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Multi-level Politics and Central European  
Democratic Development

by

Matthew T. Stenberg

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

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and the Designated Emphasis

in

Global Metropolitan Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Spring 2022

Multi-level Politics and Central European  
Democratic Development

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By  
Matthew T. Stenberg

Abstract

Multi-level Politics and Central European  
Democratic Development

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Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

Designated Emphasis in Global Metropolitan Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Christopher K. Ansell, Chair

Democratic backsliding, illiberalism, and authoritarian encroachment are undermining the political stability of many newly democratized countries. This dissertation examines challenges to liberal democracy in Central Europe, theorizing and testing how subnational and supranational tiers of government contribute to democratic backsliding. In the 1990s empowering subnational governments and the EU was seen as an essential strategy for promoting the liberal democratic transition. Instead, we have seen these levels of government have facilitated democratic backsliding as the multilevel character of policymaking and politics and has become intertwined with democratic decline in the region.

The chapters in this dissertation use original data to empirically analyze the democratic backsliding process in Central Europe at multiple levels. Chapters 1 and 2 examine local backsliding; Chapter 1 focuses on party strategy in subnational electoral politics Hungary, where Fidesz has pushed democratic erosion furthest in the region. Chapter 2 examines differences in electoral rules in Hungary and Poland to understand why local politics have been more resilient in Poland than in Hungary. Chapter 3 shifts focus to the supranational level, to understand how democratic oversight in the European Parliament remains beholden to national-level dynamics, limiting its ability to curb the democratic backsliding processes. Together, these chapters show that the multilevel politics of the region have been an important component of democratic decline.



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## Introduction

During the economic and political transition that followed the collapse of communism, the countries of East Central Europe needed to construct new political institutions almost from scratch. As part of building a new democratic and capitalist region, politicians, policymakers, and advisors, from both inside and outside the region, offered advice on how to best stabilize the transition. While much emphasis was focused on the structure of national-level politics, this period also witnessed the emergence of a multi-level politics. Across the region we see the devolution and decentralization of politics to regional and local governments, with the latter generally directly elected by voters. We also see the states of East Central Europe move concretely to align themselves with Western Europe and to assertively pursue membership in the European Union (EU). Both decentralization and Europeanization were expected to stabilize democracy in the region.

Decentralization was seen as a contributing factor to a successful democratization process (Manor 1999; Grindle 2007; Faguet 2014). It was even advocated for as a major component of the regional transition by many international institutions in the West (Blair 1998; United Cities and Local Governments 2009). While some scholars (correctly, as it turns out) were skeptical of the long-term relationship between decentralization and democracy (Pickvance 1997), it remained an important component of the reform agenda and was implemented (to varying degrees) throughout East Central Europe. For most countries, this marked a major shift from how policymaking was done under state socialism. Under democratic centralism, the governing philosophy of the Communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, lower tiers of government were entirely subordinate to higher tiers and merely carried out orders from the central government (Von Beyme 1975). The transition transformed municipal units from implementers of public policy to municipalities with elected self-government and with newly designated responsibilities and authority that required greater local bureaucratic capacity. This situation marked a major change from the Socialist period: no longer would local interests be inherently subordinate to the national interest (Swianiewicz 1990). As such, decentralization entailed a major shift that was expected to have positive impacts on policymaking generally and democracy specifically.

Given that the post-Socialist states of East Central Europe consciously decided to follow Western European models in their transition (Offe 1996; 1997), Europeanization also represented a key opportunity to undergird their democratic transition. The European Union is commonly thought to have stabilized democratic transitions in Spain and Portugal (Royo and Manuel 2003). Moreover, membership in the EU requires the adoption of its entire system of laws and regulations – the *acquis communautaire* – as a condition for membership in the organization. Member states must also abide by the criteria for membership (called the Copenhagen Criteria); one key criterion among these expressly requires that EU member states be democratic. It was assumed that the carrot of considerable EU funding for convergence would encourage post-Socialist countries to build stable democratic institutions to ensure their membership, and that after accession they would continue to converge towards Western Europe's level of democracy and of economic development, becoming stable liberal democracies.

Unfortunately, in practice, we have not seen this borne out. The European Union now has eleven post-Socialist member-states: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia (which joined in 2004); Romania and Bulgaria (which joined in 2007); and Croatia (which joined in 2013). While all of the post-Socialist EU members have seen

substantial economic growth since acceding, we have not seen the same consistent move toward more stable liberal democracy. Scholars have identified autocratization or democratic backsliding – a weakening of the institutions of liberal democracy in several post-Socialist EU member states. Backsliding trends have been identified in Czechia (Vachudova 2020), Bulgaria (Ganev 2018), and Romania (Sedelmeier 2014), while scholars are increasingly concerned about Slovenia (Kuźelewska 2022), previously considered one of the most successful democratic transitions in the region. The two greatest culprits, however, are Hungary and Poland, where we have seen the most aggressive and sustained backsliding. Since taking power in Hungary in 2010, the right-wing Fidesz party has instituted widespread reforms designed to solidify its power in a dominant-party state and to undermine democratic institutions. Since 2015 in Poland, the right-wing PiS party has similarly sought to assert its control over democratic institutions, with a particular focus on the judiciary.

Rather than act as a backstop to limit the erosion of democracy, as might have been supposed, both subnational and supranational politics have instead been used to further democratic backsliding and autocratization processes. In Hungary, Fidesz has considered local politics as an important component of its establishment of national-level dominance. Fidesz uses local workfare programs to clientelistically engage voters (Mares and Young 2018; 2019). The party has reformed city council institutions to undermine the ability of opposition councilmembers to effectively do their jobs or run for election, while also reducing public oversight of city activities (Jakli and Stenberg 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Fidesz used public health measures as a pretext to undermine the independence of municipal finance in opposition-controlled cities (Stenberg, Rocco, and Farole 2022). They have maintained a focus on local politics in spite of a constitutional supermajority that allows them to pursue any policy objectives nationally that they might want. While, as Chapters 1 and 2 will show, Fidesz has gone furthest in its concentration on local politics, we see that subnational politics matter for consolidation elsewhere as well. For example, in Poland, we see considerable effort to push the ruling PiS party's anti-LGBT agenda at all tiers of subnational politics (Żuk, Pluciński, and Żuk 2021; Stenberg and O'Dwyer 2022).

The supranational level has been, likewise, less effective at supporting democracy in post-Socialist Europe than we might have expected. While the prospect of EU membership was still a valuable motivation during the transition, the EU has a clearly limited ability to sanction member states for violations of democracy and the rule of law once they have acceded as members (Kochenov and Pech 2016; Blauburger and Kelemen 2017; Kelemen 2017; Bochsler and Juon 2020). EU funding mechanisms have been used to solidify backsliding regimes (Magyar 2016; Tóth and Hajdu 2018; Fazekas 2019; Kelemen 2020), and the ease of migration within the EU's single market has facilitated the outmigration of many would-be opponents (Kelemen 2020). Even the European party political system itself can be said to be a contributing factor (Kelemen 2020; Wolkenstein 2022).

The three papers in this dissertation empirically examine the role that subnational and supranational politics have played in contributing to, rather than countering, democratic backsliding processes in East Central Europe. Chapter one focuses on Hungary, the most advanced case of democratic erosion in the region. I examine how mayoral elections have been strategically used by Fidesz to limit opportunities for the opposition to contest the regime. Its focus on mayoral elections is critical: in the 2022 elections, the pan-opposition unified around one such opposition mayor, Péter Márki-Zay, indicating the importance of that role as a launching pad and proving ground for opposition candidates. Chapter two compares Hungary

and Poland, to understand why local politics have been less involved in PiS' backsliding processes than in Fidesz's. I find that local electoral institutions play a role, and that the two-round mayoral election system in Poland makes it more difficult for PiS to split the opposition and to dominate local politics when compared to Fidesz in Hungary. In both chapters I rely on original panel data for mayoral elections to understand the evolution of aspiring dominant-party control over time.

Chapter three shifts the focus to the supranational level, to examine the European Union. As noted, the EU requires its members to be democracies but has been unable to enforce this requirement, in part because it has been unwilling to use some of the tools at its disposal. I examine the role of the European Union by exploring the European Parliament's oversight capabilities. The European Parliament is considered to be the most democratic of the core EU institutions and the least beholden to member state governments. I use an original dataset of all of the text of parliamentary questions submitted by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to the Commission and the Council between 2004, when post-Socialist states join the EU, and 2019. I use structural topic modeling, followed by regression analysis, to identify patterns and key substantive areas of interest for MEPs. I find that there are considerable regional differences between what MEPs from Western and Post-Socialist states focus on in legislative oversight. Furthermore, I show that national interest in particular topics is associated with several straightforward predictors of a topic's importance to national politics. I then delve further into legislative oversight over topics that could be associated with issues of democratic backsliding and rule of law violations.

Together these chapters provide new empirical analysis on the ways that the democratic backsliding process in East Central Europe – and especially in Hungary and Poland – has been multilevel in nature. The local level is increasingly being used to consolidate rule in Hungary, and while PiS in Poland has been unable to assert electoral dominance in the same fashion, they are finding new ways to use local politics to push their agenda. Oversight at the European level shows that even within the most democratic EU institution, and in an institution where MEPs are not supposed to be beholden to national issues, national interests predominate. In both cases, albeit through different means, we see that neither the subnational nor supranational is substantively undergirding East Central Europe's democracy. Instead, we see that in both they actively contribute to the backsliding process.



## Chapter 1: Subnational Consolidation in Dominant Party Regimes: Evidence from Hungarian Mayoral Elections

Over the past twenty years, there has been an undeniable shift toward illiberalism in both advanced and developing democracies. Major countries like Russia, Turkey, the Philippines, and Poland are considered to have made illiberal and/or autocratic turns, while the world's largest democracies in India, Brazil, and the United States have elected leaders with varying degrees of authoritarian tendencies. This rise has often been accompanied by democratic backsliding, which weakens the rules, norms, and institutions associated with democracy (Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). As it advances, backsliding can lead toward electorally dominant parties seeking to retain power through hybrid regimes that blend elements of authoritarianism and democracy, oftentimes at the expense of liberal democracy as traditionally conceived.

Backsliding generally has a purpose: to establish enduring regime dominance. Dominant party regimes are those where an incumbent political party can create virtuous cycles of policy implementation and institutional reform to minimize the likelihood of their being removed from office (Pempel 1990). In addition, dominant parties are able to accrue resource advantages and make it more difficult for opposition parties to effectively contest elections (K. F. Greene 2007). Despite the advantages held by the incumbent party, historical instances of party dominance have been occasionally interrupted by challenger parties, largely based in urban areas. Municipalities have formed the core of opposition to the regime and the basis of successful challenges to dominant parties, most notably in the paradigmatic cases of Mexico (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001; Middlebrook 2001) and Japan (Scheiner 1999; 2006; Smith 2013).

I argue, however, that municipalities can be crucial for the *consolidation*, rather than erosion, of party dominance. Subnational control, with a special emphasis on district and regional capitals, is an important mechanism by which a party can sustain dominance, a phenomenon that remains understudied in the literature on democratic backsliding and regime consolidation. However, we do not understand where and when autocratizers seek to consolidate power locally. This is important to understanding how the processes by which autocratizing parties build long-term dominance. By using local politics to reinforce national-level anti-democratic reforms, dominant parties consolidate control and minimize the efficacy of local politics for the opposition, reducing long-term threats to the regime. Understanding these tactics better can help illustrate which subnational units might be vulnerable to this type of strategy seeking establish regime dominance.

To explore these subnational autocratizing strategies, I use an original panel dataset of Hungarian mayoral elections from 2002 to 2019. By focusing on all municipalities with significant responsibilities in local administration instead of exclusively the largest cities, these data provide insight to a wide range of cities of different sizes and economic significance. These data allow us to not only understand why a dominant regime might focus on the subnational level but also which municipalities it is likely to contest – and win.

Hungary has advanced significantly in subnational regime consolidation and is a helpful guide for understanding dominant party incentives in subnational politics. Since taking power in 2010, the right-wing Fidesz party has embarked on a series of escalating reforms designed to ensure its continued electoral success. To that end, Fidesz has sought to extend its dominance to municipal politics, nationalizing local elections as part of a systematic party strategy to ensure local control to minimize the likelihood of the formation of a successful opposition. This strategy may prove an attractive template to other leaders pursuing an anti-democratic agenda,

particularly consolidating control in subnational capitals, especially in contexts where maintaining the appearance of democracy is important.

I argue that intermunicipal variation is important for Fidesz's strategy. I hypothesize that Fidesz concentrates its efforts in municipalities where there are administrative or financial resources that can be used to further solidify regime control; Fidesz has demonstrated a clear strategy of using government resources for cronyism and rewarding allies. The results bear this out: subnational capital city status is associated with an increase in the probability that Fidesz wins an election, indicating that the administrative and economic resources at the district capital level may be important assets for regime consolidation.

This paper will first examine the literature on the importance of municipal politics in the context of democratic backsliding and party dominance. Subsequently, I will outline the argument and hypotheses of the paper: namely that local control is especially important for eliminating the opportunities for grassroots opposition to form and for maintaining key political relationships through cronyism. Then, I describe the case of Hungary, the data, and methods to be used in assessing local election results before discussing the results and implications of the model. Finally, I discuss the implications for cases beyond Hungary.

### **1.1. The Importance of Subnational Politics for Dominant Parties**

Most studies of democratic backsliding examine troubling national trends in which institutional erosion occurs in many of the major areas undergirding liberal democracy: media freedom, judicial independence, the legitimate contestation of elections, and manipulation of public financing (Bermeo 2016; Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2017). There have been backsliding trends among a range of liberal democracies, with changes in informal norms being the most persistent across cases (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Studies of backsliding, however, focus almost exclusively on national political dynamics, neglecting the important policy formation and implementation, as well as political contestation, that happen at subnational tiers of government. The subnational dimension is typically only examined in the context of the recentralization of authority in the regime. While existing research, like Gel'man (2010), Reuter (2017), and Scheiner (1999; 2006), examines the role that subnational levels play in perpetuating established dominant party regimes, the role of municipal politics in actively facilitating democratic backsliding and regime *consolidation* remains understudied.

Subnational politics are also intrinsically important. Significant policymaking, implementation, and politics happens at the subnational level (Trounstin 2009; Connolly and Mason 2016). This is especially true in Europe, where there has been a broad trend toward the direct election of mayors (Henry Bäck, Heinelt, and Magnier 2006). As mayors gain more authority and legitimacy, the position increases in salience for party politics and becomes a site of greater political contestation. Moreover, besides simply providing control over subnational politics and resources, the local level can reinforce national control. Bottom-up politics in local elections can ultimately serve as an important means of affecting national-level campaigns (Bechtel 2012) and democratic institutions (Sellers, Lidström, and Bae 2019), indicating the importance of local politics for an aspiring dominant party regime. On the whole, the role of subnational electoral politics in furthering democratic backsliding to consolidate party dominance has not been sufficiently studied.

Cases where a dominant national party uses municipal politics to maintain control most closely resemble what Gel'man (2010) terms centralized subnational party authoritarianism, in which a dominant national party uses regional governments to maintain its control. Failure to

maintain subnational dominance, once established, can be indicative of regime weakness (Gel'man 2010, 12). This type of motivation compels electoral authoritarian regimes to pursue supermajorities through illicit means, even when not necessary to guarantee political control, to discourage rivals from even contesting elections (Geddes 2005; Magaloni 2006). Gel'man's theorization, however, mainly considers the means by which the national directly controls the subnational – especially at the *regional* level – and has not been empirically examined. Existing studies of hybrid regimes examine party strategy through subnational variation in national-level elections (Cinar 2016), or the decision to allow subnational elections at all (Reuter et al. 2016), instead of examining subnational politics as such. A focus on mayoral elections is an especially likely strategy in situations where maintaining the façade of democracy is crucial to maintaining legitimacy, rendering impossible options like replacing elected mayors with appointed administrators or ending subnational elections entirely. EU membership, which requires maintaining democratic procedures, is one such case where maintaining a façade of democracy is critical.

Pursuing subnational dominance can occur alongside with democratic backsliding and the nationalization of local politics instead of relying on established authoritarian control or the power to appoint local officials. Thus, subnational democracy can push regime consolidation forward. Instead of undermining the existence of independent local elections, a dominant party can incorporate them into the virtuous cycles of reform that establish party dominance (Pempel 1990). Institutional reforms coupled with incumbency effects make it difficult to dislodge party-affiliated mayors. The literature on incumbency broadly suggests a substantively important advantage for mayoral incumbents (Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014a; Freier 2015), which could even be higher in a dominant party system where the regime sets the rules of the game.

Control of local governments is important to dominant parties seeking to reduce the ability for opposition parties to develop promising politicians at the grassroots level who might eventually pose a threat to the regime. Moreover, virtuous cycles in dominant party regimes, which solidify ruling party incumbents and reduce the possibility of open seat elections, may further reinforce this advantage. Reducing opportunities for opposition parties to develop emerging politicians who could subsequently challenge the ruling party is an incentive for parties to pursue local control in a variety of settings across the world; however, it is especially salient in dominant party regimes, which Fidesz aspires to establish. In Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s, opposition party candidates used local offices as a springboard for higher office, and opposition parties themselves used subnational elections to gain credibility and legitimacy (Lucardi 2016). In Japan, the limited electoral breakthroughs of the opposition (1993–1994; 2009–2012) came when the opposition was able to recruit quality candidates who had often served in local government (Scheiner 1999; 2006; Smith 2013). Opposition parties in Japan have seen ‘local party building...[as] necessary for party success at the national level’ (Hijino 2015, 293). In South Africa, Farole (2021) similarly finds that opposition parties effectively governing at the local level can lead to positive electoral spillovers in neighboring jurisdictions. In post-Socialist contexts, ambitious politicians historically have used mayoralties as a step toward running for the national legislature (Jakli and Stenberg 2021; Papp 2018). These findings further underline the potential importance of local control for consolidating political dominance and indicate why dominant parties may choose to allocate significant resources to local politics after gaining national control. This is a powerful logic in more democratic dominant-party governments as well (such as Japan); however, the importance of local politics in backsliding regimes is heightened by manipulated electoral rules and restrictions on media freedom.

Despite the inherent importance of municipal elections, even large, electorally dominant parties make strategic choices about where to devote resources to subnational campaigning. While dominant parties have a structural advantage in that they are able to compete in most subnational units (Jones and Mainwaring 2003), municipal elections are often contested between candidates unaffiliated with national parties. Instead, the nationalization of party politics is driven by a party's strategic choices (Enns-Jedenastik and Hansen 2013; Hjellum 1967). Local politics are an important venue for incubating new parties and for helping parties that have been weakened nationally to survive (Kjær 2012). However, existing scholarship insufficiently examines the municipal targeting strategies of nationally dominant parties.

## 1.2. Hypotheses

Not all cities are equally desirable electoral prizes: in any country, certain cities are of a greater innate importance for economic, cultural, societal, or symbolic reasons. Subnational capitals are especially important, both for their access to resources and symbolic value. Rapoport describes the relationship between subnational capitals and other cities as part of a national hierarchy of municipalities (1993, 34), and the *South China Morning Post* considers political status as one of the three components of its interpretation of Chinese city tiers (Hernández 2016). City tiers can be a rough proxy for importance, in which district and county capitals are classified differently than towns without capital status.

Regional and district capitals are representative examples of state-anchored industrial districts, with a stable development structure dominated by government-sponsored institutions with relatively stable annual budgets (Markusen 1996). The expansion of government programs, regulations, and bureaucratic capacity within capitals has increased the economic importance of government centers (Gottmann 1977, 242). Capital status serves as a differentiating function from neighbors, of otherwise similar political, economic, or demographic importance, as demonstrated by decentralization programs in France (Negrier 1993). Subnational capitals in other decentralized contexts were chosen based on their historical political importance (Kim and Law 2016, 123), creating path dependence where decentralization ensures their continued relevance even in a nationalized political environment.

Subnational capitals in post-Communist Europe, where decentralization happened late, may have been determined to optimize the benefits of regional policy, providing additional resources to the capitals (Przybyła, Kulczyk-Dynowska, and Kachniarz 2014, 181–82). As Hungary underwent less territorial reorganization than other countries in the region, county capitals were able to benefit from the concentrated urban development of the socialist period. County seats retained their economic and political importance in the national hierarchy after the transition (Beluszky and Gyóri 2005, 391–93). Their continued economic importance is indicated by their serving as the basis for regional commuting sheds (Bihari and Kovács 2005, 371). In Russia, a similar case of dominant party consolidation, regional capitals amalgamated a large portion of the political resources available at that tier of government (Golosov, Gushchina, and Kononenko 2016, 510), indicating that these cities can likely be considered more politically important, *ceteris paribus*.

Capital cities also serve a symbolic function as representative institutions of democratic governance (Engstrom, Hammond, and Scott 2013), and Gibson (2012) finds that capital cities in particular have been centers of the opposition to dominant party regimes. While these symbolic functions are undeniably more powerful at the national level, we might expect small villages to think of the district seat as having the same effect on a much smaller scale. Thus, even aside

from the control of resources that administering a district capital might allow, the symbolic impact of controlling a district capital may be representative of its greater political importance in the surrounding area.

Given the symbolic and practical importance of subnational capitals, I argue that a dominant party will strategically emphasize higher tier cities when allocating resources for electoral campaigns, thereby being more likely to field candidates.

*Hypothesis 1: The ruling party is more likely to contest mayoral elections in cities with a higher tier of classification.*

Another reason why dominant party regimes might value the local level is more particular to parties seeking to maintain control through cronyism. Blaydes' (2010) study of Egypt finds that localities supporting opposition parties generally received less investment in public services than those areas supporting the government. This finding is in line with findings that the provision of local public goods can be tied to party loyalty and rewarding subnational jurisdictions that support national parties (Joanis 2011; Sengupta 2011). This is particularly true in dominant party regimes, where political competition is often less focused on programmatic politics and more about the dominant party using its considerable resources to ensure electoral success (Costa-i-Font, Rodriguez-Oreggia, and Lunapla 2003; Scheiner 2005; Golden and Picci 2008).

The involvement of the EU brings a multilevel character to cronyism that could not be accomplished through control of the national level alone. EU grants are selected and managed by national ministries, which act as managing authorities. The national-level selection process would already allow a dominant party to claim credit for funds, indicating that the emphasis on local control is not simply about publicity. Kelemen (2020), among others, argues that such funding is critical for the establishment of undemocratic regimes within the EU.

While national governments select the projects that receive EU funding (as long as projects meet broad parameters set by the EU), implementation of local projects is typically handled at the municipal level. Thus, control of local governments is essential for controlling the disbursement of EU funds and serves as a key means of rewarding allies and courting new supporters. However, the involvement of the EU makes this not a simple case of clientelism, in the sense of increasing public goods provision just prior to an election or transactionally engaging with voters. The process of EU-sponsored regional development requires significant planning and is dictated by budget cycles that do not coincide with national elections.

Public tendering plays a significant role in rewarding supporters, and picking business partners based on political loyalty is a key political strategy of governments (J. P. Martin and Ligeti 2017). As such, given that municipalities are increasingly dependent on the national level for funding, that public tendering is a key means of rewarding political supporters, and that EU funds are especially well suited for manipulation (eg. Huliaras and Petropoulos 2016), we would expect dominant parties to prioritize those cities where EU funding allocations are larger. Gaining control of cities that had been allocated EU funding could be especially valuable to both reward supporters and maintain electoral control going forward. While courting votes is important, this system of allocation is more about cultivating and maintaining relationships with elites to solidify the party itself and to minimize opportunities for the development of an effective opposition. We might expect that, in addition to the carrot of cronyism, a dominant party may use the stick of disinvestment as another key reason for wanting to control the

implementation of European regional funding. If a city does not elect a regime-affiliated mayor, it would presumably have a weaker claim on subsequent EU funding allocations, if they are determined nationally.

*Hypothesis 2: The ruling party at the national level is more likely to contest cities with higher total allocation of EU funding.*

Generally, I assume that the ruling party is more likely to win in elections that they strategically contest in a dominant party context, by tactically allocating scarce resources to mayoralities that have greater value. This strategic calculus is different than one that would purely maximize seats won, as in Snyder (1989). Instead, it would more resemble the party strategy for high-stakes seats, as described by Jeong and Shenoy (2022). Given this strategy, I expect that dominant parties are more likely to win more politically important cities and cities with greater EU funding. Given the opportunities for patronage, the stakes would be the highest in these mayoralities.

*Hypothesis 3: Mayoral candidates affiliated with the ruling party at the national level are more likely to win in cities with a higher tier of classification.*

*Hypothesis 4: Mayoral candidates affiliated with the ruling party at the national level are more likely to win in cities with higher total allocation of EU funding.*

### **1.3. The Case of Hungary**

Hungary is a key case for examining these dynamics. It is a state in which the right-wing Fidesz party has sought to establish enduring party control while maintaining the façade of procedural democracy.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it is a case where the national government has made concrete reforms to local government, the decentralization of authority, and territorial reorganization, indicating a keen awareness of the importance of the subnational level to regime consolidation. As is typical for dominant parties, Fidesz certainly appeals to rural and periurban areas (Mares and Young 2018; 2019; Lubarda 2020), and Fidesz is very successful with rural voters (Z. Kovács and Vida 2015). Yet Fidesz succeeds in larger cities, refusing to cede them to a more liberal opposition by nationalizing local politics. This is part of their strategy to nationalize local politics to remove the capacity for the opposition to make independent appeals. While nationalizing local politics may lead other parties to also contest elections, this will disproportionately advantage the dominant party when the ruling party holds all the levers of power.

Backsliding in Hungary at the national level has been widely studied by scholars (Enyedi 2016; Pech and Scheppele 2017, among many others). Since gaining a legislative supermajority in 2010, Fidesz has implemented a nationalist, illiberal project, undermining the fair conduct of elections and minimizing space for critical discussion in society to ensure it stays in power. However, Fidesz has also pursued backsliding subnationally, pursuing reforms to further solidify its political control by reducing the ability of the opposition to effectively contest local elections. Fidesz changed electoral rules before the 2010 local elections to be more majoritarian (Dobos and Várnagy 2017, 124–25). This change was part of a larger trend in the structural recentralization of power after it took control, where Fidesz used its two-thirds majority to alter

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<sup>1</sup> In May 2018, Orbán suggested that he would remain in power personally until at least 2030 (EurActiv 2018).

the Cardinal Law of Local Government in 2011. This trend toward recentralization, bringing more local authority under national control, may be an enabling factor: Chhibber and Kollman (2004) find that party nationalization increases as national politics become more relevant for voters, and local parties are more successful when there is greater local autonomy. Fidesz consciously undermines municipal autonomy to strengthen its own control: nationally through reconsolidation and subnationally through manipulation.

Once in power locally, Fidesz uses municipal control to undergird its national regime. Fidesz altered local rules and regulations to undermine the formation or maintenance of local opposition parties and reduce public oversight, clear evidence of replicating Fidesz’s national-level backsliding in subnational politics (Jakli and Stenberg 2021). This is accomplished through gradual institutional change at the subnational level, through replacing seemingly minor regulations, coopting existing structures of oversight, and, as previously discussed, abusing alternative funding sources for political means. These practices fall in what Whitehead and Behrend call the “intermediate zone,” where elections remain nominally democratic but a variety of barriers to democracy impede genuine contestation and solidify regime control (2016, 292). In this case, anti-democratic subnational practices are a strategic tool of the national government to maintain dominant party control at all levels of government.

This strategy has been effective. Table 1.1 below illustrates Fidesz’s success in municipal elections. When considering only municipalities with town (*város*) status or higher, Fidesz’s rate of winning elections that it contests has increased from 32.7 percent in 2002 (in a race after it lost the national election) to 63.2 percent in 2010 (after several months in power and after instituting changes to subnational election procedure. The jump in the 2006 local elections can be explained by the September 2006 reveal of Socialist Party (MSZP) Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány’s speech to a party congress earlier that year, where he admitted that MSZP deceived voters in its national campaign, causing a political crisis. This revelation happened two weeks before the October 1 local elections.

**Table 1.1.** Fidesz and local elections.

Year	Total Races <sup>2</sup>	Fidesz contested	% Contested	Fidesz win	% Win
2002	276	159	57.6%	52	32.7%
2006	312	210	67.3%	113	53.8%
2010	351	304	86.6%	192	63.2%
2014	369	298	80.8%	207	69.5%
2019	369	275	74.5%	172	62.5%

In the 2014 local mayoral elections, Fidesz fielded candidates in the 298 races of municipalities with *város* status (or higher). Of these 298 candidates, 207, or 69.5 percent, were victorious. In 2019, Fidesz was less successful; pan-opposition coalition victories in several larger cities received a great deal of attention, and there may be an important symbolic role to the opposition victories (Hegedüs 2019; Novak 2019; Kovarek and Littvay 2022). At the same time, we can still see that on the whole, Fidesz remains quite successful in local politics, winning more than 60 percent of the mayoral races it contested.<sup>3</sup> However, we can also see that Fidesz lacks the

<sup>2</sup> Variation in total races is due to the increasing number of settlements granted *város* status.

<sup>3</sup> *Város* is an administrative status assigned to municipalities. Another potentially relevant threshold is a city population of 10,000, above which the structure of local council elections changes. Cities over 10,000 incorporate

capacity (or strategic will) to field candidates in *all* municipal elections and makes strategic choices about where to best allocate resources to contesting local politics.

Even after the significant recentralization of power in Hungary stemming from the reforms of the Cardinal Law of Local Government, municipalities still have important functions in Hungarian policymaking. These include tasks like land use planning, budgetary authority, local property management, welfare state provision, transportation, housing, utilities, local taxation, and cultural and small business promotion (Temesi 2017), all of which offer a fair amount of discretion. Crucially, the majority of subnational TV and radio stations are run by municipalities, allowing them to control messaging in many mid-sized municipalities (Vásárhelyi 2017). While the Cardinal Law reforms aggregated some policymaking tasks to the county level, administrative tasks were especially concentrated in district (*járás*) capitals (Pálné Kovács 2016), giving these specific municipalities additional importance.

Local politics in Hungary matter not only because of the importance of municipal control of policymaking responsibilities and for strengthening the regime; they are key to maintaining control over financial disbursement and implementation, which may be especially crucial in the context of the EU. In smaller municipalities, mayors have used access to public services for clientelistic purposes, taking advantage of local provision of public services to solidify political control (Szombati 2018; Mares and Young 2018; 2019). However, not only national funding is at stake. The local level is the primary implementing level of grants from the EU, allowing the party in control to use European resources for clientelistic purposes and/or material gain. This can also reinforce national politics; Papp (2019) finds that under MSZP administration prior to 2010, EU funding reinforced the electoral performance of national MPs in towns administered by government-affiliated mayors; Muraközy and Telegdy (2016) demonstrate that mayors affiliated with the government are associated with a 16–21 percent increase in EU grant value for visible projects and find a relationship between EU projects and the change in votes for an incumbent mayor; and Medve-Bálint (2016) argues that the national government's level of control over funds leads to bias in funding decisions. EU funding is essential to the functioning of the Hungarian economy. A KPMG report (2017) finds that although the national economy grew 4.6 percent between 2006 and 2015, it would have shrunk without EU regional funding.

The possibilities for corruption in resource distribution at the local level give Fidesz an important incentive to control local politics beyond the pure policymaking potential of the municipal level. A recent examination of local level tenders in Sweden suggests that local party dominance allows elected officials more political control of resource distribution to perpetuate their political control (Broms, Dahlström, and Fazekas 2019). EU funded contracts can be especially vulnerable to corruption, and Fazekas and Tóth (2016a) argue that the additional risk associated with European funds may be exacerbated in regions already prone to corruption. Hungary qualifies as such a region;<sup>4</sup> corruption is widespread in Hungarian contracting (Fazekas and Tóth 2016b) and provides Fidesz a clear motivation for maintaining national control (Magyar 2016). Local opposition politicians emphasize the importance of contracting for Fidesz to reward allies and disincentivize local businesses from making important alliances and

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compensatory lists in council elections instead of single member districts, a reform designed promote the nationalization of local politics (Dobos 2016). To account for the importance of this threshold, models are run separately on *all* towns with város status and only in those with a population above 10,000.

<sup>4</sup> Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perception Index rates Hungary as tied for the most corrupt EU member. It has become considerably more corrupt in recent years (2021).



connections with opposition politicians, who have no similar largesse to share (Jakli and Stenberg 2021).

#### 1.4. Data and Method

To examine which elections that Fidesz, the dominant party in Hungary, contests and wins, I compile an original panel dataset comprising the results of the 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2019 municipal elections for each of the 346 towns (*város*) in Hungary. Data on districts in Budapest are included when available, resulting in 369 entries and a total N of 1,845. This dataset includes candidate names, parties, and electoral results for each participant. This has been augmented with information about the demographics and economic circumstances of towns in election years, as well as data regarding EU funding projects in each municipality. Table 1.2 briefly outlines the variables in the model; see Appendix A for elaboration and information about alternative specifications.

The dichotomous dependent variable *Fidesz Candidate* indicates that an officially Fidesz-affiliated candidate contested a municipal mayoral election. The dichotomous dependent variable *Fidesz Winner* indicates if an officially Fidesz-affiliated candidate won the mayoral election; 0 indicates that an otherwise-affiliated (or unaffiliated) candidate won. Neither captures if independent candidates that are likely aligned with Fidesz win an election, so may understate the effect.

**Table 1.2.** Variable Specifications.

Variable	Type	Possible Values	Source
Fidesz Candidate	DV	1 if candidate, 0 if none	National Election Office (NVI)
Fidesz Winner	DV	1 if winner, 0 if loser	NVI
Higher Tier City	IV	1 if district capital, county capital, or city with county rights; else 0	Central Statistics Office (KSH)
EU Grant Value	IV	Monetary grant value in three-year period	Hungarian Prime Minister's Office
Population	Control	Logged municipal population	KSH
Opposition Incumbent	Control	1 if yes, 0 if no	NVI
Library Books per Capita	Control	Number of books per resident	KSH
Unemployment	Control	Percentage of population seeking jobs	KSH
Number of Candidates	Control	Total candidates seeking election	NVI

There are two main independent variables of interest. *EU Grant Value* calculates the total value of EU Structural Fund grants issued to Hungarian municipalities in a three-year electoral cycle (for example, 2004-2006), measured in millions of Hungarian Forint. *Higher Tier City* is a dummy variable measuring city tier. Cities are classified in seven categories: (1) village, (2) city, (3) district capital, (4) city with county rights,<sup>5</sup> (5) city with county rights that is also a county capital, (6) electoral district, and (7) capital city. Electoral districts apply only to

<sup>5</sup> A city with county rights is a higher administrative status with many of the responsibilities of counties, the higher tier of government in Hungary. For more on this status, see Tábit (2012).

Budapest's 23 districts, while Budapest itself is the only capital city. Higher Tier City is coded as 1 to indicate the city is a district capital, city with county rights, or city with county rights that is a county capital, or 0 to indicate that has no special political status or is a district within Budapest.

Five potentially confounding variables are also included. *Population* is the logged election year municipal population;<sup>6</sup> city population is a primary determinant of the involvement of national political parties in local elections (Kjær and Elklit 2010). *Opposition Incumbent* captures if an incumbent mayor, not affiliated with Fidesz in the election in question,<sup>7</sup> runs in the mayoral election. *Library books per capita* is included as a control for local public goods provision, often cited as a clientelistic voting motive in local elections (Wantchekon 2003). *Unemployment*, though associated with ambiguous findings, is also an important control for local election analysis (Maškarinec and Klimovský 2016). *Number of Candidates* states the total number of candidates that ran in an election. If an election is uncontested, this value is 1; the highest value in the dataset is 9. I assume Fidesz is less likely to win elections with fewer candidates, which might reflect that the opposition has coalesced around a compromise candidate. Additionally, Appendix E controls for Fidesz's national vote share in the most recent national election prior to the municipal election. While Fidesz's vote share is highly significant and predictive of its decision to run a candidate, it does not affect the significance of the key independent variables.

These data are most effectively analyzed using a panel logit random effects model with yearly fixed effects, which reduce omitted variable bias. Random effects are necessary to account for the fact that one of our independent variables (higher tier city) is unchanging for the study period for a majority of cases. Yearly fixed effects, not city fixed effects, are used, because the lack of change on the dependent variable in many cities over the period, either by Fidesz winning all elections or none of them, resulted in these cities being dropped from the dataset. The inclusion of yearly fixed effects captures the general economic conditions at the national level, as well as important national political trends (such as the broad decline in MSZP following its corruption scandals). Sensitivity tests are available in Appendix B.

Models are run for two separate time periods: the complete dataset and then for only the elections (2010-present) after Fidesz established its supermajority national control. Those hypotheses pertaining to the contestation DV (Hypotheses 1 and 2) are run on the entire dataset, while hypotheses about the likelihood of Fidesz's winning elections (3 and 4) are tested on only those municipality-years in which Fidesz contested an election. As such, I test the likelihood of Fidesz winning those elections in which it chooses to compete, as opposed to likelihood of winning elections altogether. This subset of the data includes 1286 observations.

#### 1.4.1. Limitations

As this research is based on observational data, it is likely subject to omitted variable bias. The inclusion of yearly fixed effects will reduce, though not eliminate, this bias. Another key limitation of this data is that it will systematically undercount the potential influence of

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<sup>6</sup> Multicollinearity tests between population and the dependent variables are in Appendix C. Population distributions are in Appendix H. Appendix L replicates models for MSZP, the only other Hungarian party to contest elections continuously during the study period. Appendix M groups cities into within-panel population quintiles to examine if impacts from population are driven by cities under a certain population threshold.

<sup>7</sup> There is non-zero party switching, so someone classified as an opposition incumbent in the present election may have previously been affiliated with Fidesz.

Fidesz in local politics. This data cannot capture those officially independent candidates who nevertheless ally with the ruling party. Party switching is not altogether uncommon in Hungarian municipal politics, and the ‘official’ switching of affiliation may be used to mask relationships with Fidesz when it might be politically unpalatable. Some cases clearly lend themselves to this interpretation, where a Fidesz-affiliated candidate ‘leaves’ the party to run for reelection as an independent, but Fidesz does not field its own candidate to run against her. However, this analysis only considers candidates officially affiliated with Fidesz and not candidates who may be formally independent but inclined to support Fidesz initiatives. This limitation systematically biases the results against the tested hypotheses and can only understate the influence of Fidesz in local politics.

The data includes all municipalities at the *város* level and higher; however, 94 towns gained this status (through promotion from village status) during the study period. As such, although they are included in the data to complete the panel, dynamics may have differed in earlier elections. A complete list of cases is available in Appendix K.<sup>8</sup>

I lack data for EU local funding allocations in the pre-accession period, where project-level data are not publicly available and thus variables cannot be calculated for 2002. The nature of cross-sectional time-series analysis ends up dropping cases with omitted variables for the analysis. In practice, this means that when variables pertaining to EU funding at the local level are included, Budapest and its 23 districts are dropped from the dataset, as we lack data on EU funding variation by district within Budapest.<sup>9</sup> Additional models are run on only those cities above 10,000 people, to account for the importance of the compensatory list in nationalizing local politics in cities above that threshold (Soós 2015). I also specifically examine elections since 2010, to analyze only those elections after Fidesz’s national project began.

## 1.5. Results and Discussion

The models are first run on the dependent variable *Fidesz Contest*, a dichotomous variable measuring whether Fidesz fields a candidate in the local election, to test hypotheses 1 and 2. Marginal effects are shown below in Table 1.3,<sup>10</sup> with confidence intervals shown in Figure 1.1. Standard regression coefficients are available in Appendix D.

The models provide little support for Hypothesis 1, which addressed the political importance of the city. In the complete dataset, the variable is significant at the .01 level. However, when considering only elections after Fidesz took power nationally, the variable loses its significance, and it does not matter in any models that exclusively examine larger towns. There is also no support for Hypothesis 2, regarding the importance of EU funding for determining which elections to contest. These are both surprising findings, as they suggest that resource allocation may not strongly motivate Fidesz’s strategic decisions of where to *contest* mayoral elections.

Unsurprisingly, the presence of an opposition-affiliated incumbent is associated with a 23.6–25.6 percent reduction in the probability that Fidesz fields a candidate in the whole sample, and even a 9.3–13.0 percent reduction in the larger cities. Of the other control variables included – a measure of public goods provision, the number of candidates, and local unemployment –

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<sup>8</sup> Pre-promotion data (before gaining *város* status) are included but may systematically differ, as villages that never are promoted are excluded from the dataset.

<sup>9</sup> Losing these datapoints has the unfortunate side effect of removing jurisdictions where Fidesz is disproportionately likely to do worse.

<sup>10</sup> These are calculated assuming the marginal effect of the random effects is 0.

only number of candidates seems to have any association with a change in Fidesz's likelihood of contestation, but the size of the effect of this variable is small.

**Table 1.3.** Marginal Effects on Fidesz contesting.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Population	0.385 <sup>***</sup> (0.035)	0.313 <sup>***</sup> (0.049)	0.119 <sup>**</sup> (0.041)	-0.025 (0.057)
Higher Tier City	0.071 <sup>**</sup> (0.027)	0.024 (0.031)	0.032 (0.029)	0.015 (0.029)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-0.236 <sup>***</sup> (0.025)	-0.256 <sup>***</sup> (0.024)	-0.130 <sup>***</sup> (0.034)	-0.093 <sup>***</sup> (0.031)
Library Books per Capita	0.003 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)	0.002 (0.005)	0.009 (0.007)
Unemployment Rate	0.027 (0.425)	0.305 (0.440)	0.156 (0.603)	-0.571 (.532)
Number of Candidates	0.013 (0.008)	-0.0001 (0.009)	0.025 <sup>**</sup> (0.009)	0.024 <sup>*</sup> (0.011)
Year=2006	0.363 <sup>***</sup> (0.031)		0.268 <sup>***</sup> (0.051)	
Year=2010	0.544 <sup>***</sup> (0.027)		0.324 <sup>***</sup> (0.048)	
Year=2014	0.480 <sup>***</sup> (0.027)	-0.067 <sup>*</sup> (0.026)	0.305 <sup>***</sup> (0.048)	-0.029 (0.021)
Year=2019	0.408 <sup>***</sup> (0.029)	-0.142 <sup>***</sup> (0.033)	0.254 <sup>***</sup> (0.047)	-0.089 <sup>**</sup> (0.034)
EU Grant Value		-6.56e-08 (1.23e-07)		7.42e-09 (3.95e-08)
Observations	1835	1034	824	425

Standard errors in parentheses. Logistic regressions were used to estimate models.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

**Figure 1.1** Confidence intervals for Contestation models.<sup>11</sup>

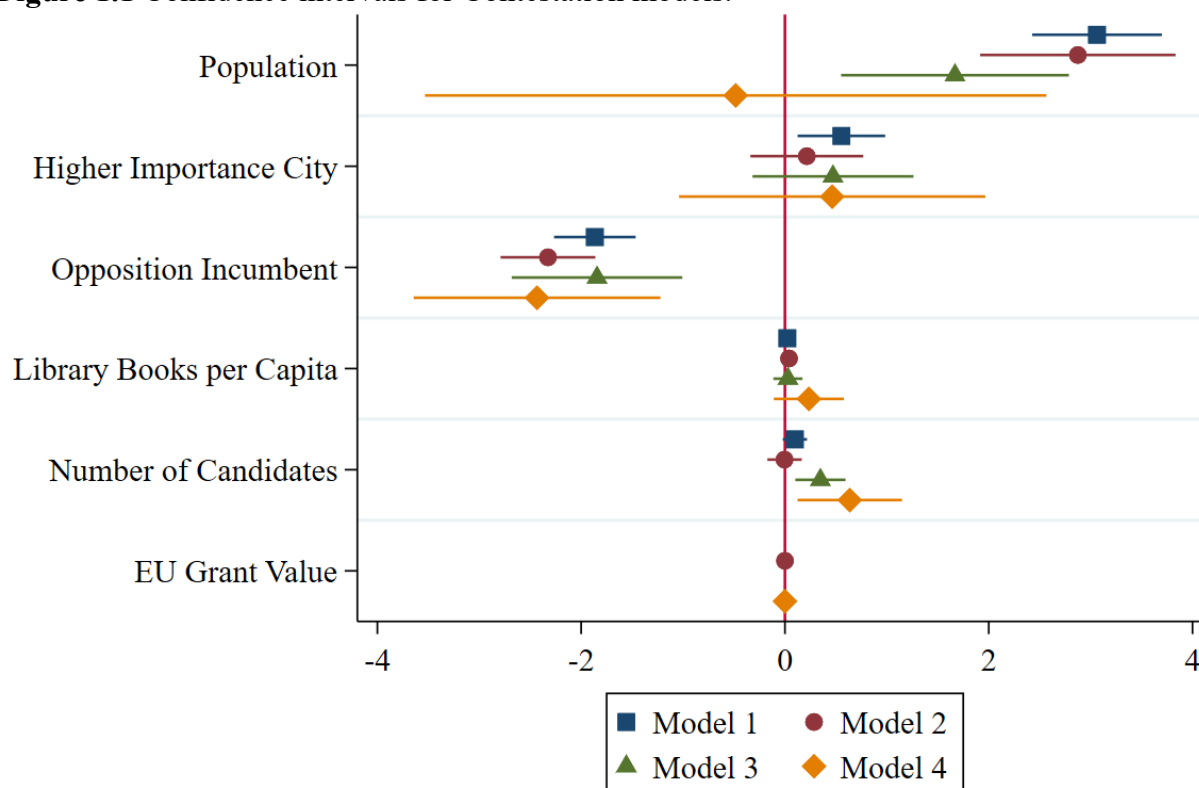


Table 1.4 shows the results of the model run on all Fidesz-contested elections for the dichotomous dependent variable *Fidesz Winner*. Figure 1.2 shows the confidence intervals. These models differ in important ways from the results in Table 1.3 and point to two key factors: incumbency and city classification. If an opposition candidate runs as an incumbent, Fidesz is associated with a 28.2 to a 37.6 percent reduction in the likelihood of winning the election, significant at the .001 level, as we might expect. City classification is also substantially important, associated with a 21.1–25.9 percent increase in the probability that Fidesz wins an election in a higher tier city. In most models the higher tier city variable is significant at the .001 level; when subsetting to local elections in the largest municipalities after regime establishment, it remains significant at the .01 level. Together, these results offer support for the hypothesis (3) that a ruling party is more likely to win in higher tier cities.

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all plotted figures show non-standardized coefficients.

**Table 1.4.** Marginal effects on Fidesz victory.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model 7</i>	<i>Model 8</i>
Population	-0.080 (0.048)	-0.071 (0.068)	-0.109 (0.071)	-0.059 (0.102)
Higher Tier City	0.241 <sup>***</sup> (0.041)	0.211 <sup>***</sup> (0.050)	0.258 <sup>***</sup> (0.060)	0.223 <sup>**</sup> (0.072)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-0.282 <sup>**</sup> (0.034)	-0.304 <sup>***</sup> (0.034)	-0.328 <sup>**</sup> (0.050)	-0.376 <sup>***</sup> (0.038)
Library Books per Capita	-0.013 <sup>*</sup> (0.006)	-0.018 <sup>*</sup> (0.007)	-0.007 (0.009)	-0.015 (0.010)
Unemployment Rate	-1.365 (0.716)	-0.274 (0.707)	-3.461 <sup>**</sup> (1.189)	-1.739 (1.105)
Number of Candidates	-0.029 <sup>*</sup> (0.012)	-0.040 <sup>**</sup> (0.014)	0.016 (0.016)	0.006 (0.018)
Year=2006	0.437 <sup>***</sup> (0.045)		0.556 <sup>***</sup> (0.048)	
Year=2010	0.527 <sup>**</sup> (0.042)		0.665 <sup>***</sup> (0.047)	
Year=2014	0.505 <sup>***</sup> (0.041)	0.007 (0.040)	0.506 <sup>**</sup> (0.052)	-0.120 <sup>*</sup> (0.049)
Year=2019	0.324 <sup>***</sup> (0.044)	-0.122 <sup>*</sup> (0.048)	0.317 <sup>***</sup> (0.055)	-0.213 <sup>***</sup> (0.060)
EU Grant Value		-6.13e-12 (7.31e-08)		-1.75e-08 (7.28e-08)
Observations	1286	817	731	397

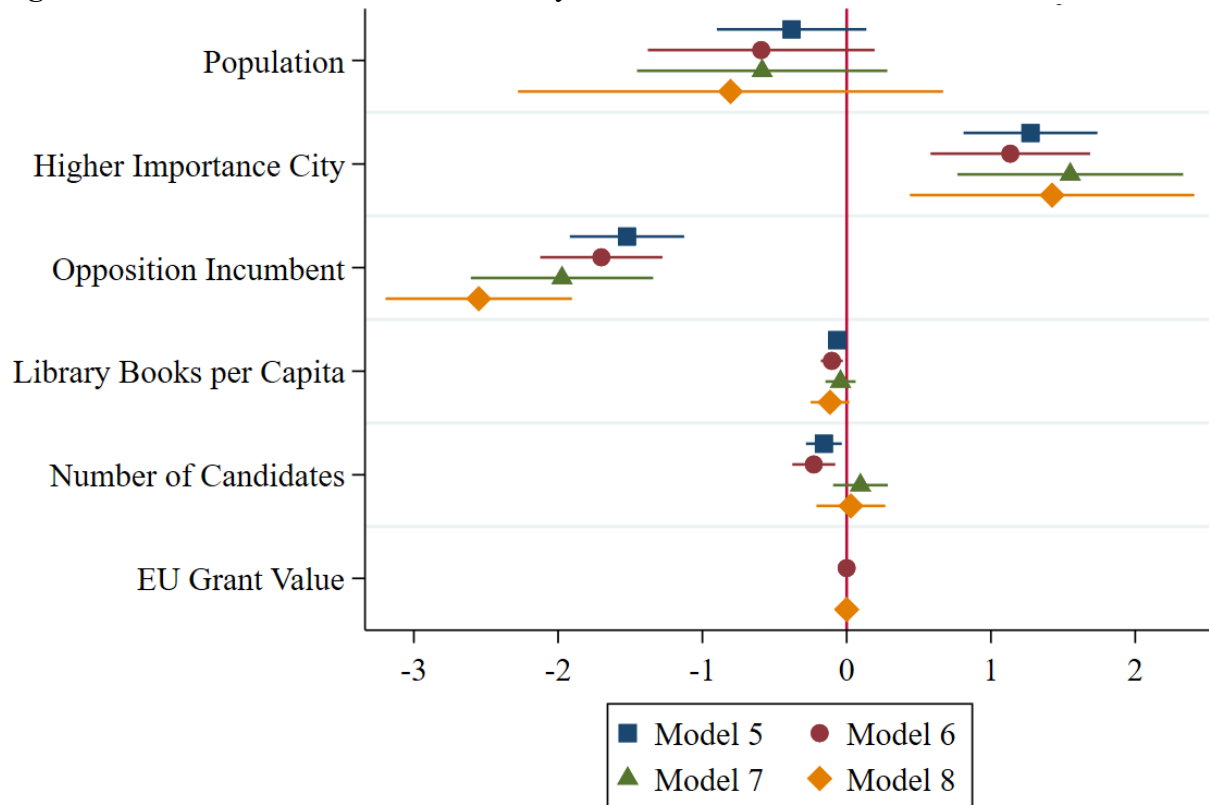
Standard errors in parentheses. Logistic regressions were used to estimate models.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Logistic regressions were used to estimate models.

As in the contestation models, there is no evidence that voters reward Fidesz for these transfer payments at the municipal level, as the value of grants does not impact Fidesz's likelihood of winning elections.<sup>12</sup> The utility of EU funding for maintaining subnational political control may still exist; however, it may be more important for maintaining economic relationships with key supporters, as found by several scholars examining the wider process, than for directly engaging with voters. Nevertheless, we fail to reject the null for hypothesis 4 and should interpret increased EU funding in a municipality as having no direct impact on the likelihood of Fidesz winning a mayoralty.

<sup>12</sup> My findings differ from Muraközy and Telegdy (2016); however, their research is specifically on the effect on incumbent vote share, not on partisan vote share in a dominant party context.

**Figure 1.2.** Confidence intervals for Victory models.



### 1.5.1. Implications

These findings have two key implications for Fidesz’s attempts to solidify its emerging dominant party regime at the subnational level and more broadly for understanding the circumstances under which dominant parties attempt to secure control at the local level. The significant and substantively large effect of incumbency suggests two things. First, there is an opportunity for anti-Fidesz parties in those areas where an independent/opposition incumbent has survived Fidesz’s consolidation of power. If opposition forces coalesce around an *incumbent*, the advantages of incumbency may allow for mayors to survive Fidesz’s attempts to dislodge them, even if the results offer little support for the popular wisdom that Fidesz is less likely to win if there are fewer candidates in the race. Second, as Fidesz gains incumbency advantages in more towns, as it did with its gains in the 2014 local elections, it will be harder to dislodge, given the substantial size and significant effects of incumbency in the models. This is especially true when coupled with the structural advantages that their national dominance and institutional reforms afford. The limited, albeit highly publicized, successes of the unified opposition coalition in the 2019 demonstrate the power of this entrenchment: a pan-opposition coalition, pairing the left and far right, was necessary to dislodge Fidesz from a limited number of cities. Moreover, in most cases the coalition won only narrowly.

Fidesz’s structural advantages build off its increasing incumbency advantage. Fidesz also benefits from gaining control of both policymaking and public administration at the district and county levels, where there is no elected self-government to contend with. As such, these factors may combine to solidify Fidesz’s electoral gains over the long term, creating, as Pempel (1990)

puts it, a “virtuous cycle” for the party in which it becomes difficult to dislodge. Contesting elections at the local level does not intrinsically make a dominant party antidemocratic, but can be a powerful force for undergirding democratic backsliding when it has already been occurring nationally.

The findings also suggest that concerns about the *direct* influence of EU funding on local elections in backsliding regimes may be misplaced. While these funds are undoubtedly used by dominant parties to reward supporters and develop capacity in other ways, there is little evidence that bringing EU funds to a municipality motivates voters to reward the ruling party in local elections. Indeed, it is possible that given the virulence of Fidesz’s attacks on the EU, awareness of European funding could make the regime look hypocritical to voters. The utility of EU funding for maintaining subnational political control may still exist; however, it may be far more important for maintaining economic relationships with key supporters, as has been found by scholars examining the bid process, than directly engaging with voters.

Finally, the findings suggest that scholars should take both intermunicipal variation and the role of subnational capitals more seriously. Fidesz is shown in nearly all model specifications to be more likely to win mayoral elections in cities of greater political importance – namely district and county capitals. This suggests that Fidesz 1) may use resources from other tiers of government to campaign in these municipalities where they would stand to gain further control of local government resources and policymaking capacity, and 2) may have used the 2013 territorial reorganization to transfer subnational capital status to cities where it believed the party to be more electorally viable, to improve its odds of controlling such resources. The advantages of controlling administrative and financial resources are heightened by Fidesz’s consolidation of the broad media environment both nationally and subnationally, giving them real communication monopolies in many cities. Overall, this finding suggests that district capitals in Hungary are worthy of further study. While these findings demonstrate the role that subnational politics can play in solidifying backsliding in less democratic or hybrid regimes, they suggest that subnational capitals might be understudied prizes in more democratic systems as well. Scholars of decentralization and urban politics might study intermunicipal variation, including capital status in lower tiers of government, more systematically in the future.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

In the context of de-democratization, it is increasingly important to consider subnational politics. While conventional narratives of backsliding focus on important changes to constitutional law, judicial independence, and media and electoral rules, subnational politics are also used to consolidate dominant party control. Subnational consolidation can be an especially viable strategy for ruling parties wanting to undermine the ability of the opposition to organize and compete in politics while still maintaining a democratic façade, as subnational politics draw less attention from international critics. These strategies may be generalizable to other regional regimes exhibiting characteristics of backsliding within the EU, as Hungary may demonstrate the limits of acceptable behavior before incurring significant sanctioning from the supranational level.

The case of Hungary offers a guide to understanding where and when autocratizers seek to consolidate power locally. The ruling Fidesz party has made a concerted, strategic effort to stabilize its rule and to deny the opposition a chance to use municipal politics for building credibility, legitimacy, and organizational capacity. Fidesz has undeniably had success with its focus on local elections, contesting and winning an increasing number of mayoralties to solidify



its efforts to establish enduring party control in a dominant party electoral regime. There is strong evidence that Fidesz strategically targets subnational capitals, benefitting from the virtuous cycles created by the administrative resources in these municipalities.

These findings challenge some conventional wisdom around Fidesz's local electoral success. There are common perceptions of Fidesz using EU grants as a means to reward supporters and solidify control, and substantial evidence of corruption. Despite all this, there is no evidence of a correlation between cities receiving large EU regional policy grants and the municipal electoral goals of Fidesz. This finding has no bearing on the argument that Fidesz misuses European funds, as has been argued by many, but suggests that the presence of such funds is not essential to Fidesz's electoral strategy. Future research may further examine municipal resource allocation and its relationship to local elections to determine which types of resources prove most desirable to a dominant party strategically considering where to contest elections.

Subnational politics represent a clear path for a dominant party to seek to consolidate regime control. A significant amount of policy making occurs at the local level, including the implementation and disbursement of some intergovernmental grants. Moreover, cities and municipal politics have historically offered one avenue for opposition parties to build up candidates and support to eventually oppose the regime at the national level. International institutions like the EU too often focus only on national politics and miss attempts to consolidate backsliding regimes subnationally. These can create powerful incentives for parties pursuing an anti-democratic agenda to strategically use municipal politics to ensure regime survival while maintaining a democratic façade, and we should consider the avenues that subnational politics offer for democratic backsliding.

## Chapter 2: Local-level Democratic Backsliding? The Consolidation of Aspiring Dominant-Party Regimes in Hungary and Poland<sup>13</sup>

Democratic backsliding is a much-studied development in contemporary global politics, with political and institutional challenges to liberal democracy and the rule of law becoming widespread. Central Europe, in spite of the European Union's *de jure* requirement that its members be liberal democracies, is no exception. Among EU members, democratic backsliding has proceeded furthest in Hungary and Poland. In Hungary, Fidesz, a right-wing party, has consolidated control since 2010, undermining the exercise of free democracy while maintaining a constitutional supermajority. In Poland, the Law and Justice party (PiS) has attacked the judiciary and rule of law while implementing a conservative, nationalist project. Backsliding began earlier and has advanced further in Hungary, but the strategies and intentions of both parties in consolidating dominance are strikingly similar; as PiS's leader Jarosław Kaczyński stated in 2011, "Viktor Orbán gave us an example of how we can win. The day will come when we will succeed, and we will have Budapest in Warsaw" (quoted in Kelemen 2017, 227). The EU has opened formal sanctioning procedures against both backsliding members, though in neither country have the trends reversed.

Most discussion of democratic backsliding focuses on mechanisms by which dominant parties cement their political control at the national level. Studies of how dominant-party regimes are constructed and consolidated typically overlook local politics because political parties, even dominant ones, tend to be less organized at the local level, and extending national party organizational influence over territory is costly. At the same time, however, the ideological appeal of right-wing populist parties tends to be strongest outside the major cities – that is, in the small- to mid-sized towns that constitute the bulk of municipal government. Thus, it is an open question which of these forces will prove decisive in shaping nationally dominant parties' capacity to capture local-level offices. Because of this uncertainty, local politics has important implications for the dominant party's national-level hold. If the opposition can retain a foothold through winning local elections, it can use that foothold to challenge dominant parties in higher-level arenas later. Likewise, a dominant party that wins local elections not only closes off this avenue for challenge; it can also use perks to extend its appeal to the electorate and change rules to solidify control.

These considerations prompt our central research question: can municipal elections serve as a backstop against the consolidation of the dominant party's control in de-democratizing regimes and, if so, how? We consider two possibilities for this control: electoral institutions and candidate strategy, both of which may help opposition candidates overcome difficulties in coordination. These coordination difficulties are particularly relevant for postcommunist local politics because parties tend to be under-institutionalized, candidates less professionalized, political resources few, and independent candidates common. In terms of electoral institutions, one variation in particular would seem to be critical: the distinction between one-round and two-round, or runoff, systems. Two-round systems greatly reduce the need for opposition candidates to coordinate with each other because the first round has the potential to focus the race on the

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most viable opposition candidate. In the absence of favorable electoral institutions, overcoming dominant-party candidates requires strategic cooperation among opposition candidates to unite around the most viable challenger to the dominant party among them.

In our empirical analysis, we compare two prominent examples of backsliding, Hungary and Poland, to examine dominant parties' success in penetrating local politics by focusing on mayoral elections. Both Fidesz and PiS are right-wing parties, so both tend to be structurally disadvantaged in larger urban areas. They differ in one key respect, however: in Hungary, Fidesz has been able to duplicate its national-level success in subnational elections, winning a majority of the mayoral elections it contests. PiS has not been able to replicate this success and has not consolidated its control subnationally, where the opposition has had several well-publicized victories setting up its candidates as potential challengers to the dominant-party regime. Hungary and Poland also differ in that Hungary uses a single-round mayoral electoral system, while Poland uses a two-round system.

In pursuing a structured, focused comparison of cases that are broadly similar in terms of overall context but differ in terms of a key theoretical variable (i.e. electoral system), we are employing a most similar systems research design (Przeworski and Teune 1970). This offers the attention to causal mechanisms characteristic of case-study designs while mitigating the loss of comparative leverage also characteristic of such designs. Further, by using a large-N sample of municipalities within our country cases, we can statistically analyze our theoretical propositions. This method has been fruitfully applied to studying the effects of electoral rule differences on election results within the region (Stegmaier and Marcinkiewicz 2019). We use pre- and post-regime establishment panel data on mayoral election results in Poland and Hungary to better understand the variation in subnational consolidation of right-wing regimes and why PiS has been unable to replicate the urban electoral success that Fidesz has achieved. Each panel is built from local electoral data aggregated by its respective national electoral agency (see Table 2.3). Overall, we find evidence that two-round electoral systems advantage opposition candidates but little evidence that strategic coordination on its own is effective in blocking the encroachment of dominant parties into local government.

We proceed in three parts. First, we examine democratic backsliding, subnational politics and electoral institutions in Poland and Hungary, arguing that local politics is an important, if less recognized, site for dominant-party regime consolidation. Second, we introduce our data and hypotheses about electoral institutions and candidate strategy. Finally, we discuss our results and their implications for democratic backsliding.

## **2.1. Democratic Backsliding from a Local Perspective**

Democratic backsliding describes a process by which ruling parties undermine political and civil societal institutions to tilt the playing field in their favor, effecting a form of gradual regime change which may travel through various stages (semi-consolidated/electoral democracy, hybrid regime/electoral- or competitive authoritarianism), potentially culminating in stable authoritarianism. Analysts describe a common playbook used by dominant parties: undermining the fairness of elections; discretionary use of legal instruments to undermine civil liberties; and restricting the opposition's access to public resources, the media and the judicial system (Levitsky and Way 2010, 7–12). There is consensus among analysts that Fidesz and PiS have both borrowed heavily from this playbook, but also that Fidesz has been more successful thus far in doing so.

The origins of Hungary’s backsliding date to Fidesz’s winning a constitutional supermajority in 2010. This supermajority allowed Fidesz to enact institutional and policy changes designed to lock in long-term dominance: changes to the constitution, Cardinal Laws, and rule of law (K. Kovács and Scheppele 2018); constitutional court-packing (Kelemen 2017); restrictions on media (Bajomi-Lázár 2017) and academic freedom (Enyedi 2018); and attacks on civil society (Kover 2015). Poland’s PiS won an absolute majority in 2015, aided by the United Left coalition’s inability to reach the 8% minimum threshold. Lacking Fidesz’s supermajority, PiS has not been able to change the constitution directly. Instead, PiS has sought to undermine the rule of law to the extent it can work outside the limits of constitutionalism (Sadurski 2018). It undermined the Constitutional Tribunal by packing the court and reducing its scope, before instituting measures to reduce the independence of lower-court judges (K. Kovács and Scheppele 2018, 196). Further echoing Hungary, the PiS-led government has limited freedom of assembly (Sadurski 2019) and restricted media freedom (Stanley and Cześniak 2019), especially of state-funded broadcasts and publications.

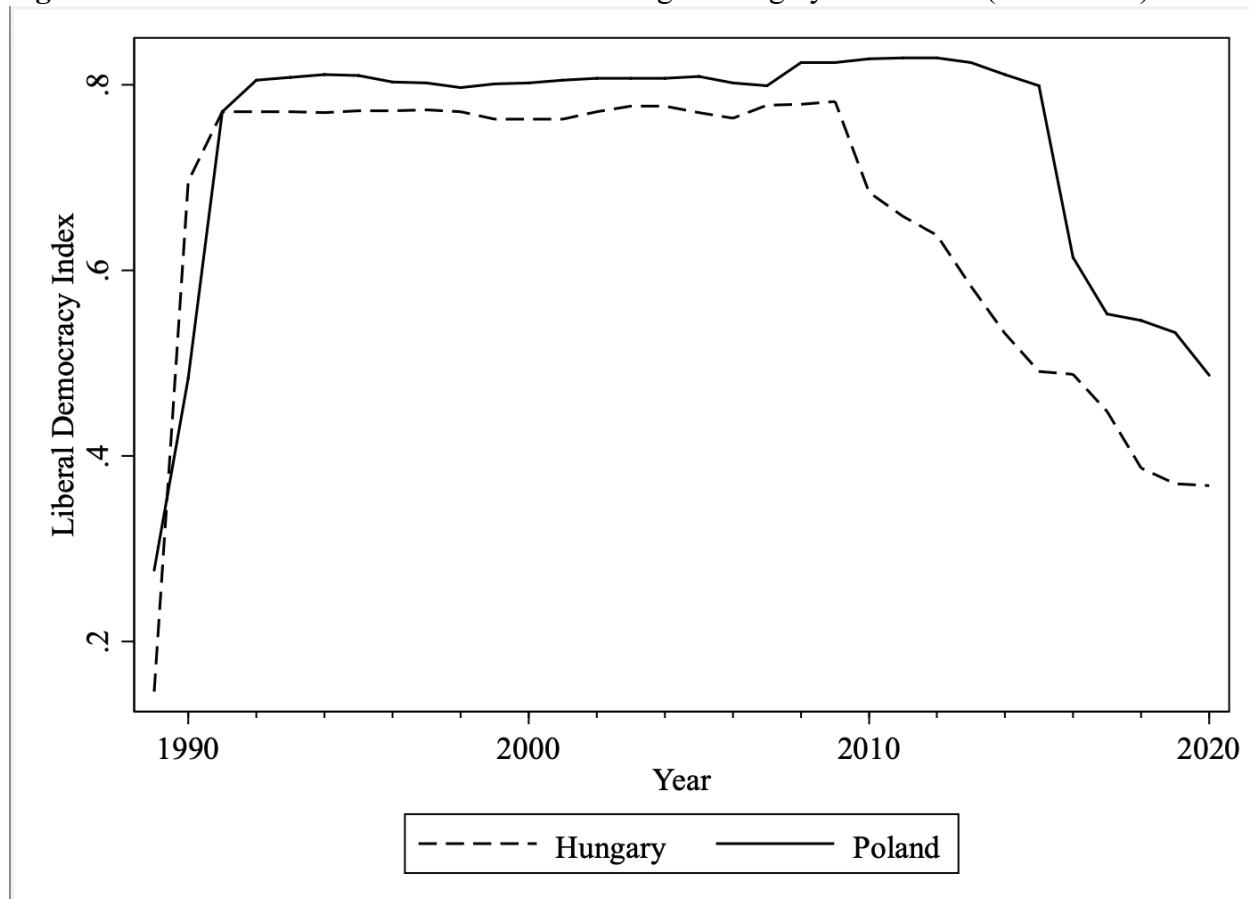
Figure 2.1 plots the V-Dem Institute’s national-level measure of liberal democracy for both countries, highlighting Hungary’s earlier backsliding but also Poland’s subsequent convergence. Between 2009 and 2019, Hungary and Poland’s liberal-democracy scores declined by 0.36 and 0.33 respectively. This decline pushed Hungary’s regime into the “electoral-authoritarianism” category in 2019 (Maerz et al. 2020, 915); Freedom House downgraded Hungary from “semi-consolidated democracy” to “transitional or hybrid regime” in 2020 (Freedom House 2020). András Bozóki and Dániel Hegedüs categorize Hungary as a hybrid regime as early as 2014 (2018, 1174). Poland is still classified as an “electoral democracy” by V-Dem and as “a semi-consolidated democracy” by Freedom House. In Bozóki and Hegedüs’s words, “the dismantling of democracy and rule of law in Poland is still in progress, while in Hungary the hybrid regime is already entrenched and stabilized” (2018, 1177).

We believe that there are enough similarities between municipal elections in Hungary and Poland to make comparing them instructive, even acknowledging differences in the degree of national-level backsliding.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, the national-level regime matters to opposition candidates’ strategies in municipal elections. In a stable democracy, local parties offer programs tailored to their voters and urge those voters to vote for their candidate; however, in authoritarian conditions or when democracy is under threat, opposition parties may urge supporters to vote tactically – that is, to back the most viable opposition candidate in order to defeat the dominant party, programmatic differences notwithstanding. Since, typically, parties “are conservative organizations and resist change” (Harmel and Janda 1994, 278), it takes extraordinary circumstances – such as democracy itself being at risk – to induce this kind of change in party behavior, a point that we will develop in presenting our hypotheses. The degree of backsliding is significant enough in both countries to cast local politics in the light of challenging de-democratization.

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<sup>14</sup> As a practical matter, we would add that the municipal elections in our analysis occurred when the V-Dem Institute and Freedom House still classified both regimes as electoral democracies.

**Figure 2.1.** National-Level Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Poland (1989–2020).



Source: Varieties of Democracy v11.1, [www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v111/](http://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v111/).

If national regime matters to subnational politics, there are also theoretical and historical reasons to believe that subnational politics matter to national regimes. As Ulrik Kjær has observed, local representation can be both a “‘respirator’ that brings a party through difficult times and makes it possible for it to gain strength and re-enter the national parliament” and an “incubator” of new parties struggling to find their footing in national politics (2012, 202). This kind of impact may be even greater in de-democratizing regimes. Studying it can enrich the broader literature on how subnational levels of government can be areas of institutional divergence challenging the logic of the national political regime (Key [1949] 1984; Gibson 2012). This literature is often framed through the lens of subnational authoritarianism, where residual pockets of undemocratic rule persist in otherwise democratic regimes. However, in backsliding regimes the opposite can sometimes be true, and urban centers can form a more liberal, more democratic center of opposition resistance (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001; Wallace 2013). This is one way to view the position of cities in contemporary Poland and Hungary. It is not only that the ruling parties are less successful electorally in cities. Cities can challenge ruling parties through their economic power and ability to contradict national government policies. A recent example was the Warsaw City Council’s decision to expand protections for LGBT residents, strongly contradicting PiS’s program (O’Dwyer 2019). Making a further stand against illiberal developments in the region, Budapest and Warsaw, together with

Prague and Bratislava, formed the Pact of Free Cities, collaborating to increase their leverage against national governments and seek external support (Hopkins and Shotter 2019).

There are also historical reasons for focusing on local government when analyzing democratic backsliding in Central Europe. Devolving power from central to local governments was seen as key to breaking the power of the old political elites and communism's hyper-centralization (Regulski 1996). Because of the perceived centrality of local government in the transition from communism in the 1990s, there is significant policymaking and resource allocation at the local level. Poland's local governments have maintained among the highest levels of autonomy in Europe, particularly in terms of policy scope, organizational autonomy and voice in higher-level policymaking (Ladner et al. 2019, 232). Though on par with Polish localities in the 1990s, the autonomy of Hungarian localities has declined substantially (Ladner et al. 2019, 142, 338). Andreas Ladner et al. (2019, 341–45) describe local governments in Hungary as “bureaucratized” and “subordinate” to the center, whereas Poland's are “empowered” and engage in “thick coordination” with the center. At least some of the decreased autonomy of Hungarian municipalities is strategic. In 2010–11 Fidesz amended local election rules and Hungary's Fundamental Law governing local government (Mötv) to advantage itself structurally at the opposition's expense and recentralized many aspects of policymaking to allow itself more direct control should the opposition be successful in municipal elections (Soós and Dobos 2014). Though the power of directly elected mayoralties inclines both Fidesz and PiS to pursue them actively, municipalities' weaker autonomy in Hungary may help explain Fidesz's greater success in these races. It may also be argued, however, that the greater autonomy of Polish municipalities increases their value to both the ruling party and its challengers.

## **2.2. Mayoral Election Success: Similar Conditions, Different Outcomes**

Mayors in both Poland and Hungary are directly elected. In Hungary, all elections are single round, and only a simple majority is required to win a municipal mayoral election. In Poland, if no mayoral candidate obtains an absolute majority in the first round, a second-round election is held two weeks later between the top two first-round candidates. This is a key institutional difference between the two countries.

Hungary's Fidesz has been remarkably successful at the local level, steadily increasing its reach into municipal politics. As noted in Chapter 1, in 2014, Fidesz won 70% of mayoral elections that it contested in Hungarian towns and cities, after winning only 32% in 2002. This was no accident. Fidesz consciously manipulated city council rules and regulations to reduce oversight and fair contestation in municipal politics (Jakli and Stenberg 2021). It then used local resources clientelistically to ensure the support of voters (Mares and Young 2019). Ultimately this has helped Fidesz to overcome the traditional success of the Hungarian left in urban areas.

Local electoral politics in Poland have generally followed a different pattern. Parties have never played a predominant role in municipal electoral politics (Gendźwiłł 2012). While the share of candidates and elected councilors going to party-affiliated candidates had been increasing before 2010, this peaked in that year and then markedly declined following local election reforms (Gendźwiłł and Żółtak 2017, 123). Poland shifted from using party lists to single-member districts in most city council elections in 2012, although lists were retained in larger cities. While independent lists were already dominant in local elections, the reform further strengthened those lists affiliated with elected mayors (Gendźwiłł and Żółtak 2017). Party politics have not penetrated municipal elections significantly, though parties are increasingly interested in contesting local elections (Gendźwiłł and Żółtak 2014).

Table 2.1 shows the respective electoral success of Fidesz and PiS in mayoral elections immediately before and after taking control nationally. The denominator in the winning percentage column is the number of races that the party actively contests as opposed to the total number of possible races.

**Table 2.1.** Ruling-party Wins in Mayoral Elections by Electoral Cycle.

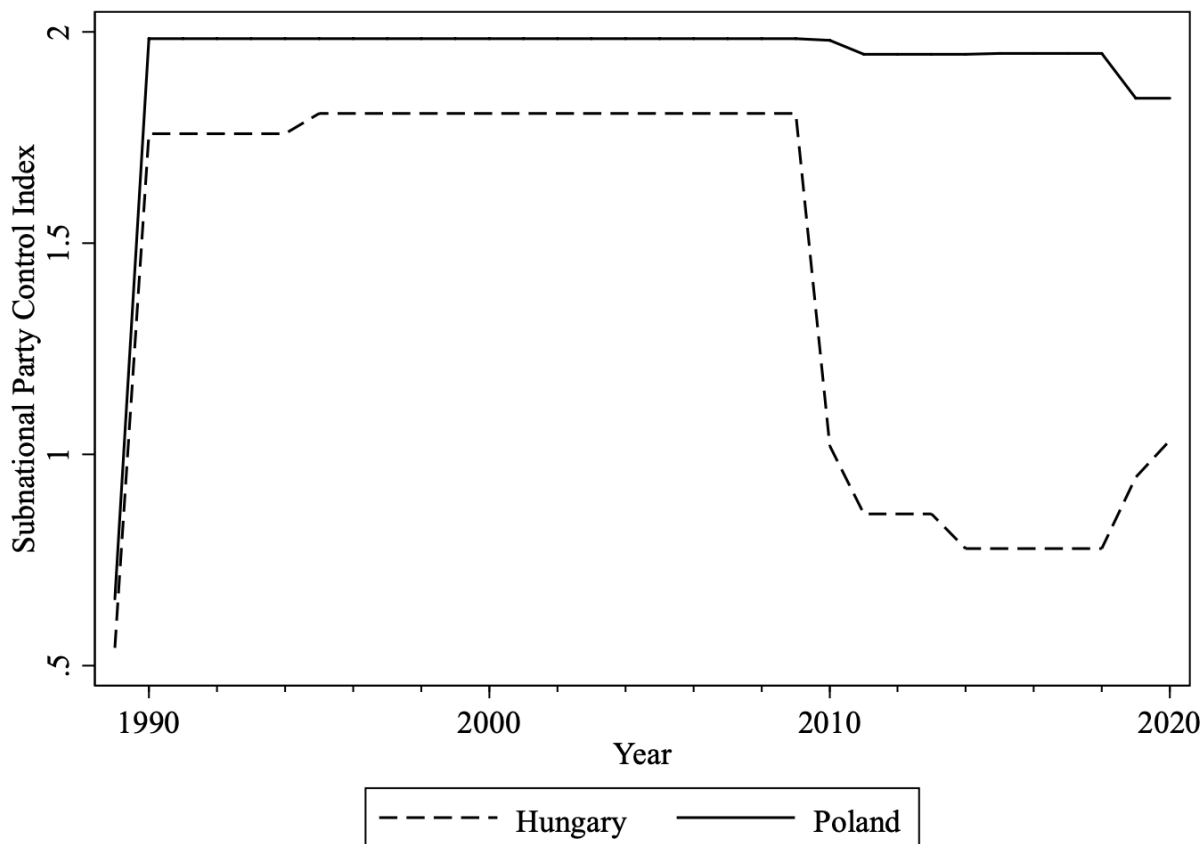
	<b>Hungary</b>			<b>Poland</b>		
<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Elections Won</i>	<i>Winning %</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Elections Won</i>	<i>Winning %</i>
1	2006	113	53.8%	2014	80	15.8%
2	2010	192	63.2%	2018	89	14.9%
3	2014	207	69.5%			

Source: Authors' calculations.

As additional context on national-party penetration into subnational politics, Figure 2.2 presents data from V-Dem on the extent to which a “single party control[s] important policymaking bodies across subnational units (regional and local governments).” The clear historical baseline in both countries is a *lack* of influence of any one party subnationally. In Poland, this lack of influence remains the general trend after the rise of PiS, even allowing for an uptick following the 2018 subnational elections. Meanwhile in Hungary, Fidesz’s rise has coincided with a significant shift towards national party penetration of subnational governments.

Although parties have nationalized local politics more in Hungary than in Poland, the urban–rural cleavage remains especially salient in both. In national elections, conservative parties tend to do better in rural areas and smaller towns and cities, while the center-right and left-wing opposition are more successful in urban areas. Kamil Marcinkiewicz (2018) finds significant and substantively large county-level effects on political support for Polish parties in his analysis of 2015 national election results: PiS and the Polish People’s Party (PSL), a conservative agricultural party, are much less likely to be supported by urban areas, whereas greater urbanization leads to much higher support for more liberal or left-wing parties. Moreover, he finds that the urban–rural divide explains divergent political support better than any other explanation.

**Figure 2.2.** National Party Influence at the Subnational Level in Hungary and Poland Compared (1989–2020).



Source: Varieties of Democracy v11.1, [www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v111/](http://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v111/).

Note: The scale of subnational party control is reversed and follows the scale:

- 0: In almost all subnational units (at least 90%), a single party controls all or virtually all policymaking bodies.
- 1: In most subnational units (66%–90%), a single party controls all or virtually all policymaking bodies.
- 2: In few subnational units (less than 66%), a single party controls all or virtually all policymaking bodies.

This comparison suggests that municipal elections may potentially impede the consolidation of dominant-party regimes. Although PiS has duplicated many of Fidesz’s national-level successes – limiting democratic contestation, reducing media freedom, undermining the opposition, weakening the rule of law and mobilizing rural support in national elections – local-level races have proved beyond its reach. We now investigate why, focusing on electoral rules and candidate strategy.

### 2.3. Hypotheses

If the subnational divergence between Hungary and Poland described above indicates that municipal elections could impede the consolidation of dominant-party regimes in the context of democratic backsliding, the question becomes how? Two possibilities are favorable electoral rules and strategic coordination among opposition candidates. Insofar as candidate strategies are adaptations to electoral rules, the latter are theoretically prior; however, to highlight the difficulties of opposition coordination in dominant-party regimes, we begin with strategies.



A central contention of the party competition literature is that combating a ruling party requires uniting the opposition around a strong candidate: this minimizes the risks associated with splitting the anti-regime vote among opposition candidates, allowing them to form a bloc. Such coalition formation is often labelled a unified opposition strategy. It has received widespread media attention in a variety of contexts. It was implemented in Hungary's 2019 local elections, achieving several high-profile successes. Most opposition parties – on both the left and the far right – supported common candidates in the mayoral elections, leading to wins in ten (an additional six) cities with county rights, the largest cities in Hungary (Political Capital 2019).<sup>15</sup> Although this gave the opposition credibility and momentum, it did not re-establish fair democratic contestation (Hegedüs 2019).

Scholarly research on the strategy's efficacy is mixed. For example, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal's analysis of voting patterns in the U.S. Congress describes both-ends-against-the-middle, one subtype of a unified opposition coalition, as a 'deviant voting pattern' (2011, 6). A ruling unified opposition coalition can be especially unstable at the national level, where its disparate member parties need to maintain an effective coalition to prevent the plurality party from forming a minority government (Nikolenyi 2009, 78–80). Such coalitions may also be difficult in a dominant-party system, where the single party seeking dominance is considered central to coalition formation (Sened 1996, 360–61).

There are, however, reasons to think that local-level conditions may be more hospitable to this strategy. Mayors are executives and may not need to maintain a governing coalition to act on local issues; unsurprisingly, the position of mayor is the most desirable in local coalition negotiations (Laver 1989). This may create incentives for interparty cross-municipal cooperation, especially if contending parties agree to distribute candidates equitably across the country, guaranteeing each a reasonably similar number of mayoralties. In theory, this would allow those parties an equitable distribution of opportunities for developing national candidates and for disbursing resources allocated by local government.

There are also grounds to suggest that this strategy may work when local opposition candidates face democratic backsliding, or even outright competitive authoritarianism. As Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda have argued, typically political parties “are conservative organizations and resist change” (1994, 278), which augurs badly for an atypical strategy like “unified opposition.” They also argue, however, that external shocks – such as constitutional changes, changes in longer-term electoral prospects or events that challenge “confidence in the correctness or importance of key positions” – may make parties open to fundamental change (Harmel and Janda 1994, 267, 270). We argue that democratic backsliding constitutes just this kind of shock. For vote-maximizing parties, it threatens “the terms of exchange in the electoral arena,” and for policy-oriented parties, it calls into question adherence to policy positions when democracy itself is at stake (Harmel and Janda 1994, 265). Empirical work by Jennifer Gandhi and Ora John Reuter (2013) finds that, in multiparty authoritarian regimes with competitive elections, the emergence of opposition coalitions against the ruling party depends in part on party system institutionalization and harassment of the opposition; both are moderately high in Hungary's emergent hybrid regime. Historically, the most notable instances of this coalition type have occurred in Mexico against the PRI government (Eisenstadt 2003) and in India, where Adam Ziegfeld and Maya Tudor (2017) argue that opposition coordination plays a crucial role in

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<sup>15</sup> In practice, unified opposition candidates in Hungary are associated with a “lead” party – the party listed first under their candidate registration. This accords with Laver's (1989) findings that cross-municipal cooperation may be necessary to overcoming the barriers to unified opposition coalition.

defeating the dominant Congress Party. This practice has been especially durable in Mexico, albeit aided by the relative absence of stable ideology among the major national parties. Elections were most frequently lost by the PRI when subnational coalitions were formed by the largest opposition parties, PRD and PAN (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001, 278–81). It has been more widespread at the gubernatorial level but has also been seen locally since the 1990s (Eisenstadt 2003; Giraudy 2015). In Turkey, Orçun Selçuk and Dilara Hekimci (2020) suggest that opposition parties in both local and national elections have coalesced around a democracy–authoritarian cleavage made salient by democratic backsliding.

How do these cross-national examples translate to the context of local politics in Central Europe? Overall, we are skeptical of the viability of coordinating united opposition coalitions in local mayoral races. First, despite the high-profile successes in Hungary’s 2019 local elections mentioned above, there is no indication of how the fractured opposition will fare in governing. Likewise, there is little indication that this strategy worked in any but the largest cities, which are already predisposed to support the opposition. Even when agreements are reached, voters may vote against such a coalition. Jennifer Gandhi and Elvin Ong (2019) experimentally demonstrate that if a less favored opposition candidate emerges in a unified opposition coalition, individual voters may defect from the opposition to a dominant party. This risk is real in Hungary, where the far-right Jobbik party’s participation is numerically necessary. In Poland’s May 2019 European Parliament elections, the opposition successfully negotiated an agreement to combat PiS but was still defeated (Rae 2019). In either case, we might consider the failure to make such a coalition – organized or de facto – would likely result in fracturing the opposition vote. Second, Central European parties are generally under-institutionalized, especially opposition parties in dominant-party systems and especially at the subnational level (Gendźwiłł 2012).

One way we might see evidence of such coalitions would be through a reduction in the number of candidates. The logic is simple: if fewer parties support unique candidates, we would expect to see fewer in the race. Moreover, if local-level opposition coordination is a viable strategy in postcommunist circumstances, then we should observe a positive relationship between the number of candidates and the dominant-party candidate’s odds of victory. Dominant-party candidates should perform better when multiple opposition candidates are competing, indicating an absence of coordination among opposition forces. A weak or non-existent relationship would indicate that strategically limiting the number of candidates is not much help at the polls. This logic will be most powerful under single-round, first-past-the-post electoral rules. As discussed below, we expect that two-round electoral rules reduce the incentives for candidate coordination, allowing for an inverse relationship between the number of candidates and the dominant party’s odds of success:

*Hypothesis 1: The more candidates running for a mayoralty, the more likely the ruling party is to win.*

Our remaining hypotheses concern conditions affecting dominant-party success in two-round systems. Extant scholarship suggests that this institutional variation should impact the possibility of opposition coordination because the second round can focus the contest into a race between the opposition candidate and the dominant-party candidate. Aurélie Cassette et al. (2013) find variability in two-round French mayoral elections and suggest that different factors and electorates come into play between the two rounds. Broader studies of two-round elections at the presidential level find that having a majoritarian system, as opposed to a simple majority

system, favors party alternation in government (Rakner and van de Walle 2009). A second-round election creates a clear opportunity for the opposition to overcome some of the coalitional obstacles to forming a cordon sanitaire against a threatening party.<sup>16</sup> If the opposition has credible fears that the ruling party aspires to a single-party dominant regime, they have greater incentives to overcome these obstacles. This leads to our second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: A dominant party's odds of victory decrease if a race reaches a second round.*

As indicated above, the possibility of a second round should also affect the relationship between the number of candidates and the odds of ruling-party victory in two-round systems. The possibility of a second round limits the incentives for opposition candidates to cooperate and unify in the first round, which would lead us to expect more candidates entering races. How might this affect the dominant-party candidate's odds? In theory, at least, it could advantage the ruling-party candidate: Laurent Bouton (2013) argues that the "Ortega effect," in which opposition voters overestimate the chances of their candidate reaching a second round, may advantage political blocs with more unified support. Those voters may choose to support less viable candidates, assuming that they will have another opportunity to vote with their head.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, it may hurt the dominant-party candidate's odds by the following logic. First, even if the possibility of a second round leads to more opposition candidates in the first round, vote-splitting among the opposition candidates as a group does not add to the votes needed for the ruling-party candidate to achieve an absolute majority and avoid a second round. Second, the first round may serve as a filter for opposition-candidate quality: the idea here is that the ruling-party candidate will face the strongest of the first-round candidates (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006). The more candidates there were in that first round, presumably, the more likely the one that survives will be a strong candidate. Our final hypotheses encapsulate these arguments:

*Hypothesis 3: In two-round systems, as more candidates contest an election, the odds of a dominant-party win decrease.*

*Corollary to Hypothesis 3: In two-round systems, as more candidates contest an election, the odds of a dominant-party win in the second round specifically decrease.*

#### **2.4. Data**

Our data consist of panel local-level mayoral results for all municipal elections at the town level or higher in Poland and Hungary. Because Fidesz and PiS assume power nationally in different years – 2010 and 2015, respectively – we base our panel on the position of an election in the cycle of establishing regime dominance. In both cases, we include the local election immediately before the regime takes power nationally as a baseline panel (in Hungary, 2006; in Poland, 2014). We then include subsequent election results after national control is established,

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<sup>16</sup> The possibility exists that a runoff can structurally advantage the dominant party if the alternatives are not considered palatable (see Valenzuela 1993, 7–9).

<sup>17</sup> Another possible outcome may come from strategic error on the part of voters. Higher victory thresholds make it still more difficult to oust a dominant party, especially in weaker democracies (Birch 2003).

beginning with Panel 2. Table 2.2 shows the asynchronous distribution of panels across election years.

**Table 2.2.** Panel election alignment.

Country	Panel 1 Election	Panel 2 Election	Panel 3 Election
<i>Hungary</i>	2006	2010	2014
<i>Poland</i>	2014	2018	X

We include all municipalities at the town level and higher in both countries. Our sample comprises 895 Polish and 345 Hungarian local government units. In Hungary, this includes all 345 towns (*város*) as of 2014. In Poland, we include all urban (*miejaska*) and urban–rural (*miejsko-wiejska*) local government units (*gmina*).<sup>18</sup> Urban *gmina* comprise a single town/city, while urban–rural *gmina* consist of a town and villages within its orbit.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, status as a town (Hungary) or urban/urban–rural *gmina* (Poland) is determined administratively and not based on any particular population threshold. Data on village elections in Hungary and rural (*wiejska*) *gmina* in Poland are not included, as elections in these areas are not typically contested by national parties; instead, we focus on town and city politics exclusively.

Our dependent variable is whether the ruling-party candidate (PiS or Fidesz) wins a given municipal election. We only include cases in our analysis where PiS or Fidesz chooses to field a candidate; where they do not field a candidate, our dependent variable is coded as missing, so as not to bias the results. In other words, the dominant party should not be considered to have lost a race it did not contest. We have two independent variables of interest. To proxy pre-electoral strategic coordination, we use the number of candidates running for office in a given municipal election.<sup>20</sup> We also use a dichotomous variable indicating whether an election required a second round. Uncontested elections are included in our data. The data come from the respective national election agencies and have been consolidated into a panel data set.

We include several control variables to account for potential confounders. In national-level elections, the strongholds of PiS and Fidesz are typically described within the parameters of the urban–rural divide familiar from other examples of populist resurgence. Fidesz evolved as a party catering to rural voters and maintained this electoral strength as it achieved structural dominance (Knutsen 2013), while PiS performs much worse in urban areas in national elections (Marcinkiewicz 2018). Both parties are considered to have their base in small- to medium-sized municipalities that are less economically dynamic, whose residents are older on average and have lower levels of educational attainment. By contrast, the liberal opposition generally prevails in larger cities with expanding economies and younger, better-educated residents. We control for three factors often tied to populist party success. The first is municipal population, as resistance from urban centers has been prominent in challenges to dominant parties in largely (Scheiner 2006), semi- (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001) and un-democratic (Wallace 2013) contexts. The second is economic distress, operationalized as the local unemployment rate. The third is

<sup>18</sup> Data are unavailable for the medium-sized Polish city of Zielona Góra due to its merger with the surrounding rural district in 2015.

<sup>19</sup> While some controls allow for splitting urban–rural *gmina* into “urban” and “rural” parts, electoral returns are not broken down similarly, so the district as a whole is considered.

<sup>20</sup> This variable considers neither candidate viability nor votes received. It is possible that only two candidates in a race are viable, and that each additional candidate may get a very small percentage of the vote. As a robustness check, in Appendix P the models are rerun with only candidates receiving over 10% of the vote.

generational–cultural backlash, the idea being that support for illiberal populists is driven by a return to traditional values in the face of progressive cultural change, especially among older voters (Norris and Inglehart 2019). We operationalize this as the percentage of the local population over 60 years old.

Finally, we include a dummy variable to control for the presence of a dominant-party affiliated incumbent in the race. Incumbency is generally considered advantageous for a candidate in any type of election, but research shows it to be especially valuable in mayoral contests (Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014b; Freier 2015). Blane Lewis (2020) also finds that pre-election coalitions may not matter for incumbent mayors as much for challengers; this indicates that an incumbent affiliated with a nationally dominant party may be especially well insulated against a united opposition coalition. In Poland specifically, Jarosław Flis (2018) argues that incumbency is advantageous in local elections, while Chapter 1 shows that in Hungary opposition incumbents make it substantively less likely for Fidesz to win mayoralties. The perceived strength of an incumbent becomes an important strategic calculation for potential candidates seeking election as mayor (Flis, Gendźwiłł, and Stolicki 2018). Dominant-party incumbents may be especially advantaged in Polish and Hungarian mayoral elections due to the politicization of the media apparatus by the nationally dominant party (Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2020).

Control variable data come from the respective national statistical agency’s subnational data sets; population uses logged electoral year estimates. Table 2.3 summarizes the variables.

To analyze these data, we use a panel logit model since our key dependent variable is dichotomous. We use a random effects model, as there is not sufficient variation *within* each case across time on all variables of interest (Bell and Jones 2015). Random effects also capture differences between cities that do not vary systematically. Where appropriate, country and cycle fixed effects are included.

**Table 2.3.** Variable Specifications.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Possible Values</b>	<b>Hungary Source</b>	<b>Poland Source</b>
Dominant-party Winner	DV	1 if winner, else 0	National Election Office (NVI)	National Electoral Office (KBW)
Number of Candidates	IV	Total candidates seeking election	NVI	KBW
Second Round Election	IV	1 if decided by runoff, else 0	N/A	KBW
Population	Control	Municipal population, logged	National Statistics Office (KSH)	Central Statistics Office (GUS)
Unemployment Rate	Control	% of job seekers / municipal population	KSH	GUS
Population % over 60	Control	% of municipal population aged 60+	KSH	GUS
Dominant-party Incumbent	Control	1 if dominant-party affiliated incumbent, else 0	NVI	KBW

### 2.4.1. Limitations

Like all research based on observational data, our analysis is likely subject to omitted variable bias. To reduce this bias, we include both cycle fixed effects and, when results are pooled, country fixed effects. We use cycle fixed effects rather than yearly fixed effects because in the year of overlap (2014) there is little reason to expect that the international political environment would affect both countries systematically; instead, variation in party situation in 2014 (Fidesz in the second local election after regime establishment vs. PiS running before achieving national success) would create more conflict than including yearly fixed effects would reduce.

There are also slight differences with the construction of the local government tier in Hungary and Poland. The urban *gmina*, which consists solely of one Polish municipality, and Hungarian *város* are directly comparable: they are local governments comprising single municipal units. However, urban–rural *gmina* differ. These *gmina* include not only a town but also several small surrounding villages. Thus, there is a possibility that voters in the surrounding villages behave systematically differently from voters in towns. We include these *gmina* because we do not want to miss political dynamics in the central towns; however, this comes at the cost of the dilution of “urbanness,” even if the urban–rural *gmina* are centered on a core municipality.<sup>21</sup>

A second point regarding the data is our coding of party affiliation in Poland. The plurality of mayoral candidates in Poland’s municipal elections run as independents. However, the unsystematic nature of how election data are recorded tends to obscure the influence of national party organizations, and thus magnify the visibility of independents. Independents are typically identified on election ballots under such names as the “The Electoral Committee of Voters of CANDIDATE SO-AND-SO” or “The Electoral Committee of Voters for a Better FILL-IN-CITY-NAME.” When a candidate is supported by a national-level party, the name of the electoral committee will often, but not always, reflect it: for example, “Electoral Committee Law and Justice.” The Polish Electoral Commission’s official data also provide information regarding declared membership in a national party and support of a national party. Unfortunately, these data are not collected systematically. Often, the party membership and party support variables are missing, but the name of the electoral list clearly indicates a party connection. It can also happen that the electoral committee indicates an independent candidate, but the party membership variable declares an affiliation. Looking at only one of these three variables makes national party organizations seem much less visible at the local level than reading all three together would. In our coding, we take the most comprehensive approach. Specifically, we code a candidate as affiliated with a national party if: (1) she is a member of a national party; (2) she is supported by a party; or (3) she runs on a ballot listing the name of a national party. If a candidate meets none of these conditions, we code her as independent. In Hungary, while there is non-zero switching between independent and party-affiliated status, party affiliation among mayoral candidates is widespread, and this issue is less present in the data.

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<sup>21</sup> Robustness checks on this are available in Appendices O, Q, and R. Appendix O controls for suburban status, defined according to the Functional Urban Area criteria. Appendix Q considers the impact of electoral system changes in city council elections (cities over 20,000 in Poland and over 10,000 in Hungary), which some argue impact mayoral elections (Gendźwiłł and Żółtak 2017; Soós 2015). Appendix R includes a dummy variable accounting for urban-rural status.

## 2.5. Results

Table 2.4 summarizes our statistical analysis of the factors influencing dominant-party candidates' odds of victory. For more intuitive interpretation, we present the odds-ratios – that is, the percentage change in the odds of victory for a unit change in a given independent variable (Appendix N reports the logistic regression coefficients). The models are organized into three groups, with country-specific subsets depending on the hypotheses under examination: a first set of baseline models with only the control variables included; a second set focusing on unified opposition strategies; and a third set examining two-round electoral systems.

Considering only our control variables (Models 1–3), the evidence in Table 2.4 suggests differing degrees of local-level hegemony for Fidesz and PiS. In Poland, PiS has been unable to overcome its mobilizational disadvantages in larger cities. There is a statistically significant decrease in the odds of PiS winning a mayoral election associated with an increase in municipal population (the effect of other controls seems to be subsumed by population size). In Hungary, there is no such association with population size, which is surprising given the traditional urban strength of left-wing opposition parties against dominant-party regimes. The country fixed effects for Hungary are statistically significant and substantively large, indicating that the dominant party is much more likely to win in Hungary than in Poland. In both countries, the presence of a dominant-party incumbent is associated with a far greater likelihood of a dominant-party election win. Having a dominant-party incumbent in the race increases the odds of a dominant-party victory from anywhere between about 7 times (Models 2 and 5) and 40 times (Model 1).<sup>22</sup> This accords with the broader literature on incumbency in mayoral elections (Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014b; Freier 2015) as well as specific findings about incumbency in previous local Polish elections (Gendźwił and Żółtak 2014). These results confirm the basic trends in the descriptive data presented in Table 2.1 and Figure 2.2, which show the contrast in dominant-party success across both countries.

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix N.

**Table 2.4.** Odds Ratios (Dependent variable: win by dominant party).

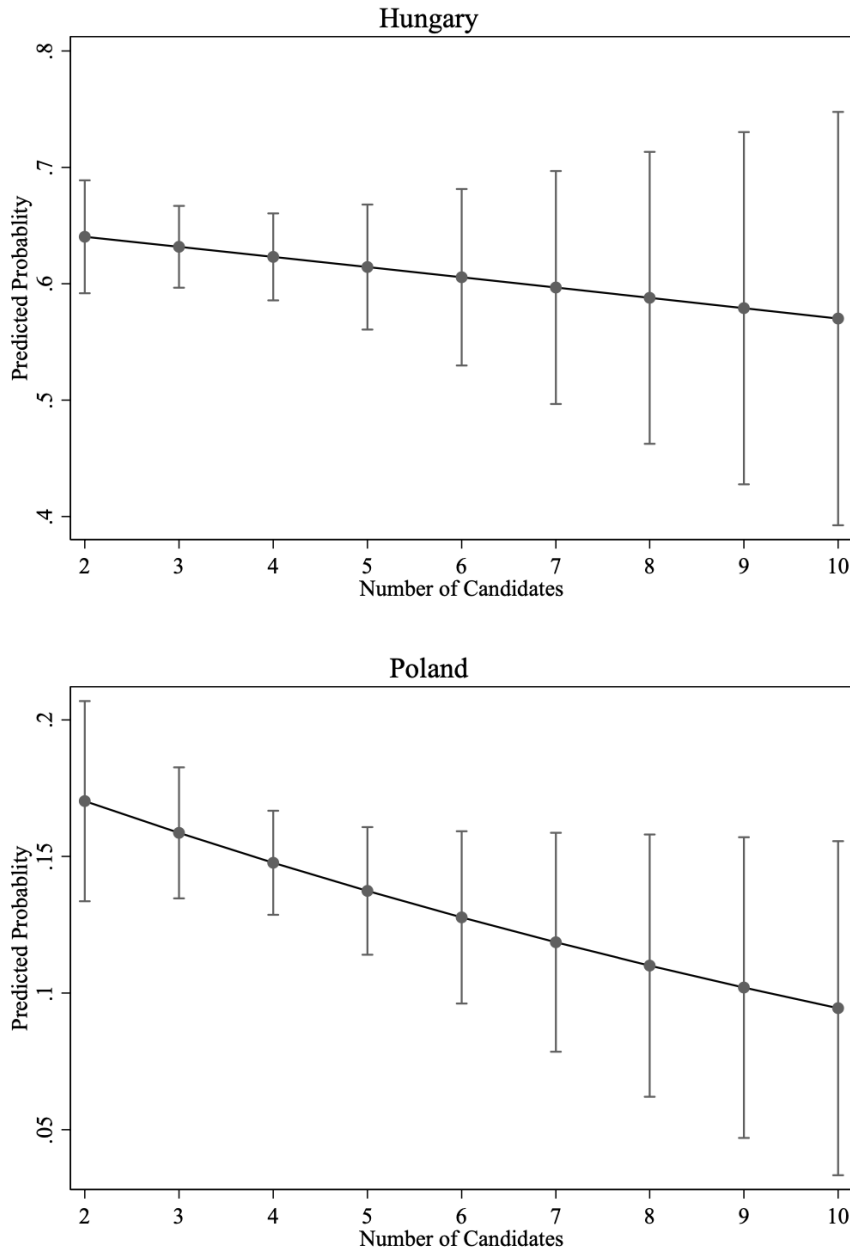
	<i>Controls Only</i>			<i>“Unified-Opposition” Models</i>			<i>2-Round Models (Poland Only)</i>		
	<i>Poland only (1)</i>	<i>Hungary only (2)</i>	<i>Poland &amp; Hungary (3)</i>	<i>Poland only (4)</i>	<i>Hungary only (5)</i>	<i>Poland &amp; Hungary (6)</i>	<i>All Rounds (7)</i>	<i>All Rounds (8)</i>	<i>Second Round Only (9)</i>
Population (logged)	0.324** (0.118)	1.805* (0.499)	0.806 (0.142)	0.403* (0.156)	1.891* (0.544)	0.933 (0.176)	0.551 (0.326)	0.429* (0.170)	0.489 (0.231)
Unemployment Rate	3.353 (23.76)	0.609 (2.056)	1.114 (2.852)	6.752 (47.47)	0.684 (2.323)	2.523 (6.538)	245360 (2782183)	6.67 (47.41)	4016 (33278)
% Over 60 yrs. old	0.0003 (0.0014)	13.23 (37.65)	0.085 (0.182)	0.001 (0.005)	14.65 (41.90)	0.151 (0.325)	0.0001 (0.0009)	0.0018 (0.0084)	0.00005 (0.00030)
Cycle Year=2	0.884 (0.281)	1.123 (0.267)	0.937 (0.142)	0.797 (0.257)	1.129 (0.270)	0.893 (0.137)	1.142 (0.519)	0.764 (0.250)	0.770 (0.318)
Cycle Year=3		0.898 (0.241)	0.715 (0.171)		0.912 (0.247)	0.713 (0.171)			
Country=Hungary			6.776*** (1.281)			6.565*** (1.236)			
Dominant-party Incumbent	39.48*** (12.88)	6.79*** (1.63)	14.97*** (2.41)	36.68*** (11.93)	6.63*** (1.61)	14.35*** (2.32)		34.20*** (11.01)	14.58*** (6.11)
Number of Candidates				0.880 (0.075)	0.953 (0.069)	0.899* (0.045)	0.368*** (0.087)	0.556** (0.109)	0.916 (0.103)
Decided in 2 <sup>nd</sup> Round							0.093* (0.092)	0.277 (0.207)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round x Number of Candidates							2.359** (0.635)	1.690* (0.345)	
Constant	52.40* (93.82)	0.046* (0.065)	0.476 (0.442)	26.76 (48.83)	0.044* (0.062)*	0.340 (0.322)	32.38 (93.69)	61.49* (117.96)	25.88 (56.10)
Observations	1110	771	1881	1110	771	1881	1110	1110	544

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses; Logistic regressions were used to estimate models.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



**Figure 2.3.** Predicted Probabilities of a Dominant-Party Win by Number of Candidates (with 95% confidence intervals).



Models 4–6 analyze the efficacy of unified opposition strategies, as operationalized through Hypothesis 1. Only Model 6 shows a statistically significant relationship between the number of candidates and the dominant-party candidate’s odds of victory; however, individual country models do not reach statistical significance.<sup>23</sup> Another way to visualize this relationship is in terms of the estimated probability of a dominant-party victory – as opposed to the change in

<sup>23</sup> We posited this might reflect multicollinearity between population and number of candidates but this is not the case. The correlation between the number of candidates and the municipal population was 0.26 in Hungary and 0.40 in Poland.

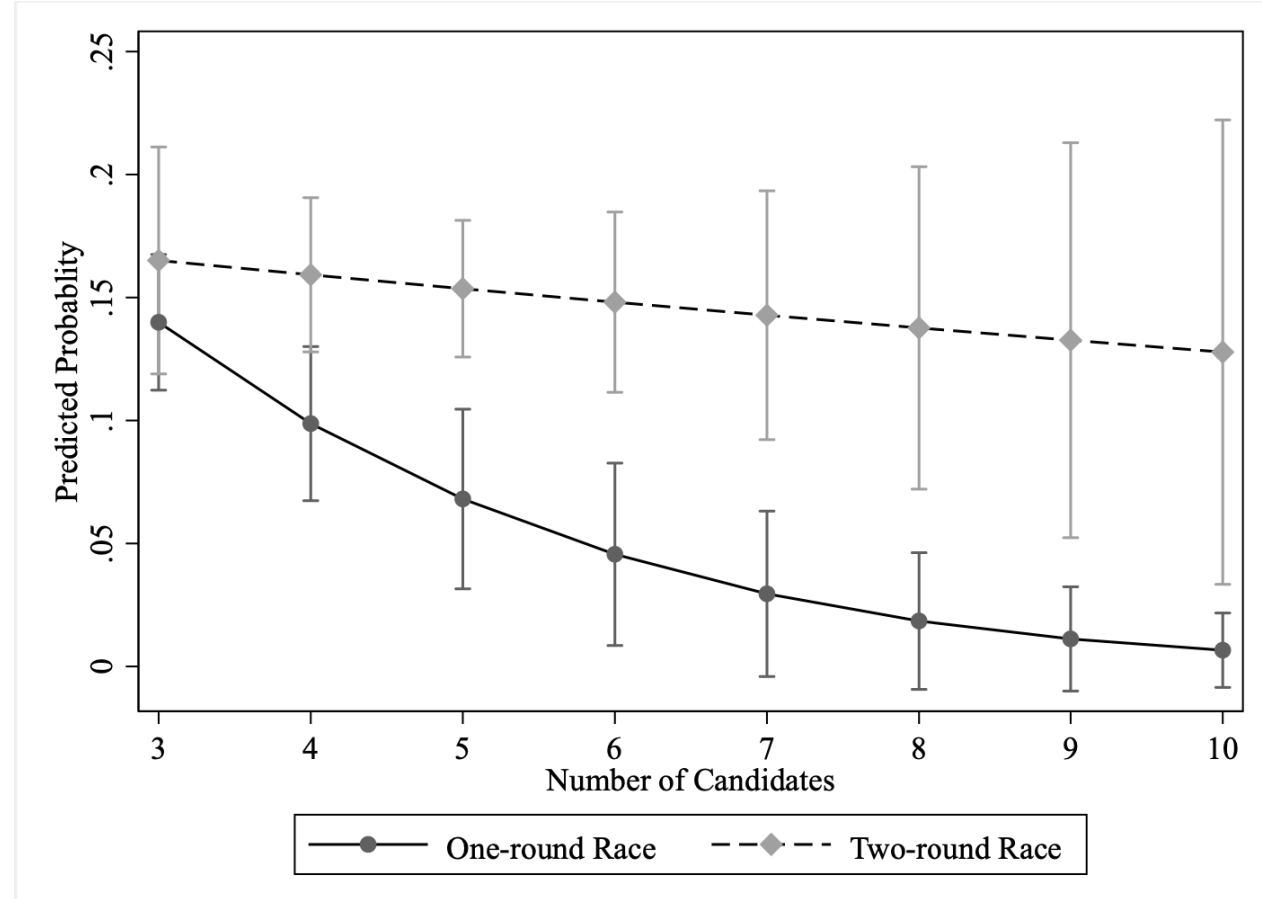
the odds of victory, as we have done thus far (see Figure 2.3). Contra Hypothesis 1, Figure 2.3 shows a *decreasing* probability of dominant-party victory with more candidates (based off of Models 4 and 5), though, again, it is not statistically significant. Because its single-round rules should most incentivize opposition candidate coordination, the lack of a relationship is most striking for Hungary (Model 5). This result could be either because of the advantages of Fidesz incumbency (the “Dominant Party Incumbent” term) or because the under-institutionalization of opposition parties at the local level makes coordination too difficult. We suspect both are at play. Turning to Poland (Model 4), the lack of relationship between number of candidates and dominant-party victory is less surprising given that the possibility of a second round decreases the incentive for opposition coordination. In sum, Models 4–6 strongly suggest that strategic opposition coordination is insufficient to prevent the consolidation of dominant-party regimes at the local level.

That dominant-party candidates do not benefit from facing a fractured opposition in Poland could indicate that electoral rules disadvantage dominant-party candidates, as Models 7–9 probe. These models add two independent variables to capture the effects of runoff rules. The first is a dummy variable indicating whether a race went to a second round (“Decided in 2nd Round”); it offers a straightforward test of Hypothesis 2, that a dominant-party candidate’s odds of victory decrease if a race goes to two rounds because of the runoff’s clarifying effect. Second, an interaction term, “2nd Round x Number of Candidates,” allows us to address Hypothesis 3 and its corollary, as explained below.

Regarding the clarifying effect of a second round, Models 7 and 8 provide qualified support for Hypothesis 2. In Model 7, the odds of a dominant-party victory decrease significantly in races that go to a second round (variable: “Decided in 2nd Round”): for such races, the odds of dominant-party victory are reduced by 90.7%. When the presence of a PiS incumbent candidate is accounted for (Model 8), however, this effect is more attenuated, and it falls just below the 0.05 threshold of statistical significance ( $p = 0.086$ ). This leaves open the possibility that the second round may offer a clarifying effect, especially considering the significance of the interaction term, as discussed below.

The evidence supports Hypothesis 3: as the number of candidates in two-round systems increases, the odds of a dominant-party win decrease. In Model 7, the effect of the number of candidates is negative, substantively large and statistically significant at the 0.001 level, when considering the effect of elections decided in the first round. For each additional candidate in the race, the odds of a dominant-party win decrease by 63.2%. Including the “Dominant-Party Incumbent” variable – which we saw earlier to be very powerful – in Model 8 moderates the effect somewhat but it remains highly statistically significant and substantively important. Figure 2.4 illustrates the interaction between number of candidates and election round in terms of estimated probabilities. It suggests no evidence for the “Ortega effect” in Polish elections – that is, that opposition candidates overestimate their chances of advancing and thereby make it easier for the dominant-party to win in the first round. Instead, our results suggest that increasing the number of candidates simply divides the vote among more options, thereby reducing the dominant party’s chances in the first round. In short, there is no penalty to having more opposition candidates.

**Figure 2.4.** Predicted Probabilities of a Dominant-Party Win in Poland (by number of candidates and rounds, with 95% confidence intervals)



In the corollary to Hypothesis 3, we hypothesized that more candidates in the first round may decrease a dominant-party candidate’s odds in the second round specifically by ensuring that she faces a strong challenger (the filter effect). In Model 8, the interaction effect between the number of candidates and the second-round variable shows a statistically significant difference in how the number of candidates affects races decided in the first round versus those decided in the second: specifically, the impact of the number of candidates on second-round races is much smaller, and is, in fact, effectively zero (see Figure 2.4).<sup>24</sup> To determine whether the number of candidates retains an effect within second-round elections, Model 9 examines only those Polish elections decided in the second round. We find that the number of candidates does not significantly impact the likelihood of PiS winning. Thus, we do not find strong support for a filter effect.

We draw the following general conclusions from this analysis. First, since the impact of the number of candidates is much higher in races that do not reach the second round, there appears to be little cost to an especially appealing independent or opposition candidate for each additional candidate in the race; she can still win in the first round. Second, in elections reaching

<sup>24</sup> Referring to the logistic regression results in Appendix N, in Model 8, the impact of number of candidates for second-round elections only is the sum of the coefficients for the number of candidates and the interaction effect, or -0.063, compared with -0.588 for first-round races.

the second round, the number of candidates seems not to play a major role: this indicates that the opposition is not weakened by being more fractured before the election. We conclude therefore that once the election has reached the second round the number of candidates does not impact the likelihood of the dominant party winning in either direction. In sum, the negative relationship between the number of candidates and the dominant party's chances of victory in all Polish elections appears to be related to the clarifying effect of a second electoral round regardless of the number of candidates. While Model 9 does not demonstrate a clear filtering effect, it remains plausible that a larger number of candidates increases the likelihood of the strongest opposition candidate advancing, but that the strength of this candidate is not impacted by the number of candidates.

## 2.6. Conclusion

In both Hungary and Poland an elected right-wing party has changed laws, rules and institutions to ensure that they maintain electoral control. Both remain successful nationally, each handily winning their most recent national parliamentary election. This chapter has investigated whether local-level mayoral elections might constitute an arena for opposition politicians to challenge the dominant PiS and Fidesz parties and, if so, how. Our findings indicate that, given the under-institutionalization of local parties and the strong advantages of dominant-party incumbents, opposition success at the local level is difficult to achieve if it must rest on strategic electoral coordination alone. Our findings do suggest that dominant parties are more vulnerable in local races based on two-round electoral rules than in simple majority ones. This institutional variation offers a plausible explanation for why PiS has been less successful than Fidesz in extending its dominance to local government.

Our findings have implications for party politics in both countries. In Hungary, absent an incumbent to coalesce around, the strategy of forming a unified opposition coalition may not be a panacea, despite considerable media attention. National parties embraced this strategy for the 2022 parliamentary elections, (unsuccessfully) fielding a joint candidate for prime minister and party lists after Fidesz pushed through reforms designed to make a looser coalition impossible (Bayer 2020). It is possible, however, that it may be preferable to maintain a diverse opposition so that voters feel a greater sense of choice. In Japan, attempts to form a broad opposition coalition through strategic withdrawal of candidates ultimately reduced voter interest in the election and brought about a dominant-party victory (Scheiner, Smith, and Thies 2016).

That said, these findings should not be seen deterministically. We would not suggest to opposition parties in hybrid regimes that a unified opposition coalition is a failed strategy, rather that they should not expect automatic success. Opposition parties need to balance cooperation and their own, individual electoral prospects. The value of incumbency in local elections means that *individual* parties also have to consider the potential ramifications of ceding control to another opposition party. Given the instability in the Hungarian party system, especially among left parties, party survival is a salient concern for party leaders. Consequently, even when cooperation might make an opposition electoral victory possible in a particular race, it still may be a losing proposition for an individual party's long-term viability.

In Poland, too, the opposition should be wary of any pre-election coalition formation given the variance in electoral structures. Our findings show that PiS is substantively less likely to win elections that go to the second round and elections with *more* candidates. However, our findings raise questions about the mechanisms by which the possibility of a runoff helps opposition candidates. The evidence suggests that runoffs reduce the costs of a fractured

opposition (the clarifying effect), but we do not find clear evidence that they help filter out weaker opposition challengers. Future research should investigate the reasons behind these findings, both specifically in the Polish context but also in larger comparative work. A practical takeaway is nevertheless clear: if an increase in number of candidates is associated with decreasing likelihood of dominant-party victories, there is little need for disparate opposition parties to spend time and resources trying to negotiate painful concessions for coalitions that might otherwise be politically unpalatable. Investigating the effects of candidate quality in dominant regime perpetuation would be a promising avenue for future research. Additionally, future research can examine why Poland's PiS has not adopted some of the more aggressive subnational strategies of Fidesz. While these strategies would undermine subnational democracy, they would enable the further consolidation of their party's control.

Finally, to consider Hungary and Poland in terms of broader trajectories of democratic backsliding, our findings point to underlying weakness for PiS. Fidesz has extended its dominance to local politics in concrete ways, eliminating a primary avenue for opposition parties to build up credibility to challenge a dominant-party regime. PiS has had no such success. Descriptive statistics show that it wins many fewer races than Fidesz, and we see no statistically significant cycle effect in Poland to suggest the regime is consolidating over time. Poland seems more likely to follow historical examples where threats to a dominant party emerge after achieving subnational electoral success, demonstrating their viability to challenge the regime. Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski emerging as the strongest challenger to Polish President Andrzej Duda in the 2020 Polish presidential election is perhaps the best example of this potential. Naturally, it is important to remember that democratic backsliding is not only a question of how competitive elections are, especially municipal ones. In particular, Fidesz's and PiS's tactics show backsliding is also a question of the independence of the judiciary and media. Even if the playing field of municipal politics remains level, it will not immediately correct the national field's tilt. However, just as backsliding is often a chipping away at democracy's foundations, so too might a weakening of dominant-party influence begin locally before it reaches to the top.

### Chapter 3: Regional and National Variation in Parliamentary Questions at the European Parliament<sup>25</sup>

As the EU has been forced to respond to a series of crises in the past fifteen years, we have seen positional differences between member states take center stage. There have been debates between member states about responding to the rule of law crisis, the migration crisis, and, most recently, the appropriate types of aid to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. National leaders from across the political spectrum have frequently articulated the ways that their national interests sometimes depart from European interests. These public, contentious discussions have underscored the ways that the national backgrounds of politicians seeking to solve problems at the European level continue to play a crucial role.

At the same time, the European Parliament has continued to increase in institutional importance at the European level, as the EU continues to respond to critiques regarding its democratic deficit. Many studies on the behavior of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) indicate that MEPs align more with members of their party group than with members of their national delegation (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007, among others). Yet at the same time, MEPs remain responsible to national voters. Moreover, they have been socialized in national political traditions, with most staying involved in national political debates, campaigns, and dynamics. As such, we might expect that these differences still might affect the way they approach their parliamentary duties, even with the great deal of party cohesion seen in voting and the significant socialization effects of the European Parliament itself. Given potential socialization effects, shared policy interests (acting as an aggregation of common national preferences), and common geographies, we may expect to see evidence of the influence of national background at both a regional bloc level and an individual member state level, depending on the particular topics that MEPs are pursuing. This may be especially important for issues of regional concern, such as backsliding in East Central Europe.

The European Parliament is commonly understood to be an institution that generally propels European integration forward (Hix and Høyland 2013). One potential complication for this move toward greater institutional integration, however, can be the continued enlargement of the parliament (the so-called wider vs. deeper debate). While enlargement in general might have the potential to slow the pace of integration, the erosion of democratic norms and principles in some of the newer states likely provides an even stronger challenge.

Indeed, it is important to consider the potential systematic differences in the ways that officials from national backgrounds – including major regional differences that could affect larger areas like the EU members of the former Eastern bloc – may utilize EU institutions. Most studies examining differences in MEP behavior focus on voting. However, fewer studies examine the European Parliament through the lens of one of the most important functions of any legislature: oversight. Oversight in the European Union is instead commonly seen through the lens of national policy implementation. However, the European Parliament has institutional pathways to regularized oversight through the parliamentary questions mechanism, which allow MEPs the opportunity to receive on-the-record responses from the Council and Commission. While MEPs certainly use parliamentary questions for a variety of purposes, ranging from information gathering to campaigning for re-election, parliamentary questions are still at their core an oversight mechanism. While we do have considerable evidence of the primary role that

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<sup>25</sup> This chapter is covered by UC Berkeley IRB Protocol 2018-03-10848.

party politics plays in the way MEPs vote, the ways that other cleavages (like national background) could impact additional aspects of MEP behavior remain understudied.

The patterns of interest aggregation seen in parliamentary questions, the primary oversight procedure in the EU, raise important concerns about the limits of quasi-federal integration in the European Parliament. If MEPs are more focused on representing *national* constituencies, as opposed to *ideological* constituencies (represented by their party membership), it would suggest that the EU lacks a legislative chamber truly focused on political contestation at the supranational tier of government. New data on oversight mechanisms allow us to develop new ways of assessing the ways that national behavior might impact the Parliament and, secondarily then, the integration process as a whole. To understand that impact, however, requires understanding the nature of the differences between MEPs representing different member states: Do MEPs from different countries use parliamentary questions for different purposes? To examine this question, this paper takes a mixed method approach to the question of national and regional differences in oversight in the European Parliament. First, a series of elite interviews with MEPs and senior Commission officials were conducted in Brussels in Fall 2018 to augment existing literature and facilitate hypothesis generation. These interviews also inform the discussion of the findings. Second, an original dataset of the text of parliamentary questions, which are submitted by MEPs to the Council or Commission, is analyzed as a corpus for computational text analysis and structural topic modeling. This is the first large-scale computational text analysis of parliamentary questions at the European Parliament and builds on computational work examining debates and other procedures at the Parliament (Proksch and Slapin 2015; D. Greene and Cross 2017; Sorace 2021). The data consist of 130,921 questions from 2004–2019, with extensive metadata available to augment the analysis. To examine national, rather than regional, differences, these questions are then re-aggregated into a nation-year panel dataset that assigns questions to the topic they are most associated with. These data are then analyzed with linear regression models to examine how national characteristics strongly impact the specific topics of questions asked by MEPs. I test several straightforward hypotheses as proof of concept before discussing further questions on corruption, one of the key topics pertaining to democratic development in Central Europe. The corruption topic illustrates how opposition MEPs use such questions to draw attention to major issues relating to backsliding in Hungary, even if that attention does not necessarily translate to action from the Commission.

This paper proceeds in four parts. First, I review the literature on both party cohesion in the European Parliament and parliamentary questions and oversight in the European Union. Second, I propose hypotheses regarding differences in the oversight activities of MEPs based off national background, based on existing literature and elite interviews, emphasizing the parliamentary question procedure. Third, I discuss the data and method. Finally, I discuss the findings from the topic models and conclude.

### **3.1. Party Politics in the European Parliament**

A considerable – and persuasive – body of literature examines the politics of the European Parliament and argues that party politics are the dominant axis of conflict. Historically, this meant that politics in the European Parliament were contested not based off national interests but on a left-right political spectrum (Hix and Noury 2009; McElroy and Benoit 2012). Increasingly party politics remain the primary axis of conflict, but the relevant cleavage is not left-right but instead competition between Euroskeptic and Europhilic parties – what Hooghe and Marks

(2018) call the transnational cleavage (see also Hix, Noury, and Roland 2019). While the primary cleavage between parties may have shifted, parties themselves remain central actors.

The centrality of party is clear from the consistently strong party cohesion demonstrated by party groups within the European Parliament irrespective of regional divides (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2005; McElroy and Benoit 2012; Yordanova and Mühlböck 2015). Party cleavages do not strongly map onto regional divides. This is even true in the context of enlargement; since 2004 the EU has grown considerably larger and added member states with very different political histories (Bressanelli 2014; Bíró-Nagy 2016). Cohesion increased over time as the powers delegated to the Parliament increased, thereby raising the stakes for MEP activity (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007). Even in policy domains where we might expect national interests to be stronger, we still see strong evidence for party cohesion among MEPs (Raunio and Wagner 2020). Moreover, existing research (discussed below) does go beyond MEP voting behavior and finds that party politics can also be predictive of other behavior at the European Parliament: for example, the number of questions asked by an MEP.

While the literature clearly demonstrates party cohesion in voting and illustrates the importance of party politics in other aspects of the legislative role of MEPs, research also suggests that nationality plays a role in MEP behavior. Hix's work, while convincingly arguing for notable cohesion of party groups in European parliamentary activities, still acknowledges some of the importance of national politics and parties (2002). He and his coauthors argue, for example, that party discipline is enforced by national party rather than European party group (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007, Chapter 7). Senninger and Bischof (2018) find that political parties internally transfer ways of addressing policy issues between European-level and national-level party affiliates. Other authors have gone further. Costello and Thomson (2016) find that MEPs do break with party cohesion when national issues are at stake. And recent research by Buzogány and Četković (2021) examines votes on environmental and climate policy and finds some evidence of national background impacting MEP votes, as well as correlations between national opposition to policies in the Council (where national interests clearly predominate) and national MEPs opposing legislation in the European Parliament. If national background can still matter in some votes, even when party is the primary axis, then it stands to reason that it could also matter in the parliamentary question procedure, where politicians can pursue individual agendas on issues of their choice and we have fewer reasons to expect party discipline. Parliamentary questions could give MEPs the opportunity to demonstrate their interest in matters of national importance in a transparent way without impeding party cohesion.

### **3.2. Oversight, Parliamentary Questions, and the European Parliament**

Oversight in the European Union is commonly interpreted in the context of the relationship between member states and central institutions. First, there are the questions of how European-level institutions oversee implementation of European laws, policies, and directives at the national level (Jensen 2007; Falkner and Treib 2008; Fjølseth and Carrubba 2018) or ensure that member states maintain democratic norms and values (Closa and Kochenov 2016; Kelemen 2017; Pech and Scheppele 2017). Second, there is the question of how national governments oversee the European level – either through national parliaments (Holzhacker 2002; Auel 2007; Winzen 2013; Senninger 2017) or through European institutions (Ballmann, Epstein, and O'Halloran 2002; Pollack 2003; Blom-Hansen 2011). Intra-European oversight mechanisms, however, are also important, and the European Parliament plays a crucial role in these processes



(for example, Dehousse 2003; van de Steeg 2009), with a range of institutional responsibilities and mechanisms at its disposal (Poptcheva 2019).

Oversight is among the primary responsibilities of most democratically elected legislatures. Pelizzo and Stapenhurst note that a legislature's "performance of the oversight function is essential to improving the quality of democracy and...reducing corruption" (2013, 17). Oversight can not only be used to ensure the appropriate implementation of policies and use of resources but also can be an important means of ensuring that legislative prerogatives are protected in the face of actions taken by the executive branches (Kriner and Schickler 2016). A range of tools are available to legislatures and parliaments to carry out legislative oversight. In parliamentary systems, parliamentary questions are among the most widely available mechanism of legislative oversight,<sup>26</sup> and they are the most regularized oversight mechanism in the European Parliament. Governments are then required to respond to inquiries from members of parliament – in the case of the European Parliament, they primarily ask questions of the Commission. These questions could be either routine or motivated by crisis (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984) and could be used for political or apolitical ends—none of which are mutually exclusive (Wiberg 1995).

Wiberg and Koura (1994) argue that parliamentary questions have three broad functions: control, responsiveness, and political profile. Of these, the first two have concrete implications for legislative oversight, while the other serves an obvious political function. Within control seeking questions, oversight consists of criticism and scrutiny, while responsiveness-seeking questions seek to hold institutions accountable to legislative actions. Again, however, these rationales should not be seen as mutually exclusive. For example, Martin (2011) finds that parliamentary questions are often used to address, or at least demonstrate involvement in, constituent concerns in addition to serving as an oversight mechanism. Even the most nakedly political question may ultimately serve a functional role in service of oversight.

Parliamentary questions offer a regularized, institutionalized path for MEPs to obtain information from the other major institutions.<sup>27</sup> While parliamentary questions can be used for a variety of functions,<sup>28</sup> oversight is among the most important. MEPs can submit questions in writing to either the Council or Commission – though in practice, most questions are directed to the Commission. There is also a less utilized possibility for oral questions to subsequently be asked of Commissioners at Parliament sessions, often if a written response is not received in a timely manner or the response is somehow considered unsatisfactory. At present, MEPs are limited to asking 12 questions per month, including one priority question; however, prior to a reform in early 2016, MEPs were able to ask questions without set limits.

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<sup>26</sup> Wiberg (1995) finds that oral or written questions are used in every Western European country. A 2009 IPU-WBI survey of legislative bodies found that 96.4% of lower house respondents had oral/written questions as a legislative tool (n=97) and 100% of upper house respondents (n=19) (Pelizzo and Stapenhurst 2012).

<sup>27</sup> To briefly illustrate a typical question, British Labour MEP Linda McAvan asked the following question in January 2011 (P-011314/2010): "In an answer to a previous question on the labelling of peat (E-8636/10EN), the Commission stated that they were not considering introducing mandatory labelling of horticultural products containing peat, and mentioned that a voluntary European Ecolabel scheme already exists. Could the Commission comment on whether the Ecolabelling scheme has had any impact in terms of demand for peat-free horticultural products? Has the Commission monitored the sale of these products before and after the introduction of the Ecolabel? And has the Commission ever done any studies on the awareness of the Ecolabel amongst European consumers?"

<sup>28</sup> For an elaboration of the various purposes questions can serve for MEPs, see (Raunio 1996, 357–58). Questions of how different purposes might impact the content of questions are important but outside the scope of this paper.

The existing research on parliamentary questions at the European Parliament has largely found two different factors can explain differences in the use of parliamentary questions: 1) the domestic status of one's political party (in domestic opposition or coalition government, with opposition parties asking more) or 2) membership in a European party group that is either inside or outside the mainstream, with the assumption that outside the mainstream parties ask more.<sup>29</sup> Interviews with Commission officials and MEPs indicate that there is widespread belief among insiders in the validity of both arguments.

Proksch and Slapin (2010) find that MEP questions are one of the primary ways that politicians in opposition at the domestic level attempt to exercise oversight of European policy, lacking clear representation on the Council or, perhaps, the Commission as well. This finding is corroborated by Font and Pérez Durán's (2016) examination of the ways that the European Parliament oversees European-level agencies. Much as in domestic parliaments (Döring 1995; Saalfeld 2000), formal questions allow parties in domestic opposition to hold governments accountable when other more informal avenues are not available. Questions may also be designed to attract attention to national-level violations made by ruling parties. MEP questions can stimulate Commission involvement on issues where violations of European laws and regulations have been found (Jensen, Proksch, and Slapin 2013). The use of EP questions while they are in domestic opposition gives politicians an avenue to try to exert influence over their national governments. One MEP in domestic opposition shared this view and said that parliamentary questions served as a means of trying to hold a national government to account [Interview 1].

Findings for the other primary argument about variation in parliamentary question use have been more mixed. Raunio (1996) tests the hypothesis that parties with greater distance from the center in the European Parliament should ask more questions. Asking greater numbers of questions would account for the fact that smaller parties are more marginalized in much of the policymaking process in the EU. Raunio, however, generally finds limited evidence for the theory outside of the Green Party, though he does find that the Liberal and Conservative mainstream groups do ask proportionally fewer questions than might be expected. Sozzi (2016) finds limited support for this theory as well, showing that the far left group (GUE/NGL) and non-attached members use questions more frequently, but otherwise finding inconclusive results. Others, however, have found more evidence for this, with Brack and Costa (2019) finding that Euroskeptic party groups ask proportionally more questions than others. Interviews with Members of the European Parliament corroborate this argument as well. One Western MEP from a major party suggested that parliamentary questions offered far left and far right parties an opportunity to "blame" the Commission for political issues [Interview 9]. An interview with an MEP from outside the governing coalition offered examples of ways that MEPs from more peripheral party groups use parliamentary questions to emphasize their issues of concern [Interview 2]. Another MEP suggested that differences in questions among party groups would reflect different political priorities for election campaigning [Interview 6].

While the existing literature offers clear evidence that party politics play a role in the use of questions at the European Parliament, it is far from clear that they are the only factor, and interviews indicate a strong perception of national background impacting the use of parliamentary questions. The following section will propose hypotheses for potential ways that national background could impact parliamentary question use.

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<sup>29</sup> Other work, however, has found that there is no characteristic that explains variation in the use of questions well (Sorace 2018).

### 3.3. Hypotheses

Although we have considerable evidence of the primary role of party politics in how MEPs vote, we still have less evidence for party politics playing the primary role in how MEPs ask parliamentary questions and conduct legislative oversight. My interviews with MEPs and especially Commission officials suggest that national backgrounds may play an important role in questions. One Commission official suggested that various member state characteristics impact the questions received by their office, including the size of the country (smaller countries wanting to maintain more visibility) and degree of decentralization (resulting in regionally, rather than nationally, focused questions) [Interview 4]. Another Commission official indicated that their DG received more questions from Eastern and Southern European MEPs than from other regions [Interview 5], while others offered anecdotes about their own portfolios, explicitly arguing that MEPs from particular countries were more likely to ask questions about particular topics [Interviews 7, 10]. One official said that in their issue area, when given a question that framed a situation negatively that it was “80 percent predictable from which [party] group and which nationality the question comes from” [Interview 7]. Some MEPs shared this view as well. One Western MEP said that most parliamentary questions were designed to have national relevance more than European relevance [Interview 6]. Another Western MEP said that issues, often with a territorial component, may be of particular interest for particular national delegations [Interview 13]. An MEP from a post-Socialist member state echoed this view, stating that some topics might be more frequent from members from a particular country or region [Interview 1].

Some academic work to date corroborates these observations. Kirchner’s work examining the behavior of MEPs in the early stages of the European Parliament finds evidence of national differences in both the amount of and issue focus of questions submitted by MEPs with different national backgrounds (1984, 95, 115–35). Brack and Costa’s (2019) recent chapter finds that, in a coded sample of written questions, national concerns seem to make up a significant portion of MEP questions. They find that 27.48% of written questions in their sample were coded as pertaining to national or subnational concerns. They also preliminarily find that “peripheral” countries in Southern and Eastern Europe tend to skew more towards national level concerns. This builds on Fabio Sozzi’s (2015) findings, that the background of MEPs affects how they pursue representative functions using parliamentary questions.

Both MEPs and academic work point to the potential relevance of being from a “peripheral” region for the types of questions asked by MEPs. To get a sense of the potential importance of national background in European oversight, we will start by aggregating to one of the most salient core-periphery divides in the contemporary EU: the East-West divide (Epstein and Jacoby 2014; Grzymała-Busse 2016; Rupnik 2016). This divide reflects not only contemporary policy differences but also the legacies of socialism for party politics and parliamentary systems. Political parties in Western Europe are more doctrinaire than in Eastern Europe, where parties are weaker and less consolidated (Kitschelt 1995; Bielasiak 1997; Thames 2005; Nikolenyi 2014). Instead, parties often focus more on patronage issues than programmatic issues associated with Western European political cleavages (Meyer-Sahling 2006; Kopecký and Spirova 2011). Ohlén (2013) outlines the difficulties of integrating political parties in post-Socialist Europe into European party groups. Given these findings, we might expect MEPs representing post-Socialist countries to be less motivated by party politics concerns and instead approach European oversight through a more nationally-motivated mindset, resulting in different use of the parliamentary question procedure.

*H1: MEPs from Post-Socialist and Western member states will address different substantive topics in parliamentary questions.*

While establishing a baseline difference between MEPs from Western and post-Socialist MEPs provides an indication of some trends on a macrolevel, we can also begin to examine such differences nationally, not only regionally. Determining these differences lends itself to broad hypotheses that are difficult to empirically test; however, we will also test more specific corollaries that can provide evidence for the hypotheses. Both are straightforward ways of thinking about the importance of national background in parliamentary activities.

One possible national-level factor that might impact which questions are asked by MEPs is a country's innate national geographic and demographic characteristics. We should expect countries to ask questions that are relevant based simply off geographic location. As one narrow example, the EU has several macroregional strategies. We would expect the Baltics to ask fewer questions about the Danube or Adriatic and Ionian regional strategies because of their geographic proximity. While this distinction is too narrow to be tested using data at this level of aggregation, it is illustrative of the types of differences we might see in larger policy domains that are also impacted by geography. At face value, this makes sense: the innate characteristics of a nation's territory, geography, or population are likely to impact an MEP's oversight concerns at the European level.

*Hypothesis 2: National differences in proportions of questions can be explained by geographic or demographic characteristics.*

To operationalize Hypothesis 2 in a testable way, we will test three straightforward corollaries as easy tests, to examine the plausibility of a baseline of national differences. Two will examine the relationship of member states to Russia and the Eastern Neighborhood, a topic domain where we might observe significant differences between post-Socialist and Western MEPs; the third will examine fisheries and maritime policy, where the differences between post-Socialist and Western MEPs would be less clear.

Given the fraught historical relationships with Russia, we might expect post-Socialist member states to ask proportionally more questions about the Eastern Neighborhood and foreign policy towards Russia and other CIS countries. In an analysis of voting behavior, Krekó et al. (2020) do find that post-Socialist countries systematically support tougher treatment of Russia, in comparison to MEPs from Western or Southern countries. We also might expect there to be more questions about Russia specifically from those countries nearest to Russia, where threats of Russian intervention are most acute. Proximity to Russia will be proxied by the great circle distance between the primary airport in the national capital and Moscow's Domodedovo Airport.

*Corollary 2A: MEPs from post-Socialist countries will ask proportionally more questions about Russia and the Eastern Neighborhood.*

*Corollary 2B: MEPs from countries with capitals nearer to Moscow will ask proportionally more questions about Russia and the Eastern Neighborhood.*

We might also expect geography to play a role in domestic policy concerns. So we expect countries with more coastline to ask more questions about some policy domains that would seem at face value to be more relevant: fisheries and maritime policy.

*Corollary 2C: MEPs from countries with longer coastlines will ask more questions about fisheries.*

*Corollary 2D: MEPs from countries with longer coastlines will ask more questions about maritime policy.*

The second possible explanation for differences between countries are policies and economic conditions. We can logically expect countries with similar policy perspectives or environments to share common concerns. Countries that are struggling economically across the EU are likely to seek to address similar problems through European oversight, which might not be shared by countries in boom times.

Another important factor may be differentiated within countries. We may see shared opposition positions, with MEPs using similar types of oversight when their parties are out of power domestically. As noted before, existing research finds that parliamentary questions are especially utilized by MEPs whose parties are in the national opposition (Proksch and Slapin 2010; Font and Pérez Durán 2016). They use this as a means of holding their national governments to account. There are several domestic concerns among opposition parties that are not evenly distributed. Corruption is one such major issue: if national governments are behaving corruptly, and especially if that corruption might involve the abuse of EU resources (Huliaras and Petropoulos 2016; Kelemen 2020), we could anticipate that we would see more oversight questions from these countries about corruption as MEPs seek to draw attention to this issue. Here, this will be operationalized using the corruption perception index from Transparency International by looking at questions pertaining to public procurement and investigations. Qualitative analysis of Hungarian MEP questions on the latter topics will be incorporated to examine differences between opposition- and government-affiliated MEPs as well as better understand the specific impact (or lack thereof) that parliamentary questions have on the EU's response to democratic backsliding.

*Hypothesis 3: National differences in proportions of questions can be explained by shared policy differences.*

*Corollary 3A: MEPs from countries with lower GDP growth rates will ask proportionally more questions about current economic conditions.*

*Corollary 3B: MEPs from countries with lower GDP growth rates will ask proportionally more questions about economic topics more broadly.*

*Corollary 3C: MEPs from countries with greater perceptions of corruption will ask proportionally more questions about procurement.*

*Corollary 3D: MEPs from countries with greater perceptions of corruption will ask proportionally more questions about investigations.*

### 3.4. Data and Method

This project takes a mixed-method approach to examine how questions submitted by Members of the European Parliament, which are then answered by EU officials, are used by different blocs of actors. The primary data used for this project are large N text analysis of questions submitted by MEPs to the Commission and the Council. Parliamentary questions are an important facet of legislative behavior (Rozenberg and Martin 2011); additionally they offer a clear, albeit partial, publicly available record of legislative activity and priorities for an individual MEP. In-depth elite interviews are used to help develop the hypotheses examined with the qualitative data.

Interviews were conducted with MEPs (in most cases together with staff) and senior Commission officials in Brussels in Fall 2018. Interview subjects were contacted via e-mail at their official points of contact. Response rates differed significantly by subject type. 77 MEPs were contacted, with efforts made to ensure diversity of both of national and party group backgrounds. Of these, 48 (62.3%) did not reply to either initial or follow-up communications. Seven (9.1%) agreed to be interviewed, while the remaining 22 (28.6%) declined. A smaller number of Commission officials were contacted, to keep the sample balanced. Seven offices associated with the Commission were contacted, and six interviews were conducted (85.7%). While this interview sample is not used to test hypotheses, it aided in hypothesis generation and findings are incorporated into discussion of the quantitative results and implications.

The quantitative analysis is based on an original dataset of questions to examine the oversight role of MEPs in the European Parliament. Both oral and written questions are included, as are questions directed at the Commission, Council, and High Representative. Question text and metadata, has been collected from publicly available sources.<sup>30</sup> The text data consist of 130,921 questions from 2004–2019, accounting for the period that post-Socialist MEPs were involved in the European Parliament.<sup>31</sup> Biographical metadata about the question submitter (MEPs) has also been collected. The biographical data on MEPs has been originally collected, though previous versions of this project used data from Hix and Høyland (2013). Questions asked jointly by multiple MEPs are dropped from the data to ensure that biographical data is accurately matched and that there are not issues with question weighting in the data structure.

This data is examined first using structural topic modeling (STM), allowing for inference in large-scale text analysis (Roberts et al. 2013). Structural topic modeling uses a Bag of Words approach, divorcing word meaning from sentence structure. STM is based off of latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), which means that it considers topics as two tiered: each topic has an associated set of words, and each document has an associated set of topics. Importantly, however, STM allows for the incorporation of metadata into the analysis by subsequently running regressions on covariates of interest and estimating the covariance between topics (Roberts et al. 2014). This allows for the data about the question, as well as the MEP asking the question, to be brought into the analysis. In this case, an upstream approach to metadata will be used (Wesslen 2018), which will allow for separate modeling of topics within questions asked by both Western and post-Socialist to see how similar the results are. This data should be well suited to STM, as they avoid the most common pitfalls present in LDA data: namely, the sample being too small or the document text being too short (Tang et al. 2014). The models here focus on the text of the

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/parliamentary-questions.html>

<sup>31</sup> Post-Socialist MEPs are defined as members representing states once governed by Communist regimes: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria. As Germany is a unified European Parliament constituency with national party lists, representatives from the former East Germany are excluded, though could be incorporated by determining German MEP birthplace if future analysis warrants.

questions submitted by MEPs to the Commission and the Council for written or oral response. These questions have undergone various stages of preprocessing to remove stop words, incorporate stemming, and standardize documents and metadata between years to account for variability that might otherwise skew the results (Lucas et al. 2015). These decisions will be discussed below, to heed Denny and Spirling's (2018) call to take the implications of preprocessing choices seriously.

A significant amount of custom stop words and phrases were incorporated to account for the particular data. Parliamentary questions are both short and formulaic; moreover, the majority of them have been officially translated by the European Parliament from their original language into English for this analysis. As such, we removed a significant number of words that did not appear to indicate the topic of discussion but instead amounted to words setting up the discussion (for example, "clarify"). Some words were removed only in unstemmed form, as opposed to stem form: for example, "currently." By only removing the unstemmed form, this allows a question about water or air currents to still be identified in the dataset. Words removed in unstemmed form were typically either adverbs or had common stems. Finally, we also incorporated entire phrases into the stop words list. This was done to account for words with multiple meanings, especially those that are often found in clichés. For example, we did not want to lose substantive questions about bears, the animal. However, "bear" is also used in several phrases commonly found in these types of questions ("bear the burden", "bearing in mind"). Topic modeling struggles to account for words with multiple meanings, so the frequent use of such idioms was noticeably and unconstructively affecting the models. This is a somewhat more expansive use of stop words than is often used in topic models; however, given the nature of our largely translated texts that often follow set patterns, this has improved our model quality without interfering with the ability to get at the substantive topics present in individual questions.

Additionally, member state references in both noun ("Italy") and adjective ("Italian") forms have been replaced with "nation" and "national," respectively, which will allow cleaner differentiation on thematic topics by eliminating the aggregation of questions about a single member state into particular topics that focus on different policies.<sup>32</sup> This data was then processed, tokenizing question text into individual words, organizing them into a sparse data frame to be used as the basis for the topic models. As a secondary illustration of differences in topics, log-odds ratios are used to illustrate differences in the proportion of terms used by post-Socialist and Western MEPs.

After words have been grouped using unsupervised STM, the researcher must infer and assign meaningful conceptual labels based on the groupings. This is a necessarily interpretative exercise. In this case, three different tools are used to determine the most likely conceptual significance of a group: 1) the words most frequently found in a topic (Chang et al. 2009); 2) FREX, a measure that balances frequency of a word with exclusivity to a topic (Bischof and Airolti 2012; Roberts, Stewart, and Airolti 2016); and, 3) the most representative passages – here, individual parliamentary questions – associated with a topic (Roberts et al. 2014). Here, they are generated by the `findthoughts` command within the STM package in R (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014). The top results for the three tools for each topic were used in conjunction to determine the most likely conceptual reason for the grouping.

Variance between the regional groupings is then tested for statistical significance. Specifically, we test the gamma scores associated with each regional grouping. The gamma score

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<sup>32</sup> Third country names were retained; this pre-processing step only applies to EU members. National clustering about foreign policy topics is still possible.

of each is the weight associated with a particular document-topic classification, here measured as the average per topic of all questions submitted by a group. To compare the post-Socialist and Western MEPs in a binary comparison, we determine statistical significance using a T-test. Significance levels are adjusted with the Bonferroni correction.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, hypotheses 2 and 3, and their respective corollaries, are tested using OLS regression analysis. To do this analysis, we aggregated the findings from the topic model into a numerical dataset. Each question has a topic that it is most associated with. We aggregated the number of questions most associated with each topic by country-year, giving us an N of 433. Data are organized into national panels. Where possible, both national and annual fixed effects are used to capture national characteristics that might affect the count of questions being asked (i.e., number of MEPs) as well as chronological characteristics that might skew the data (i.e., the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull leading to more questions about volcanoes). When time invariant national measures are included (such as length of coastline), random effects models are used. This is necessary to account for the lack of variation within fixed characteristics on some variables of interest within the panel. In these models, national fixed effects cannot be used for this same reason. In these cases, the number of MEPs in a country at the start of a year is included as a control variable to account for the base question counts. When national fixed effects are included, this variation will be accounted for.

Data for dependent variables to test the corollaries are derived directly from the topic model. Data on the number of MEPs per year comes from the European Parliament. Data on the distance from national capital airports to Moscow are calculated according to aerial great circle flying distance. Data on coastlines, measured in km, comes from the CIA World Factbook (n.d.). Data on GDP growth rates comes from Eurostat (n.d.). Data on the corruption perception index come from Transparency International (2021).

### 3.5. Models and Discussion

Hypothesis 1 focuses on the substantive differences between MEPs representing post-Socialist and Western member states. The dependent variable is the differences in issue area between the two sets of MEPs. Descriptive statistics can show us some of the differences between the two. A preliminary method of comparison, the log-odds ratio, illustrates differences in the ratio of word frequencies between a dichotomous set of actors: here, MEPs from post-Socialist countries vs. MEPs from Western European backgrounds. Fundamentally, it shows us the words that appear most disproportionately in one grouping (ie, said fairly often by post-Socialist MEPs but rarely by Western ones). Log-odds ratios do not consider semantic coherence of documents, but merely the frequency of terms; nevertheless, this comparison illustrates some preliminary differences. Table 3.1 below shows the results from a log-odds ratio comparing these two groupings. To ensure that these statistics are not driven by rare words, Table 3.1 only includes words that appear at least 90 times in the dataset<sup>34</sup> and shows the ten terms that were most disproportionately used by both MEPs from post-Socialist countries and MEPs from Western countries.

Table 3.1 provides evidence for Brack and Costa's (2019) arguments about territorial concerns being the basis for many parliamentary questions – terms referring to the geography of

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<sup>33</sup> In this case, dividing our thresholds by the number of tests (69) leads to .000725 being equivalent to the .05 level; .000145 being equivalent to the .01 level; and 1.45e-05 being equivalent the .001 level.

<sup>34</sup> Log-odds ratios here are calculated prior to several of the pre-processing steps for the topic models described in the data and method section. However, clear duplicates were consolidated.



member states appear very frequently on both sides. However, we can see some key differences. MEPs from Western States – especially, it appears, Spain – are more often referring to subnational units, which are likely indicative of greater traditions for subnational autonomy in some western member states. Sozzi (2015) finds that states with greater decentralization lead to a more subnational focus on MEP representation. In eastern member states, where true subnational autonomy has a more limited history, these terms appear less frequently, and MEPs focus more on national-level issues. Aside from the evidence for the territorial representation argument, we see some trends in differences on European issues as well. We see differences in foreign policy concerns. Post-Socialist member states strongly focus on relationships with the East, being more likely to ask questions about Belarus, Russia, and Moldova. Western MEPs are more likely to ask about former colonies.

**Table 3.1.** Top Terms in Log-Odds Ratios.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Disproportionately Likely Post-Socialist MEP Term</b>	<b>Disproportionately Likely Western MEP Term</b>
1	Magyar Nemzeti Bank (Hungarian National Bank)	Valencia
2	Belarus	Galicia
3	Paks	Tuscany
4	Orbán	Azores
5	Slovak	Civil Society Forum on Drugs
6	Polish	Catalonia
7	Kremlin	National Strategic Reference Framework
8	Lukashenko	Lazio
9	Sergei	Crete
10	Moldova	Bissau

More developed structural topic models, however, give us a far more in-depth picture of the types of questions that MEPs ask. To determine the appropriate number of topics ( $K$ ), an iterative approach was taken, first running models with 20, 40, 50, 60, 80, and 100 topics, and then running diagnostic tests as advised by Silge (2018); this showed decreasing returns after the 60-70 model range. One random seed was generated and used for all iterations of the model. Graphs of the diagnostic iterations are available in Appendix S. These diagnostics offered some guidance as to the appropriate number of topics, or  $K$ . The true value of  $K$ , however, must be determined inductively by the researcher through in-depth qualitative analysis to determine when topics are substantively meaningful (Quinn et al. 2010; Catalinac 2016). A  $K$  of 69 fits within our broad diagnostic tests, and within this range offers the most substantively meaningful representation of the most frequent topics in the parliamentary questions data; therefore, this model was used for further analysis. Topics were also clustered into eight larger groups (macrotopics), to aid in interpretability and analysis. Table 3.2 below shows the 69 individual topics generated by the topic model created from the questions submitted by MEPs, organized into these eight larger categories, determined inductively by the researcher.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> A separate, automated view of the relationships between topics, as defined by most overlapping words, can be found in a network graph, in which each node is one of the 69 topics, in Appendix U.

Topic labels were applied by the investigator based on the word probabilities assigned to the topic, the frequency-exclusivity scores associated with a topic (measured by a weighted mean between overall word frequency and exclusivity of words within a topic), and the documents most associated with a topic. The twelve most frequent word stems per topic (measured by  $\beta$ , the probability that a word stem is in a given topic) were automatically generated by the STM algorithm; a chart showing the frequent word stems for all 69 individual topics is in Appendix T.

**Table 3.2.** Clustered Summary of Topic Labels.

<p><b>Cluster 1: European Oversight (18)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Procurement</li> <li>2) EU Law violations</li> <li>3) Outermost regions</li> <li>4) Standardization</li> <li>5) Follow up questions</li> <li>6) Member state comparisons</li> <li>7) Civil service</li> <li>8) EU – Municipal</li> <li>9) Implementation</li> <li>10) EU meetings</li> <li>11) EU strategies</li> <li>12) Mutual recognition</li> <li>13) EU budget</li> <li>14) Free movement</li> <li>15) EU Treaties</li> <li>16) Parliamentary initiatives</li> <li>17) Crime</li> <li>18) Investigations</li> </ol>	<p><b>Cluster 2: Social and Cultural Policy (11)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Education</li> <li>2) Cultural heritage</li> <li>3) Civil society</li> <li>4) Fundamental rights</li> <li>5) Health care</li> <li>6) NGOs</li> <li>7) Social policy</li> <li>8) Discrimination</li> <li>9) Children</li> <li>10) Media</li> <li>11) Language policy</li> </ol>	<p><b>Cluster 3: Energy, Infrastructure, and Environment (11)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Air transportation</li> <li>2) Energy emissions</li> <li>3) Maritime</li> <li>4) Waste management</li> <li>5) Energy market</li> <li>6) Animal welfare</li> <li>7) Environment</li> <li>8) Nuclear</li> <li>9) Conservation</li> <li>10) Land transportation</li> <li>11) Infrastructure</li> </ol>	<p><b>Cluster 4: Foreign Policy (10)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Foreign relations</li> <li>2) Israel/Palestine</li> <li>3) Armed conflict</li> <li>4) Political events</li> <li>5) FTAs</li> <li>6) Turkey</li> <li>7) International cooperation</li> <li>8) Political prisoners</li> <li>9) Sanctions</li> <li>10) Eastern neighborhood</li> </ol>
<p><b>Cluster 5: Economy (9)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Industry</li> <li>2) Banking</li> <li>3) Competition</li> <li>4) Taxation</li> <li>5) Tourism</li> <li>6) Economic conditions</li> <li>7) Employment</li> <li>8) Digital economy</li> <li>9) Imports/Exports</li> </ol>	<p><b>Cluster 6: Regulation (5)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Food labels</li> <li>2) Risk mitigation</li> <li>3) Consumer protection</li> <li>4) Regulation</li> <li>5) Chemical safety</li> </ol>	<p><b>Cluster 7: Agriculture and Fisheries (3)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Natural disasters</li> <li>2) Fisheries</li> <li>3) Agriculture</li> </ol>	<p><b>Cluster 8: Migration (2)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Migration</li> <li>2) Borders</li> </ol>

While Table 3.2 shows the topics prevalent in parliamentary questions irrespective of nationality, Table 3.3 compares questions from Western MEPs and questions from post-Socialist MEPs, using gamma values (the assignment of a particular document to a particular topic) from the topic models to measure the percentage of documents in a given topic. This is a concrete measure of issue salience, taken from the proportion of total MEP questions assigned to a particular topic. This illustrates the corpus-level distribution of proportions of each topic within the separate post-Socialist and Western groups. Each row indicates the percentage of the parliamentary questions assigned to a given topic. Each column represents the entire universe of submitted parliamentary questions for that group of MEPs; however, it may not add up to precisely 100% due to rounding. Western and Post-Socialist MEPs are calculated separately and compared. P values are measured in scientific notation, so as to account for the much smaller significance thresholds under the Bonferroni correction.

**Table 3.3.** Gamma Value Means by Region.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Western</b>	<b>Post-Socialist</b>	<b>Pr(&gt; t )</b>
Natural Disasters	1.33%	1.30%	2.75E-01
Education	1.09%	<b>1.30%</b>	2.55E-08***
Migration	1.38%	1.37%	8.18E-01
Procurement	1.79%	1.73%	2.08E-03
Foreign Relations	<b>0.96%</b>	0.87%	6.36E-09***
Cultural Heritage	<b>1.50%</b>	1.33%	2.55E-09***
Industry	<b>1.53%</b>	1.30%	6.92E-22***
Food Labels	1.19%	<b>1.30%</b>	1.43E-04**
Banking	<b>1.63%</b>	1.38%	1.92E-09***
Violations of EU Law	<b>1.77%</b>	1.69%	3.81E-08***
Civil Society	1.68%	<b>1.92%</b>	3.96E-43***
Air transport	<b>1.17%</b>	0.93%	1.03E-11***
Fundamental Rights	1.84%	1.79%	1.57E-01
Health Care	2.05%	1.93%	3.98E-02
NGOs	<b>1.06%</b>	1.02%	1.11E-11***
Israel / Palestine	<b>0.81%</b>	0.52%	4.29E-35***
Competition	1.68%	<b>1.91%</b>	6.55E-15***
Taxation	1.19%	1.14%	1.07E-01
Tourism	1.10%	<b>1.23%</b>	3.33E-33***
Economic Conditions	1.95%	1.97%	6.30E-01
Social Policy	1.44%	<b>1.79%</b>	2.36E-18***
Outermost Regions	1.40%	1.34%	7.07E-03
Employment	<b>1.41%</b>	1.27%	8.21E-10***
Fisheries	<b>1.23%</b>	1.07%	2.15E-04*
Standardization	0.97%	<b>1.07%</b>	1.55E-27***
Armed Conflict	<b>1.93%</b>	1.68%	2.02E-07***
Follow Up Questions	<b>2.30%</b>	2.01%	1.77E-40***
Energy Emissions	1.39%	<b>1.77%</b>	4.89E-15***
Discrimination	1.51%	1.43%	6.06E-02
Risk Mitigation	1.00%	<b>1.03%</b>	2.35E-07***

Consumer Protection	1.37%	1.42%	4.38E-02
Maritime	0.73%	0.81%	1.12E-03
Member State Comparison	3.25%	<b>3.61%</b>	4.96E-33***
Politics	1.58%	1.60%	4.24E-01
FTAs	1.78%	<b>1.97%</b>	5.94E-06***
Agriculture	1.29%	<b>1.81%</b>	2.32E-27***
Civil Service	1.02%	0.98%	6.07E-03
Waste Management	<b>1.03%</b>	0.80%	4.60E-12***
Turkey	<b>1.37%</b>	0.90%	6.37E-70***
EU - Municipal	<b>1.91%</b>	1.23%	6.42E-99***
Energy Market	0.82%	<b>1.02%</b>	2.36E-13***
Implementation	<b>1.83%</b>	1.74%	7.17E-07***
International Cooperation	1.17%	1.13%	9.35E-04
Children	1.47%	1.56%	8.81E-03
Political Prisoners	1.53%	1.49%	4.50E-01
Animal Welfare	1.48%	1.60%	1.22E-02
Environment	0.98%	0.88%	1.06E-03
Sanctions	0.83%	0.82%	7.30E-01
Nuclear	0.79%	0.78%	7.00E-01
EU Meetings	1.42%	1.38%	7.76E-02
EU Strategies	1.91%	<b>2.19%</b>	2.36E-37***
Conservation	<b>1.62%</b>	1.11%	2.84E-29***
Mutual Recognition	0.81%	0.84%	7.66E-02
Media	<b>1.27%</b>	1.16%	7.87E-23***
Regulation	1.58%	<b>1.72%</b>	1.38E-18***
Borders	0.91%	<b>1.14%</b>	2.53E-18***
Digital	1.73%	1.85%	4.64E-03
Land Transport	1.43%	1.45%	7.30E-01
Chemical Safety	1.79%	1.71%	9.87E-02
Language	1.03%	1.00%	2.42E-01
Budget	2.58%	2.50%	4.83E-02
Infrastructure	1.52%	1.53%	6.88E-01
Free Movement	1.37%	<b>1.49%</b>	4.46E-09***
EU Treaties	2.09%	2.13%	1.40E-01
Parliamentary Initiatives	1.68%	<b>1.80%</b>	3.08E-11***
Eastern Neighborhood	1.04%	<b>1.78%</b>	2.12E-68***
Imports / Exports	1.60%	<b>1.88%</b>	3.54E-14***
Crime	<b>1.47%</b>	1.29%	1.05E-07***
Investigations	<b>1.67%</b>	1.54%	3.15E-11***

\*  $p < 7.25e-4$ , \*\*  $p < 1.45e-4$ , \*\*\*  $p < 1.45e-5$ . Paired T-tests were used to estimate models.

For ease of interpretation, when a difference is significant, the side with the larger share of questions is bolded.

Columns may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

To illustrate one topic in the table, 1.77% of total questions submitted by Western MEPs have been assigned to the “Violations of EU Law” topic, while 1.69% of questions submitted by Post-Socialist MEPs have. Table 3.3 shows that the differences between quite a few topics are statistically significant, and some highly so. For example, Post-Socialist MEPs are significantly more likely to ask questions about Russia and Eastern neighbors, about energy, and about agriculture. Western MEPs are significantly more likely to ask questions about air transportation, Turkey, and banking. Some of the differences are unsurprising – post-Socialist MEPs, were much more likely to ask questions about borders, which we might expect given the vehemence of anti-migrant position of some Eastern member states. Western MEPs are more likely to ask questions about environmental conservation, which we would expect given general policy differences and the higher proportion of Green Party MEPs coming from older member states.

While the differences in percentages in Table 3.3 are small, given the size of the dataset, the effect is still in many cases a substantial difference of several hundred questions. We can see that questions comparing member states to one another make up the largest share of questions for both post-Socialist and Western MEPs. The differences become starker in more substantive policy domains, however. While questions about agriculture make up 1.81% of total questions submitted by post-Socialist MEPs, they make up only 1.29% of Western MEP questions. And there are clear and statistically significant distinctions in foreign policy priorities between the regions: post-Socialist MEPs ask considerably more questions about Russia than the Middle East, while we can see that Western MEPs ask a greater share of questions about Turkey than about Russia, and ask more questions about the Middle East than do post-Socialist MEPs.

Not all topics are different – we can see that for a large number of topics, MEPs from post-Socialist and Western countries ask questions at roughly the same rate. Nevertheless, these significance tests and topic proportions here strongly suggest that there are some systematic differences with how MEPs from post-Socialist and Western backgrounds use submitted questions for oversight purposes. While they share some key areas of focus, each group of MEPs also shows different broad policy concerns, both in terms of content and proportionality. And while the percentages do not differ by orders of magnitude, the size of the corpus means that the substantive differences in numbers of question could still tangibly impact oversight capacity. These show considerable evidence for Hypothesis 1, that there are substantive differences regional differences between MEPs in their oversight activities at the European Parliament.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 discuss how variability in national characteristics and national policies might influence oversight questions. These are tested by illustrative corollaries, which provide examples of ways we might expect national characteristics and policies to affect MEP behavior. As these are time invariant characteristics, national fixed effects are not possible, and random effects are used so that we can assess the impact of time invariant characteristics on our models of interest. In these models the number of MEPs is included as a control for the volume of questions while also proxying the effect of national population.

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 show the findings for the corollaries about fixed national characteristics. Corollaries 2A and 2B examine how fixed national characteristics might impact the number of questions that MEPs asked about Russia and the Eastern neighborhood of the EU. 2A posited that the post-Socialist countries generally would ask more questions, while 2B hypothesized that the specific geographic distance from Moscow might more accurately predict.

We can see that distance the national capital to Moscow is predictive of the number of questions about the Eastern Neighborhood, albeit significant only at a .05 level. A dummy variable measuring post-Socialist status in a given year is not significant in any configuration.

When yearly fixed effects are included, we see a major boost in questions between 2013-2015 at the height of the Ukraine crisis; however, the significance of proximity to Russia remains. This suggests that, even with the differences we see between Western and Post-Socialist countries in Table 3.3, specific national characteristics might give clearer pictures of oversight, and that there are important differences within the post-Socialist bloc.

**Table 3.4.** Predictors of Questions about the Eastern Neighborhood.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Distance from Moscow	0.00178* (0.000838)		0.00225* (0.000997)	0.00219* (0.00101)
Number of MEPs	0.136*** (0.0250)	0.144*** (0.0275)	0.140*** (0.0255)	0.142*** (0.0259)
Post-Socialist		-0.537 (1.423)	1.361 (1.564)	1.186 (1.589)
Year=2004				0 (.)
Year=2005				1.520 (2.444)
Year=2006				1.480 (2.444)
Year=2007				2.617 (2.401)
Year=2008				3.950 (2.401)
Year=2009				0.543 (2.401)
Year=2010				3.616 (2.401)
Year=2011				3.246 (2.401)
Year=2012				2.410 (2.401)
Year=2013				8.963*** (2.382)
Year=2014				5.928* (2.382)
Year=2015				10.86*** (2.382)
Year=2016				1.897 (2.382)
Year=2017				2.040 (2.382)
Year=2018				1.504 (2.382)
Year=2019				-0.639 (2.382)
Constant	-2.047 (1.742)	1.406 (1.242)	-3.592 (2.489)	-6.653* (3.029)
Observations	433	433	433	433

Standard errors in parentheses. OLS was used to estimate models.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Corollaries 2C and 2D examine how length of coastline, another fixed geographic characteristic, might impact the number of questions that MEPs asked about fisheries and maritime policy. We would predict that increased coastline length would be a reasonable proxy for the importance of these topics for MEPs representing different nations. Table 3.5 below shows the findings.

Models 5 and 6 examine the “Fisheries” topic, while models 7 and 8 examine the ‘Maritime’ topic. We can see that in both cases the length of a country’s coastline is predictive of the number of questions about these topics, at the .01 and .001 levels respectively. The inclusion of yearly fixed effects in Models 6 and 8 does not impact the significance of coastline length. Tables 3.4 and 3.5 provide some illustrative evidence of the potential impact of fixed national characteristics on the number of oversight questions at the European level.

**Table 3.5.** Predictors of Questions about Fisheries and Maritime Policy.

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Coastline length	0.00118** (0.000412)	0.00117** (0.000428)	0.000350*** (0.0000697)	0.000348*** (0.0000699)
Number of MEPs	0.0852 (0.0595)	0.0908 (0.0622)	0.0119 (0.0102)	0.0139 (0.0103)
Year=2004		0 (.)		0 (.)
Year=2005		0.840 (1.702)		0.320 (0.650)
Year=2006		1.720 (1.702)		0.600 (0.650)
Year=2007		2.284 (1.672)		0.727 (0.639)
Year=2008		3.396* (1.672)		1.541* (0.639)
Year=2009		1.470 (1.672)		0.430 (0.639)
Year=2010		5.005** (1.676)		4.307** (0.639)
Year=2011		5.597*** (1.676)		2.789*** (0.639)
Year=2012		4.944** (1.674)		1.631* (0.639)
Year=2013		4.053* (1.662)		2.055** (0.634)
Year=2014		3.232 (1.662)		1.984** (0.634)
Year=2015		5.531*** (1.663)		1.884** (0.634)
Year=2016		1.281 (1.663)		0.741 (0.634)
Year=2017		0.816 (1.663)		0.705 (0.634)
Year=2018		1.102 (1.663)		0.955 (0.634)
Year=2019		-3.327* (1.663)		-0.0446 (0.634)
Constant	1.508 (2.100)	-1.008 (2.512)	0.607 (0.356)	-0.743 (0.577)
Observations	433	433	433	433

Standard errors in parentheses. OLS was used to estimate models.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Hypothesis 3 looks the importance of policy differences to explain national variation. This was operationalized under two sets of corollaries, which are each texted in panel regressions including country fixed effects. Corollaries 3A and 3B examine the impact of national GDP growth rates on the number of questions asked by MEPs. Data for these questions includes the years 2009-2019, as annual GDP growth rates were unavailable for earlier years. Table 3.6 shows the results; Models 9 and 10 specifically examine the impact on the number of questions about the 'Economic conditions' topic. Models 11 and 12 examine the impact on the number of questions in the entire Economic cluster, as described in Table 3.2.

As expected, GDP growth rate is a significant predictor of questions about economic conditions. The negative sign here means that the number of questions declines for countries with higher growth rates; thereby, conversely, countries with lower growth rates ask more questions. This is significant at the .01 level without the additional inclusion of yearly fixed effects, and at the .001 level when yearly controls are included.

**Table 3.6.** Predictors of questions about economic topics.

	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
GDP Growth Rate	-0.537** (0.196)	-0.973*** (0.270)	-1.409 (0.774)	-3.063** (0.991)
Year=2009		0 (.)		0 (.)
Year=2010		14.27*** (3.487)		50.85*** (12.80)
Year=2011		11.24** (3.489)		54.89*** (12.81)
Year=2012		12.73*** (3.227)		51.04*** (11.84)
Year=2013		15.31*** (3.297)		72.22*** (12.10)
Year=2014		9.767** (3.542)		41.90** (13.00)
Year=2015		15.22*** (3.777)		69.40*** (13.86)
Year=2016		9.254* (3.604)		39.81** (13.23)
Year=2017		8.559* (3.792)		33.60* (13.92)
Year=2018		6.805 (3.703)		26.48 (13.59)
Year=2019		4.740 (3.619)		1.245 (13.28)
Constant	7.798*** (0.725)	-1.325 (2.511)	55.21*** (2.859)	17.69 (9.215)
Observations	304	304	304	304

Standard errors in parentheses. OLS was used to estimate models.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The relationship between the GDP growth rate and the number of questions about the entire economic cluster of topics is more ambiguous. Without the inclusion of yearly fixed effects (Model 11), there is no statistically significant effect. However, with the inclusion of yearly fixed effects (Model 12), it is significant at the .01 level. Given the strong temporal correlations evident in the finding – unsurprising given the nature of the economic cycle – we have a strong prior for the inclusion of yearly fixed effects on top of national fixed effects, so there is at least some reasonable evidence for an association between GDP growth rate and the number of questions about all economic topics.

These corollary tests provide some quick illustrations of potential operationalizations of the ways that national background might impact the ways that MEPs conduct oversight. These tests aggregate all single-author MEP questions from a given year, classifying them by most associated topic. The findings suggest that there are some clear, relevant associations between national policies and characteristics and the types of oversight questions that MEPs ask. These findings are in line with the elite interviews conducted at the outset of this project. These corollary tests are only loose proxies for Hypotheses 2 and 3, but they provide some preliminary



evidence of the importance of taking national background of MEPs seriously, even in light of the considerable literature on the importance of party politics at the European Parliament.

Having used these more general hypotheses to as a proof of concept, we turn now to discussing a topic directly related to democratic backsliding. Table 3.7 below shows the associations between the Corruption Perception Index (a score of 100 being the least corrupt, a score of 1 being the most corrupt) and questions asked about public procurement (Models 13 and 14) and investigations (Models 15 and 16).

**Table 3.7.** Predictors of questions about Procurement and Investigations.

	Model 13	Model 14	Model 15	Model 16
Corruption Perception Index	-0.231* (0.0948)	-0.267** (0.0918)	-0.147* (0.0690)	-0.158* (0.0651)
Year=2012		0 (.)		0 (.)
Year=2013		0.949 (0.823)		1.223* (0.583)
Year=2014		0.947 (0.830)		0.441 (0.588)
Year=2015		2.416** (0.854)		1.726** (0.605)
Year=2016		0.0518 (0.835)		0.681 (0.591)
Year=2017		-0.582 (0.836)		-0.742 (0.592)
Year=2018		-0.608 (0.836)		-0.915 (0.592)
Year=2019		-2.453** (0.831)		-1.685** (0.589)
Constant	18.02** (6.106)	20.22*** (5.830)	11.77** (4.445)	12.39** (4.130)
Observations	223	223	223	223

Standard errors in parentheses. OLS was used to estimate models.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The negative coefficient here shows that countries with higher CPI scores – which indicate fewer perceptions of corruption – ask fewer questions about both public procurement and investigations. Therefore, we should expect more corrupt countries (with lower CPI scores) to ask more questions about both. For each model, this measure is significant at the .01 level, with or without the inclusion of yearly fixed effects. Data include the years 2012–2019, as CPI measures prior to 2012 used a different formula and are not directly comparable. These findings are in line with previous research emphasizing the ways that opposition parties use parliamentary oversight in the European Parliament; it stands to reason that the concentrated questions about public procurement in countries associated with more corruption are unlikely to come from government-affiliated MEPs.

To examine how these questions address issues of backsliding, we can analyze the content of questions submitted on these two topics by Hungarian MEPs, given that Hungary is where backsliding has progressed the furthest in the EU. Between 2012 and 2019, Hungarian MEPs asked 26 questions that were most associated with the procurement topic. Of these, 25/26 (96.2%) were asked by opposition MEPs. The single question asked by a Fidesz MEP dealt with the slowness of official translation of documents into the Hungarian language.<sup>36</sup> Many

<sup>36</sup> E-003265/2012

opposition questions, meanwhile, clearly addressed backsliding and were primarily concentrated in the 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament, which was after Fidesz's 2014 reelection.<sup>37</sup> For example, Demokratikus Koalíció (DK) MEP Péter Niedermüller in a 2015 question directly speculated that “the government's purpose in restricting the freedom of information could be to cover up cases of corruption.”<sup>38</sup> In a subsequent question, Niedermüller draws on external reporting about fraud in procurement, noting to the Commission:

At the same time, according to OLAF's report for 2014, 28 procedures were carried out in Hungary, but the authorities did not indicate a single one of them to be well-founded. This makes it clear that the Commission's current monitoring systems are not capable of guaranteeing the regularity of the expenditure of EU funds in cases where a Member State's authorities do not cooperate in the investigation of corruption cases.<sup>39</sup>

Another opposition MEP, Csaba Molnár, also of DK, calls attention to the misuse of EU funds as well: “Meanwhile, citing an economic miracle, Viktor Orbán has envisaged 4% to 4.5% economic growth and uses EU funds not for public purposes, but for satisfying the interests of his own oligarchs.”<sup>40</sup>

Similar examples can be seen in the Investigations topic. Molnár draws attention to the directing of EU funding to Fidesz allies:

In 2014 the Ministry of Human Resources studied the programme and uncovered instances of serious abuse: the HUF 30 million feasibility study was produced in less than three weeks and HUF 310 million was spent on advertising the programme, which most Hungarians have never heard of. According to media reports, the advertising expenditure, construction of the portal linked to the programme and the studies were all secured by people close to the governing parties.<sup>41</sup>

Benedek Javór of Párbeszéd similarly in 2014 tried to draw attention to both public and media concerns about the misuse of EU funding, noting “members of the public have serious doubts as to whether EU support is being put to the right use” and “[i]n the press, specific suspicions have been expressed concerning abuses linked to government circles.”<sup>42</sup> In 2018, Molnár escalated, arguing that “Hungary's investigative bodies simply make a joke out of the action taken against corruption.”<sup>43</sup> While on the whole there were marginally more Fidesz questions in this group (2/19, or 10.5%), there was again a significant tilt toward opposition parties. This lends evidence to those scholars who have suggested that opposition status domestically dictates how MEPs use the parliamentary question procedure (Proksch and Slapin 2010; Font and Pérez Durán 2016).

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<sup>37</sup> This is not to suggest that either all opposition questions on this topic were about backsliding, or that all backsliding questions would fall in these two topics; unfortunately, the topic model did not cleanly output a thematic topic on democratic backsliding, perhaps because questions on the topic might be more limited in many member states with more established democratic practice.

<sup>38</sup> E-011422/2015

<sup>39</sup> E-001698/2016

<sup>40</sup> E-002844/2018

<sup>41</sup> E-003296/2016

<sup>42</sup> E-006302/2014

<sup>43</sup> E-000303/2018

This analysis shows a mixed effect for European Parliament on countries undergoing democratic decline in the European Union. On the one hand, MEPs are clearly comfortable using their voice at the European level to draw attention to issues of democratic backsliding. While this may not be covered in the domestic media, clearly they do not fear reprisals and call attention to this issue at the European level. On the other hand, the European Union has, at least at the time of writing, yet to do anything of substance with this information to try to preserve democracy in backsliding countries like Hungary. This inaction persists despite fairly aggressive tactics by the Parliament to try to pursue an EU-level response, including suing the Commission at the European Court of Justice for their refusal to implement rule of law conditionality (Bayer 2021). As such, the European Union can primarily be seen to provide an outlet for opposition parties to point out the issue of democratic backsliding, but to provide limited substance in actually addressing it. Politicians clearly use the parliamentary question procedure as a whole for national issues, but when those issues intersect with EU fundamental values, they do not necessarily bring about effective outcomes.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

Quantitative text analysis can give us further insight into the ways that Members of the European Parliament behave as legislators as well as the ways that their behavior can impact broader processes of European integration. The existing literature on parliamentary behavior is primarily based on voting and broadly argues that party politics supersede nationality when explaining MEP voting outcomes. This emphasis on party politics is shared by the existing literature on parliamentary questions, which finds that domestic political opposition status and being on the outside of the Europhilic/Euroskeptic cleavage explains variation in the use of parliamentary questions.

While not intending to suggest that party politics are insignificant, this paper, however, argues that nationality plays an important understudied role in oversight in the world's most institutionalized transnational parliament. By focusing on one institutional pathway – parliamentary questions – this project assesses both regional variation (between MEPs from post-Socialist states and MEPs from West European backgrounds) and national variation (through panel analysis of questions asked at the country-year level) in European oversight. Elite interviews conducted with both Members of the European Parliament and senior Commission officials also suggests that national background plays a clear role in the use of parliamentary questions by some MEPs. Structural topic models of the question texts submitted by MEPs preliminarily show some key differences and similarities in areas of focus between MEPs of different backgrounds, suggesting that regional backgrounds can indeed influence the types of concerns addressed through the use of European-level oversight. The preliminary findings suggest that, zeroing in further, there is important national variation in topics as well. For example, a post-socialist dummy variable does not predict a higher number of total questions about the Eastern neighborhood; however, distance between one's national capital and Moscow does. These findings suggest that although MEPs may vote with their party, they appear to utilize the parliamentary question process to address national and regional concerns. From the perspective of seeing the European Parliament as a transnational body, one motivated by party politics above other factors, the continued ways that MEPs are motivated by national concerns – both as part of governing coalitions and as part of the opposition – suggests that this tool might be too beholden to national politics. Viewing all European-level issues through national lenses could lead to inadequate oversight on truly supranational issues and exacerbate a lack of

solidarity among member states, an issue that has been keenly felt through the crises facing the EU during the past fifteen years. Further study is needed to consider the important ways that national background can influence European oversight.

I analyze one specific use of the parliamentary question process in more detail: attempts by opposition-affiliated Hungarian MEPs to use the parliamentary question process to draw attention to democratic backsliding at home. I show that there is a correlation between countries' corruption perception index scores and the number of questions that MEPs from that country ask about public procurement and investigations, two topics present in the model. Qualitative analysis of Hungarian MEP questions on this topic shows that there are clear attempts to both draw public attention to misuse of EU funds in Hungary, which Kelemen (2020), among others, has argued is a key factor in maintaining Fidesz's control of power. Given that questions are addressed to the European Commission, and the European Commission needs to respond, the questions also function to try to put backsliding as an issue on the Commission's agenda. While at face value this seems to offer opposition politicians an outlet to curtail democratic backsliding in Hungary, the lack of a substantive response to Hungarian backsliding from the European Union suggests that this outlet cannot have a significant impact on democracy preservation. Moreover, given the fundamental challenge toward the integration process that democratic backsliding represents, we must be concerned about the ways that MEPs representing parties that participate in democratic backsliding might result in the perversion of oversight processes at the European Union to undergird their continued national control.

This paper should only be considered the starting point for research on regional and national variation in oversight at the European Parliament. Future research could verify these results using natural language processing (NLP) to incorporate sentence structure and other semantic factors, not just word meaning. Future research can also explore the intersection of regional variation with party variation, to analyze how the interaction between party politics and regional influence affects MEP oversight behavior and outcomes.

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## Appendix A. Variable definitions (Chapter 1).

The dichotomous dependent variable *Fidesz Candidate* indicates that an officially Fidesz-affiliated candidate was one of any number of candidates in a municipal mayoral election. The dichotomous dependent variable *Fidesz Winner* indicates that an officially Fidesz-affiliated candidate won the mayoral election; 0 indicates that an otherwise-affiliated (or unaffiliated) candidate won. This variable does not capture those cases in which independent candidates likely aligned with Fidesz won the election, so may understate the effect. This variable is derived from electoral data that come directly from the local election section of the Hungarian National Election Office (Nemzeti Választási Iroda n.d.). This includes data on candidates, results, eligible voters, and turnout for each included municipality-year.

The main independent variables of interest are defined below, but alternative specifications for the variables are available in the appendices. *EU Grant Amount* calculates the total value of EU Structural Fund grants issued to Hungarian municipalities in a three-year electoral cycle (for example, 2004-2006), measured in thousands of Hungarian Forint. Data for these variables come from the database of EU project funding maintained by the Hungarian national government (Magyarország Kormánya n.d.). An alternative specification of this variable (Appendix J), using the number of grants issued instead of the total value of grants, does not change the results. Additional specifications of each were tested that focused only on grants issued in a single year instead of a cycle but did not change the results.<sup>44</sup>

*Higher Tier City* is a dummy variable measuring city tier. Cities are classified categorically with seven options: (1) village, (2) city, (3) district capital, (4) city with county rights, (5) city with county rights that is also a county capital, (6) electoral district, and (7) capital city. Electoral districts apply only to the 23 districts of Budapest, while Budapest itself is the only capital city. Higher Tier City is coded as 1 to indicate the city is a district capital, city with county rights, or city with county rights that is a county capital, or 0, indicating that has no special political status or is a district within Budapest. These city classifications are based on the 2013 territorial reorganization in Hungary, which introduced the *járás* as a county-level unit. Two alternative specifications of this variable are tested in the appendices. Appendix F considers if a city was the seat of a subregion (*kistérség*) prior to the reorganization and *járás* in the 2014 election.<sup>45</sup> Appendix I uses a categorical specification of the variable.

*Population* (logged here) is the Hungarian Central Statistics Office's (KSH) measurement of annual municipal population. Several control variables are included as well. Data for demographics and various public goods control variables are collected from the Regional Statistics Dissemination Database from the KSH, which provides time series data at the settlement level (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal n.d.). *Library books per capita* is included as a control for local public goods provision, derived from the number of library books per official resident in the KSH population data, as local public goods provision is often cited as a clientelistic voting motive in local elections (Wantchekon 2003). *Unemployment*, though associated with ambiguous findings, is also considered an important control for local election analysis (Mařkarinec and Klimovský 2016). Unemployment rates are not directly calculated by the KSH so are calculated by dividing the number of registered job seekers by the total municipal

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<sup>44</sup> Project data is current as of June 11, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> There is a great deal of overlap between the capitals of subregions and districts, though some cities did lose/gain capital status at the subregional tier of government. A more complete account of the reorganization (in Hungarian) can be found in Faluvégi (2012).

population. This undercounts unemployment, as it will miss any unemployed citizens who are not registered with local authorities.

***Opposition Incumbent*** captures if an incumbent mayor, not affiliated with the Fidesz party in the election in question, is running in the mayoral election. An interaction variable between an individual incumbent candidate and Fidesz being the incumbent party results in an overfit model and cannot be included here. Instead, the joint effects of party and incumbency are captured by the variable ***Opposition Incumbent***. This is preferable for two reasons. First, there are very few instances in the dataset of Fidesz deciding not to field a candidate when they are the incumbent party. Further, incorporating Fidesz incumbency as a control variable (as would be the case in this particular interaction) would threaten to induce a particular form of post-treatment bias. A central theoretical prediction of this paper posits that Fidesz should target higher-tier cities and therefore win more frequently in those cities. Controlling for Fidesz incumbency would therefore involve controlling for an outcome of the treatment rather than a potential *pre-treatment* confounder.

***Number of Candidates*** states the number of total candidates that ran in an election. If an election was uncontested, this value is 1; the highest value present in the dataset is 9. Conventional wisdom indicates that an ends-against-the-center coalition in Hungary might help to unseat Fidesz. Discussion of such a strategy grew after opposition parties banded together to support an independent candidate who won an upset victory in the special mayoral by-election in the city of Hódmezővásárhely six weeks prior to the April 2018 national elections, despite the city's traditional lean toward Fidesz.<sup>46</sup> We would assume Fidesz would be less likely to win elections with fewer candidates, with the implication being that the opposition might coalesce around a compromise candidate.

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<sup>46</sup> Fidesz won the mayoral election in Hódmezővásárhely in each election in the dataset.

## Appendix B. Sensitivity Tests (Chapter 1).

The following sensitivity tests are run on the baseline Models 2 and 6. As the dependent variable is dichotomous, this limits the number of other potentially viable models. Results are shown for a random effects model without yearly fixed effects and a random effects model with both yearly fixed effects and clustering robust standard errors at the city level.

For both models, coefficients and standard errors are nearly identical. Clustered standard errors are not used in the main model because the dataset can be considered a census of the towns in Hungary, and there should not be standard error associated with sampling. Indeed, we see with the robust cluster error model that standard errors actually marginally increase, especially in the contestation models. There are two main differences of note. First, unemployment is significant in the random effects contestation model that omits yearly fixed effects – and this is something we would very much expect to vary consistently across the country over time, given the Eurocrisis. Second, the control variable library books per capita become significant at the .01 level rather than .05 level in the victory model that includes clustered standard errors.

**Table B.1.** Sensitivity Analysis for Contestation Models.

	<i>Model 2 (baseline)</i>	<i>Random Effects Model</i>	<i>Random Effects with Robust Cluster Error</i>
Population	2.845*** (0.487)	2.960*** (0.483)	2.845*** (0.524)
Higher Tier City	0.217 (0.282)	0.166 (0.280)	0.217 (0.295)
Opposition Incumbent	-2.324*** (0.237)	-2.168*** (0.230)	-2.324*** (0.260)
Library Books per Capita	0.0380 (0.0422)	0.0405 (0.0425)	0.0380 (0.0417)
Unemployment	2.767 (4.007)	12.09*** (3.498)	2.767 (4.075)
Number of Candidates	-0.000818 (0.0860)	0.0502 (0.0845)	-0.000818 (0.0903)
EU Grant Value	-5.96e-07 (1.11e-6)	-8.18e-7 (9.25e-7)	-5.96e-7 (1.02e-6)
Year=2014	-0.674* (0.270)		-0.674* (0.285)
Year=2019	-1.284*** (0.310)		-1.284*** (0.306)
Constant	-7.748*** (1.905)	-9.560*** (1.870)	-7.748*** (2.103)
Observations	1034	1034	1034

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table B.2.** Sensitivity Analysis for Victory Models.

	<i>Model 6 (baseline)</i>	<i>Random Effects Model</i>	<i>Random Effects with Robust Cluster Error</i>
Population	-0.394 (0.379)	-0.295 (0.369)	-0.394 (0.367)
Higher Tier City	1.174*** (0.290)	1.121*** (0.283)	1.174*** (0.298)
Opposition Incumbent	-1.687*** (0.220)	-1.601*** (0.214)	-1.687*** (0.256)
Library Books per Capita	-0.0977* (0.0388)	-0.0940* (0.0379)	-0.0977** (0.0354)
Unemployment	-1.524 (3.934)	2.782 (3.267)	-1.524 (4.132)
Number of Candidates	-0.225** (0.0768)	-0.173* (0.0733)	-0.225** (0.0775)
EU Grant Value	-3.41e-11 (4.08e-07)	-1.27e-07 (4.06e-07)	-3.41e-11 (3.47e-07)
Year=2014	0.0415 (0.236)		0.0415 (0.244)
Year=2019	-0.672* (0.275)		-0.672* (0.272)
Constant	3.759* (1.570)	2.776(1.458)	3.759* (1.509)
Observations	817	817	817

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ **Appendix C. Multicollinearity Tests vs. Population**

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is a common measure of multicollinearity, measured by  $1/(1-R^2)$ . The soft test for multicollinearity indicates that a VIF over 10 is potentially problematic, while the stricter test is a VIF above 2.50, which corresponds to an  $R^2$  measure of .60. The VIF indicates that multicollinearity is only a potential concern for the number of grants variable, but only for the harder test. The condition number is an alternative measure of multicollinearity, based on the square root of the largest eigenvalue divided by the smallest eigenvalue. A condition number above 15.0 is indicative of multicollinearity. All four variables tested here are well below the 15.0 threshold.

**Table C.1.** VIF Measures for Variables.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>VIF</b>	<b>R-Squared</b>	<b>Condition Number</b>
<i>City Type</i>	1.33	.249	5.7624
<i>Grant Value</i>	4.62	.784	4.3897
<i>Grant Number</i>	1.63	.386	2.4347
<i>Number of Candidates</i>	1.02	.024	5.4057



## Appendix D. Regression Coefficients

The main text shows the marginal effects for each included variable in the models. Standard regression coefficient tables are shown here.

**Table D.1.** Likelihood of Fidesz contesting.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model D1</i>	<i>Model D2</i>	<i>Model D3</i>	<i>Model D4</i>
Population	3.048*** (0.324)	2.845*** (0.487)	1.676** (0.570)	-0.668 (1.508)
Higher Tier City	0.560* (0.220)	0.217 (0.282)	0.453 (0.404)	0.388 (0.772)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.866*** (0.204)	-2.324*** (0.237)	-1.840*** (0.427)	-2.440*** (0.622)
Library Books per Capita	0.0217 (0.0289)	0.0380 (0.0422)	0.0353 (0.0732)	0.249 (0.174)
Unemployment Rate	0.218 (3.371)	2.767 (4.007)	2.209 (8.524)	-15.01 (14.09)
Number of Candidates	0.0994 (0.0606)	-0.000818 (0.0860)	0.349** (0.126)	0.639* (0.263)
Year=2006	2.481*** (0.262)		2.373*** (0.502)	
Year=2010	4.241*** (0.323)		4.153*** (0.716)	
Year=2014	3.480*** (0.274)	-0.674* (0.270)	3.231*** (0.590)	-1.272 (0.796)
Year=2019	2.836*** (0.250)	-1.284*** (0.310)	2.135*** (0.438)	-2.417** (0.914)
Grants per Cycle		-5.96e-07 (1.11e-06)		1.95e-07 (1.04e-06)
Constant	-13.09*** (1.346)	-7.748*** (1.905)	-7.716** (2.580)	5.983 (6.690)
Observations	1835	1034	824	425

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table D.2.** Likelihood of Fidesz victory.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model D5</i>	<i>Model D6</i>	<i>Model D7</i>	<i>Model D8</i>
Population	-0.429 (0.259)	-0.394 (0.379)	-0.658 (0.429)	-0.395 (0.688)
Higher Tier City	1.298*** (0.237)	1.174*** (0.290)	1.554*** (0.398)	1.499** (0.518)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.519*** (0.202)	-1.687*** (0.220)	-1.973*** (0.322)	-2.530*** (0.338)
Library Books per Capita	-0.0683* (0.0319)	-0.0977* (0.0388)	-0.0398 (0.0527)	-0.103 (0.0689)
Unemployment Rate	-7.344 (3.885)	-1.524 (3.934)	-20.85** (7.491)	-11.70 (7.585)
Number of Candidates	-0.156* (0.0634)	-0.225** (0.0768)	0.0986 (0.0967)	0.0419 (0.123)
Year=2006	2.340*** (0.290)		3.240*** (0.401)	
Year=2010	2.866*** (0.297)		4.108*** (0.463)	
Year=2014	2.733*** (0.272)	0.0415 (0.236)	2.912*** (0.370)	-0.919* (0.395)
Year=2019	1.755*** (0.257)	-0.672* (0.275)	1.843*** (0.335)	-1.501** (0.458)
Grants per Cycle		-3.41e-11 (4.08e-07)		-1.18e-7 (4.91e-07)
Constant	1.092 (1.132)	3.759* (1.570)	0.995 <sub>[SEP]</sub> (1.966)	3.756 <sub>[SEP]</sub> (2.903)
Observations	1286	817	731	397

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Appendix E. Fidesz's National Vote Share

*Fidesz National Vote Share* measures Fidesz's electoral performance in the previous national election within a particular municipality, collected by aggregating data from individual polling places. Unsurprisingly, Fidesz receiving a higher share of the vote in the previous national election within a municipality increased the likelihood of the party winning the mayoral election. The variable has a very large coefficient and is generally highly significant. It does not affect the significance of our independent variables, but it does reduce the importance of some of the control variables, like number of candidates or library books per capita, in some specifications of the victory models. It is less relevant for Fidesz's decision to contest an election, as shown by Table E1.

**Table E.1.** Likelihood of Fidesz contesting.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model E1</i>	<i>Model E2</i>	<i>Model E3</i>	<i>Model E4</i>
Population	3.379*** (0.351)	2.861*** (0.511)	1.968** (0.620)	0.631 <sup>[SEP]</sup> (1.634)
Higher Tier City	0.483* (0.222)	0.218 (0.284)	0.301 (0.419)	0.464 (0.789)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.825*** (0.205)	-2.322*** (0.239)	-1.774*** (0.430)	-2.525*** (0.660)
Library Books per Capita	0.0253 (0.0291)	0.0384 (0.0424)	0.0328 (0.0736)	0.251 (0.178)
Unemployment Rate	1.046 (3.405)	2.785 (4.016)	4.902 (8.823)	-15.55 (14.20)
Number of Candidates	0.118 (0.0614)	0.000286 (0.0872)	0.363** (0.127)	0.636* (0.264)
National Fidesz Vote	3.469** (1.220)	0.139 (1.618)	3.135 <sup>[SEP]</sup> (2.369)	-2.104 (4.868)
Year=2006	2.447*** (0.264)		2.304*** (0.507)	
Year=2010	3.854*** (0.345)		3.734*** (0.776)	
Year=2014	3.407*** (0.275)	-0.662* (0.304)	3.101*** (0.596)	-1.446 (0.910)
Year=2019	2.613*** (0.260)	-1.277*** (0.318)	1.966*** (0.455)	-2.533* (0.988)
EU Grant Value		-6.63e-07 (1.26e-06)		-3.69e-07 (1.59e-06)
Constant	-15.97*** (1.731)	-7.889** (2.451)	-10.25** (3.262)	6.965 (8.507)
Observations	1834	1033	823	424

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table E.2.** Likelihood of Fidesz victory.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model E5</i>	<i>Model E6</i>	<i>Model E7</i>	<i>Model E8</i>
Population	0.577* (0.271)	-0.0316 (0.413)	0.705 (0.461)	-0.0611 (0.839)
Higher Tier City	1.032** (0.218)	1.075*** (0.276)	1.005** (0.367)	1.391** (0.526)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.455*** (0.202)	-1.591*** (0.217)	-1.813*** (0.325)	-2.299*** (0.360)
Library Books per Capita	-0.0558 (0.0300)	-0.0859* (0.0377)	-0.0462 (0.0500)	-0.0865 (0.0724)
Unemployment Rate	-4.912 (3.676)	-0.393 (3.838)	-10.14 (7.176)	-8.680 (7.817)
Number of Candidates	-0.104 (0.0633)	-0.166* (0.0768)	0.125 (0.0980)	0.0918 (0.131)
National Fidesz Vote	11.49** (1.467)	7.067*** (1.639)	16.02** (2.626)	8.159* (3.214)
Year=2006	2.234*** (0.294)		3.103*** (0.416)	
Year=2010	1.655*** (0.315)		2.208*** (0.475)	
Year=2014	2.548*** (0.272)	0.657* (0.284)	2.558*** (0.368)	-0.193 (0.473)
Year=2019	1.240** (0.261)	-0.271 (0.288)	1.259*** (0.342)	-0.963 (0.494)
EU Grant Value		8.55e-07 (8.59e-07)		5.86e-07 (1.10e-06)
Constant	-8.177*** (1.588)	-1.856 (2.186)	-11.55*** (2.818)	-2.341 (4.515)
Observations	1285	816	730	396

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Appendix F. County Seat at Time of Election

Models run here account for the territorial reorganization in Hungary in 2013, which replaced *kistérség* with *járás* as the county-level unit in the country. As such, there is some variation in county capitals in the 2002-2010 elections and in the 2014 and 2019 election. The findings for this specification are similar for the contestation model and slightly weaker for the victory models: a smaller coefficient size and significant at the .01 rather than .001 level. This is likely a product of the fact that the 2013 territorial reorganization was endogenous to Fidesz success, and it is likely that Fidesz removed capital status from cities it would be less competitive in and rewarded cities that it believed it could be successful in. The specific consequences of this reorganization are an avenue worth pursuing in future research. Appendix G lists the municipalities promoted to district capital status.

**Table F.1.** Likelihood of Fidesz contesting.

	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model F2</i>
Population	2.845*** (0.487)	2.818*** (0.476)
Higher Tier City	0.217 (0.282)	
Subnational Seat at Election		0.275 (0.270)
Opposition Incumbent	-2.324*** (0.237)	-2.320*** (0.237)
Library Books per Capita	0.0380 (0.0422)	0.0354 (0.0416)
Unemployment	2.767 (4.007)	2.795 (3.996)
Number of Candidates	-0.000818 (0.0860)	-0.0000458 (0.0860)
EU Grant Value	-5.96e-07 (1.11e-06)	-6.15e-07 (1.08e-06)
Year=2014	-0.674* (0.270)	-0.666* (0.270)
Year=2019	-1.284*** (0.310)	-1.276*** (0.309)
Constant	-7.748*** (1.905)	-7.664*** (1.861)
Observations	1034	1034

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table F.2.** Likelihood of Fidesz victory.

	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model F6</i>
Population	-0.394 (0.379)	0.0780 (0.363)
Higher Tier City	1.174*** (0.290)	
Subnational Seat at Election		0.646** (0.249)
Opposition Incumbent	-1.687*** (0.220)	-1.744*** (0.214)
Library Books per Capita	-0.0977* (0.0388)	-0.0676 (0.0370)
Unemployment	-1.524 (3.934)	0.170 (3.792)
Number of Candidates	-0.225** (0.0768)	-0.239** (0.0755)
EU Grant Value	-3.41e-11 (4.08e-07)	-1.94e-07 (3.96e-07)
Year=2014	0.0415 (0.236)	0.0819 (0.233)
Year=2019	-0.672* (0.275)	-0.608* (0.269)
Constant	3.759* (1.570)	1.950 (1.498)
Observations	817	817

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **Appendix G. Cities promoted to capital status**

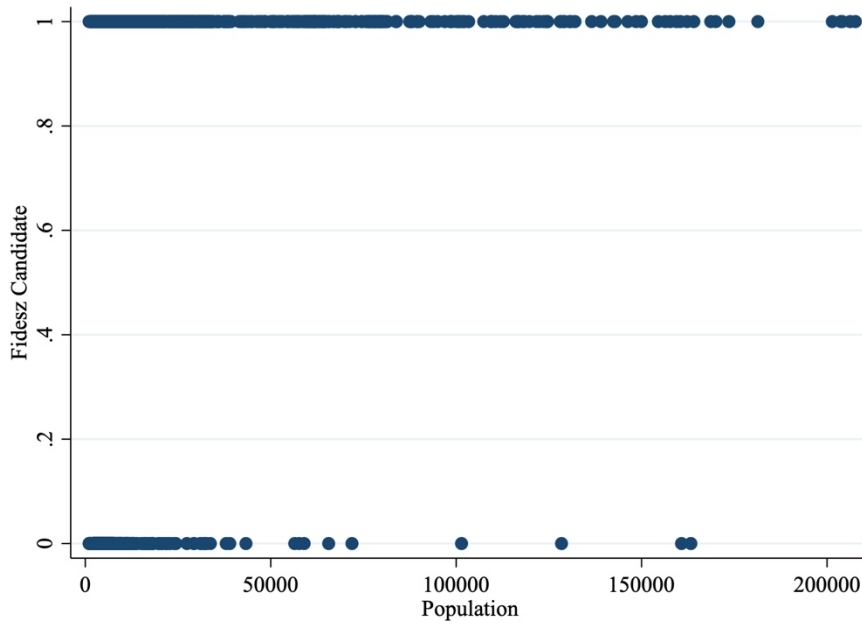
Appendix G notes (alphabetically) the cities promoted to capital status in the 2013 Hungarian territorial reorganization. Previously, all of these municipalities were secondary cities in a subregion (*kistérség*) and received capital status with the introduction of districts (*járás*) as the new subregional classification.

1. Bóly
2. Budakeszi
3. Gyomaendrőd
4. Hajdúnánás
5. Jászpati
6. Kemece
7. Kunhegyes
8. Nagykőrös
9. Nyíradony
10. Polgárdi (Only for the 2014 election – in 2015, Polgárdi Járás was merged)
11. Putnok
12. Szigetszentmiklós
13. Tiszakécske
14. Tolna
15. Vecsés

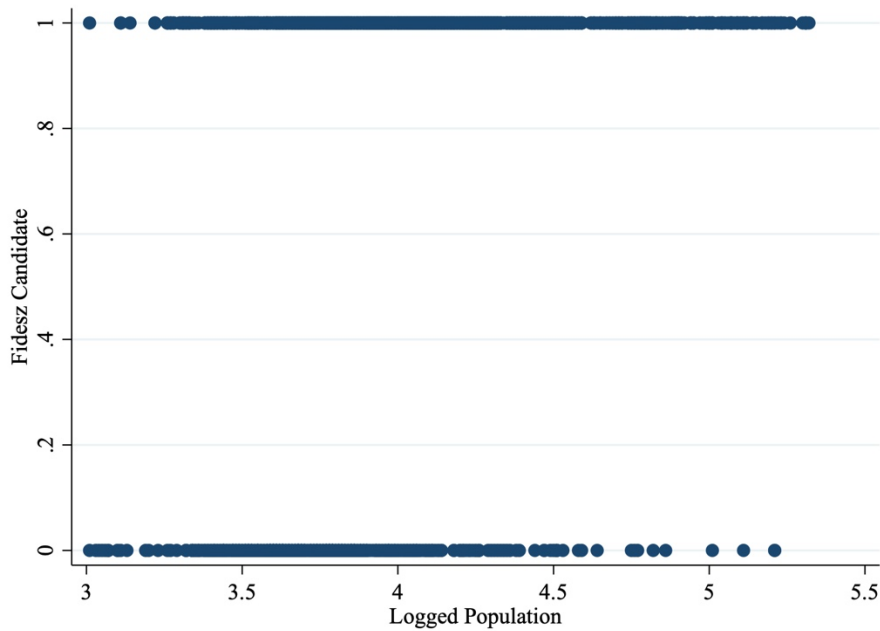
## Appendix H. Population Variables

Appendix H shows the distribution of mayoral candidacy vs. population. The distribution, as shown in Figures H1 and H2, suggests that logged population better fits the data and is therefore used in the models.

**Figure H.1.** Population vs. Fidesz Candidate



**Figure H.2.** Logged Population vs. Fidesz Candidate





## Appendix I. Categorical specification

Cities are classified categorically with seven options: village (1), city (2), district capital (3), city with county rights (4), city with county rights that is also a county capital (5), electoral district (6), and capital city (7). Electoral districts apply only to the 23 districts of Budapest, while Budapest itself is the only capital city. The specific EU funding data available results in the electoral districts dropping out of the analysis, so in practice, the five categories in the model are on average of increasing political significance. The City Type variable itself has similar significance levels to the dummy variable construction; it is significant for the contestation models only when EU funding is *excluded* to incorporate the 2002 election, and it is significant for the victory models when EU funding is *included*. The latter is a small change from the models in the main paper, where the equivalent variable is significant in all specifications. This may be an artifact driven by the relatively small number of Tier 4 and 5 cities in the 2002 local elections, where Fidesz was recently ousted from national office only six months before. The larger shift is with the significance of population. In some model specifications, population becomes significant and negatively associated with the likelihood of Fidesz winning, whereas it is insignificant in all of the main models; however, this finding is not robust across all specifications, so I do not think it is a strong enough correlation to draw attention to in the main results. It may suggest the need for future research.

**Table I.1.** Likelihood of Fidesz contesting.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model I1</i>	<i>Model I2</i>	<i>Model I3</i>	<i>Model I4</i>
Population	2.802*** (0.382)	2.976*** (0.501)	-0.129 (0.880)	0.936 (1.913)
City Type	0.333* (0.135)	0.0378 (0.252)	0.602** (0.226)	-0.650 (0.701)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.867*** (0.203)	-2.342*** (0.237)	-1.778*** (0.425)	-2.697*** (0.627)
Library Books per Capita	0.0278 (0.0286)	0.0484 (0.0427)	0.0558 (0.0703)	0.387* (0.187)
Unemployment Rate	0.708 (3.357)	3.021 (4.004)	3.600 (8.034)	-8.213 (13.55)
Number of Candidates	0.0961 (0.0608)	-0.00545 (0.0858)	0.369** (0.127)	0.643* (0.261)
Year=2006	2.448*** (0.262)		2.330*** (0.503)	
Year=2010	4.136*** (0.322)		4.060*** (0.709)	
Year=2014	3.366*** (0.275)	-0.672* (0.271)	3.187*** (0.589)	-1.176 (0.782)
Year=2019	2.737*** (0.253)	-1.278*** (0.310)	2.114*** (0.438)	-2.179* (0.881)
EU Grant Value		-5.82e-07 (1.22e-06)		1.39e-07 (1.02e-06)
Constant	-12.70*** (1.435)	-8.303*** (1.789)	-1.705 (3.408)	0.340 (7.402)
Observations	1835	1034	824	425

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table I.2.** Likelihood of Fidesz victory.

	<i>All cities and towns</i>		<i>Cities over 10,000 population</i>	
	<i>Model I5</i>	<i>Model I6</i>	<i>Model I7</i>	<i>Model I8</i>
Population	-0.320 (0.385)	-0.860 (0.451)	-1.070 (0.710)	-2.324* (1.119)
City Type	0.227 (0.135)	0.992*** (0.240)	0.139 (0.184)	1.308** (0.446)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.536*** (0.204)	-1.660*** (0.218)	-2.054*** (0.322)	-2.444*** (0.339)
Library Books per Capita	-0.0161 (0.0299)	-0.121** (0.0416)	0.0520 (0.0493)	-0.171* (0.0804)
Unemployment Rate	-2.826 (3.846)	-2.222 (3.905)	-10.92 (6.925)	-11.91 (7.667)
Number of Candidates	-0.178** (0.0635)	-0.237** (0.0760)	0.0634 (0.0955)	0.0224 (0.123)
Year=2006	2.275*** (0.289)		3.206*** (0.398)	
Year=2010	2.640*** (0.292)		3.803*** (0.439)	
Year=2014	2.625*** (0.271)	-0.00169 (0.235)	2.799*** (0.360)	-0.891* (0.390)
Year=2019	1.678*** (0.256)	-0.712** (0.275)	1.807*** (0.330)	-1.502** (0.460)
EU Grant Value		-8.11e-07 (4.29e-07)		-6.27e-07 (4.94e-07)
Constant	0.374 (1.392)	3.884* (1.586)	2.889 (2.658)	9.717* (4.078)
Observations	1286	817	731	397

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Appendix J. Number of EU Grants

Appendix J re-runs Models 2 and 6 with the alternative measure of EU grants, focusing on the number of grants issued in the three-year electoral cycle as opposed to the amount of funding issued. Similar tests were conducted for the grants/grant value in a single year; these also do not affect significance.

**Table J.1.** Likelihood of Fidesz contesting.

	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model J2</i>
Population	2.845*** (0.487)	3.063*** (0.504)
Higher Tier City	0.217 (0.282)	0.237 (0.284)
Opposition Incumbent	-2.324*** (0.237)	-2.354*** (0.239)
Library Books per Capita	0.0380 (0.0422)	0.0434 (0.0426)
Unemployment	2.767 (4.007)	3.117 (4.031)
Number of Candidates	-0.000818 (0.0860)	-0.00520 (0.0863)
EU Grant Value	-0.000000596 (0.00000111)	
EU Grant Number		-0.00158 (0.000859)
Year=2014	-0.674* (0.270)	-0.666* (0.271)
Year=2019	-1.284*** (0.310)	-1.133*** (0.322)
Constant	-7.748*** (1.905)	-8.565*** (1.964)
Observations	1034	1034

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table J.2.** Likelihood of Fidesz victory.

	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model J6</i>
Population	-0.394 (0.379)	-0.638 (0.399)
Higher Tier City	1.174*** (0.290)	1.215*** (0.286)
Opposition Incumbent	-1.687*** (0.220)	-1.685*** (0.219)
Library Books per Capita	-0.0977* (0.0388)	-0.105** (0.0391)
Unemployment	-1.524 (3.934)	-2.037 (3.916)
Number of Candidates	-0.225** (0.0768)	-0.226** (0.0764)
EU Grant Value	-3.41e-11 (0.000000408)	
EU Grant Number		0.000609 (0.000590)
Year=2010	0 (.)	0 (.)
Year=2014	0.0415 (0.236)	0.00775 (0.237)
Year=2019	-0.672* (0.275)	-0.780** (0.291)
Constant	3.759* (1.570)	4.754** (1.664)
Observations	817	817

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Appendix K. Towns promoted during study period.<sup>47</sup>**

<b>Town</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Promotion Date</b>
Albertirsa	Pest	1-Jul-2003
Bábolna	Komárom-Esztergom	1-Jul-2003
Kaba	Hajdú-Bihar	1-Jul-2003
Nyékládháza	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2003
Abaújszántó	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2004
Adony	Fejér	1-Jul-2004
Badacsonytomaj	Veszprém	1-Jul-2004
Balkány	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	1-Jul-2004
Bélapátfalva	Heves	1-Jul-2004
Berhida	Veszprém	1-Jul-2004
Cigánd	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2004
Dunavarsány	Pest	1-Jul-2004
Dunavecse	Bács-Kiskun	1-Jul-2004
Fót	Pest	1-Jul-2004
Hajdúsámson	Hajdú-Bihar	1-Jul-2004
Jánossomorja	Győr-Moson-Sopron	1-Jul-2004
Kenderes	Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	1-Jul-2004
Lábatlan	Komárom-Esztergom	1-Jul-2004
Örkény	Pest	1-Jul-2004
Szigethalom	Pest	1-Jul-2004
Tompa	Bács-Kiskun	1-Jul-2004
Velence	Fejér	1-Jul-2004
Abádszalók	Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	1-Jul-2005
Csorvás	Békés	1-Jul-2005
Kadarkút	Somogy	1-Jul-2005
Kemecse	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	1-Jul-2005
Kisköre	Heves	1-Jul-2005
Kistarcsa	Pest	1-Jul-2005
Martonvásár	Fejér	1-Jul-2005
Nyírlugos	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	1-Jul-2005
Nyírtelek	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	1-Jul-2005
Ócsa	Pest	1-Jul-2005
Óriszentpéter	Vas	1-Jul-2005
Pálháza	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2005
Pilis	Pest	1-Jul-2005
Sándorfalva	Csongrád	1-Jul-2005
Üllő	Pest	1-Jul-2005
Ács	Komárom-Esztergom	1-Jul-2007
Alsózsolca	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2007

<sup>47</sup> Data come from (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal 2017, 97–100).

Biatorbágy	Pest	1-Jul-2007
Bük	Vas	1-Jul-2007
Kozármisleny	Baranya	1-Jul-2007
Körösladány	Békés	1-Jul-2007
Maglód	Pest	1-Jul-2007
Mándok	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	1-Jul-2007
Törökbálint	Pest	1-Jul-2007
Bodajk	Fejér	1-Jul-2008
Fertőszentmiklós	Győr-Moson-Sopron	1-Jul-2008
Hajós	Bács-Kiskun	1-Jul-2008
Halásztelek	Pest	1-Jul-2008
Isaszeg	Pest	1-Jul-2008
Pusztaszabolcs	Fejér	1-Jul-2008
Rudabánya	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2008
Zamárdi	Somogy	1-Jul-2008
Balatonkenese	Veszprém	1-Jul-2009
Beled	Győr-Moson-Sopron	1-Jul-2009
Budakalász	Pest	1-Jul-2009
Csanádpalota	Csongrád	1-Jul-2009
Gyöng	Tolna	1-Jul-2009
Igal	Somogy	1-Jul-2009
Jászkisér	Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	1-Jul-2009
Mágocs	Baranya	1-Jul-2009
Medgyesegyháza	Békés	1-Jul-2009
Mélykút	Bács-Kiskun	1-Jul-2009
Mezőkeresztes	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2009
Nagymányok	Tolna	1-Jul-2009
Nyírmada	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	1-Jul-2009
Pacsa	Zala	1-Jul-2009
Rácalmás	Fejér	1-Jul-2009
Rákóczi falva	Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	1-Jul-2009
Sajóbáony	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	1-Jul-2009
Tápiószele	Pest	1-Jul-2009
Újkígyós	Békés	1-Jul-2009
Vaja	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	1-Jul-2009
Vép	Vas	1-Jul-2009
Zsámbék	Pest	1-Jul-2009
Aba	Fejér	15-Jul-2013
Ajak	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg	15-Jul-2013
Besenyszög	Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	15-Jul-2013
Csákvár	Fejér	15-Jul-2013
Diósd	Pest	15-Jul-2013

Fegyvernek	Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok	15-Jul-2013
Gyöngyöspata	Heves	15-Jul-2013
Jánosháza	Vas	15-Jul-2013
Kerepes	Pest	15-Jul-2013
Kondoros	Békés	15-Jul-2013
Lébény	Győr-Moson-Sopron	15-Jul-2013
Onga	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén	15-Jul-2013
Órbottyán	Pest	15-Jul-2013
Piliscsaba	Pest	15-Jul-2013
Sülysáp	Pest	15-Jul-2013
Tát	Komárom-Esztergom	15-Jul-2013
Újhartyán	Pest	15-Jul-2013
Verpelét	Heves	15-Jul-2013

### Appendix L. Likelihood of MSZP contesting elections

Appendix L replicates the Chapter 1 contestation models 1-4, to look at the likelihood of MSZP of contesting mayoral elections. MSZP is the only current opposition party to be active throughout the 2002-2019 period, so provides the best empirical test. MSZP is also shown to be consider the city's population.

**Table L.1.** Likelihood of MSZP contesting.

	<i>Model L2</i>	<i>Model L2</i>	<i>Model L3</i>	<i>Model L4</i>
Population	5.024*** (0.412)	2.845*** (0.487)	3.489*** (0.550)	-0.668 (1.508)
City Type	0.627* (0.261)	0.217 (0.282)	0.497 (0.374)	0.388 (0.772)
Opposition Incumbent	-0.0845 (0.212)	-2.324*** (0.237)	-0.276 (0.286)	-2.440*** (0.622)
Library Books per Capita	0.00424 (0.0342)	0.0380 (0.0422)	0.0000735 (0.0578)	0.249 (0.174)
Unemployment	5.774 (4.340)	2.767 (4.007)	-2.385 (7.118)	-15.01 (14.09)
Number of Candidates	0.473*** (0.0711)	-0.000818 (0.0860)	0.458*** (0.101)	0.639* (0.263)
EU Grant Value		-0.000000596 (0.00000111)		0.000000195 (0.00000104)
Year=2006	0.210 <sub>SEP</sub> *** (0.273)		0.368 (0.427)	
Year=2010	-1.602*** (0.289)		-1.251** (0.400)	
Year=2014	-2.330*** (0.278)	-0.674* (0.270)	-2.406*** (0.383)	-1.272 (0.796)
Year=2019	-2.873*** (0.294)	-1.284*** (0.310)	-2.836*** (0.388)	-2.417** (0.914)
Constant	-21.81*** (1.754)	-7.748*** (1.905)	-14.62*** (2.423)	5.983 (6.690)
Observations	1835	1034	824	425

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Appendix M. Population Quintiles

Appendix M re-runs Chapter 1's models 1 and 2 (contestation) and models 5 and 6 (victory) to look at which population quintiles Fidesz is most electorally successful in. The upper quintile includes the various districts of Budapest as individual municipalities. Models looking exclusively at cities over 10,000 are not replicated here, as these cities are all in the upper half of the distribution. The logged population variable is removed from the model and replaced by a series of dummy variables per quintile, with the lowest quintile as a baseline. Table M1 shows the results for the contestation models; we see that the likelihood of Fidesz contesting the relationship increases in each successive quintile and remains statistically significant at the .001 level. Table M2 shows the results for the victory models; we see that, as in the main models, population is not significant; however, the size of the effect is negative and increases for each quintile.

**Table M.1.** Likelihood of Fidesz contesting by population quintile.

	<i>Model M1</i>	<i>Model M2</i>
Higher Tier City	0.419 (0.219)	0.202 (0.288)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.868*** (0.203)	-2.293*** (0.238)
Library Books per Capita	0.0286 (0.0287)	0.0495 (0.0435)
Unemployment Rate	0.521 (3.357)	2.914 (4.054)
Number of Candidates	0.105 (0.0606)	0.0000445 (0.0865)
Lower-Middle Quintile	0.813** (0.254)	0.853** (0.310)
Middle Quintile	1.575*** (0.280)	1.542*** (0.351)
Upper-Middle Quintile	2.746*** (0.331)	2.443*** (0.444)
Upper Quintile	3.595*** (0.392)	2.779*** (0.648)
Year=2006	2.470*** (0.261)	
Year=2010	4.191*** (0.322)	
Year=2014	3.429*** (0.273)	-0.687* (0.272)
Year=2019	2.775*** (0.249)	-1.327*** (0.313)
EU Grant Value		6.76e-07 (1.40e-06)
Constant	-2.621*** (0.379)	1.898*** (0.553)
Observations	1836	1035

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



**Table M.2.** Likelihood of Fidesz winning by population quintile.

	<i>Model M5</i>	<i>Model M6</i>
Higher Tier City	1.353*** (0.256)	1.208*** (0.298)
Non Fidesz Incumbent	-1.517*** (0.203)	-1.688*** (0.221)
Library Books per Capita	-0.0695* (0.0328)	-0.0988* (0.0399)
Unemployment Rate	-7.589 (3.905)	-1.567 (3.926)
Number of Candidates	-0.156* (0.0633)	-0.223** (0.0764)
Lower-Middle Quintile	0.0189 (0.338)	-0.120 (0.335)
Middle Quintile	-0.151 (0.349)	-0.243 (0.358)
Upper-Middle Quintile	-0.358 (0.369)	-0.303 (0.386)
Upper Quintile	-0.567 (0.384)	-0.558 (0.459)
Year=2006	2.343*** (0.290)	
Year=2010	2.874*** (0.298)	
Year=2014	2.735*** (0.273)	0.0421 (0.236)
Year=2019	1.753*** (0.257)	-0.671* (0.274)
EU Grant Value		-1.06e-07 (3.67e-07)
Constant	-0.430 (0.460)	2.419*** (0.526)
Observations	1287	818

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Appendix N.** Logistic Regression Coefficients (Dependent variable: win by dominant party).

**Table N.1.** Logistic Regression Coefficients (Dependent variable: win by dominant party).

	<i>Model N1</i>	<i>Model N2</i>	<i>Model N3</i>	<i>Model N4</i>	<i>Model N5</i>	<i>Model N6</i>	<i>Model N7</i>	<i>Model N8</i>	<i>Model N9</i>
Population (logged)	-1.129** (0.365)	0.591* (0.277)	-0.216 (0.176)	-0.908* (0.388)	0.637* (0.288)	-0.0697 (0.189)	-0.597 (0.591)	-0.846* (0.396)	-0.715 (0.473)
Unemployment Rate	1.210 (7.087)	-0.496 (3.376)	0.108 (2.560)	1.910 (7.030)	-0.380 (3.398)	0.925 (2.592)	12.41 (11.34)	1.898 (7.106)	8.298 (8.286)
% Over 60 yrs. old	-8.064 (4.514)	2.586 (2.836)	-2.466 (2.143)	-6.756 (4.512)	2.685 (2.859)	-1.892 (2.157)	-9.015 (7.101)	-6.293 (4.543)	-9.894 (5.932)
Cycle Year=2	-0.123 (0.317)	0.116 (0.238)	-0.0649 (0.151)	-0.227 (0.323)	0.121 (0.239)	-0.113 (0.153)	0.133 (0.455)	-0.269 (0.327)	-0.261 (0.413)
Cycle Year=3		-0.108 (0.269)	-0.335 (0.239)		-0.0921 (0.271)	-0.338 (0.239)			
Hungary			1.913*** (0.189)			1.882*** (0.188)			
Dominant Party Incumbent	3.676*** (0.326)	1.915*** (0.240)	2.706*** (0.161)	3.602*** (0.325)	1.892*** (0.243)	2.664*** (0.162)		3.532*** (0.322)	2.680*** (0.419)
Number of Candidates				-0.128 (0.0855)	-0.0480 (0.0723)	-0.106* (0.0497)	-1.000*** (0.237)	-0.588*** (0.178)	-0.0873 (0.112)
Decided in 2nd Round							-2.373* (0.989)	-1.283 (0.746)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round x Number of Candidates							0.858** (0.269)	0.525* (0.204)	
Constant	3.959* (1.790)	-3.073* (1.401)	-0.741 (0.931)	3.287 (1.825)	-3.123* (1.410)	-1.079 (0.947)	3.477 (2.893)	4.119* (1.918)	3.253 (2.168)
Observations	1110	771	1881	1110	771	1881	1110	1110	544

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **Appendix O. Suburbs**

Appendix O includes a dummy variable to indicate if a municipality is a suburb or not, to see if effects are driven by satellite municipalities tied to the politics of larger cities. If municipalities are listed by the OECD/Eurostat as being in a functional urban area (FUA) but are *not* the core city, then they are coded as 1. Core cities and municipalities outside the FUAs are coded as 0. The variable itself is not statistically significant, and its inclusion has no substantial effects on the size or significance of our variables of interest.

**Table O.1.** Logistic Regression Coefficients (Dependent variable: win by dominant party).

	<i>Model O1</i>	<i>Model O2</i>	<i>Model O3</i>	<i>Model O4</i>	<i>Model O5</i>	<i>Model O6</i>	<i>Model O7</i>	<i>Model O8</i>	<i>Model O9</i>
Population (logged)	-1.128** (0.365)	0.557* (0.281)	-0.239 (0.177)	-0.906* (0.388)	0.603* (0.292)	-0.0936 (0.190)	-0.596 (0.591)	-0.844* (0.396)	-0.721 (0.472)
Unemployment Rate	0.787 (7.220)	-1.108 (3.507)	-0.540 (2.622)	1.439 (7.161)	-0.960 (3.533)	0.324 (2.661)	10.61 (11.57)	1.388 (7.242)	7.797 (8.374)
% Over 60 yrs. old	-8.492 (4.731)	1.924 (3.008)	-3.244 (2.263)	-7.220 (4.715)	2.062 (3.037)	-2.600 (2.284)	-10.65 (7.449)	-6.797 (4.756)	-10.58 (6.226)
Cycle Year=2	-0.122 (0.318)	0.145 (0.243)	-0.0461 (0.152)	-0.227 (0.323)	0.148 (0.244)	-0.0947 (0.154)	0.132 (0.456)	-0.269 (0.327)	-0.259 (0.413)
Cycle Year=3		-0.0772 (0.274)	-0.304 (0.241)		-0.0644 (0.276)	-0.310 (0.241)			
Hungary			1.920*** (0.190)			1.889*** (0.189)			
Dominant Party Incumbent	3.676*** (0.326)	1.913*** (0.240)	2.702*** (0.160)	3.601*** (0.326)	1.892*** (0.244)	2.662*** (0.161)		3.531*** (0.322)	2.677*** (0.419)
Number of Candidates				-0.129 (0.0856)	-0.0445 (0.0725)	-0.104* (0.0498)	-1.003*** (0.237)	-0.590*** (0.178)	-0.0863 (0.112)
Suburb	-0.0972 (0.306)	-0.143 (0.220)	-0.177 (0.163)	-0.109 (0.303)	-0.133 (0.222)	-0.156 (0.162)	-0.399 (0.492)	-0.116 (0.305)	-0.148 (0.382)
Decided in 2nd Round							-2.389* (0.990)	-1.292 (0.747)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round x Number of Candidates							0.860** (0.269)	0.526** (0.204)	
Constant	4.091* (1.839)	-2.730 (1.490)	-0.406 (0.978)	3.428 (1.867)	-2.802 (1.502)	-0.773 (0.998)	4.024 (2.978)	4.276* (1.964)	3.485 (2.246)
Observations	1110	771	1881	1110	771	1881	1110	1110	544

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Appendix P. Number of Viable Candidates (receiving over 10% of the vote)**

Appendix P replaces the ‘Number of Candidates’ independent variable with a variable counting the number of candidates receiving more than 10% of the vote in the first round, to assess if the effect of number of candidates was skewed by unviable candidates.

Effects on our variables of interest are small; however, the number of candidates variable *gains* significance in Models 4 (all Polish elections) and 9 (second round elections only) when limited to viable candidates.

**Table P.1.** Logistic Regression Coefficients (Dependent variable: win by dominant party).

	Model P1	Model P2	Model P3	Model P4	Model P5	Model P6	Model P7	Model P8	Model P9
Population (logged)	-1.129** (0.365)	0.591* (0.277)	-0.216 (0.176)	-1.000** (0.367)	0.600* (0.279)	-0.184 (0.178)	-1.066 (0.581)	-1.058** (0.379)	-0.792 (0.437)
Unemployment Rate	1.210 (7.087)	-0.496 (3.376)	0.108 (2.560)	2.575 (7.260)	-0.432 (3.400)	0.828 (2.624)	13.41 (11.94)	2.564 (7.524)	9.188 (8.403)
% Over 60 yrs. old	-8.064 (4.514)	2.586 (2.836)	-2.466 (2.143)	-6.868 (4.622)	2.710 (2.870)	-1.950 (2.189)	-11.32 (7.514)	-7.388 (4.813)	-9.389 (5.989)
Cycle Year=2	-0.123 (0.317)	0.116 (0.238)	-0.0649 (0.151)	-0.220 (0.326)	0.125 (0.240)	-0.0894 (0.153)	0.343 (0.470)	-0.174 (0.338)	-0.221 (0.410)
Cycle Year=3		-0.108 (0.269)	-0.335 (0.239)		-0.107 (0.270)	-0.364 (0.242)			
Hungary			1.913*** (0.189)			1.878*** (0.191)			
Dominant Party Incumbent	3.676*** (0.326)	1.915*** (0.240)	2.706*** (0.161)	3.676*** (0.334)	1.901*** (0.243)	2.685*** (0.163)		3.698*** (0.342)	2.724*** (0.421)
Number of Viable Candidates				-0.384** (0.145)	-0.0611 (0.127)	-0.209* (0.0853)	-1.898*** (0.430)	-1.117*** (0.328)	-0.403* (0.196)
Decided in 2nd Round							-2.191 (1.409)	-0.725 (1.057)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round x Number of Viable Candidates							1.242* (0.509)	0.621 (0.386)	
Constant	3.959* (1.790)	-3.073* (1.401)	-0.741 (0.931)	4.202* (1.804)	-2.983* (1.420)	-0.427 (0.947)	7.035* (3.019)	5.879** (2.000)	4.344* (2.176)
Observations	1110	771	1881	1110	771	1881	1110	1110	544

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Appendix Q. Larger cities with list-based Council elections**

Larger cities (population over 20,000 in Poland and over 10,000 in Hungary) have different systems for electing City Councils, using party list voting. To see if this result was driven solely by this additional difference in electoral rules, where partisanship could have different effects in mayoral elections (which are not subject to this list vote, but list votes could have secondary impacts on mayoral elections), the models were run again with two different robustness checks. Table Q1 includes only cities with population above this threshold. There are three notable effects of this. First, population loses significance across the models – perhaps unsurprising, given that we only include large municipalities. Second, there is a significant negative effect associated with the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle year in Hungary, although dominant party candidates are still more likely to win. Third, the significance of number of candidates decreases; however, its interaction with elections reaching the second round remains significant. This suggests that the absolute number of candidates has a reduced impact in larger municipalities; however, the clarifying effect provided by the second round seems to still be in effect.

**Table Q.1.** Logistic Regression Coefficients in cities above party-list threshold (Dependent variable: win by dominant party).

	<i>Model Q1</i>	<i>Model Q2</i>	<i>Model Q3</i>	<i>Model Q4</i>	<i>Model Q5</i>	<i>Model Q6</i>	<i>Model Q7</i>	<i>Model Q8</i>	<i>Model Q9</i>
Population (logged)	-1.010 (0.878)	0.922 (0.485)	0.240 (0.347)	-1.221 (0.924)	0.819 (0.500)	0.142 (0.375)	-1.391 (1.422)	-1.153 (0.913)	-1.195 (1.035)
Unemployment Rate	22.26 (14.50)	-3.612 (5.526)	3.359 (4.781)	22.03 (14.70)	-3.845 (5.574)	3.081 (4.831)	59.39* (23.65)	22.25 (14.46)	19.79 (17.25)
% Over 60 yrs. old	-11.88 (7.986)	-1.427 (5.146)	-6.151 (3.982)	-13.48 (8.401)	-1.017 (5.188)	-6.321 (4.046)	-13.45 (12.14)	-10.51 (8.311)	-16.38 (10.60)
Cycle Year=2	-0.358 (0.576)	0.0321 (0.354)	-0.316 (0.240)	-0.228 (0.605)	0.0289 (0.355)	-0.290 (0.244)	0.659 (0.835)	-0.305 (0.602)	-0.414 (0.780)
Cycle Year=3		-0.884* (0.431)	-1.032** (0.385)		-0.961* (0.438)	-1.054** (0.389)			
Hungary			2.518*** (0.321)			2.585*** (0.340)			
Dominant Party Incumbent	3.458*** (0.497)	2.515*** (0.347)	2.909*** (0.247)	3.516*** (0.510)	2.542*** (0.349)	2.926*** (0.251)		3.420*** (0.502)	2.510*** (0.683)
Number of Candidates				0.107 (0.131)	0.0949 (0.109)	0.0550 (0.0751)	-0.688 (0.405)	-0.506 (0.320)	0.197 (0.162)
Decided in 2nd Round							-4.194* (1.842)	-2.982* (1.393)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round x Number of Candidates							0.974* (0.445)	0.763* (0.346)	
Constant	3.360 (4.008)	-3.524 (2.196)	-2.312 (1.656)	4.106 (4.154)	-3.483 (2.213)	-2.105 (1.694)	4.954 (6.508)	5.355 (4.227)	4.639 (4.794)
Observations	530	391	921	530	391	921	530	530	277

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



The results in Table Q2 approach the question in a slightly different way, including a dummy variable, where 1 is a city above the electoral threshold (20,000 in Poland, 10,000 in Hungary) for party-list Council voting, and 0 is a city beneath that threshold. In this specification, we can see that the effect of population similarly goes away almost entirely, with the exception of the Hungary specific models. This is not surprising given the significant multicollinearity between population and cities meeting the electoral threshold. The threshold variable itself is not statistically significant in any model. In this formulation, findings for number of candidates and the effect of the second round directly correspond to those seen in the main models in the text and Appendix N, suggesting that there our results are not driven by a statistically significant association between the use of a party list for council elections and the likelihood of the nationally dominant party candidate winning the mayoral election.

**Table Q.2.** Logistic Regression Coefficients (Dependent variable: win by dominant party).

	<i>Model Q1B</i>	<i>Model Q2B</i>	<i>Model Q3B</i>	<i>Model Q4B</i>	<i>Model Q5B</i>	<i>Model Q6B</i>	<i>Model Q7B</i>	<i>Model Q8B</i>	<i>Model Q9B</i>
Population (logged)	-1.052 (0.543)	0.804* (0.396)	0.0124 (0.261)	-0.836 (0.558)	0.845* (0.403)	0.160 (0.272)	-0.537 (0.845)	-0.817 (0.567)	-0.861 (0.686)
Unemployment Rate	1.169 (7.085)	-0.717 (3.356)	-0.144 (2.552)	1.872 (7.028)	-0.604 (3.379)	0.665 (2.585)	12.39 (11.34)	1.886 (7.107)	8.464 (8.334)
% Over 60 yrs. old	-8.070 (4.514)	2.396 (2.813)	-2.567 (2.130)	-6.765 (4.512)	2.495 (2.838)	-1.999 (2.145)	-9.030 (7.105)	-6.300 (4.544)	-9.936 (5.946)
Cycle Year=2	-0.123 (0.317)	0.114 (0.237)	-0.0655 (0.151)	-0.226 (0.322)	0.119 (0.238)	-0.113 (0.152)	0.134 (0.455)	-0.268 (0.327)	-0.263 (0.414)
Cycle Year=3		-0.117 (0.268)	-0.340 (0.238)		-0.101 (0.270)	-0.343 (0.238)			
Hungary			1.976*** (0.198)			1.945*** (0.197)			
Dominant Party Incumbent	3.675*** (0.326)	1.939*** (0.239)	2.715*** (0.160)	3.601*** (0.325)	1.916*** (0.243)	2.673*** (0.161)		3.532*** (0.322)	2.686*** (0.421)
Number of Candidates				-0.127 (0.0854)	-0.0463 (0.0720)	-0.106* (0.0494)	-0.999*** (0.237)	-0.588*** (0.178)	-0.0882 (0.112)
Party List Council Election Threshold	-0.0710 (0.374)	-0.233 (0.302)	-0.239 (0.206)	-0.0667 (0.370)	-0.229 (0.304)	-0.240 (0.206)	-0.0572 (0.575)	-0.0267 (0.373)	0.132 (0.443)
Decided in 2nd Round							-2.373* (0.989)	-1.282 (0.746)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round x Number of Candidates							0.858** (0.269)	0.524* (0.204)	
Constant	3.665 (2.356)	-3.769* (1.680)	-1.574 (1.164)	3.009 (2.382)	-3.805* (1.690)	-1.917 (1.183)	3.247 (3.706)	4.006 (2.478)	3.820 (2.907)
Observations	1110	771	1881	1110	771	1881	1110	1110	544

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Appendix R. Urban-rural gmina

Appendix R assesses if urban-rural gminy are driving the findings in Poland (there is no analogous category in Hungary, so only Poland-specific models are included) using a dichotomous variable for local government units with this status. We find no effect for the urban-rural gminy, and the inclusion of the variable does not substantively affect the significance or size of other variables.

**Table R.1.** Effects of Urban-rural gminy.

	<i>Model R1</i>	<i>Model R4</i>	<i>Model R7</i>	<i>Model R8</i>	<i>Model R9</i>
Population (logged)	-1.207** (0.398)	-0.992* (0.416)	-1.010 (0.648)	-0.921* (0.423)	-0.846 (0.507)
Unemployment Rate	1.691 (7.196)	2.432 (7.149)	14.29 (11.57)	2.349 (7.206)	8.168 (8.203)
% Over 60 yrs. old	-8.872 (4.766)	-7.627 (4.745)	-12.91 (7.528)	-7.032 (4.752)	-11.02 (6.064)
Cycle Year=2	-0.101 (0.322)	-0.206 (0.327)	0.257 (0.466)	-0.250 (0.331)	-0.227 (0.411)
Dominant Party Incumbent	3.677*** (0.330)	3.600*** (0.330)		3.528*** (0.326)	2.621*** (0.420)
Number of Candidates		-0.132 (0.0864)	-1.012*** (0.240)	-0.594*** (0.180)	-0.0886 (0.111)
Urban-Rural Gmina	-0.134 (0.284)	-0.156 (0.281)	-0.806 (0.453)	-0.136 (0.281)	-0.239 (0.335)
Decided in 2 <sup>nd</sup> Round			-2.444* (1.002)	-1.312 (0.753)	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Round x Number of Candidates			0.862** (0.272)	0.530** (0.206)	
Constant	4.510* (2.112)	3.903 (2.125)	6.549 (3.435)	4.671* (2.207)	4.244 (2.570)
Observations	1109	1109	1109	1109	544

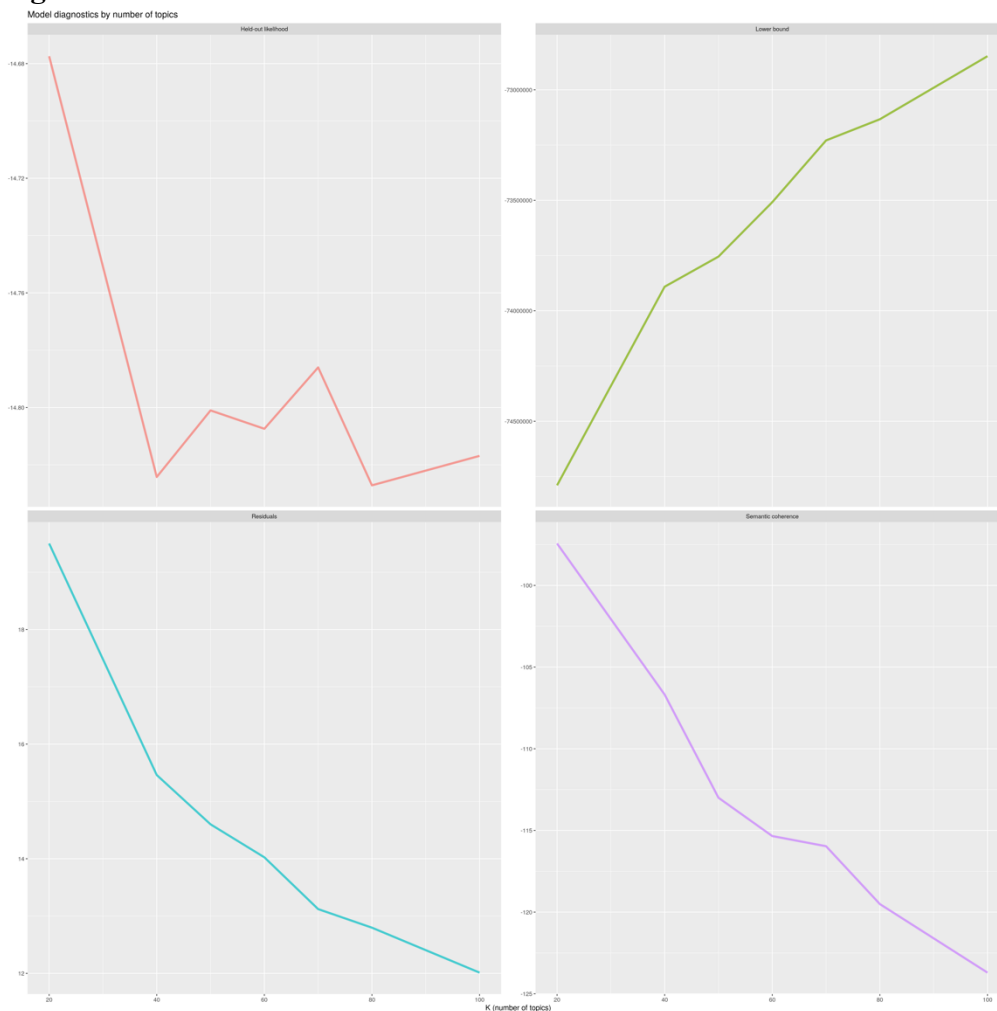
Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Appendix S. Model Diagnostics

The following tests were suggested by Julia Silge (2018) for use with data formatted using the `quanteda` package, to help diagnose the ideal number of topics ( $K$ ) in topic modeling. As a shorthand, for held-out likelihood and semantic coherence, higher values are better; for residuals, lower bounds are better. There is no definitive way of determining which  $K$  value will be optimal, but these diagnostic tests can provide a guideline.

**Figure S.1. Model Distribution**



These diagnostic tests are not definitive. However, there seem to be some indications given the slope changes in held-out likelihood and residuals between 60-80 topics that this would be an appropriate range to consider values. This is an appropriate and necessary step of determining the correct number of topics (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). Increases above 70 topics appeared to result in overly-specific topics that created artificial divisions between aspects of the same concept.

# Appendix T. Beta Chart for All Topics

## Figure T.1. Beta value chart by topic.

