives both in power and in opposition use their influence to direct public resources to their own districts, and in effect seek personal reelection. A typical example of this is seen in the USA where members of Congress maintain such influence (cf. Evans 2004; DeBacker 2010; Del Rossi 1995). On the other hand, in an environment with stronger political parties a centralized model of pork barrel politics is likely to occur. Here the distribution is open only to the ruling parties who allocate resources either to constituencies where their candidates won with a clear margin or to districts where their victory is uncertain. The research covers many such examples including Australia, Canada, Greece, Italy, France and Sweden (Denemark 2014; Gaunt 1999; Milligan, Smart 2005; Hazakis, Ioannidis 2014; Buiatti et al. 2014).

In general, pork barrel politics lies somewhere between economic rationalism and political pragmatism. Primarily, the distribution of goods is an economic process that should optimally pursue equity and efficiency. Existing literature, however, contradicts this normative standpoint, and in this context it seems naive to think of distributive politics in purely economic terms, as it is, to some extent, driven by political motivations (cf. Roberson 2008; Hazakis, Ioannidis 2014; Costa-I-Font et al. 2003). As the expenditure of public resources is often discretionary, the political actors in charge face only few obstacles in pursuing their interests (Milligan, Smart 2005).

Pork barrel politics may have a variety of aims, such as pursuing a legislative agenda, rewarding or punishing voters for their previous behavior or ensuring the reelection of selected partisans. First, pork barreling may be motivated by the desire to seek support among elected representatives. Evans (2004), for example, shows how pork barrel projects help to build majority coalitions in US Congress. In her book, she provides a complex analysis of such a case and shows the importance of distributive politics in the legislative process. She states that pork barrel politics may have a damaged reputation but it 'gets things done' (Evans 2004: 2). Here, pork operates as a reward for those willing to support the agenda and vice versa. Similarly, Bullock and Hood (2005) demonstrate this by showing how benefits promised to districts helped the governor of Georgia to rally support in the General Assembly in order to pass a legislative act on the state flag.

Second, by using pork barrel projects, ruling parties may reward or punish voters for their previous voting behavior. If an agency distributes resources primarily to areas governed by its partisans, a signal is sent to voters that by supporting them a further flow of projects is ensured and vice versa. There is a decent amount of research showing that governments tend to reward districts with their own partisans in charge (Golden, Picci 2008; Costa-I-Font et al. 2003; Milligan, Smart 2005). In this field, however, a gap can be observed regarding coalition governments. When dealing with the political bias of distribution politics, prevailing literature covers either cases of single-party governments or treats coalition

cabinets as solid blocs (cf. Gaunt 1999; Veiga, Veiga 2013; Hazakis, Ioannidis 2014; Golden, Picci 2008). The latter approach excludes tracking potential internal dynamics in coalition governments which may occur providing the distribution process is under control of only one of their members. So far this subfield of pork barrel allocation research is rather under-developed.

The third motive is partly connected to the previous one. As political parties seek power their general aim is to maximize their gains of votes and seats. Pork barrel distribution may help ruling parties keep their positions as the flow of public money may enhance incumbents' electoral prospects. Here, ruling parties may use different tactics. Following Hoare (1992), they may either pursue the distribution of public money to areas where their members won with a clear margin (safe seats) or they may support highly contested districts (marginal seats). The existing research shows a prevalence of the latter behavior (cf. Bickers, Stein 1994; Gaunt 1999; Johansson 2003). An example of this is provided by Denemark (2000) who analyzed the allocation of sport grants in Australia before the federal elections in 1990 and 1993. He found that the governmental distribution of resources was strongly influenced by partisan interests and that projects were primarily given to governmental party incumbents who were facing risk of loss in the next election. Similarly, Dahlberg and Johansson (2002) studied the allocation of environmental donations in Sweden and their results show that political representatives supported districts with swing voters to a greater extent.

A crucial point regarding pork barrel politics is who takes the credit. Focusing on the centralized form of distributive politics, which is more important for this article than that of the individual, the pork barrel mechanism is a top-down process which typically allocates resources from the national to the regional or local level. An example might be a new school built in a town; although it was paid for by a governmental grant it is more natural to expect that the credit is given to local authorities. However, there are issues that need to be taken into account. As the literature indicates, the credit is more easily given to those who occupy elected offices as individual personalities, such as mayors, as they operate as sole units and do not share their successes and failures. On the other hand, collective bodies such as assemblies instead include representatives of more parties. Hence in such a structure any credit is diffused among the assembly members of different political affiliations (cf. Ansolabehere, Snyder 2006; Ames 1995).

This point leads to the effects of pork barrel politics. The literature provides more findings in which resources are distributed in order to gain support of elected representatives for specific legislative agenda (cf. Evans 2004; Bullock, Hood 2005; Ames 1995). The authors generally agree that pork barrel is helpful to incumbents when seeking reelection (cf. Bernhardt et al. 2004; De La O 2013; Manacorda et al. 2011), although more proof seems to be needed. Regarding local representatives, Luo et al. (2010) analyzed the case of rural China. Based on their results, directly elected mayors who were able to gather more public resources were also more likely to be reelected. Similarly, Levitt and Snyder (1997) found that pork barrel spending helps incumbents to improve their electoral results. These findings thus indicate that including the real effects of pork barrel politics into the research is of vital importance, particularly when the support of voters is at stake.

The explanation of the positive effect of public funding on the electoral prospects of incumbents is quite straightforward. If towns are awarded with public resources, local

authorities may display this as a sign of their good work. As a result, the incumbents receive important support for their next election campaign. Unlike their challengers, they may use the pork as evidence of their abilities and as a promise of further income from public resources for the next term in the event of their reelection. This is easier for incumbents if the effects of projects are more visible to the electorate (cf. Hoare 1992; Milligan, Smart 2005).

A sole effect of public funding on the reelection of incumbents may vary based on specific conditions. First, the number of obtained projects may play a role here. As Bickers and Stein (1994) conclude, a greater number of grants help the incumbents as they are given more opportunities to demonstrate their abilities to the voters. Thus more grants allow elected representatives to present their work as a continuous effort during their whole term, at least in a more persuasive way than a single grant can do. Second, the existing research shows that the effects of subsidies depend on their timing. Although each grant may affect the electoral results of incumbents, voters might be able to better recall those projects awarded later in the term than those obtained in its earlier stages. Hence, voters may reward resources awarded shortly before an election more than grants distributed earlier in the electoral cycle (cf. Veiga, Veiga 2013). In light of this, the amount of grants and the timing of distribution are relevant to a more complex understanding of the potential effects of pork barrel spending.

3. Local Projects in Slovakia

Slovakia has a parliamentary democratic system with a prevailing tradition of coalition governments. After 1989, the country restored the local government. Each municipality has two directly elected bodies, an assembly and a mayor. The first is a collective body which ranges from 3 to 41 members based on the town population and it is elected for a four year term via block vote. The mayor is the head of the municipality, and is its highest executive official and its main representative. The office is occupied by a single person elected using FPTP system for four year terms. Altogether, Slovakia has nearly 2,900 towns and villages (cf. Spáč, Sloboda 2014).

Municipalities are given vast competences to exercise power in various areas including education, culture, traffic and ecology. To perform their duties, the local government is primarily funded through public resources. The towns are awarded a share of the tax revenues and they may collect their own local taxes and fees. Their income further includes interest on capital, collected fines, gifts and donations (cf. Nižňanský 2005; Law 583/2004).

In 2004, following post-2000 decentralization reforms (cf. Nižňanský, Kling 2002), Slovakia introduced a new funding program aimed at helping the towns with their specific, individual needs. The program is constructed as a top-down mechanism allowing the national government, or more specifically the Ministry of Finance, to distribute a set sum of money to selected municipalities. The grants are intended to assist the towns with infrastructure issues such as traffic, repair and modernization of buildings, etc. The money cannot be used for resolving municipal debt or interest obligations or for paying employee wages.

The whole mechanism works as follows: The program is run annually with each year being a separate round. To apply for a grant the municipalities have to file an official request

within the first three months of the respective year. Here they have to state the sum of money they are asking for and its intended use. The municipalities also have to show that at least one tenth of the projects' costs will be paid from their own resources. The requests are collected at the national level and the government typically decides by the end of July which towns will be given a subsidy and in what amount. A single year program is thus essentially finished within the first half of the year. The government decision is discretionary, without any guidelines or formulas (cf. Ministry of Finance 2005). Note that the government is also not bound by the sum each town requests. Thus a successful municipality may be given financial assistance for its project but with a lower amount of money than it asked for.

Financially, the funding program is rather modest although the funding level used to vary. It reached its peak in 2009 with more than seven million EUR. With respect to individual grants, some funding limits are also applied, e.g. in 2014 the minimum grant sum was set at 1,000 EUR and the maximum was 13,500 EUR (cf. Ministry of Finance 2014). The Minister of Finance may personally decide to exceed the limits, however this happens very rarely. Based on the given limits, the government may theoretically award some money to all municipalities; in practice, however, this does not happen, and only a portion of applicants succeed with their requests (see below).

This paper analyzes the distribution of local grants in 2004–2014. During this period, grants were given every year with two exceptions. Slovakia was damaged by heavy floods in 2010 and the government decided to use the resources to deal with the consequences of this natural disaster. In 2013, local grants were also not funded for two possible reasons. The first reason may have lay in the austerity measures taken by the government. Second, there was an overall increase in wages in the education system which municipalities were unable to cover with their own resources and therefore needed the help of the state. Since 2004, apart from these two years, the funding of local projects took place nine times with four different governments in office (Table 1).

Table 1: Governments in office and local project funding		
Government (PM)	In office	Funding local projects
Dzurinda	2002–2006	2004, 2005, 2006
Fico I	2006–2010	2007, 2008, 2009
Radičová	2010–2012	2011, 2012
Fico II	2012–2016	2014
Source: Author.		

4. Data and Methods

This paper studies pork barrel politics in Slovakia. More specifically, it focuses on a governmental program of local grants introduced in 2004 officially aimed at helping towns

with their individual, primarily infrastructure, needs. The literature shows that in order to provide better insight into the topic, pork barrel research should not orient itself only on the distribution funds but also on the consequences of how funds are distributed.

Two main aims are thus presented. First, the paper analyses the patterns of the distribution of local grants in Slovakia based on the political affiliation of mayors during 2004–2014. The program in Slovakia is an example of a centralized pork barrel mechanism (cf. Hoare 1992) which effectively rewards loyal local representatives and punishes others. The subsidy program was launched in 2004 by the cabinet of Mikuláš Dzurinda and since then the country has seen three more governments. After the national election in 2006, a new and rather leftist government was created with Robert Fico as Prime Minister. In 2010, the center-right parties came back into power as they formed a government led by Iveta Radičová. The cabinet did not survive a veto of confidence and an early election was held in 2012. This led to the single party leftist government of SMER-SD, with its leader Fico once again serving as Prime Minister. Note that in all cases the composition of governments has completely changed and thus no party was part of two consecutive cabinets. Hence it seems important to assess whether the installation of new governments led to different tactics in local grant distribution. More generally, the paper tracks the development of the funding program over time since its introduction in 2004.

In accordance with the topic of this paper, the independent variable covers the political affiliation of mayors. The candidates for mayor in Slovak local elections may be supported either by political parties or they may run as independents. Based on this, four basic categories of mayors are distinguished. First are mayors of governmental parties, i.e. persons who were elected as nominees only of those parties who are in government at the time of the allocation of grants [M_GOV]. The second category contains mayors from opposition parties [M_OPP] and, third, those who received the support of both government and opposition parties [M_MIX]. The final category contains the independents [M_IND]. Note that the affiliation of mayors is current to the date of the distribution of grants and not to the date of the local election which they won. Hence, except for the independents, the affiliation of mayors is flexible, because with a change of government the once governmental mayors may become oppositional, etc.

Although the presented categorization has its merits, it is unable to operate on the individual party level. The distribution process however is run by Ministry of Finance led by a minister nominated by only one of the ruling parties. Hence it is reasonable to expect that if towns with a closer link to the government are better off in the distribution, it might be primarily due to the advantage given only to municipalities led by mayors supported by the party of the minister. To concentrate on this, the two groups of towns whose mayors have the support of either of governmental parties, i.e. the category M_GOV and M_MIX, are further divided into two parts. The first subgroup contains mayors supported by the party of the minister [M_GOVa, M_MIXa] and the second those that do not [M_GOVb, M_MIXb]. This specified interest facilitates investigation into the potential internal dynamics in coalition governments; this means that it is applicable only for the period up to the 2012 election, after which a single party government was created. Table 2 presents the full categorization of towns.

Table 2: Categorization of towns based on party support of mayors		
Town variable	Parties supporting mayor	Support by party of minister
M_GOVa	Government	Yes
M_GOVb	Government	No
M_MIXa	Government and opposition	Yes
M_MIXb	Government and opposition	No
M_OPP	Opposition	–
M_IND	None (independent)	–
Source: Author.		

The dependent variable may either address the access of towns to grants or it can focus on the amount of distributed money. The latter approach is found in the existing literature (cf. Denemark 2014; Gaunt 1999; Hazakis, Ioannidis 2014), however this has its limits, as it may easily produce a false impression of fairness if the grants are of rather similar value, which is also the case in Slovakia.[1] Hence, in a distribution where only some of the requests are successful while others are not, it is more suitable to focus on the access to public money rather than the amount received. The dependent variable is thus constructed as dummy and it tracks whether a town that filed a request was awarded a grant or not. In the former case the variable has a value of one while in the latter it is zero.

Based on the presented variables, two hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Towns led by mayors with a closer tie to the government gain better access to local grants than other towns.

H2: Towns led by mayors supported by the party of the Minister of Finance gain better access to local grants than municipalities with mayors supported by other governmental parties.

In addition to this, a set of control variables is applied. In the economic sense, public funding may follow redistribution or efficiency criteria. The former includes the allocation of funds, primarily to less developed areas, in order to reduce regional disparities while the latter seeks investments into areas that allow for higher returns. The efficiency strategy is, however, only hardly observable in the case of local grants, as the variables used for analysis in the existing research are typically available only for larger territorial units than towns, i.e. regions or federal member states (cf. Rodriguez-Oreggia, Rodriguez-Pose 2004; De la Fuente et al. 1995). On the other hand, the redistribution criteria is more accessible for research purposes and in order to track it in the program of local grants in Slovakia, unemployment is included as a proxy of the economic development of towns (cf. Del Rossi 1995; Hazakis, Ioannidis 2014).

Two additional control variables highlight some municipal characteristics. The first is town population. Smaller towns may find themselves lacking resources for important infrastructure projects hence governments may tend to help them first. The second variable

addresses the share of Hungarians in a town's population. Hungarians represent the biggest ethnic minority in Slovakia, with around ten per cent of the country's population. Historically Slovakia and Hungary witnessed some mutual tension with important political consequences which remain until the present day (cf. Mesežnikov 2004; Petőcz 2004). After 1989, parties representing the minority have been able to enter parliament, and since 1998 even the government, as they have participated in cabinets led by Mikuláš Dzurinda and Iveta Radičová. For analytical purposes it thus seems interesting to track whether towns with higher shares of Hungarians are advantaged in the allocation of grants in times when parties representing this minority belong to government or, conversely, suffer when these parties are in opposition.

The second aim of this paper addresses the real effects of pork barrel politics. Local representatives who are able to gather more public resources have better chances of reelection. In Slovakia, this falls primarily on mayors who, as individual representatives, do not share credit with anyone for a grant awarded to their town (cf. Ansolabehere, Snyder 2006), unlike local assemblies which consist of members of various political parties. Hence the paper studies whether grants given to Slovak municipalities increase the chances of reelection for their mayors. Such a finding is essential in understanding the whole mechanism of pork barrel politics.

The literature suggests that public grants are more prone to affect the electoral results if they are visible to the voters (cf. Stein, Bickers 1994). The case of Slovakia fits the presented scenario. The funding program is aimed at infrastructure projects hence its results are easily noticed by citizens. Mayors, as the heads of municipalities, thus may use the local grants to support their reelection. Since the introduction of the program in 2004, three local elections have been held (2006, 2010 and 2014). Three rounds of distribution were conducted in each of the analyzed mayoral terms. Note that local elections in Slovakia are held in winter, therefore they always took place after the allocation of grants was finished in the respective year. This provides the opportunity to observe the possible effects of public resources on the electoral prospects of mayors.

The dependent variable is coded as a dummy as it tracks the reelection of mayors with value one given to those who accomplish this goal and zero to those who do not. The main aim is to estimate whether mayors who are successful in gathering public resources are more likely to be reelected. Hence, the independent variables cover several assumptions based on existing literature. First, it is assumed that mayors who obtain grants are more likely to be reelected than local representatives whose municipalities get no grants during their term. For this purpose a dummy is constructed [Awarded grant] with value one for towns that receive at least one subsidy during the mayor's term and zero for towns that do not. Second, due to the potential importance of timing, another dummy is set [Grant before election] with value one for towns that receive grants in the most recent distribution round before local rallies and zero for the remaining municipalities. In the local elections in 2006 and 2014, the final distribution was conducted in the same years, however for the 2010 election, due to the heavy floods in that year, the most recent allocation occurred in 2009. Third, it is presumed that more grants obtained during a term produce a stronger effect than a single grant. Hence, two dummies are constructed. The first maps towns that received one subsidy in the mayoral term [One grant] and second encompasses those that obtained more

than one grant in a term [More grants]. The latter category is not further split because, due to a change in government in 2012, virtually none of towns received three grants during the 2010–2014 mayoral term.

Hence, three additional hypotheses are presented:

H3: Awarded local grants increase the likelihood of reelection for mayors.

H4: Local grants awarded in the most recent distribution before local rallies increase the likelihood of reelection for mayors to a greater extent than the effect expected in H3.

H5: More grants awarded during a term increase the likelihood of reelection for mayors to a greater extent than a single grant.

Examining the reelection of mayors, three control variables dealing with local conditions and competition are used. First, it might be expected that in smaller towns stronger personal relationships benefit the incumbents (cf. Oliver et al. 2012). To track this, a control variable covers the population of towns. Second, the theory of economic voting presumes that voters reward incumbents during better economic times and punish them when the conditions are worse (Lewis-Beck, Nadeau 2011; López de Nava Velasco 2004; Posner, Simon 2002). In this paper, unemployment serves as a proxy for the towns' economic situation, hence, in less developed areas, the need for a change in political representation might be stronger, eventually lowering the prospects of incumbents for reelection. The third and final control variable concerns the competition in local rallies. It measures the amount of running challengers whose numbers may affect incumbent prospects when seeking reelection. The number of challengers ranges from one to fourteen. Due to the low incidence of towns with seven or more challengers, such municipalities were merged with units with value six.

For both aims of this paper, i.e. the analysis of distribution of local grants and the reelection of mayors, the dependent variables are constructed as dummies. Based on this binomial logistic regression is used to measure the effects of the covariates. This method makes it possible to estimate the effects of unit change in the predictors on the odds that the outcomes will occur (be it a grant award for a town or the reelection of a mayor).

This study collects data for all 2,926 (all but two) Slovak municipalities. Both the capital Bratislava and the city of Košice are further internally divided into the parts which have their own local governments. However, the official data about distribution of grants treat these two cities as solid blocs, hence making it impossible to identify which of their parts file an application for a subsidy and which are awarded a grant. The two cities are thus excluded from analysis; this only very slightly reduces the dataset to 2,887 units.[2] In order to follow the two main aims of this paper – the distribution of grants and the reelection of mayors – further specific reductions of the dataset are applied for the models presented in the following chapters. Regarding grant distribution, only towns that file an application are included, as only these can be awarded with a subsidy. In the case of the reelection of mayors, the models contain only towns with a competitive rally and an incumbent mayor running for the office. The presented reductions of the dataset thus effectively provide that models are

not spoiled by the presence of units which, due to their nature, are excluded from scoring each of the values on the dependent variable.

The data for the analysis were gathered from official state institutions. The data about the distribution of local grants were obtained from Ministry of Finance by request. The information about municipalities concerning their population, share of Hungarians and unemployment was acquired from the results of the Population and Housing Census conducted by the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2001; 2011) and from Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family by request. Finally, the data on local elections and their results are from official electoral sources provided by the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2016).

5. Distribution of Grants

With two exceptions (see above), grants have been distributed every year since 2004. Table 3 presents the basic outline of grants awarded and the development of the funding program over time. As the data show, governments distribute several hundred grants in every round, however in 2012 only 65 subsidies were given. This was because of the specific position of Radičová's government at the end of 2011 in which it did not survive a vote of confidence and operated with only limited powers until the early election in spring 2012.

Table 3: Grants awarded to towns based on the affiliation of mayors							
Year	M_GOVa	M_GOVb	M_MIXa	M_MIXb	M_IND	M_OPP	Total
2004	81 (1.9)	123 (-.8)	26 (.0)	13 (-2.0)	235 (1.2)	208 (-1.0)	686
2005	86 (8.2)	57 (-1.2)	22 (2.0)	13 (-.2)	102 (-1.6)	78 (-3.9)	358
2006	124 (11.8)	71 (-3.7)	46 (5.2)	20 (.2)	167 (-2.1)	145 (-4.5)	573
2007	445 (21.2)	125 (3.3)	55 (2.5)	30 (.3)	140(-11.1)	56 (-14.3)	851
2008	446 (14.8)	115 (.2)	59 (2.5)	27 (-.9)	183 (-6.1)	70 (-12.0)	900
2009	466 (13.1)	123 (-.5)	61 (1.7)	34 (-.6)	220 (-5.1)	90 (-10.6)	994
2011	120 (15.8)	27 (.2)	21 (2.6)	7 (-2.0)	84 (-1.5)	40 (-9.6)	299
2012	30 (8.9)	2 (-1.7)	8 (3.5)	1 (-1.1)	16 (-1.4)	8 (-4.5)	65
2014	333 (16.1)	N/A	144 (7.0)	N/A	128 (-9.5)	95 (-11.2)	700

Note: Adjusted standardized residuals are in parentheses. A separate calculation is done for each year with towns not awarded with grants not reported in the table. Chi-Square is significant (p < 0.001) for 2005–2014.

Source: Author.

The data suggest a partisan bias in the distribution process. As can be seen in the table, a constant preference was given to towns with mayors who were supported by governmental parties at the expense of the independents and, predominantly, of the municipalities with

oppositional leadership. This advantage however was only given to those of these towns whose mayors were supported by the party of the Minister of Finance, i.e. M_GOVa and M_MIXa. Municipalities whose mayors got support from other governmental parties did not enjoy such benefits, although they were still better off than towns with independents or oppositional representatives. The depicted pattern is observable from 2005 and, as the standardized residuals show, it even intensified after Robert Fico became Prime Minister in 2007. What is more, this method of distribution was, without exception, preserved and adopted by further governments.

The above presented outcomes are supported by the success rate of towns when applying for a subsidy (Table 4). This data confirm that requests filed by towns with independent or oppositional mayors were the least successful during the entire analyzed period. Towns from M_GOV and M_MIX categories were better off, although only if their mayors got support from the Minister of Finance's party. The sole backing by other governmental parties had no such effect. Note that success rate of M_GOVa towns was always higher than for M_GOVb towns, with a substantial margin ranging from 8.6 to 42.6 percentage points. Both subgroups of M_MIX towns showed a slightly lower difference (9.2–22.6 percentage points), but it was still relevant. A question might be raised about the overall low numbers in 2011 and especially in 2012. The explanation is straightforward as the then-government decided to award fewer grants than the previous cabinets. With the amount of requests from towns being the same, the success rates naturally went down for all categories, however without any influence on the positive bias based on partisan links.

Table 4: Percentage success rate of grant applications

Year	M_GOVa	M_GOVb	M_MIXa	M_MIXb	M_IND	M_OPP	All
2004	46.0	37.4	39.4	26.0	41.5	37.7	39.4
2005	48.9	21.1	34.4	22.8	21.4	17.5	24.0
2006	61.4	18.8	50.0	27.4	23.6	20.3	26.4
2007	73.2	46.8	48.7	39.0	20.5	10.9	37.6
2008	74.6	50.4	62.1	44.3	37.9	20.6	49.9
2009	79.0	55.7	65.6	54.0	47.3	29.9	57.4
2011	48.2	15.5	24.7	7.6	13.1	5.2	14.9
2012	13.6	1.2	10.4	1.2	2.6	1.1	3.4
2014	68.0	N/A	57.6	N/A	22.0	17.8	37.7

Source: Author.

In order to better estimate of the distributive politics, a logistic regression is applied with separate models for each year. The calculations include the affiliation of mayors with oppositional mayors being the reference category. As for the control variables, the share of Hungarians and the level of unemployment are in per cent while population size is

expressed in thousands of people. No multicollinearity was found between the variables. Table 5 provides the results.

Table 5: Distribution of grants (B coefficients)									
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011	2012	2014
	Dzurinda	Dzurinda	Dzurinda	Fico	Fico	Fico	Radičová	Radičová	Fico
Mayor_GOVa	.346*	1.544***	1.888***	2.863***	2.340***	2.122***	2.868***	2.656***	2.237***
	(1.413)	(4.681)	(6.603)	(17.507)	(10.386)	(8.352)	(17.604)	(14.242)	(9.364)
Mayor_GOVb	-.120	.202	.047	1.699***	1.252***	.994***	1.221***	.182	..
	(.887)	(1.223)	(1.048)	(5.470)	(3.498)	(2.702)	(3.391)	(1.200)	
Mayor_MIXa	.127	.902**	1.394***	1.716***	1.720***	1.426***	1.812***	2.423***	1.823***
	(1.135)	(2.464)	(4.032)	(5.561)	(5.586)	(4.162)	(6.124)	(11.281)	(6.191)
Mayor_MIXb	-.481	.288	.394	1.372***	1.017**	.964**	.409	.187	..
	(.618)	(1.334)	(1.483)	(3.944)	(2.765)	(2.623)	(1.506)	(1.206)	
Mayor_IND	.135	.187	.208	.591**	.770***	.688***	.973***	1.023*	.256
	(1.145)	(1.205)	(1.231)	(1.806)	(2.160)	(1.990)	(2.645)	(2.782)	(1.291)
Mayor_OPP (ref.)	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Hungarians	.003	.002	-.004	-.015***	-.006*	-.004	-.001	-.022	-.002
	(1.003)	(1.002)	(.996)	(.985)	(.994)	(.996)	(.999)	(.979)	(.998)
Population	-.075**	.020	-.003	.024*	.030	.008	-.004	-.080	-.016
	(.927)	(1.021)	(.997)	(1.024)	(1.031)	(1.008)	(.996)	(.923)	(.984)
Unemployment	-.006	-.018**	-.015**	-.010*	-.011*	-.009*	-.017**	.003	-.001
	(.994)	(.982)	(.985)	(.990)	(.989)	(.991)	(.981)	(1.003)	(.999)
Constant	-.311*	-1.247***	-1.125***	-1.699***	-.011***	-.603***	-2.531***	-4.443***	-1.439***
	(.733)	(.287)	(.325)	(.183)	(.330)	(.547)	(.080)	(.012)	(.237)
Nagelkerke R Sq	0.020	0.079	0.115	0.345	0.222	0.177	0.204	0.157	0.260
N	1,739	1,49	2,168	2,265	1,805	1,733	2,008	1,933	1,855
*Odds ratio in parentheses. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*									
Source: Author.									

The results confirm an existing political bias in the distribution of local grants in Slovakia. If the program ran under strict economic logic we would expect the less developed areas to be more likely awarded with a subsidy. This is not the case, however. Unemployment, serving as an economic proxy for the development of towns, is found to have only a limited effect and therefore the municipalities that are worse off do not have higher odds in getting a grant. A very weak effect is also found for population size. Only in 2004 were smaller towns, which typically lack resources for infrastructure projects, given some advantage over bigger cities, however this did not recur. We may conclude that Slovak governments

do not use local grants to promote equity or to diminish economic differences at the local level. Similarly, the share of Hungarians was found to have limited effect; this suggests that presence or absence of parties representing this minority in government does not influence distribution.

The findings show that mayoral affiliation affects the access of towns to local grants. According to the results, municipalities with closer ties to the government are favored over towns with oppositional leadership. This pattern is less visible for the first distribution round in 2004, however it increased over time and it became prevalent as of 2007. What is more, with the installment of the Fico cabinet after the 2006 election, even the towns with independents were better off than those led by oppositional mayors. Hence in general, local representatives supported by the opposition witnessed the least odds of succeeding with their grant requests. The presented findings give support to hypothesis H1.

A closer look into the categories of towns led by mayors with governmental or mixed support reveals that the support from the party of Minister of Finance is important. A comparison of estimates shows that for the entire time period no single subgroup which lacked the support of the Minister of Finance's party had greater odds of receiving a grant than the respective subgroup consisting of municipalities led by mayors who had such support. More specifically, the odds for M_GOVb towns never exceeded those for M_GOVa towns, and the same goes for towns with mixed support. What is more, towns with mixed support including the party of the minister (M_MIXa) always had a greater probability of receiving a subsidy than municipalities with mayors backed solely by other governmental parties (M_GOVb).

The results thus suggest that the distribution followed both partisan and governmental interests. Towns where both these interests were met, i.e. towns with mayors who were supported exclusively by parties in government including the Minister of Finance's party (M_GOVa), had by far the best access to local grants for the whole analyzed period. However, if one of these interests criteria was missing or weakened, the comparison of odds for M_MIXa and M_GOVb shows that the Minister of Finance's party gave higher priority to towns led by mayors who it supported in conjunction with other parties (including those from the opposition) than it did to funneling subsidies to municipalities led by mayors who were supported by other parties in the ruling coalition.

In other words, it seems that if there was a conflict of the presented interests, the distribution supported partisan aims first and foremost; differentiating between government and opposition came in second. The presented outcomes thus support hypothesis H2.

In order to assess whether the findings significantly differ among the analyzed years, a pooled model with time fixed effects was calculated (Nagelkerke R square = 0.319). The model includes all units (N = 16,996) and applies interactions between the categories of towns with dummies representing the respective years. Due to its size, the model is not reported. Its outcomes confirm that the political bias in the distribution process increased over time. When compared to the first distribution round in 2004, the advantage given to municipalities with closer ties to the government increased and this change was highly significant. This shift was most notable in the case of towns led by mayors supported by the party of the minister (at $p<0.05$ in 2005 for M_MIXa and $p<0.001$ for all other years and both subgroups). A similar trend is found for types M_GOVb and M_MIXb. Finally, the

independents were treated significantly better only during the Robert Fico's first cabinet and the first year of Radičová's rule, while in the remaining years the results were not significantly different than in 2004. The pooled model thus provides evidence that the variation found among the separate models was predominantly of significant value and that the municipalities led by mayors with closer links to national governments became substantially better off over time.

6. Reelection of Mayors

By definition, pork barrel politics provides resources to selected areas while the costs are spread throughout the whole society (Shepsle, Weingast 1981). Although the results of pork barrel politics, in the form of new roads or investments in the education system, are beneficial to all citizens regardless of their political views, distributive politics is often fueled by different motives than providing for the public good. In centralized pork barrel distribution, as is the case in Slovakia, the central agency allocates resources to selected constituencies in order to provide help to incumbents, i.e. to primarily increase the likelihood of their reelection.

In general, mayors in Slovakia have a high rate of reelection. As Figure 1 shows, in towns with competitive rallies, i.e. with at least one challenger, incumbents are able to keep their office three out of four times. These numbers are lower for municipalities that do not obtain grants during the respective mayoral terms. On the other hand, towns which are awarded grants have a higher mayoral reelection rate. Although all categories with grants obtained show greater incumbent success than towns without a subsidy, the peak is found

Figure 1: Percentage of mayoral reelection in competitive elections (2006–2014)
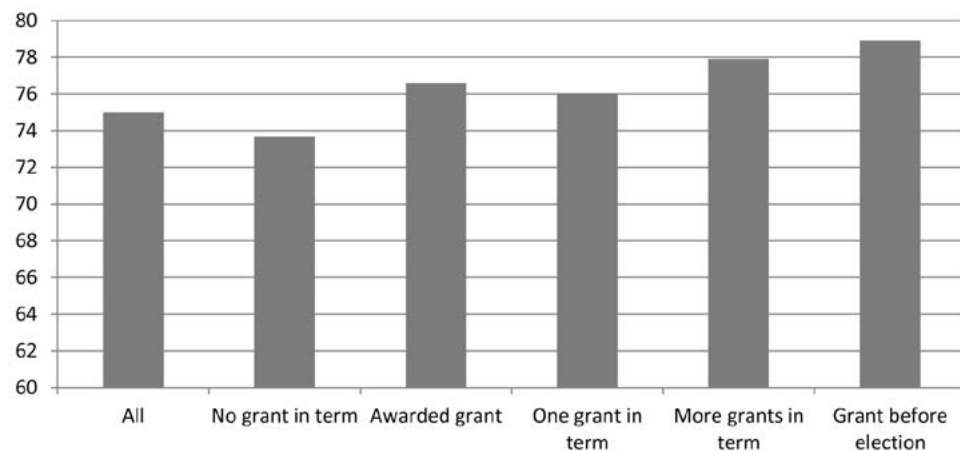
Source: Author.

for multiple grants in a term and for grants awarded in the most recent distribution round before a local election. These descriptive results are thus found to be in accordance with our expectations.

In order to examine these effects more thoroughly, a logistic regression is used. Only towns with at least two contenders including the incumbent are included in the analysis. The towns with an incumbent not running for office and towns with only the incumbent in the race are not calculated because for the former reelection is impossible, and for the latter reelection is the only option. The models thus contain only municipalities which may theoretically score each of the values of the dependent variable. To address the three hypotheses (H3 to H5) only towns with mayors who served the full term are included in the analysis. A model pooling data from all local elections was calculated (not reported in a table) which showed that the findings between each election are not significantly different. This allows the creation of one joint model for all three analyzed local rallies for each of the three scenarios.

Table 6: Reelection of mayors (B coefficients)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Awarded grant	.110*	..	..
	(1.117)		
One grant	..	.077	..
		(1.080)	
More Grants	..	.173*	..
		(1.189)	
Grant before election	..	..	.262***
			(1.299)
Population	.006	.006	.006
	(1.006)	(1.006)	(1.006)
Unemployment	.008***	.008***	.008***
	(1.008)	(1.008)	(1.008)
Challengers	-.351***	-.351***	-.350***
	(.704)	(.704)	(.705)
Constant	1.732***	1.730***	1.710***
	(5.653)	(5.643)	(5.527)
Nagelkerke R Sq	0.068	0.068	0.070
N	5,589	5,589	5,589
*Odds ratio in parentheses. * p < .1, ** p < .05, *** p < .01.*			
Source: Author.			

Table 6 presents the results of the analysis. First, the controls are discussed. The population of towns is found to have no effect. Hence, mayors in Slovak municipalities enjoy rather

the same prospects for reelection regardless of the number of inhabitants. In respect to economic development, the variable covering the unemployment has some effect, although it works against the expectation. With a higher unemployment rate, mayors are more likely to become reelected and thus they do not suffer from a weaker local economy.

Based on the regression outcomes, the reelection of incumbents is affected by the level of competition in the rallies. With an increasing number of challengers, the chances that defending mayors have of staying in office decrease. Hence, while the presence of more challengers gives voters more options, the results suggest that this does not lead them to split their votes; instead it poses a threat to the incumbents. Defending mayors are thus less vulnerable in less competitive rallies and their prospects become worse if more challengers stand against them.

Most importantly, the results confirm that studying the effects of pork barrel politics is a vital part of the research. Based on the outcomes, local grants in Slovakia increase the likelihood of mayoral reelection. Model 1 shows that mayors whose municipalities receive at least a single grant during their term have better prospects of defending their office. More specifically, this effect enhances their odds for reelection by nearly 12 per cent.

The regression analysis confirms that the number of grants obtained is also relevant. Based on Model 2, mayors who receive more subsidies during their term are better off. The estimates show that obtaining a single grant leads to greater chances of reelection, however this finding is not statistically significant. On the other hand, more subsidies allocated to towns have a significant and stronger positive effect on incumbent reelection. Mayors who lead such municipalities are given a 19 percentage point increase on their electoral prospects. These results thus suggest that the amount of received subsidies is important as it provides the local leadership with more opportunities to present their capabilities to their voters.

Finally, the results in Model 3 indicate that timing is a crucial factor. Of all individual grants, those awarded in the final round before the actual election are found to be most valuable. According to the analysis, recently awarded grants give local incumbents a 30 per cent boost in their probability of reelection. This is more than the effect found in Model 1 which suggests that subsidies distributed in the final round before an election have the potential to overshadow grants allocated earlier in the electoral cycle. What is more, their impact is even stronger than the effect of more grants allocated in a single term as presented in Model 2. Hence for mayors seeking reelection, even a single grant received in the final distribution round before the local rally may be more fruitful than resources arriving earlier in the term, even if they are repeatedly distributed.

The results of this analysis support all three hypotheses regarding this part of the paper. As expected in H3, local grants increase the likelihood of reelection for incumbents. H4 is supported by the finding that grants distributed in the final round before an election (Model 3) have a stronger effect than the allocated grants have in general (Model 1). Finally, the H5 hypothesis is also confirmed, as the outcomes in Model 2 show that more subsidies awarded during a term give the mayors better prospects for reelection than a single grant does. The last section of this paper discusses the findings and provides final conclusions.

7. Conclusions

A great amount of research has been devoted to the area of distributive politics. Authors have found that the discretionary allocation of public resources leads to rewarding loyal political representatives while punishing others. When pork barrel politics takes a centralized form, national governments tend to distribute grants to constituencies in order to provide support to their own partisans and to increase their electoral prospects. This paper tested these theoretical expectations on the case of local grants in Slovakia. It found support for existing bias in the distribution process which provides advantage to towns led by mayors with closer ties to the government. The results also show that subsidies increase the electoral prospects of local incumbents when seeking reelection.

The Slovak case provides important contributions to the literature. The setting of the distribution process analyzed in this paper requires towns to file requests for obtaining the grants. Given that this demand from municipalities exceeds the supply provided by the Ministry of Finance, in the end, only some towns succeed with their requests while many towns receive no funding at all. In such an environment, the key to understanding the distribution outcomes lies in focusing on access to the grants rather than on the amounts of resources awarded. This is even more relevant if the grants are of similar value (as is the case of Slovakia), and the comparison of money given to recipients of different political affiliations may produce a false impression that the whole process is fair. Thus for discretional distribution programs with limited access to resources for the applicants, the crucial question might be not 'how much money is being distributed' but 'who is being awarded'.

Based on the existing literature, in centralized distribution processes governments tend to allocate resources primarily to areas controlled by their candidates (cf. Gaunt 1999; Veiga and Veiga 2014). However, these results are provided mainly by studies that concentrate either on single-party governments or on coalition governments treated as solid units. The case of Slovakia analyzed in this paper shows that this approach towards coalition cabinets has its limits. If the allocation is directly controlled by only one of the ruling parties then more priority might be given to funneling grants to areas led by representatives of this party rather than to those controlled by nominees of other coalition members. Under such conditions, treating local representatives from the governmental parties as a single category excludes uncovering differences that might arise due to their different partisan affiliations. Hence this paper suggests that studies about countries with coalition cabinets should treat local incumbents from the party controlling the distribution programs separately from nominees of other governmental parties, as only this type of approach can show the existing internal dynamics in a cabinet.

Equally as important as distribution are its consequences. Using a sample of three local elections in Slovakia, this article supports the expectation that, in general, grants contribute to the reelection of incumbents. What is more, additional grants during the term help the incumbents even more, as they give them more opportunities to attract voters. Similarly, subsidies awarded in the final round before the actual elections are more valuable than those given earlier in the term. This paper thus shows that the role of public resources in increasing the likelihood of incumbent reelection might even be enhanced by the specific

patterns of distribution concerning amount or timing of grants. Hence, with proper tactics, governments are able to gather public resources collected as taxes and effectively transform them into some form of campaign support for their own partisans at the local level. This finding can be generally applied, but it is primarily applicable for countries with directly elected local leaders, as these representatives may use the obtained grants to convince voters of their capabilities in their election campaigns.

The Slovak case also brings up another interesting topic regarding the electoral prospects of incumbents. As shown in this paper, the funding program includes minimum and maximum grants amounts, with 13,500 EUR being the top. Given the found positive effect of subsidies on mayoral reelection in Slovakia, it seems that even pork barrel politics based on modest amounts of money may still have important political consequences. The findings in this paper thus suggest that the sole psychological effect of awarded grants might be worth more than the money itself, however more testing of this argument is in place.

Finally, some limits of this paper should be pointed out. First, it might be discussed whether unemployment serves as a proper proxy for the economic development of towns. Other economic indicators such as GDP, mean income etc. could be used in its place, however in Slovakia these variables are not available for the local level but only for higher territorial units which do not correspond to the towns as the unit of analysis. The second point addresses the reelection of mayors. Here it could be expected that the electoral prospects of local incumbents are affected by the overall performance of municipalities as seen from the point of view of the voters (cf. Oliver et al. 2012). Although including such measurements could improve the models, as with the previous point, no such data is available in the Slovak case. The third and last limitation is devoted to the potential of grants to influence the local rallies. The basic presumption is that local incumbents use the obtained public resources as a sign of their good work in front of their voters. However, there is no variable that is able to assess whether and how mayors truly use this opportunity. What is more, if incumbents do use grants as a part of their campaign, there is no data measuring the reach of such activities in terms of the share of voters that recognize it. To sum up, the depicted limitations can play their role but they do not pose a major challenge to the findings in this paper. The outcomes found regarding the important aspects of distribution politics and the effect of grants on the reelection of local incumbents in the Slovak case have potentially broad implications and further research should test them on other countries.

Footnotes:

1. The mean sums of local grants in Slovakia differ between years but within each year they are rather similar regardless of the political affiliation of mayors. More specifically, the mean sum of grants given to towns led by governmental mayors was not the highest in any of the analyzed years.
2. During the analyzed 2004–2014 period, less than 0.4 per cent of all allocated grants (21 out of more than 5,400) were given to the two cities and their parts. Thus, more than 99.6 per cent of all grants are included in the analysis.

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