Incumbency in Multi-level Political Systems and Recruitment Advantage: The Case of the Czech Regional Assemblies*

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Abstract: The article addresses the differential recruitment advantages of individual candidates in regional assembly elections. The authors argue that in a multi-level polity different types of incumbency exist that are reflected in the recruitment process, favour officeholders over newcomers, and at the same time differentiate the accessibility of regional offices for officeholders at various system levels. Moreover, it is argued that the effect of multi-level incumbency can be well observed even in proportional electoral systems. Empirically, the impact of incumbency on a candidate’s chances to succeed in the recruitment process and to obtain preferential votes is analysed using regional assembly elections in the Czech Republic as an example. The authors demonstrate that regional incumbents enjoy by a huge margin advantage during the candidate nomination phase and they are the most favoured group at the ballot followed by national-level politicians and big city mayors.

Keywords: incumbency, legislative recruitment, multi-level political system, political career, Czech Republic

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Introduction

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the legislative recruitment process offers unequal opportunities for different types of candidates. Among other factors, incumbency has been repeatedly identified as a primary factor influencing a candidate’s chances. Borchert even considers incumbency to be ‘the single most important predictor for electoral success in most democracies’ [2011: 122]. In this article we argue that, in multi-level political systems, where candidates competing for a political position are recruited from offices at various levels of government (local, regional, national), obvious advantages in the recruitment process can be enjoyed not only by typical incumbents, that is, candidates standing for...
re-election, but also by officeholders in other government positions. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to talk about multi-level incumbency. Since offices at different political levels provide candidates with various resources, we expect the extent and the mechanisms of the recruitment advantage to depend on what position of office is currently held in the multi-level system. We also argue that the effect of multi-level incumbency can be observed even in proportional electoral systems. Both in candidate selection and on the ballot, officeholders are systematically favoured over newcomers.

In this article the theoretical arguments for differentiating candidate recruitment chances according to whether or not a candidate holds an office and the type of office held are drawn from the scholarly debate on incumbent effects and political experience effects. In the empirical section of the article, the effect of multi-level incumbency on a candidate’s chances in the recruitment process is analysed through the example of regional assembly elections in the Czech Republic.

The Czech political system has three levels (national, regional, municipal), each with its own elected representative bodies. Some specific features of the Czech political system make it a good example for analysis. First, the Czech Republic is among the countries in Central Europe that were democratised in the early 1990s and thus have relatively brief experience with the electoral system. Most of the theory about recruitment processes and incumbent advantages has been formulated in reference to traditional democracies, mainly the United States, and has only rarely been tested in other contexts [see, e.g., Field and Siavelis 2008]. Second, regional assembly elections in the Czech Republic are based on a proportional electoral system with partially closed party lists. Analysing the chances of candidates in the recruitment process that operates in a proportional electoral system is rather unusual, as most such analyses are based on majoritarian electoral systems, which tend to be more candidate-focused (for an exception to this, see, e.g., Bernard [2012]). However, the features of the Czech electoral system offer sufficient opportunities for differentiating individual candidate chances both during the selection phase of the recruitment process, when the lists are composed and the candidates ranked, and the electoral phase (preferential votes). Therefore, theoretical propositions about the impact holding an office at various levels of the political system (which we call multi-level incumbency) has on chances of succeeding in the recruitment process in a proportional electoral system can be formulated and analytically verified by focusing on the Czech case. Third, office accumulation is relatively common in the Czech political system which has no legal prohibitions against office accumulation and most offices in local and regional politics are not professionalised, which is to say that they are not full-time positions and offer only a modest salary. As a result, many officeholders on different levels of the system will then seek election to another office. Upward and downward career patterns are consequently relatively common and the system offers sufficient opportunities for observing the chances of different officeholders.
The article is organised as follows. First, we introduce the Czech case in more detail and then introduce the term ‘multi-level incumbency’ and outline the theoretical propositions on recruitment advantages in multi-level political systems. We then formulate and empirically test our hypotheses. The article closes with a discussion of some of the consequences the findings hold for political career patterns.

**Regional self-government in the Czech Republic and elected seats in regional political bodies**

The Czech Republic established a new regional level of government in 2000 as part of a process of administrative reform. This occurred within the context of two larger processes: the post-communist transition and the Europeanisation of public administration [Baldersheim and Rose 2010; Scherpereel 2010]. Territorially, the new regions did not conform either to existing natural or historical regions. Rather than a bottom-up process based on shared regional identities, the reform was top-down and followed lengthy and difficult negotiations at the national level [Illner 2003]. Regional self-government forms the second tier in the Czech multi-level polity, which has remained relatively centralised since 2000. Prior to this reform, regional political elites representing the interests of different regions were underdeveloped. After 2000, the first regional officeholders were recruited primarily from the ranks of local politics [Čermák 2005; Ryšavý 2007]. After the Czech Republic’s accession to the European Union in 2004, the role of regional governments changed as a result of the important role they play in distributing EU Structural Funds. The position of regional political leaders in the power hierarchy was strengthened when regional administrations acquired a decisive role in the flow of European subsidies, especially in the 2007–2013 programme period [Baun and Marek 2008].

There are a large number of posts that can be run for in regional politics. There are 675 seats in the 13 regional assemblies (compared to 281 seats in the Czech Parliament’s upper and lower chambers). The number of local political positions is much larger because of the municipal structure is highly fragmented. More than 62 000 local representatives are elected in the country’s 6250 municipalities. However, an overwhelming majority of these functions are not professionalised, that is, they are not full time and the salary is modest. These representatives are expected to hold another job and to perform their political functions on a voluntary basis.

Most regional representatives’ functions also are not professionalised. In contrast, professionalisation is the rule for executive posts in regional government, which are occupied by elected regional representatives. The number of professionalised, full-time executive posts amounts in total to about 150 persons, which is between one-fifth and one-fourth of the number of seats in the regional assemblies.
Regional assembly elections are based on proportional voting with partially closed party lists. Each voter has up to four preferential votes to influence the order of candidates which thereby increases the chances of some of them being elected. A candidate needs preferential votes from at least five percent of the voters who voted for that party list\(^1\) to win preferential positions and overtake higher-ranking candidates on the list. Only political parties or registered political movements can submit party lists and run in the elections. Individual independent candidates are not eligible; however, party lists may include non-party individuals and there are various more or less cohesive groupings of independent candidates that run together under the umbrella of ‘independent political movements’.

The candidate nomination process in the major political parties is decentralised, which means that the process is delegated to the parties’ regional or district organisations. Party lists are primarily determined by the regional party conventions, which bring together delegates from all the political party organisations in the regional constituency [Outlý et al. 2014]. The nomination process for parliamentary elections is also territorially decentralised despite differences in the role of the central party leaders among the major political parties in the Czech Republic [ibid.]. The decentralisation of both nomination processes results in an overlap of key party gatekeepers in both types of election.

The electoral system allows politicians to hold multiple offices, both professional and non-professional. Initiatives to regulate the accumulation of professional functions in the executive branch of government have had little success thus far. Thus, the seats in regional representative bodies are open to candidates who hold any other, additional elected political office. It is very common for one person to hold both a municipal and a regional office, but it is less common for anyone to hold both a regional and a national office. To date there are no reliable data on the accumulation of offices and only some facts are known. According to Kjaer [2006], office accumulation in the Czech Republic is found most often in local and regional bodies, like in most other countries in Europe. Ryšavý [2016] estimates that between 2010 and 2012, ten full-time regional politicians held a parliamentary office. In 2012, 37 MPs and 511 municipal councillors were elected to a regional office and the numbers are steadily increasing [Bernard 2015].

Regional assemblies are generally more accessible than representative bodies in national level politics given the number of seats. Professional positions in regional politics are less common than at the national level, but they are only accessible to successful candidates who hold a seat in a Regional Assembly. For national-level incumbents (members of either the Chamber of Deputies and government ministers), nomination for regional elections can be a strategic step towards retirement from national politics, especially if the candidates are able to

\(^1\) The 5\% threshold was instituted before the elections of 2012. Until then, the required share of preferential votes was 10\%, which made preferential positions much more difficult to gain for all candidates.
mobilise their intra-party influence to obtain a seat as professionalised regional executives. Moreover, an executive position in regional government may be perceived as more attractive than that of an ordinary Member of Parliament. Thus, public offices at the regional level may be highly attractive to incumbents at the national level.

While local-level politicians find regional assemblies less accessible than municipal councils, they are attractive for two reasons. First, regional politics may help them advance to the national level. Second, many policy issues addressed by regional governments have an important effect on living conditions at the local level (e.g. public transportation, secondary schools, welfare services), and regional politics creates an essential framework for their work. As a result, regional-level politics can be attractive to national-level incumbents and municipal-level incumbents running for a seat in a regional assembly and the number of local- and national-level incumbents running for a regional-level office is thus relatively high.

Scholars studying incumbency effects in the Czech Republic have reached different conclusions according to the type of elections studied. Whereas Bernard [2012] identified incumbency as the most important individual-level success factor in municipal council elections and Voda [2013] confirmed the importance of incumbency at the regional level, Voženílková and Hejtmánek [2015] concluded that no incumbency advantage can be observed in the elections to the Czech Senate.

Legislative recruitment and incumbency advantage

Legislative recruitment involves two stages, candidate selection and elections, with selectors (party gatekeepers) and voters as the major determining actors [Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Patzelt 1999]. In both stages the chances adepts have of obtaining a legislative position are unequal. Incumbency has repeatedly been described as a crucial factor of recruitment success in both stages of the process. The relevancy of incumbency has been confirmed in many recruitment contexts, even though it is has been proven that the impact of incumbency differs according to the contextual differences of various recruitment systems. Incumbency advantage has been found to be stronger in plurality electoral systems and to depend on electoral volatility [Matland and Studlar 2004], while it has a weaker effect in unstable party systems [Shabad and Slomczynski 2002] and a stronger effect in more institutionalised bodies [Berry, Berkmann and Schneiderman 2000]. Nevertheless, the effect of incumbency is not limited to particular recruitment systems but is more general. Even in democratised Central European post-communist countries like the Czech Republic, the turnover of MPs declined gradually after the old regime collapsed and the re-election rate of incumbents increased [Shabad and Slomczynski 2002; Best and Edinger 2003].
Several arguments have been put forth to explain the incumbent advantage in the recruitment process. The first set of arguments concerns the electoral part. It has been argued that incumbency advantage is inherently a selection effect. Incumbent officeholders may have proved themselves as highly qualified politicians in previous elections. Moreover, voters may regard them as more promising if they think his or her previous electoral success means they have better qualities [Trounstine 2009; Stone et al. 2010]. Other sources of advantage may be the quality of the incumbents’ performance in office during the previous term or merely the ease of access to resources, in particular higher visibility than their opponents [Lascher 2005], easier access to funding from sponsors and news media coverage (especially where the government controls the content of local media) [Berry and Howell 2007; Trounstine 2009; Boyne et al. 2009], or the authority to realign the borders of electoral districts. Incumbent advantage was found to be stronger in more professionalised offices that provide more resources that incumbents can use in the campaign [Holbrook and Tidmarch 1991; Carey, Niemi and Powell 2000].

Research on electoral incumbency advantage is more established in the United States with its plurality system and given the relatively weak role parties play in candidate nomination processes. However, Matland and Studlar [2004] argue that electoral incumbency advantage based on individual constituency work or greater district visibility is not limited to the United States. The presence of individual incumbency advantage in proportional voting systems has been studied much less [Gallagher 2000; Liang 2013]. However, even in proportional voting systems with open party lists, preferential voting can advance incumbents to electable positions on the party lists. To sum up, not only in candidate-centred systems, but also in party-centred ones and even in proportional voting systems with open party lists, electoral incumbency advantage can contribute to the total incumbent advantage in the recruitment process.

The second set of arguments pertains to the process of candidate selection. Incumbent advantage during the selection process and its mechanisms has been much less studied than electoral incumbent advantage. The fact that party gatekeepers prioritise incumbents over newcomers and ‘[i]n quite a few countries the deselection of an incumbent is a newsworthy event’ [Gallagher 1988: 248] has not been more deeply explored. It has generally been argued that three individual factors influence the selection process: intra-party political alliances of party candidates and their connection to party leaders [Langston and Aparicio 2008], candidates’ institutional knowledge [Gherghina and Chiru 2010], and their ability to attract personal votes [Matland and Studlar 2004]. In fact, incumbents often enjoy significant advantages in all three factors. Office holding increases the opportunity to create important intra-party alliances and at the same time it can indicate the affiliation to powerful intra-party fractions. The personal experience incumbency necessarily provides significantly increases institutional knowledge, and in many cases incumbents are known to the public for being able to attract
personal votes from the constituency. The impact of those factors differs accord-
ing to the recruitment process [Norris 1997], but together they provide a solid explanation for incumbent advantage during the selection process. This advan-
tage is reflected in a low level of incumbent deselection. In proportional electoral systems with closed or partially open lists, incumbent advantage is manifested by incumbents occupying the top positions on the lists, which crucially enhances their electoral chances.

**Multi-level incumbency**

According to the results of studies on incumbency advantage, incumbents dif-
fer from newcomers by the political experience and political resources they may have accumulated in their office and especially by their popularity. However, it is not clear why all these advantages should be obtained exclusively by candidates with experience gained in the very same position they are running for, and not by others who hold other political functions. Most mechanisms of incumbent ad-
antage described above (visibility and popularity, funding, news media cover-
age, political alliances, and the ability to attract votes) can in theory enhance the recruitment chances of officeholders from various levels of the system, while the level of such an advantage may vary from position to position. In sum, it can be argued that multi-level polities are characterised by multi-level incumbency and the related phenomenon of multi-level incumbency advantage.

The impact of other political offices on candidate recruiting has only rarely been investigated and when it has it has mostly been done in studies on political experience. Berkman and Eisenstein [1999] explored the impact of type of prior experience on decisions to run and money raised by state legislators running for the US House of Representatives. They showed that politicians occupying more professionalised and more attractive seats are more risk averse in deciding when to run and they raise more money from Political Action Committees (PAC). They argue that the dependency of candidacy decisions on the type of political expe-
rience is explained by different opportunity costs, while the differences in PAC money manifest a recruitment advantage. Langston and Aparicio [2008] have ana-
lysed the political career choices of federal deputies in Mexico and demonstrate that the choice of their subsequent political posts was determined by the type of previous political experience. Deputies with experience from sub-state political levels tend to seek again a sub-state position, while deputies with national-level experience aspire to state-level political jobs. They argue that previous experi-
ence impacts the network of alliances, obligations, and resource control on which politicians base their career.

The argument about differential opportunity costs has been formulated for political systems without office accumulation. But the argument concerning dif-
ferent alliances and resource control by previous type of political experience can
be valid even in the Czech system with relatively common office accumulation and many non-professional political seats. Furthermore, differing levels of visibility and popularity can be expected for candidates in different offices.

Based on the theoretical considerations above, we expect office holders from different political system levels—multi-level incumbents—to enjoy significant recruitment advantages in both phases of the recruitment process (elections, and candidate selection and list composition).

We formulate five hypotheses about the multi-level incumbency effects on legislative recruitment for regional representative bodies in the Czech Republic. The logic of the hypotheses is based on both recruitment phases—candidate selection and elections.

Hypotheses about multi-level incumbency effects

(1) All types of incumbents (local-, regional-, and national-level) have a higher chance than newcomers to get a prominent (electable) position on a party list and to advance on the party list owing to preferential voting.

- As an officeholder, the incumbent has political alliances within the party that enhance his chance to be selected to top positions. It is furthermore a strategic decision to place incumbents in top positions, as personalised support based on public recognition of incumbent candidates means they can attract votes for the whole list. Moreover, personalised support results in preferential votes for the candidate.

(2) Incumbent candidates involved in regional politics are placed to better positions on the list than other office holders.

- Regional party organisations regard candidates seeking re-election as competent and respectable based on their political experience in that office.

(3) Incumbents holding offices at higher governmental levels have higher chances of advancing through preferential votes than those from lower levels.

- Their work is not limited to particular territories and they can recruit supporters from a wider population. Members of a national political body in particular enjoy high visibility among the general public.

(4) Incumbents who hold professional offices have higher recruitment advantages than those who hold non-professional offices.

- They are much more visible and can mobilise office-related resources for their campaign. Subsequently, they can attract more votes.

(5) Local-level incumbents in cities have higher recruitment advantages than local-level incumbents in small towns or villages.

- Their local constituency comprises a larger share of the regional constituency, thereby giving them a greater number of potential supporters. More voters know them and they can attract more votes.
Data and methods

We test the above hypotheses empirically in relation to the 2012 Czech regional elections. These elections fulfil many conditions posed by the theory of second-order elections, making their results strongly dependent on the outcome of previous parliamentary elections and the ruling coalition at the national level [Ryšavý 2013]. In 2006 and 2010, two subsequent national governments were formed by a coalition of right-wing parties. In contrast, the regional elections of 2008 and 2012 were won by left-wing parties. This situation increased the stability (personal continuity) of seats in regional assemblies.

The analysis is based on data from the complete dataset of candidates who ran for election to a regional assembly in 2012. The dataset indicates the party of each candidate running, the ranking on the party list, whether the candidate won the seat or not, the number of preferential votes, and whether or not that number made the candidate eligible for a preferential position. Furthermore, elected offices held by the candidate at the local, regional, and national levels of government are available, the candidate’s occupation at election time, age, gender, and university degrees. The dataset is based on the official list of candidates compiled by the Czech Statistical Office, supplemented with data on offices held (multi-level incumbency) that were obtained from a database of results of previous local and parliamentary elections and another database of regional politicians in professionalised (paid, full-time) political offices. Information on occupation, age, and university degrees was submitted by the candidates themselves and indicated on the ballot papers.

Two series of analyses were performed to test the hypotheses. The first one focused on the selection phase of the recruitment process (selectorate effects) and projected the candidates’ odds of obtaining such positions on the party lists that gave them decent chances of winning a mandate, regardless of how many preferential votes they finally received, or what is referred to as ‘electable positions’. Each political party was assigned a diverse number of electable positions depending on its electoral success. In other words, the number of electable positions was determined ex post as the total number of mandates won by the party in the election plus two. Adding two positions ensures that all candidates, even from unsuccessful parties, are included and at the same time it takes into account the uncertainty about the election outcome prior to the election.2 For example, when

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2 We preferred this solution to ex ante operationalisation (estimating the number of electable positions according to the last election results) for two reasons: First, given the relatively unstable system of parties that stand for election, using ex ante operationalisation of winnable positions would not be possible in many cases and would significantly reduce the number of observations. Second, regional elections can be considered second-order elections in the Czech Republic. Election results are thus relatively strongly dependent on the outcome of the previous national-level elections. For this reason, taking into account the previous regional elections, ex ante operationalisation would not be appropriate in many cases. We checked on the results with alternative ex post operationalisations, adding only one or three positions and the results were virtually the same.
a party won five seats in a regional assembly, electable positions were assigned to the seven top-ranking candidates on its party list. In the case of unsuccessful lists, the first two positions are regarded as electable. A candidate who holds an electable position has a reasonable chance of winning the mandate in the absence of preferential voting. Having an electable position is a relatively reliable indicator of party support. It is a better indicator than not appearing on the party list at all, because most lower-ranking positions are assigned to individuals with slim chances of winning a mandate.

In the second series of analyses the electoral effects were tested. We measured the individual candidates’ probability of winning enough preferential votes to advance to a preferential position, which means at least a 5% share of the votes for the party list as a whole. Only candidates on lists that won at least one mandate, that is, those whose preferential votes may have contributed to their chance of getting the office, were included in the analysis. The independent variables influencing the odds of electoral effects (preferential votes) and of getting an electable position include incumbency-related variables and selected control variables (age, gender, university degrees, and type of political party).

The hypotheses were tested using logistic regression. To deal with the fact that there is intra-party correlation embedded in the data structure, which has to be taken into account in parameter estimation, marginal logit models are used, also called population-averaged models, since here we interpret effects as averaged over the clusters. These are fit via generalised estimating equation (GEE) [Hosmer, Lemeshow and Sturdivant 2013: chap. 9] with an estimation of robust standard errors for a clustered data structure with individual political parties as subjects. Whereas in the case of preferential voting there are only 19 subjects, that is, successful parties (at least one candidate from a party succeeded in at least one region), in the case of gaining an electable position the analysis encompasses all 74 parties. The first part of the analysis devoted to within party selection process comprises all 11,304 candidates, whereas the second part is limited to a subset of 3,822 candidates on successful lists. Table 1 indicates the distribution of dependent and independent variables in the dataset.

3 We were confronted with a dataset with a cluster structure, in which the subjects, i.e. candidates, are nested within political parties as well as regions. Observations within a cluster might be more likely to have similar characteristics, as the processes of candidate selection/election may operate under different conditions among the parties and perhaps regions. To deal with the problem of nested data we first conducted simple mixed models with random coefficients to examine which clustering effects need to be taken into consideration. The results showed that only political party clustering must be considered, whereas for regions the random intercept model proved to be statistically non-significant. Instead of mixed models with random effects computationally less demanding marginal models (via GEE) were used to get the correct estimation of standard errors, since our strategy is not to assess more complex models (with between-cluster variation), which due to the complex structure of the data also turned out to be hardly statistically identifiable.
Table 1. Distribution of dependent and independent variables in the dataset of candidates in the 2012 regional elections

| Category                                                                 | Selectorate | Electorate |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Total candidates on lists of parties that won at least one mandate      | 3822        |            |
| Candidates in electable positions of the party lists                    | 1171        |            |
| Candidates with preferential positions due to preferential voting       | 254         |            |
| National-level incumbents (MPs)                                         | 69          | 56         |
| Regional-level incumbents                                               | 446         | 425        |
|   Regional representatives in non-professional positions                 | 328         | 311        |
|   Regional representatives in professional (full-time) positions        | 118         | 114        |
| Local-level incumbents                                                  | 3203        | 2238       |
|   Local representatives (non-professional), local population < 10 000   | 940         | 602        |
|   Local representatives (non-professional), local population > 10 000   | 845         | 645        |
|   Local representatives (professional), local population < 10 000       | 1116        | 734        |
|   Local representatives (professional), local population > 10 000       | 302         | 257        |
| Women                                                                   | 3117        | 898        |
| Age                                                                     |             |            |
|   under the age of 35                                                  | 2911        | 665        |
|   over the age of 60                                                   | 1446        | 471        |
| University degree                                                       | 4835        | 2351       |
|   Bachelor’s                                                           | 523         | 223        |
|   Master’s or comparable                                               | 3435        | 1686       |
|   Doctorate or comparable                                              | 877         | 442        |
| Type of political party membership                                     |             |            |
|   Party in the national government                                     | 1450        | 1270       |
|   Parliamentary opposition                                             | 1750        | 1463       |
|   Non-parliamentary parties                                           | 8104        | 1089       |

Source: Authors; database of candidates for regional assemblies.
Note: Total candidates 11 304.
Candidates concurrently holding a national-level office account for a relatively small share of all candidates because the number of political positions that exist at the national level is comparatively small. Despite that, about one-fourth of Members of Parliament ran on successful party lists in the 2012 regional elections, suggesting that regional political positions are highly attractive even for politicians at the national level. Regional-level incumbents accounted for a substantially higher number of candidates. Almost two-thirds of existing regional representatives in non-professional positions and almost four-fifths of those in professionalised positions ran in the election. By far the largest number of office holders was recruited from the local level. This was expected since there were about 62,000 local political positions in the Czech Republic in 2012.

Results

Selectorate effects

First, in this part we focus on the nomination of candidates which takes place within the parties. Table 3 shows the effects of various incumbency levels and control variables on gaining an electable position on the party list. Besides estimated logits (B), we present changes in the probabilities of the outcome for a discrete value change of one predictor holding other explanatory variables constant at specific values using averaged marginal effects (AME), that is, the partial effects of a predictor for each observation at its observed values averaged over all observations [Long and Freese 2014]. These are further complemented by conditional predicted probabilities at representative values of various incumbencies and types of political party (so these independent variables are left at their observed values) while the control variables are set to their most common modal category, referring here to the most common type of candidate.

The results indicate that discrete changes in the probability (from the corresponding base level) of obtaining an electable position are greater for any type of incumbency (see also Figure 1 with the conditional estimated probabilities for various level of incumbency and type of political party, while the rest of the covariates are representative for a hypothetical middle-age male with no university education). Regional-level incumbency is by far the strongest predictor of being nominated for an electable position. Candidates holding a professional office in regional government are, compared to newcomers, on average 67 percentage points more likely to be in an electable position, and for those who hold a non-professional office the figure is 27 percentage points.

All other types of incumbency increase the probability less strongly: incumbency at the national level increases probability by 14 percentage points, and at the local level, depending on the type of office and the municipality size, candidates holding a professionalised office in cities have the highest advantage (by 20 percentage points), while incumbents from small towns have only a slightly higher
Table 2. Estimated parameters from the logistic regression model (GEE) of obtaining an electable position (logits, their robust standard errors, and averaged marginal effects)

|                          | Model 1          |
|--------------------------|------------------|
|                          | B  | S.E. | AME  |
| National level incumbency—professionals | 1.264 | 0.315 | 0.143 |
| Regional incumbency       |     |      |      |
| Non-professionals         | 1.970 | 0.236 | 0.274 |
| Professionals             | 3.857 | 0.293 | 0.668 |
| Local-level incumbency    |     |      |      |
| Non-professionals, local population < 10 000 | 0.251 | 0.128 | 0.018 |
| Non-professionals, local population > 10 000 | 0.703 | 0.129 | 0.058 |
| Professionals, local population < 10 000 | 0.833 | 0.098 | 0.072 |
| Professionals, local population > 10 000 | 1.732 | 0.176 | 0.204 |
| Male                      | 0.276 | 0.114 | 0.020 |
| Age                       |      |      |      |
| Under the age of 35       | –0.400 | 0.092 | –0.029 |
| Over the age of 60        | –0.523 | 0.106 | –0.037 |
| University degree         |     |      |      |
| Bachelor’s                | 0.865 | 0.184 | 0.068 |
| Master’s or comparable    | 0.759 | 0.099 | 0.058 |
| Doctorate or comparable   | 0.955 | 0.153 | 0.078 |
| Type of political party membership |     |      |      |
| Party in the national government | –0.122 | 0.155 | –0.008 |
| Opposition in the national parliament | 0.631 | 0.337 | 0.056 |
| Intercept                 | –3.256 | 0.167 |      |
| Df                        | 16   |      |      |
| Deviance                  | 5955.528 |      |      |
| Pearson goodness-of-fit   | 1491.050 |      |      |
| Pseudo R-Square           | 0.214 |      |      |
| QIC                       | 6055.907 |      |      |
| N                         | 11 304 |      |      |

Source: Authors; database of candidates for regional assemblies.
Note: The reference categories for all types of incumbency are ‘no incumbency at the corresponding level of government/parliament’, ‘female’, ‘36–60 years old’, ‘no university degree’, ‘non-parliamentary parties’.
probability than that of newcomers (by 2 percentage points for non-professional positions and 7 percentage points for professionalised ones), and this is similarly true for non-professionals from cities with a population above 10 000 (6 percentage points). The effects of control variables (gender, age, university degree, and type of political party) on getting an electable position are less pronounced than the effects of regional- and national-level incumbency and of professional incumbency in cities.

The results confirmed more or less all the hypothesised effects of the selection phase. (1) All types of incumbents are more likely to be nominated to electable positions than newcomers. (2) Compared to other incumbents, incumbents from regional politics have the highest chances of obtaining an electable position though they are closely followed by professionals from cities. (4) Incumbents holding professional positions in both regional- and local-level gov-
ernments have distinctly higher chances of being nominated to electable positions than their counterparts in non-professional positions. (5) The effect of municipal size is highly pronounced for non-professional and professional local-level office holders. Local-level incumbents from cities have higher chances to obtain an electable position than local-level incumbents from smaller municipalities.

Electorate effects

In the regional elections of 2012, a total of 254 candidates (6.6%) on successful lists obtained preferential votes from more than 5% of party list voters. This is a large number, since there were 675 seats open in the elections. However, a closer look at the party list ranking of those successful candidates shows that a large majority of preferential votes went to candidates that would have been elected even without preferential voting given their position on the party list. Ultimately, preferential voting affected the chances of electoral success of only 86 candidates. All in all, preferential voting decided the winners of just a small minority of seats. Thus, in the Czech Republic’s regional elections, the selectorate plays a dominant role and the electorate plays a rather secondary role. In any case, we want to know whether voters used preferential voting to the advantage of incumbents and if so which type of incumbents in particular. Table 2 shows the results from the logistic marginal models of the effects of different incumbency levels and various controls on the dichotomous dependent variable, which refers to whether or not the candidate obtained preferential votes from more than 5% of voters. The first model takes no account of the candidate’s position on the party list, whereas the second one embraces this effect (using a logarithm of rank).

The results generally confirm the hypothesised electorate effects, with some exceptions (see the estimated probabilities for the categories of incumbency and type of political party in Figure 2, where the remaining covariates are set to their mode, i.e. they here represent a middle-age male candidate with a Master’s or comparable degree). Hypothesis 1 was more or less confirmed, incumbents are more likely than newcomers to obtain electoral support in the form of preferential voting. The only exception is that local politicians holding non-professional offices in small municipalities have about equal probability of winning support as newcomers. Hypothesis 3, that incumbents from higher levels of government obtain higher electoral support by means of preferential votes than those from lower levels, was not fully confirmed. When we do not take into account a candidate’s position on the party list (Model 1), the highest support goes to regional-level incumbents: incumbency in a professional position on average increases the probability of winning enough preferential votes by 35 percentage points compared to newcomers (though for non-professionals the probability of winning these votes is only 7% higher than newcomers). However, a similar advantage applies to national-level incumbents, who have a 30 percentage point
Table 3. Estimated parameters from the logistic regression model (GEE) of obtaining 5% of the preferential votes in the regional elections in 2012 in the Czech Republic (logits, their robust standard errors, and averaged marginal effects)—first part

| Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---------|---------|
| B       | S.E.    | AME  | B     | S.E.    | AME  |
| National-level incumbency—professionals | 2.747  | 0.540  | 0.300 | 2.538  | 0.562  | 0.151 |
| Regional incumbency |
| Non-professionals | 1.108  | 0.278  | 0.071 | 0.228  | 0.159  | 0.008 |
| Professionals    | 3.105  | 0.264  | 0.345 | 0.927  | 0.304  | 0.038 |
| Local-level incumbency |
| Non-professionals. local population < 10 000 | −0.016 | 0.298  | −0.001 | 0.099  | 0.344  | 0.003 |
| Non-professionals. local population > 10 000 | 0.965  | 0.239  | 0.046 | 0.858  | 0.189  | 0.028 |
| Professionals. local population < 10 000 | 0.902  | 0.265  | 0.042 | 0.701  | 0.275  | 0.022 |
| Professionals. local population > 10 000 | 1.967  | 0.291  | 0.135 | 1.459  | 0.325  | 0.056 |
| Male          | 0.724  | 0.206  | 0.032 | 0.520  | 0.256  | 0.017 |
| Age |
| Under the age of 35 | −0.615 | 0.303  | −0.028 | −0.451 | 0.300  | −0.015 |
| Over the age of 60 | −0.761 | 0.192  | −0.033 | −0.776 | 0.261  | −0.024 |
| University degree |
| Bachelor’s      | 0.727  | 0.251  | 0.033 | 0.183  | 0.403  | 0.006 |
| Master’s or comparable | 0.547  | 0.146  | 0.023 | 0.090  | 0.164  | 0.003 |
| Doctorate or comparable | 1.441  | 0.172  | 0.085 | 0.944  | 0.227  | 0.037 |
Table 3. Estimated parameters from the logistic regression model (GEE) of obtaining 5% of the preferential votes in the regional elections in 2012 in the Czech Republic (logits, their robust standard errors, and averaged marginal effects)—second part

|                           | Model 1          |               | Model 2          |               |
|---------------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|
|                           | B    | S.E.  | AME            | B    | S.E.  | AME            |
| Type of political party membership |       |       |                |       |       |                |
| Party in the national government | −0.882 | 0.175   | −0.061          | −0.964 | 0.197   | −0.043          |
| Opposition in the national parliament | −2.243 | 0.190   | −0.107          | −2.481 | 0.278   | −0.082          |
| Position on the party list (ln) | −1.821 | 0.097   |                 | −1.821 | 0.097   | −0.063          |
| Intercept                 | −3.850 | 0.360   | 1.377           | 1.377 | 0.562   |                 |
| Df                        | 16    |        |                | 17    |        |                |
| Deviance                  | 1431.519 |        |                | 931.832 |        |                |
| Pearson goodness-of-fit   | 4960.559 |        |                | 11673.343 |        |                |
| Pseudo R-Square           | 0.247  |        |                | 0.510  |        |                |
| QIC                       | 1465.091 |        |                | 959.444 |        |                |
| N                         | 3822          |        |                | 3822          |        |                |

Source: Authors’; database of candidates for regional assemblies.
Note: The reference categories for all types of incumbency are ‘no incumbency at the corresponding level of government/parliament’, ‘female’, ‘36–60 years old’, ‘no university degree’, ‘non-parliamentary parties’.
higher probability of winning preferential votes. This advantage is also enjoyed by local-level incumbents where the effect is less pronounced, with professionals from cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants having 14 percentage point higher chances than newcomers. This picture changes when we take into consideration a candidate’s position on the party list (Model 2), in which case holding the position of a professional regional incumbent only slightly increases a candidate’s probability of gaining preferential votes, which reflects the fact that regional professionals serve as ballot leaders.

However, electoral support for regional incumbents and local-level incumbents depends primarily on the professional status of their office at both levels and in case of the latter also on the size of the municipality. Hypothesis 4 can be confirmed because incumbents holding professionalised offices gain more elec-
toral support than those in non-professional offices at both levels. The effects of professionalisation are appreciably high at the regional level and to a lesser extent at the local level within cities. Yet, local-level professionals from cities gain more electoral support than non-professionals at the regional level. Hypothesis 5 can be confirmed as well because local-level incumbents from cities are found to secure more electoral support than other local-level incumbents and this applies to both professional and non-professional positions.

The fact that most incumbency effects are weaker in the second model (notably for regional-level professionals and members of the national parliament and local-level professionals from cities) indicates that list position is an important mediating variable between incumbency status and electoral support. Voters prefer to give their preferential votes to candidates in the top position. However, this fact, which has also been confirmed by other studies [Voda 2013], is not easy to explain. A plausible explanation is the list composition strategy. Party gatekeepers prefer to place the best-known candidates with the greatest assumed electoral appeal in the top positions. Many of these candidates with strong appeal are incumbents from various levels of the electoral system. Therefore, controlling for list position decreases the direct effects of incumbency on electoral support. However, the remaining direct incumbency effects after controlling for rank indicate that even incumbents who were not put in top positions on the ballot enjoy significant electoral support. In other words, it is incumbency as such rather than the position on the list per se that attracts voter attention.

The effects of the control variables show that voters also consider the personal characteristics of a candidate. On average, being a man increases a candidate’s probability of gaining preferential votes by 3%; candidates aged 35 years or younger and seniors over the age of 60 have about a 3 percentage point lower probability of reaching the threshold than middle-aged candidates. The chance of obtaining preferential votes rises if the candidates have a university degree: compared to having no tertiary education a candidate with a bachelor’s or a master’s degree would enjoy better chances by 3 and 2 percentage points, respectively, and someone with a doctorate by as much as 9 percentage points. And finally, there is a significant party-type effect. All other things being equal, parties in a governmental coalition and especially parliamentary opposition candidates were less likely to win preferential votes than candidates from non-parliamentary parties.4

4 The interpretation of the party-type effect is not straightforward. The extra chances of candidates from non-parliamentary parties can probably be explained as their dependency on strong personalities who are able to attract personal votes, whereas voters of parliamentary parties vote more often for the whole list with less respect to its composition.
Conclusion

Generally, the results of the study indicate that multi-level incumbency became a very significant factor of recruitment advantage in the newly democratised and regionalised political system of the Czech Republic. Furthermore, it illustrates the importance of incumbency in a proportional voting system, showing that in both stages of the recruitment process office-holding plays an important role, albeit somewhat differently in each stage, and that recruitment advantages based on multi-level incumbency have an important impact on political career patterns. As a single case study, its results can’t be easily generalised. However, they are consistent with theoretical propositions and they offer solid evidence for their validity in the conditions of the Czech political system.

Electorate effects reflect in particular individual visibility and popularity. Next to national-level professional politicians regional-level incumbents are the most advantaged group, followed by political professionals from local governments. The public visibility of their offices makes professionals more popular than non-professional candidates. They derive additional advantage from the prescribed format of the ballot papers, which requires a candidate to indicate his or her occupation. The overwhelming majority of professional politicians indicate the public office they hold as their occupation, so that they are easily identifiable to voters. Non-professional politicians, however, cannot indicate the office they hold as their occupation, which means voters are less able to associate their names with their political performance.

Selectorate effects in the candidate nomination process substantially increase the stability of regional political elites in terms of their personal continuity. Regional incumbents, and especially those who held professionalised executive offices in the preceding electoral term, have the best prospects of advancing to top positions on the party lists and win mandates with ease irrespective of preferential voting. This translates into electoral success for more than 80% of professionalised and more than 50% of non-professional regional incumbents. However, the selectorate effects are an asset to national- and local-level politicians as well. At the local level, this applies especially to candidates holding professionalised offices in cities. Additional data would be required to shed light on the exact mechanism of these positive selectorate effects. It remains a question whether incumbency is the real driving force behind the advantage in the candidate selection stage or whether it is just a reflection of a candidate’s long-term stable integration in powerful intra-party alliances or affiliation with important local party branches that are able to promote ‘their’ candidates to prominent list positions.

We shall now demonstrate the impact of the perceived recruitment advantages on the composition of the Regional Assemblies elected in 2012. All office holders together won 86% of the seats in the regional assemblies, even though they made up only 61% of the candidates running on successful party lists. An overwhelming majority of successful candidates were local-level politicians (75%
Regional incumbents accounted for only 11% of candidates on successful party lists and won 41% of the seats. National-level politicians made up only 1.5% of candidates and won 5.5% of the seats. Local politicians won a majority of mandates because they outnumbered other candidates by a high margin. However, the highest win ratios (ergo the highest recruitment advantage) were measured for regional and national politicians.

These results exemplify the ways political careers are shaped by differences in the recruitment chances of various political positions. The advantage enjoyed by all types of incumbents poses an important obstacle to candidates starting their political careers at the regional level. Compared to incumbents, newcomers have only a slight chance of winning a mandate and as a result, few politicians launch their careers in regional representative bodies. Furthermore, these patterns of accessibility influence the number of political careers with upward mobility from local to regional politics. A large number of regional politicians held an office in local politics when they were elected; the cause is not only the large number of local politicians running in regional elections, but also their advantage over newcomers. However, the number of such upward careers is limited by personally stabilising effects. Regional incumbents enjoy the key recruitment advantage of top positions on party lists, which gradually gives rise to a stable stratum of regional politicians occupying a large part of existing mandates. While these mandates are easily contested by local-level professionals from larger cities, the same is very difficult for local politicians holding non-professional offices or coming from small municipalities. Finally, recruitment advantages facilitate the downward mobility of national-level politicians to the regional level. A relatively large portion of Members of Parliament ran in the regional elections of 2012, and achieved an impressive electoral success. While the stability (personal continuity) of regional political elites is strengthened primarily by the role of the selectorate in the candidate nomination process, the success of this kind of downward political mobility is enhanced mostly by preferential voting. Downward mobility is less common than upward mobility, but the number of MPs running successfully for a regional office is relatively high and, moreover, has been rising since the regional level was established [Bernard 2015]. A description of motivational factors for this type of political careers is beyond the scope of this article. However, it seems, that some specifics of the Czech system, in particular the rising financial power of regions and a higher visibility of MPs compared to regional- and local-level politicians and a decentralised nomination process for parliamentary elections, enhance this type of career. Furthermore, a relatively weak regional personnel base of political parties which weakens competition on the lists could be another explanatory factor.

Even if research on incumbency effects remains to be focused largely on the US political system, the results of the analysis show that the impact of office holding on recruitment chances remains highly important even in other contexts. Recently, career patterns consisting of local/regional/national-level offices have...
been studied in a number of European countries, based on the concept of opportunity structure [Schlesinger 1966; Borchert 2011]. In many cases, similarities with the Czech case have been found—in particular close personal connections between the local and the regional level and the tendency towards the formation of a specific regional political class (see Dodeigne [2014] on Wallonia and Stolz [2010] on Catalonia and Scotland). One of the key dimensions of opportunity structure is the differential accessibility of public offices, defined as: ‘the relative ease with which a certain position can be obtained’ [Borchert 2011: 122]. The Czech case study illustrates how the differential accessibility of regional offices embodied by the recruitment mechanisms contributes to the process described also by Dodeigne and Stolz through favouring regional-level and local-level incumbents. However, the possibility to accumulate mandates also gives rise to national-level politicians who can rely on strong electoral support when they strive for a regional political office, thus supporting Stolz’s arguments [Stolz 2003: 224] against the unidirectional hypothesis that politicians use regional political positions just as stepping stones towards national office and in favour of much more complex political careers.

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