Pork Barrel Politics in Context of Action Plan
- Support of Least Developed Districts

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to find out and describe if and by which means the attributes of Pork barrel politics were present in redistribution of funds from Regional grants, which were part of Action Plan – Support of Least Developed Districts. Secondary aim is to see how receiving of this grant could have helped in reelection of incumbent in next election. An Index of political patronage was assembled to measure the level of pork barreling. Based on party affiliation, mayors with connections to government were not highly favored when receiving grant, not even in the case of affiliation with party, which redistributed the grants. Neither there were no significant differences in the odds of reelection based on whether the incumbent received a grant nor not. That is an unexpected result relative to other research in the field.

1   Introduction

The malpractices used in political contest and efforts to abuse political systems are a subject of study of many scholars. Many concepts have been defined to describe at first sight similar concepts, the phenomenon of corruption, patronage, clientelism and pork barreling are being addressed by various scholars in various meanings. Pork barreling is often defined as a practice which aim is to gain voter´s favour in exchange for access to resources, as it is defined by Hoare [5] or Lancaster [8]. Very similar practices of exchange of voter`s favor, or change of voter`s behavior for some kind of reward are considered to be a trait of clientelism by Mares and Young [9] and [10], Örnebring [11] and Fox [4]. Furthermore, that is defined as one of corruption practices [1] and in definition is close to the concept of political and party patronage, as defined by Sičáková-Beblavá and Pavel [13]. For the purposes of our paper, we are going to narrow down the used concepts and based on existing knowledge in the field we form our definition of pork barreling that we will use in our research.

In definition of clientelism, we will try to narrow down the concept. There is more or less an agreement in the field of political studies, for example, we see in work of Mares and Young [9] and [10] or Örnebring [11] that it is a relationship between politician and voter, where vote is gained from voter by offering him some kind of incentive. Jonathan Fox [4] stated that it is obvious, what is clientelism for those, who come to contact with it. Being aware of the vagueness, he described propositions researcher needs to address while studying clientelism, in which he claims that clientelism is making the agent – principal (politician – voter in this case) relationship reciprocal and is one of the strategies of using resources for political manipulation [11]. This dyadic understanding of clientelism is also typical for the work of Mares and Young [9] where they describe it as a relationship based on "quid pro quo" principle, to be more concrete, exchange of voter`s support for some pre-agreed behaviour of the politician. Örnebring [11] diffuses the dyadic understanding of clientelism and claims, that media fit in the system of clientelism, both as a tool of elite-to-elite and elite-to-mass communication. His contribution we see not only as describing a new, third actor in the relationship, but as a way of pointing out the complexity of the phenomenon and a change of perspective from dyadic relationship to more complicated network of more possible actors. The "quid pro quo" principle is also addressed by Stokes et al [19] which

they consider to be especially harmful because it undermines the freedom of choice and the autonomy of the voter.

In the aspect of the reward for the voter itself, a very simple, but sufficient distribution is given by Mares and Young. They divide the incentives provided by politicians to voters into positive and negative ones [9]. The positive ones are practices like vote-buying (or as we will describe further in the text, the pork-barrel will fit here too) or providing any form of reward, in form of resources, money, goods, or services. The negative incentives are for example cutting off voters from systems of benefits [9]. These practices, if a secret ballot is respected, are being done more with the voters, whose behaviour is predictable [10]. To briefly sum it up, considering all the above mentioned, we can say that clientelism is a practice of political manipulation in order to change the voter`s behaviour using a system of incentives. There are many actors involved in the process, but crucial is the relationship of politician and voter.

Regarding pork barrel politics, useful is the definition provided by Lancaster who states, that pork barrel politics are distributive politics that favour specific districts which is somehow connected to politician from resources that were gained by general taxation [8]. Here we can see the difference compared to clientelism – pork barrel politics is having a geographical aspect. Lancaster also adds, that the reward voter gets can have an impact on re-election of the politician and therefore this phenomenon is present in all liberal democracies, because all of them generate politicians, which have the incentives to do so [8]. The geographical aspect of the pork barrelling is also stated in the work of Evans [3], also Takahashi [21] considers this geographical aspect to be the distinction between pork-barrel and clientelism, where both of it he considers to be practices which aim to gain political support in exchange for public resources, but clientelism is not geographically targeted, but rallies on building networks. Evans [3] also claims, similarly to Lancaster, that the aspect of re-election is fundamental for the pork barrel politics. Another definition provided by Hoare [5] also distinguishes between several types of pork barrel politics according to who is the key agent and what is the strategy of pork barrelling. He describes the individual form, where the goal is for the individual politician to keep his seat, safe seat form, where the political party rewards their voters and marginal form of pork barrel politics, where the political party tries to win the district. Based on above mentioned knowledge about both, clientelism and pork barrel politics, we will consider that for a phenomenon to be called a pork barrel politics, it needs to fulfil these 3 criteria:

1) Pork barrel politics is a distributive politics, which redistributes public resources based on geographical targeting that is made purposefully, and not on set of objective criteria.
2) Pork barrel politics functions on dyadic relationship of voter and politician on "quid pro quo" principle, where the aim is to exchange vote for a form of reward. In this relationship, other actors can enter too.
3) Pork barrel politics aims to change voter`s behaviour, it is a tool of political manipulation.

Research has been done on the topic of pork barrel politics in Slovakia, so far reaching also outside of the academic world. Transparency International Slovakia evaluated the programme of Grants for Individual needs of municipalities for year 2008, which was conducted by the Ministry of Finance, where they focused mainly on party membership of mayors and it`s compatibility to the party membership of those responsible for distribution, where those who had ties to government have 10 times higher probability in receiving a grant [12]. Their other research focused on fire trucks, which were given to municipalities by the Ministry of Interior in years 2014 to 2016. Here, the most successful were those who had ties to governmental party Smer-SD or were independent, where author states that they might still be linked to the party [6]. In year 2019 they evaluated 1.3 million € of grants, that were distributed at external meeting of the government in the district of Bardejov. 23 municipalities didn`t receive grant, out of them 21 had mayor with no ties to government. Out of 85 municipalities with mayor with support of one of governmental parties, 83 received funds [20]. Another organisation, Slovak Governance Institute, analysed Prime Minister`s reserve in years 2002 and 2013 and also found clear evidence of pork barrelling, where political ties of mayors meant their benefiting in the process of redistribution [7].

In academia, the topic is covered mostly by the work of Peter Spáč, researcher at Masaryk University. His work For the Game, For the loyal Partisans, where he evaluated a governmental programme of grants from year 2015 for building multi-functional sports centres, shows, that there were no objective criteria and the most important factor for receiving grant was having ties to government, and that being tied to opposition meant to be almost ignored [16]. A very similar situation was in the case of environmental grants between years 2005 and 2015 [17]. New observation here is that this practice was not tied to one specific government but is a settled trend that is present across all the governments [17]. Furthermore, research of Central Bohemia region confirmed, that pork-barrel politics occurs not only on national, but also on regional level of politics [18]. The same conclusion as in case of environmental and sports grants can be made about the programme of local infrastructure grants between years 2004 and 2014, but furthermore, Spáč proved that receiving a grant had impact on re-election of the incumbent [15]. The incumbent effect is present in Slovak municipalities, incumbents, who are defending their seats are 6 to 7 times more successful as their rivals [14]. Spáč`s research proves, that receiving a grant from the local infrastructure programme added extra 12% to the probability of incumbent`s re-election and that even small grants, where the upper limit was 13 500€, can play a role [15]. Bernhardt et al [2] further add, that senior incumbents are even more capable of pork barrelling into their own constituencies. Also, important to mention is the fact, that if distribution of the grant is in competence of only one governmental party solely, bigger advantage for the incumbents than just ties to the governments at all are ties to that exact party [17].

The paper has two aims, first is to find out and describe if and by which means the attributes of Pork barrel politics were present in redistribution of funds from Regional grants, which were part of Action Plan – Support of Least Developed Districts. Secondary aim is to see how receiving of this grant could have helped in re-election of incumbent in his next elections. We are going to answer these research questions "Are attributes of pork barrel politics present in re-distributing regional grants of the Action Plan – Support of Least Developed Districts?" and "How does receiving a regional grant affects the re-election of the incumbent?"

2 Material and Methods

As might be already clear from the aim of the research and research questions, in our paper we will analyse the programme of Action Plan – Support of Least developed districts (hereinafter Action Plan). To receive support from the Action Plan is possible for municipality, that are located amongst the 20 Least developed regions, and also other subjects located in the district, such as firms, municipality-run enterprises or third sector organisations [22]. For our research, we decided to take into account also those grants received by firms and institutions, not only by municipalities, Projects realised by them could be also projected into mayor`s political profit – we do not see much difference between a municipality directly receiving funds to renovate pavements or a firm in the village receiving grant to increase employment rate.

Responsible for distributing of the resources from Action Plan was the Government Office of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter the Government office) in the past, lately, the competence fell to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for Investments and Informatization (hereinafter Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) [22]. For the incumbents, we know that they are advantaged by being tied to the government, especially to that exact party that distributes the resources [17]. In both cases, position of Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister was held by the government, and also by the same party, Smer-SD.

In the research, we are going to analyse all the contracts that have been signed in time period between 10.2.2016 (which is a date of launch of Action Plan for the first district – district of Kežmarok) until the date of last municipal elections, which were held on the 10.11.2018. We chose this time framing and decided not to analyse all the contracts signed by the term of writing this paper, because only those signed before the elections could have impacted the mayor`s chances in municipal elections.

We are going to analyse 13 districts (out of 20, which by definition are considered to be the least developed districts). We chose those districts that had at least one contract signed prior to the date of the municipal elections. It was the districts of Gelnica, Kežmarok, Lučenec, Poltár, Revúca, Rimavská Sobota, Rožňava, Sabinov, Sobrance, Svidník, Trebišov, Veľký krtíš and Vranov nad Topľou. In these districts there are 729 municipalities in total. All the data about the contracts were obtained in e-mail communication with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, all the statistical data about the municipalities we used, exactly the name of the mayor, his party affiliation, number of inhabitants and support of Smer-SD in elections were retrieved and are available on the official website of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter Statistical Office) where both the demographics and municipal elections of 2018 datasets are available to download.

To see whether the distribution of resources from the Action Plan has traits of pork barrelling or not, we constructed an index of political patronage. We based our index on one used by Transparency International Slovakia in the past. Index of political patronage is counted as share of share of mayors (of each category based on party affiliation) among those who received grant and share of mayors (of the same category) from all the mayors in the region. For example, if one category consists of 10% of mayors in the region, but the same category includes 30% of mayors who received grant, their index of political patronage would be 3.0, that means they were three times more successful compared to scenario based on random distribution.

Out of dataset of 729 municipalities, we had to exclude four, because we couldn`t retrieve the information about who was elected as the mayor in 2014, not even after trying to directly contact the municipalities. Our index therefore doesn't include the municipalities of Buzitka in Lučenec District, České Brezovo in Poltár district, Kuzmice in Trebišov District and Veľký Lom in Veľký Krtíš district. Also, we processed all the contracts received from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, where after selecting only those in time framing of our research and excluding all those, which were not assignable to a concrete municipality (for example, contract for creating a tourism centre for whole district), we ended up with 143 contracts about receiving regional grant.

The original index used by Transparency International Slovakia [13] divided the mayors into categories by affiliation to governmental parties one-by-one, to government at all and to opposition. We decided to not copy this, but adjust the categories on our own for two reasons. First one is, in time of distributing resources of the Action plan political situation changed dramatically compared to elections of 2014 and many parties, that used to be relevant back then, are now a non-parliamentary political plankton. We created 8 new categories, and those were; The mayors with support only of Smer-SD, Mayors with support only of SNS, Mayors with support only of Most-Híd, Mayors with support of at least 2 government coalition parties, Mayors with support of Smer-SD and any other political subjects, Mayors supported by at least 1 governmental coalition party, Mayors with support of any political party excluding the governmental coalition and the last one, Independents mayors. These categories were used as variables, and when there was affiliation of mayor to this group or not, we coded them 1 or 0. In the same way, we coded 1 or 0.

As we know from previous research in the field, even receiving a grant in the amount of few thousands of euro can play a role in re-election and increases the incumbent effect [15]. In the Action plan, some of the contracts are on higher, amounts, hundred thousand are sometimes granted to municipalities, firms, and other organizations for single purposes. To the database of 725 municipalities, we added information also about the mayor`s and their party affiliation from the year 2018. We again coded municipalities that received a grant or not 1 or 0, the same we way we coded the re-election. We then counted to share of re-elected mayor, where we created again three groups; all the mayors, mayors with support of Smer-SD and independent mayors.

3 Results and Discussion

As Lancaster mentioned, in all liberal democracies the politicians have incentives for pork barrelling [22]. This incentive might be not only to gain advantage in political competition, but

also might happen as a form of political reward [22]. We might predict, that pork barrelling in this case might have been not only how the money were distributed, but even the decision to establish the action plan that will cover the least developed districts, and starting with these 13 districts before elections might have been a case of pork barrelling. We therefore looked at the share of mayors in these districts compared to their share in all of the Slovak republic. As we see, there is only a marginal difference in the number of mayors who have affiliation to any governmental party. Where we see a difference, there is significantly less mayors with affiliation to non-governmental parties and a significantly greater number of independents. A further research, whether these independents were somehow party affiliated in the past and there might be some form of political strategy, where running as independent might be more appealing to the voters. Also, the voter preferences and support of Smer-SD in the districts could be interesting to look at.

Figure 1: Share of mayors after 2014 municipal ellections

Party affiliation of mayor	Share of mayors in 13 least developed districts	Share of mayors in all Slovak republic
Smer-SD only	29.7	29.1 (-0.6)
SNS only	1.4	1.4 (0)
Most-Híd only	6.8	3 (-3.8)
At least 2 government parties	2.1	2.1 (0)
Smer SD + any other subject	38.6	38.1 (-0.5)
At least 1 government party + any other subject	48.7	44.7 (-4)
Non-government parties only	23.2	17.3 (-5.9)
Independents	28.1	38.0 (+9.9)

Source: Authors.

Figure 2: Index of political patronage

Party affiliation of mayor	Share on all mayors in 13 least developed districts	Share on mayors who received grant	Index of political patronage
Smer-SD only	29.7	17.4	0.586
SNS only	1.4	0.0	0.000
Most-Híd only	6.8	4.3	0.643
At least 2 government parties	2.1	4.3	2.101
Smer SD + any other subject	38.6	34.8	0.901
At least 1 government party + any other subject	48.7	40.6	0.833
Non-government parties only	23.2	17.4	0.751
Independents	28.1	42.0	1.494

Source: Authors.

Regarding the Index of Political patronage (figure 2), the observations are nothing like expected. Interesting are the results of those mayors supported by single government coalition party. There is a strong evidence from previous research, mayors with government's ties and government party affiliation are more likely to be favoured. We see, that not in this case. There was only a small number of mayors with support of SNS, but none of them received any grant, also, for two other government coalition parties, they share on those who received grant was smaller than their share on total numbers. What contradicted the knowledge we have so far the most, was that the share smallest for the mayors who were supported only by Smer-SD. Index of political patronage for this group was 0.586. Even those with support of any other, but government coalition party had better outcome, their index was at 0.751. Those, who had support of Smer-SD and any other political subject were still less favoured, but not that much, their index was at value of 0.901.

Only two groups had bigger index than 1.0 are those with support of at least two parties, and those who were independents. Those with support of two parties reached index of political patronage at level of 2.101, they were more than two times more likely to receive a grant than in a scenario based on randomness. As we know, one of the aspects that makes incumbent effect stronger, is the ability and easier access to networking [14]. The fact, that they were able to bargain support from two parties might be an indicator of their better network, therefore, this might have had an impact on their ability to access the grants more easier. The other group were the independents, where they reached index level of 1.494. A further research on their previous party affiliation, or even their latter one, would provide a more sufficient answer. Their previous affiliation to government might mean, they are still cooperating, but to be an independent candidate is a form of strategy used in elections, their latter affiliation with the party could indicate, that receiving a grant might be a form of recruitment.

Figure 3- median and average amount of grant received per capita

Party affiliation of mayor	Average amount of grant per capita	Median amount of grant per capita
All mayors	74.46 €	35.80 €
Smer-SD only	52.31 €	38.09 €
SNS only	0.00 €	0.00 €
Most-Híd only	41.85 €	35.93 €
At least 2 government parties	27.72 €	27.78 €
Smer SD + any other subject	45.14 €	29.90 €
At least 1 government party + any other subject	50.89 €	33.37 €
Non-government parties only	98.00 €	34.64 €
Independents	88.03 €	36.43 €

Source: Authors.

Also, when analysing both, the median and average amount of grant per capita received, we don`t see, that those with party affiliation related to government parties have not been favoured again, furthermore, those with support of at least 2 coalition parties had about one third of money in the average compared to all the mayors in the regions. Who had more money in the average were the independents, and also, surprisingly, those mayors with party affiliation of all the other, but the governmental parties. In median amount, we don`t see that one group would be specifically better off compared to all of mayors. Therefore, we can say, that here, once again, we can`t see any pattern, that could imply that government tied mayors would receive bigger funds. Once again, we can`t spot pork barrelling here.

Figure 4- share of re-elected mayors

Party affiliation	All mayors		Mayors with grant		Mayors without grant	
	Amount	Re-elected	Amount	Re-elected	Amount	Re-elected
All mayors	725	72.40%	69	73.90%	656	72.30%
Mayors with support of Smer-SD	280	70.70%	24	62.50%	256	71.40%
Independents	204	69.60%	17	70.50%	187	69.50%

Source: Authors.

Although, Spáč in his previous research [15] found out, there even small grants up to 13 500€ can have an impact on re-election, in our case, where the regional grants amounts were in many cases much higher, we can`t see a significant difference in re-election. When comparing all the mayors, the rate of those re-elected who received a grant is only one and half percentual points higher than those without grants, in independents only, its only one percentual point difference in favour of those who received a grant. What was counter intuitive and unexpected was, that those mayors with support of Smer-SD who received a grant had an 8.9 percentual points lower rate of re-election as their party colleagues who didn`t receive a grant. A hypothetical

explanation could be that these projects might have been hard to notice by the voter. We will elaborate on this further in the conclusion.

4 Conclusion

This paper analysed distribution of Regional grants in the Action plan of Support of least developed districts, with focus on pork-barrel politics. Secondly, we tried to find, whether receiving this grant had impact on re-election and incumbent effect. Firstly, before going deeper into our conclusions, we would like to state all the limits of this research we are aware of.

First limit, we need to take into consideration is that the analysis would be more complete, if we would analyse all the available contracts, not only those 143 that were signed before the municipal elections of 2018. We are limited here by our own decision to subsequently analyse the impact of receiving regional grant on re-election. Second limit is that we are analysing the programme not after all the resources were distributed, but while it is still running. Also, the amounts of money distributed is so far smaller than amount of money allocated, therefore there is no need for the ones responsible for the project to choose from "theirs" and "other" mayors, although, incentives for pork barrelling as a tool to give advantage to your party mayors still remains. Also, we haven`t fully mapped all the processes about receiving the resources, applying for regional grants and how mayors are encouraged to use the programme, so for complete evaluation a deeper qualitative analysis would be beneficial. Another limit was the lack of some data – for a district to be considered least developed, one of the conditions is to have 1.5 times higher unemployment than is the average number in the republic. If we knew to analyse, whether the municipalities with greater unemployment rate received more funds that might be an indicator of objective redistribution. Unfortunately, unemployment data doesn`t exist on municipality level and we couldn`t find any other criteria of objective redistribution. We were also limited in part of research where we tried to map the effect of receiving regional grant on re-election, because we did not retrieve information which mayors did not run in the election anymore. From research of Sloboda [14] we know, that incumbent effect and chances for re-election also vary depending on how many terms the mayor has served. This information hasn`t been included in our research neither. We can`t therefore compare only those candidates, who would have the same starting line.

As we found out, there is no evidence of pork barrelling based on party affiliation of mayors, neither when we evaluated the decision to support the least developed districts itself, neither when we compared who received the grant and neither when it came to the amount. In the theoretical part we described three traits of pork barrel politics. We can`t say, that resources here have been redistributed purposefully, also, because we didn`t find evidence, that receiving a grant would give an advantage in re-election, we can`t say that it happened with incentive to reward voter in exchange for the vote, neither to change his/her behaviour in any other form. A further analysis, done after the completion of the plan, considering also factors we described in our limits is desired.

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