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Stepping out of the shadow of the past: how career attributes shape ministerial stability in post-communist democracies

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ABSTRACT

How do career attributes affect the survival of post-communist ministers? We theorise that career attributes determine “desirability” of ministers, and therefore the length of their tenure. While political career attributes provide superior expertise and incentives, bureaucratic career attributes fall short on both “desirability” markers. Utilizing a unique data set of individual ministers in four post-communist countries in the first two decades after transition, we provide support for our expectations. We then demonstrate that while career attributes acquired before transition remain relevant for the stability of post-communist ministers after transition, their value wanes over time as post-transition career attributes gain predominance.

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How do career attributes affect the survival of post-communist ministers? Studies of executive politics have examined patterns of ministerial stability within and across countries (Blondel 1985; Blondel and Thiebault 1991), and identified several institutional (Bucur 2017; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008; Quiroz Flores 2009), and socio-economic determinants of ministerial tenure (Bäck et al. 2009; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2007, 2010; Dowding and Dumont 2009; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005). However, much less is known about the impact of previous career experience on the length of ministerial tenure, particularly in the context of post-communist democracies.¹

Understanding how career attributes affect ministerial stability in post-communist democracies is important for two reasons. First, to the extent that minister’ career attributes affect ministers’ performance, we would expect them to also determine ministerial stability. If ministerial stability is not related to career attributes linked to ministerial performance, this is hardly good for the quality of governance and democratic accountability – something so important to establish in new democracies. Second, it remains of importance to assess whether career attributes associated with the communist regime continue determining ministerial stability even after democratic transition. If career attributes gained under communist-era state institutions determine performance and overall

“desirability” of post-communist ministers, one must question consolidation of democratic institutions – again, something so important in new democracies.

Through the analysis of ministers in four post-communist democracies in the first two decades after transition, this paper thus seeks to address a two-fold question: (i) to what extent do career attributes predict ministerial stability in post-communist democracies and (ii) to what extent are career attributes associated with the communist regime explain ministerial stability of post-transition ministers.

Building on standard models of delegation, we propose that career attributes determine “desirability” of ministers and therefore the length of their tenure. This is for two main reasons. First, career attributes indicate both ex-ante and ex-post political and technical expertise of ministers. That is, career attributes simultaneously determine prime minister’s scope of uncertainty about the “true” ability of ministers prior to their appointment, as well as ministers’ performance once in office. In principle, a successful minister needs to have both political and technical expertise, including the ability to negotiate and defend policy proposals and the ability to achieve desired policy outcomes respectively (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008). Consequently, we posit that ministers with career attributes that indicate the most suitable “mix” of political and technical expertise will “survive” longer in the office.

Second, career attributes indicate both ex-ante and ex-post preferences and incentives of ministers, and therefore their likelihood to “comply” with prime minister’s (and coalition party leaders) policy goals. That is, career attributes simultaneously affect prime minister’s uncertainty about the “true” incentives of ministers to comply with prime minister’s goals prior to their appointment, as well as minister’s actual compliance once in office. In principle, a successful minister needs to have personal preferences and incentives in alignment with the prime minister’s goals (Indridason and Kam 2008). Consequently, ministers with career attributes that indicate most compliance will “survive” longer in the office.

In assessing which attributes provide the most desirable expertise and incentives, we focus on two types of careers: (i) political experience as a party and a parliament member, and (ii) bureaucratic experience as a non-elected, appointed official in public administration. Conceptually, both attributes focus on experience with the political system, but each one captures a different type of expertise – political and technical respectively – and incentives.² Given that ministers are primarily political figures, we argue that minister’s success reflects primarily their political expertise and political incentives. Consequently, we expect ministers with political career attributes to “survive” longer in their office, while ministers with bureaucratic experience to fall short on “desirability” and therefore “survive” shorter in their office.

In order to test impact of political and bureaucratic career attributes, we generate an original individual-level dataset that indicates appointment and dismissal dates of ministers and their demographic, institutional and career attributes. What differentiates our data from existing studies of post-communist ministers (e.g. Fettelschoss 2009; Fettelschoss and Nikolenyi 2009) is the rich information on ministers’ pre-transition career attributes alongside ministers’ personal and institutional characteristics. Our detailed comparative database is therefore best suited to test a new set of theoretical propositions into how career attributes affect ministerial tenure in new democracies, while being able to separate these effects from standard socio-economic and institutional confounders.

Our data set covers four Central European countries: Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. While this inevitably implies limited geographical scope of our analysis, the four countries provide a good base for generalisation across the region. This is because the four countries differ with regard to communist legacies and post-transition political institutions, such as party and electoral systems and governments. The great country-variability within our data set allows us to explore the consequences of career attributes under different macro-level conditions, thus increasing the external validity of our findings.

Our data set covers the first two decades after transition, which inevitably limits the temporal scope of our analysis. At the same time, the early post-communist period provides the most suitable context to test our theoretical framework. First, we seek to explain how post-communist democracies approach communist-era career attributes initially, and whether these countries eventually “settle” into a dynamic that we would expect to observe in established democracies. Second, we seek to track ministers’ pre-transition experience, which in itself limits the time span suitable for our analysis. The average age of ministers at the time of appointment in our data set is about 49 years. A minister of average age that has a pre-transition experience will have been 69 by the end of the second decade after transition.

Utilizing our unique database, we apply Cox regression analysis to identify the impact of political and bureaucratic career attributes on the tenure of post-communist ministers. In line with our theoretical expectations, we find that political experience gained as a party member in a post-communist party and as an elected deputy of a post-communist parliament lengthens ministerial tenure, while bureaucratic experience at a post-communist ministry prior to appointment shortens ministerial tenure. However, political and bureaucratic career attributes gained after transition only determine the length of ministerial tenure as time goes on, with no predictive power early after transition. In turn, ministers’ pre-transition career attributes determine ministerial survival approximately in the first three or four democratic elections. Early after transition, political experience gained as a member of opposition and communist party member before transition lengthens ministerial tenure. While bureaucratic experience gained at a communist-era ministry does not have a predictive power initially, it shortens ministerial tenure as time goes on.

In many ways, our findings suggest positive development of post-communist democracies. The fact that post-communist political party members and parliament deputies are more successful in retaining their ministerial portfolios suggests both democratic accountability and institutional consolidation. The shorter survival rates of post-communist bureaucrats implies a trend of de-politicisation of post-communist ministries. At the same time, our findings also point to the importance of communist-era attributes in the initial period after democratic transition. The fact that communist party members and opposition members are initially more successful in retaining their portfolios than all other ministers suggests not only a continuity of communist-era elites, but also their relative success in the context of not-yet fully consolidated democratic institutions.

Theoretical framework: career attributes and ministerial tenure

Building on standard models of delegation, we propose that ministers’ political and bureaucratic career attributes shape their performance and therefore the length of their

tenure. Scholars of ministerial stability uncover that personal attributes, especially socio-economic and institutional, affect ministerial performance and therefore length of their tenure (e.g. Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2007; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008). In line with this research, we propose that “desirability” of ministers is not only related to ministers’ socio-economic characteristics or their institutional context, but also to ministers’ career attributes at the time of appointment. We theorise that this is for two main reasons: career attributes indicate ministers’ (i) expertise and (ii) compliance.

[1] Career attributes indicate expertise that each minister brings to their new ministerial appointment. The suitability of this expertise then affects ministers’ performance, and therefore the length of their tenure. In principle, a successful minister requires both political and technical expertise (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008).

We theorise that career attributes that endow minister with political expertise should improve minister’s chance to better navigate the political “pushes and pulls” of the ministerial job. A close-up experience with the political process, for example, helps ministers to develop compromise-making skills, press-communication skills, skills to defend proposals, a general “know-how” of the political process and even provide an easier access to “key” political actors. In addition, ministers’ political expertise can be better observed by the prime minister prior to appointment, thus reducing the level of uncertainty about their “true” political ability.

Career attributes that endow minister with technical expertise, such as those gained in a bureaucracy, may, in turn, improve minister’s chances to deliver a desired policy outcome. A close-up experience at the ministry may help the minister to make better informed policy decisions, as well as to acquire a “know-how” of the bureaucratic apparatus and even better access to “key” bureaucratic actors. In addition, ministers’ ex-ante technical expertise can be better observed by the prime minister prior to ministers’ appointment, thus reducing the level of uncertainty about their “true” technical ability.

While ministers require both political and technical expertise, and most ex-ante political and bureaucratic experiences provide some level of both technical and political expertise, the question remains which combination of political and technical expertise makes ministers most likely to perform well and therefore minimises prime minister’s chance of appointing an “unsuitable” minister. Given that ministers are primarily political figures, we expect career attributes that provide political expertise to be especially relevant for good performance, while minimizing the chance that the prime minister has appointed a minister who falls short in this respect. Consequently, we expect ministers with political expertise to “survive” longer in their positions.

On the other hand, ministers with ex-ante career attributes that do not provide sufficient level of political expertise fall short on the most relevant expertise, and therefore leave ministers with a higher chance of performance failure. In addition, the opportunity of prime ministers to pre-screen political expertise of ministers without political experience is more limited, making more likely the appointment of “unsuitable” ministers. Consequently, we expect ministers with ex-ante bureaucratic experience to “survive” shorter in their position – despite their superior level of technical expertise.

[2] For a minister to be deemed “desirable”, ministers not only need to possess political and technical expertise, but they also need to “comply” with the prime minister’s policy goals. Ministers’ likelihood of compliance therefore affects ministers’ performance, and therefore the length of their tenure. In principle, a successful minister requires limited

incentives and preferences to deviate from prime minister's goals (Indridason and Kam 2008).

We theorise that career attributes determine not only minister's expertise, but also their political preferences and incentives, and therefore the likelihood of their "compliance" with the prime minister. Political career attributes may increase a minister's alignment with the PM's preferences. A high-profile political experience implies some level of public track record of ministers' past actions and preferences, which may provide constraints on incentives to "deviate" from PM's policy goals ex-post, that is, after appointment. In addition, ministers' ex-ante political behaviour can be observed by the prime minister, thus reducing the level of uncertainty about ministers' "true" political preferences and incentives prior to appointment.

Career attributes that entail some level of bureaucratic experience may, in turn, increase minister's chances of alignment with PM's technocratic preferences. A high-profile bureaucratic appointment leaves public record of past technocratic actions and decisions, potentially putting some constraint on personal incentives to "deviate", while reducing the prime minister's uncertainty about minister's past technocratic preferences and behaviour.

While both bureaucrats and politicians have a public track record of past behaviour, the type of this record for each career attribute differs. Given that ministers are politicians rather than pure technocrats, public knowledge of their past political behaviour reduces prime minister's likelihood of appointing a politically "rebellious" minister, and also provides constraints on their political preferences to comply with prime minister's policy goals. Consequently, we expect ministers with political career experience to be less likely to "deviate" from prime minister's policy goals and therefore "survive" longer in their office.

On the other hand, technocratic behaviour does not put constraints on ministers' political preferences to the same extent. Any bureaucratic experience carries a limited public record of a minister's own political preferences, thus potentially making it more likely that – when given the opportunity to make own decisions – a minister may be more prone to deviate from PM's policy goals. In fact, if these ministers plan to come back to bureaucratic positions, they may face even greater incentives to "deviate" from the current prime minister (Dahlström and Holmgren 2019; Huber and Lupia 2001). In addition, while a prime minister can pre-screen former bureaucrats on their past technocratic behaviour, their political past record remains more uncertain. Consequently, ministers with bureaucratic experience will be more likely to "reveal" opposite preferences to the prime minister and when discovered, less likely to "survive" in the office.

Pre- vs post-transition career attributes and ministerial tenure in post-communist context

In the context of post-communist democracies, we specifically assess to what extent communist-era career attributes continue being relevant for minister's "desirability" even after democratic transition.

On the one hand, the vast institutional and personal changes that accompanied the democratic transition would have impeded the transferability of communist-era expertise, and even provide a good opportunity to "re-set" or otherwise "reveal" ministers' preferences. For example, ministers with pre-transition career experience may not have the

“know-how” of political and bureaucratic functioning after transition, be well-equipped to work with the press, effectively defend policy proposals scrutinised through systems of democratic accountability, or even have access to *all* “key” political figures of the post-transition period. Similarly, the ability of a prime minister to ascertain political preferences of communist-era figures may be relatively low, while constraints on their post-transition behaviour weaken. For example, having a political or bureaucratic experience during the “old” regime may not determine their behaviour in the “new” regime. In fact, the most “visible” and “committed” communist party members with the most transparent reputation and incentives were quickly discredited and removed (Pakulski, Kullberg, and Higley 1996).

On the other hand, despite the institutional and personal changes that accompanied the democratic transition, communist-era careers may nonetheless equip ministers with some expertise that is suitable even after transition. For example, former communist-era elites may have acquired negotiating skills, and their “know-how” of the communist functioning, transition politics, along with their access to communist and transition figures, may prove essential in navigating the post-transition environment. Similarly, past track record of communist-era elites may indicate minister’s political preferences on economic transformation and even provide constraint on their behaviour after transition. For example, having a communist-era experience may indicate minister’s commitment to socialist vs liberal political preferences, and constraint minister’s preferences on such topics. This may be especially in countries where communist party leaders were removed after transition, thus allowing lower communist party members to “adapt” and even “thrive” after transition (Pakulski, Kullberg, and Higley 1996).

While both expectations seem plausible, we propose that the relevance of pre-transition career attributes is dependent on the early institutional and personal “chaos” of the initial period after transition. Under such circumstances, communist-era elites may become a reservoir of “desirability”, while post-communist elites may not yet have enough opportunity to acquire suitable expertise and constraints. If newly established democratic institutions are fragile, unstable, undergoing series of systemic changes, or mainly focused on easing the political, economic and social transition, career attributes attained in post-transition democratic institutions may provide weak expertise, and unreliable constraints on ministers’ incentives. In a context where institutions and personnel undergo frequent changes, what was valuable today may not be so tomorrow. For example, if party membership remains volatile and party organisations weak, post-transition partisan figures may not acquire robust “know-how” of democratic politics nor have easy access to all “key” political figures of post-transition period.

We therefore expect that post-transition career attributes “take over” relevance of pre-transition career attributes as time goes on. By the third or fourth democratic election in most East European countries, most electoral and constitutional reforms were passed, party competition stabilised, electoral volatility and the effective number of parties dropped and party systems showed greater ideological consolidation (Bielasiak 2002; Horowitz and Browne 2005). By that time, delayed civil service reforms were finally being pushed forward, often under external pressures of Europeanisation (Goetz 2005; Meyer-Sähling 2009). Even though the extent to which democratic institutions have fully consolidated remains contested, especially more recently (Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018),

we expect that pre-transition career attributes lose relevance as party systems somewhat consolidate and Europeanisation instils civil service reforms.

Political and bureaucratic attributes and ministerial tenure

In this section, we apply our theoretical framework to derive expectations about how specific political and bureaucratic attributes affect the length of tenure of post-communist ministers. For the post-transition period, we focus on two types of the most common political attributes: membership in political party and parliament. For the pre-transition period, we consider ministers who were members of former communist party, as well as members of former opposition movements as communist-era political figures. For the bureaucratic attributes, we focus on minister's experience as an appointed official in civil service, both before and after democratic transition.

Post-transition career attributes

First, we expect ministers who were elected members of post-transition parliaments to acquire robust political expertise and predictable political incentives, both of which improve the likelihood that they will be ex-ante and ex-post "desirable", and therefore remain longer in their office. Among the longest-serving ministers in our data set were generally the most "seasoned" elected officials, such as the Czech Christian Democrat Cyril Svoboda who was appointed for the record six times and served for a record seven years total. This is in alignment with studies of Swedish and Germany ministers, who report a positive effect of parliamentary experience on ministerial stability (Bäck et al. 2009; Fischer and Kaiser 2011).

Being an elected member of parliament might provide rich "know-how" of the legislative process and access to other "key" political figures of the decision-making process, which may help ministers to gain support from their parliamentary faction for the passage of legislative bills. Taking part in the legislative process and frequently communicating with media may further equip ministers with rich negotiating and PR skills. In addition, being an elected official implies a public track record of political preferences and behaviours, which can both help prime minister to assess ex-ante likelihood of political alignment with the government goals and constraint ex-post incentives to "deviate" for electoral reasons.

At the same time, parliaments in the post-transition period lacked capacity despite their preeminent role in law-making (Agh 1995; Andrews 2017 for a recent review). Combined with the frequent change in electoral rules and weak partisan consolidation (Bielasiak 2002), we therefore expect that benefits of parliamentary membership increase over time.

H1: If a post-communist minister is a member of parliament, the minister's tenure will be longer. The positive effect of parliamentary membership increases as time since the transition increases.

Second, we expect ministers who were members of a post-communist political party to acquire political expertise, and public track record of past political behaviour, both of which improve their ex-ante and ex-post "desirability" and therefore lengthens their tenure. While the longest-serving ministers in our data set are generally long-term members of the parliament, others hold high positions within political parties without

being simultaneously in the parliament. For example, Slovakian Centre-Right politician Ivan Milkos, who served as a minister for a record 8 years total, has been a prominent member of four Centre-Right post-communist parties without holding a concurrent elected post in the parliament. This is in alignment with findings from Germany, which shows that ministers with membership in a political party survive longer than non-partisan ministers (Fischer and Kaiser 2011).

Being a member of a political party provides a “know-how” of partisan politics and access to key political figures in one’s party. Much like membership in the parliament, this may allow ministers to gain support from their parliamentary fraction. Being mainly active in party organisation without holding a concurrent elected post, however, may limit the opportunities of these ministers to develop strong negotiating, and communicating skills. Similarly, while party members have a rich track record of political preferences and behaviour, they are not constrained by electoral incentives to the same extent as elected public officials. Overall, however, we expect party membership to be associated with longer ministerial tenure, especially compared to ministers who are not members of a political party.

At the same time, most parties in Central and Eastern Europe were newly founded during or shortly after transition, often having rapidly developing party organisations, and volatile membership. Moreover, party stability has long been regarded as low in many countries in the region (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2017; Lewis 2006). Given the weak consolidation of party systems in the immediate aftermath of the transition, we expect that the positive impact of post-communist party membership increases over time.

H2: If a post-communist minister is a member of a political party, the minister’s tenure will be longer. The positive effect of party membership increases as time since the transition increases.

Third, we expect ministers who served as appointed civil servants at a ministry prior to their ministerial appointment to acquire primarily technocratic expertise while having less opportunities to develop rich political expertise and a track record of political behaviour. We contend that this lack of vital political attributes may be detrimental to their ex-ante and ex-post “desirability” and therefore shortens their ministerial tenures. Indeed, our data indicates that out of the 31 “purely” bureaucratic ministers with no political attributes, none was appointed twice in subsequent governments without acquiring a concurrent political post. While bureaucratic positions may therefore serve as springboards to political careers (Kopecky, Mair, and Spirova 2012), additional political engagement of “bureaucratic” ministers is needed for success.

Being an appointed official at a ministry provides rich “know-how” of the policy-making and implementation process and even good access to other “key” bureaucratic figures, both of which may serve well to post-communist ministers. Indeed, their technocratic expertise and past track record of their bureaucratic activity may be highly valued at the time of their appointment by the prime minister. However, in contrast to party members or elected deputies, former bureaucrats lack political expertise of seasoned politicians. This may be especially the case when attempts to reform the post-communist civil service ease separating political and bureaucratic careers (Goetz and Wollmann 2001). In addition, not being constrained by past political record, or even having an incentive to “deviate” from government goals in anticipation of government

change, further weakens the ex-ante and ex-post “desirability” of ministers with bureaucratic experience.

At the same time, civil service reforms in post-communist Europe have been criticised for their persistent politicisation of the civil service, especially in the initial post-transition period (Meyer-Sahling and Veen 2012). We therefore expect the negative effect to become more evident as public administration attempts to professionalise over time.

H3: If a post-communist minister worked in public administration after transition, the minister’s tenure will be shorter. The negative effect of prior work in public administration increases as time since the transition increases.

Pre-transition career attributes

Fourth, we expect members of communist-era opposition movements to acquire political expertise and to develop public track record of their political preferences and behaviours, both of which may serve these post-communist ministers well. Indeed, more than half of ministerial appointments under the first centre-right government in Poland were former members of Solidarity. Importantly, Solidarity ministers were less likely to be dismissed “early”, while ministers such as Janusz Onyszkiewicz, former Solidarity spokesman, or Leszek Belcerowicz, former Solidarity member who lead post-transition economic reforms, served as ministers for more than four years total.

Despite being short-lived and mostly irrelevant for the fall of communist (Elster, Offe, and Preuss 1998), former opposition members had an opportunity to acquire vital political expertise. Especially in countries where “round-table” negotiations with former communist figures took place, opposition members gained a first-hand insight into the politics of transition and gained access to “key” political figures of the post-transition period. Their direct involvement in the transition would have provided negotiating skills and their active involvement in the politics of transition would have provided solid record of past preferences and behaviours, thus improving both ex-ante and ex-post “desirability”.

At the same time, political expertise of former opposition members was mostly limited to the transition itself and therefore likely to wane over time. With increasing time since transition, political preferences and incentives of former opposition members are also likely to change or carry less relevant information. Even though centre-right parties emerged out of the former democratic opposition (Hanley et al. 2008), possibly providing ministers post-transition political expertise, benefits of post-communist party membership would have been limited by party fractionalisation and electoral volatility, at least until party systems sufficiently consolidated (Bielasiak 2002). We therefore expect the positive effect of opposition membership to be especially pronounced in the early period after transition.

H4: If a post-communist minister participated in the democratic opposition to the communist regime before transition, the minister’s tenure will be longer. The positive effect of participation in the former democratic opposition decreases as time since the transition increases.

Fifth, we expect ministers who were members of the communist party before transition to acquire political expertise and public track record of past political behaviour, both in much the same way as former opposition members. Indeed, according to our data, as many as one-quarter of all ministerial appointments in our data set were former

communist party members, a proportion that barely decreased during the first 20 years after transition. Among the longest-serving ministers were former communist party members, such as the Hungarian Socialist Peter Kiss who was appointed for the record six times and served for at least 7 years in total.

The political activity of former communist party members before transition provided “know-how” of the communist functioning and access to communist figures, both of which may prove essential in navigating the post-transition environment if elite reproduction after transition remains high (Pakulski, Kullberg, and Higley 1996; Williams, Fowler, and Szczerbiak 2005). Much like former opposition members, former communist members may also benefit from “know-how” of transition politics if they had participated in round-table negotiations. Similarly, their political involvement during communism provided a broad record of past preferences and behaviour, such as their likely position on economic reforms, thus improving both ex-ante and ex-post compliance with government policy goals.

At the same time, political expertise of former communist party members would have been temporally limited. While this type of political experience was helpful in reorganizing communist parties in the context of democratic politics (Grzymala-Busse 2002), it is not clear if such benefits would persist for long period of time. In addition, political expertise of former communists would have lost value as new democratic elites gained opportunities to professionalise (Fettelschoss 2009; Shabad and Slomczynski 2002). We therefore expect the positive effect of communist party members to be especially pronounced in the early period after transition.

H5: If a post-communist minister was communist party member before transition, the minister's tenure will be longer. The positive effect of communist party membership decreases as time since the transition increases.

Sixth, much like post-communist ministers with bureaucratic experience, we expect ministers who served in the communist bureaucracy to have an opportunity to acquire more technical than political expertise. In addition, their political track record would have been especially limited in contrast to communist-era politicians. Indeed, our data indicates that out of the 48 “purely” bureaucratic communist-era ministers with no concurrent political expertise, more than 70% were appointed just once, of which nearly half was dismissed “early”.

Despite the inevitable politicisation of the communist bureaucracy (Meyer-Sahling 2009), communist-era bureaucrats had an opportunity to acquire policy expertise, an understanding of policy-making and potentially knowledge of other bureaucratic personnel. However, in contrast to “visible” political figures of the communist regime, these ministers had a weaker track record of past political preferences and behaviours, while having fewer engaging opportunities to develop rich political expertise, such as a good “know-how” of the communist functioning and democratic transition in countries with round-table negotiations. In contrast to communist party members, former bureaucrats, albeit politicised, would have therefore been at a disadvantage.

At the same time, civil service reforms were often delayed and did not become more pronounced until the external pressure of the EU grew stronger (Dimitrova 2005). As in the case of post-transition bureaucratic experience, we therefore expect the negative effect of pre-transition bureaucratic experience to become more evident over time, as reforms deepen the separation between politics and administration.

H6: If a post-communist minister worked in public administration before transition, the minister's tenure will be shorter. The negative effect of former work in public administration increases as time since the transition increases.

Data and variables

In order to test the 6 hypotheses, we utilise a unique dataset that comprises all ministers who were appointed to 40 governments between 1993 and 2011 in four post-communist democracies (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). The analysis begins in 1993 for Czechia, Slovakia and Poland and in 1994 for Hungary. All ministers therefore had the chance to gain at least some experience after the transition to democracy.

In coding governments, we follow the common approach presented by Conrad and Golder (2010) and Mueller-Rommel, Fettelschoss, and Harfst (2004). A government therefore starts with the appointment of a prime minister's cabinet and ends with an election (regular or preliminary), change of prime minister, or with one party leaving or entering the government coalition. The analysis excludes caretaker governments. This yields 10 governments for Czechia, 10 for Slovakia, 7 for Hungary and 13 for Poland (see Appendix Table 1).

We are interested in the duration of a minister in their portfolio. The unit of analysis is a ministerial spell, which is defined as the time that a minister serves from their appointment until their dismissal at the same ministry in the same government.³ The rationale here is that we are primarily interested in how previous career experience affects ministerial duration "on the job." If previous political career attributes provide resources useful "on the job", we would expect that ministerial tenure in this particular "job" lengthens. An individual ministerial spell thus may start either when a new government is appointed or at any time between the appointment and termination of a government. An individual ministerial spell may end either at the end of a government or prematurely, i.e. at any time between the appointment and termination of a government.

During the period of analysis, 517 individuals were appointed to ministerial positions in 858 ministerial appointments. The list of ministers was compiled based on official government sources from each country. The career and personal characteristics of each minister were collected from CVs via official government sources where available. If little or no information was available through official sources, CVs were collected by means of online search, for instance, the personal profile of ministers on their current employer's page, news articles that included short biographies and Wikipedia entries for each country.⁴

We present a description of all variables in Appendix Table 2. We code all post-transition experience at the time of ministerial appointment. This means, for example, that ministers are considered as having political experience only if they directly transitioned from politics to the cabinet.⁵ For experience gained before transition we do not distinguish when the experience acquired. Further, we code all types of career attributes regardless of rank. The reasoning here is that we are primarily interested in the effect of various types of career attributes, not their "strength". While party leaders in ministerial posts, for example, may be able to leverage their experience to a greater extent than rank-and-file members, the party-based assets are largely similar in nature for all party members regardless of rank compared to assets acquired through other types of political and bureaucratic career attributes.

Duration model

In the analysis, we seek to identify the hazard function, which provides the likelihood that a minister survives to time t , given that this minister survived in this position this far. The paper hence asks how a minister's risk of termination varies with respect to the type of career attributes that this minister gained prior to the appointment. Ministerial "failure", that is dismissal, occurs when a minister departs from a position at a particular ministry. Hence, a minister may fail (i) at any time between the appointment and termination of the government and, which constitutes an "early" failure (ii) at the time when the government fails as long as this minister is not appointed to the same position in the next government, which constitutes "failure with government".

Our theoretical argument is consistent with either "timings" of minister's failure. We expect "early" ministerial failures to occur when a minister is perceived to underperform, whether it be due to a scandal, resignation calls, or because monitoring procedures reveal minister's poor "compliance" with the prime minister's goals. While the same applies for ministerial failures "with government", we expect these types of failure to be especially related to the reasons for government failures. New governments establish new political goals, and who was once perceived as "desirable" may no longer be deemed so. For example, one can easily imagine that the expertise of former communist members will be valued by some prime ministers but not others.

We model the hazard function for both types of failures in a pooled specification and then also separately by the timing of ministerial "failure" in a competing risks framework. In the pooled model, right censoring occurs when a minister survives until the end of the government but is immediately re-appointed to the subsequent government in the same jurisdiction. In the competing risk framework, we only consider one type of failure at a time. In all models, right censoring is also applied to ministers who die in office and whose ministry is abolished. There are no left-censored cases in our analysis.

In order to estimate the effect of minister's career attributes on their hazard rate, it is necessary to pay attention to potential confounders. We therefore seek to separate the effect of career characteristics from the effect of socio-demographic and institutional confounders identified in the literature by controlling for these socio-economic and institutional characteristics where possible. In addition, we account for institutional attributes of governments, as opposed to institutional attributes of individual ministers, with prime minister's fixed effects (see below).

The analysis applies a semi-parametric proportional hazard model, as there is no strong theoretical reason to expect a particular shape of the baseline hazard for individual ministers. The analysis therefore estimates the hazard rate of minister i as:

$$h_i(t) = h_0(t)\exp(C_i\beta' + I_i\pi' + S_i\mu')$$

where $h_0(t)$ is a minister's baseline hazard at time t , C is a vector of relevant career experience of minister i , I is a vector of institutional characteristics (size of minister's party, prime minister's party, portfolio salience) and S is a vector of socio-demographic characteristics of minister i (sex, age and education). A full description of all control variables is in Appendix Table 2.

The equation above, however, ignores that some ministers are members of the same government. If a minister's career experience is systematically correlated with government

features, we would confound the true effect of minister's career with the effect of a given government. To tackle this issue, we include prime minister fixed effects that capture all observed and unobserved confounders at the government level.

In all models, we also account for the fact that ministers who were not appointed in the initial cabinet have a lower maximum time they can serve in a given government by adding a dummy variable that controls for the timing of each appointment.

In addition, we account for the fact that nearly half of the observations (i.e. ministerial spells) are from individual ministers who serve two or more times. Ministers may serve multiple consecutive spells in the same or in several governments or multiple non-consecutive spells in a single or in several governments. Given that one can easily imagine that the baseline hazard has a different shape for each spell, we stratify all models by ministerial spell.⁶ This means that, for example, ministers who serve for the second time share the same baseline hazard, which is different from the baseline hazard for ministers who serve for the first time and for ministers who serve for the third time. We also address the possibility that failure times of the same minister in different spells might be correlated and therefore cluster standard errors around a minister's ID.

In order to assess the temporal resilience of communist-era career attributes alongside the emerging effect of post-communist career experience, we fit equation (1) on two subsamples using a 2002 cut-off. This effectively interacts all variables with a 2002 binary indicator. The 2002 cut-off was an election year in three out of the four countries in the sample,⁷ splits the sample into two periods of even length and approximates the first and second decade after transition. It therefore also coincides with greater party system consolidation and civil service reforms (Bielasiak 2002; Goetz 2005).⁸

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the mean values⁹ of relevant career attributes in the entire sample and in governments appointed before and after 2002. In the Appendix, we also show means of control variables (Appendix Table 3) and means of all variables by country (Appendix Table 4). Note that the mean values are based on ministerial spells and not individual ministers, and, should be interpreted accordingly. Whenever ministers are appointed twice, they contribute twice to the means.

With regard to political attributes, Table 1 shows that about half of the ministerial appointments are members of the parliament at the time of appointment. The number of deputies is similar before and after 2002 but varies across countries from 35% in Slovakia to 59% in Hungary. In addition, about 80% of all ministerial appointments constitute party members, although this decreased slightly after 2002 and is the least common in

Table 1. Summary statistics of career-related experience.

Sample	All (N = 858)	Before 2002 (N = 383)	After 2002 (N = 475)
PUBLIC ADMINIST. BEFORE	0.1	0.12	0.09
PUBLIC ADMINIST. AFTER	0.12	0.12	0.12
COMMUNIST PARTY BEFORE	0.26	0.27	0.25
OPPOSITION BEFORE	0.11	0.14	0.09
PARTY MEMBER AFTER	0.8	0.84	0.77
DEPUTY AFTER	0.49	0.5	0.48

Note: Cells display means.

Hungary (64%). With regard to bureaucratic attributes, 12% of ministerial appointments come straight from post-communist public administration. There are as many former bureaucrats before and after 2002, but they are most common in Hungary (20%) and least common in Czechia and Slovakia (10%).

In terms of political attributes gained before transition, 26% of ministerial appointments are members of a communist party before transition; a proportion that remains steady before and after 2002. Appointments of communist party members are most frequent in Poland (33%) and Hungary (41%), which likely reflects the strength of the communist successor parties. In turn, only about 11% of all ministerial appointments are former opposition members. This is higher before 2002 (14%) and in Poland (20%), both of which likely reflects the initially prominent role of Solidarity. The proportion of ministers with communist-era bureaucratic experience is around 10% and does not change much over time. Once again, Hungary has the largest proportion of former bureaucrats (25%), while this is only 3% of Czech ministers.

Appendix Graphs (1–7) present Kaplan–Meier (KM) survivor functions for all ministerial spells and by all career attributes. All graphs show survivor functions in a pooled model and separately by the type of ministerial failure, each for all governments in the sample, governments formed before 2002 and governments formed after 2002. The KM function for all ministerial appointments in a pooled risk specification suggests that about half of ministers survived 500 days, while nearly no minister survived beyond four years. This reflects the fact that most governments in our sample terminated early and those that survived until the end of the electoral cycle were followed by a complete change of personnel.

Appendix Graphs (2–7) show KM survivor functions by career attributes and lend initial support to our hypotheses. Political experience gained *after* transition helps ministers to survive longer in their office. This pattern persists for all types of risks and is evidently larger in governments appointed after 2002. Ministers with political attributes gained *before* transition do not have consistently distinguishable survival probabilities compared to all other ministers. However, former opposition and communist party members appear to have slightly higher survival probabilities in early post-communist governments. Ministers with experience in public administration acquired *after* transition have lower survival probabilities across all sub-samples and types of failures. Ministers with bureaucratic experience acquired *before* transition also have lower survival probabilities, although this pattern appears to be most evident in the period after 2002.

Results

The main results are reported in [Table 2](#). The models are fitted for pooled risk, and separately by the type of ministerial failure – with and without government termination. Each model is then shown for all ministers in the sample and then separately for governments that were formed before and after 2002.

In relation to political career attributes, [Table 2](#) further provides support for our first hypothesis that membership of post-communist parliaments lengthens ministerial tenure, especially with increasing temporal distance from the transition. The pooled estimates in Model (1) suggest that serving as a member of parliament decreases ministerial odds of termination by 28%. Importantly, the protective effect of membership in the

Table 2. The effect of career-related experiences on ministerial duration: hazard ratios from cox models.

Sample Risk Model	All (1–3)			Before 2002 (4–6)			After 2002 (7–9)		
	Pooled (1)	Gov't Failure (2)	No Gov't Failure (3)	Pooled (4)	Gov't Failure (5)	No Gov't Failure (6)	Pooled (7)	Gov't Failure (8)	No Gov't Failure (9)
PUBLIC ADMIN. BEFORE	1.043 (0.161)	0.889 (0.166)	1.30 (0.353)	0.841 (0.171)	0.941 (0.229)	0.772 (0.36)	1.411 (0.332)	0.979 (0.315)	2.296* (0.842)
PUBLIC ADMIN. AFTER	1.317* (0.174)	1.421 [#] (0.26)	1.506 (0.431)	1.06 (0.197)	1.058 (0.259)	1.273 (0.512)	1.671** (0.318)	1.952** (0.473)	2.028 [#] (0.793)
COMMUNIST BEFORE	1.048 (0.132)	1.294 [#] (0.179)	0.773 (0.203)	0.925 (0.144)	1.303 (0.229)	0.495* (0.167)	1.165 (0.232)	1.221 (0.262)	1.032 (0.405)
OPPOSITION BEFORE	0.965 (0.144)	0.887 (0.179)	0.986 (0.287)	0.657* (0.13)	0.879 (0.223)	0.458* (0.173)	1.381 (0.312)	0.863 (0.295)	1.934 (0.783)
PARTY MEMBER AFTER	0.925 (0.108)	0.823 (0.12)	0.94 (0.231)	1.079 (0.177)	1.19 (0.233)	0.934 (0.339)	0.755 (0.13)	0.556** (0.121)	0.875 (0.28)
DEPUTY AFTER	0.724** (0.078)	0.984 (0.127)	0.514** (0.11)	0.883 (0.124)	0.999 (0.168)	0.744 (0.22)	0.689* (0.112)	1.192 (0.232)	0.421** (0.135)
CONTROLS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
PM FEs	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
No. of observations	737	737	737	329	329	329	408	408	408
No. of subjects/clusters	456	456	456	243	243	243	241	241	241
No. of failures	493	324	169	247	165	82	246	159	87

Note: Hazard Ratios; Dependent variable is duration of ministers in days; Standard errors clustered on individual ministers; All models include a constant; list of controls in Appendix Table 2; All models are stratified by spell; ** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$, [#] $p < 0.1$.

parliament is statistically significant and has a larger magnitude *after* 2002, while the estimates are smaller and far from conventional levels of significance before 2002 (Models 4 and 7). With respect to competing risks, while ministers who are members of the parliament have about the same risk of dismissal as do ministers without such experience at the time of government termination, parliamentarians have less than half as much risk of “early” dismissal (Models 7 and 9). Given that minister’s dismissal at the time of government termination is likely to be linked to the reasons for government termination, it seems plausible that new governments set different political goals and thus alter what constitutes a “desirable” minister.

With respect to our second hypothesis, experience as a member of political party does not affect ministerial survival in the full sample (Models 1–3), already suggesting weaker “desirability” of partisans compared to elected deputies. However, differences between partisan and non-partisan ministers are observed over time and with respect to different types of risks. Party members have nearly 50% lower odds of dismissal at the time of government termination *after* 2002. Prior to 2002, the hazard ratios are close to one and far from conventional levels of significance. This provides support for our expectation that party membership in post-communist parties is somewhat desirable, but not in the immediate aftermath of transition. The fact that party membership protects ministers only at the time of government failure may reflect a higher “desirability” of partisan figures, such as senior party members who are not elected deputies, for new prime ministers.

In relation to bureaucratic experience and our third hypothesis, we find that post-transition career bureaucrats have shorter ministerial tenure. Based on the pooled estimates, ministers who worked in public administration after transition before moving to a cabinet post have 32% higher odds of termination (Model 1). The size of this effect is comparable across both types of risks in the entire sample (Models 2 and 3), but varies markedly over time. While ministers with post-transition bureaucratic experience in the second decade after transition are at a higher risk of termination, the corresponding estimates before 2002 are of smaller size and not statistically significant. This lends support to our expectation that bureaucratic experience is increasingly difficult to transfer to ministerial roles after civil service reform sought to separate political and bureaucratic roles.

With respect to pre-transition career attributes, [Table 2](#) also provides support to our hypotheses. In accordance with our fourth hypothesis, ministers with experience in former opposition have about 50% lower odds of “early” dismissal *before* 2002 (Model 6). The period after 2002 shows the opposite sign and is not significant at conventional levels. This supports our expectation that political expertise and track record acquired before transition is deemed “desirable” initially, that is before party system stabilisation and political “professionalisation”. The fact that former opposition members are only protected from “early” dismissals suggests that their “desirability”, much like that of elected deputies in post-communist governments, is heavily dependent on political preferences of each government.

In accordance with our fifth hypothesis, we find that communist party membership lowers odds of “early” dismissal by about 50% *before* 2002 (Model 6). The equivalent estimate for the period after 2002 is close to one and far from statistical significance. These results are consistent with the explanation that former communists are able to leverage their political expertise and track record. However, as newly established democratic institutions stabilise and new democratic elites professionalise, communist party membership

no longer carries much value. Neither it carries any value at the time of government termination. Former communists' risk of termination at the time of government failure, any time after transition, is nearly 30% higher (Model 2). While this result is only marginally significant at 10%, it suggests that political connection with the former regime makes former communists less likely to be re-appointed in the next cabinet. While former communist party members benefit from such experience early after transition, these ministers' political connection with the former regime makes them less desirable anytime political preferences of new governments change.

With respect to our sixth hypothesis, we find that experience in the communist administration is not associated with the length of ministerial tenure in the entire sample, but that some differences are observed over time and with respect to different types of risks. Ministers who worked in the communist administration are more than twice as likely to be dismissed "early" in the period *after* 2002 (Model 9). In the first decade after transition, on the other hand, the corresponding estimate indicates lower risk, although this is imprecisely estimated. The finding lends some support to our expectation that, much like post-transition bureaucratic experience, pre-transition bureaucratic experience cannot be easily leveraged especially as civil service reforms seek to separate professional and political roles.

Robustness checks

In this section, we check the robustness of our findings to several alternative specifications. First, we report how the main result responds to the addition of control variables, fixed effects and stratification by ministerial spell (Appendix Tables 5–7). The substantive interpretation of the results is almost invariably unaffected by controls and stratification by spell. However, the addition of prime minister (PM) fixed effects affects some results, suggesting that certain "types" of ministers were more or less likely to serve under certain "types" of governments. Specifically, the estimated risks for ministers with any communist-era attributes show the same signs, but are smaller and not statistically significant in specifications without PM fixed effects. In addition, the estimated risks for post-communist parliamentarians and bureaucrats do not vary significantly before and after 2002 in specifications without PM fixed effects.

Second, we run models where all post-transition experience is coded as having been gained at any time prior to the ministerial appointment (Appendix Table 9). As one would expect, the increased temporal distance between previous career and ministerial appointments returns weaker results. This is especially evident for bureaucrats and party members.

Third, we test the robustness to alternative cut-off points at two election years, 1998 and 2006¹⁰ (Appendix Table 8). The substantive interpretation of our results seems remarkably robust across these alternative cut-off points. Estimates point in the same direction as for the 2002 cut-off, though in several cases they are no longer statically significant, which partially stems from the smaller sample sizes before 1998 and after 2006. The only exception relates to results for former opposition members and communist party members using the 2006 cut-off point. Former communist party members are subject to a lower risk of early termination under condition of no-government-failure (like for the 2002 cut-off) but their risk increases and becomes statistically significant after a

government failure compared to the 2002 cut-off date. Moreover, the risk of early dismissal significantly increases for former democratic opposition members after 2006, which likely reflects diminishing value of opposition members over time.

Finally, we check the robustness of the main result to exclusion of a single country at the time.¹¹ The substantive interpretation of the results is remarkably robust, as the estimated effects for post-transition attributes are consistent in magnitude and direction. The only exceptions are former opposition members, who are estimated to have a lower risk in the models that exclude Poland. This is consistent with the expectation that the organisational strength of opposition movements such as Polish Solidarity, increases its relevance for post-communist ministers. Overall, these results suggest that our main findings are not driven by a country-specific communist legacy, or other post-communist institutional differences.

Discussion

This paper is the first to carry the study of ministerial stability to the post-communist democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. It shows that patterns of ministerial stability in new post-communist democracies can be explained by career-related attributes, even after controlling for institutional and socio-economic factors that have been identified in studies of ministerial stability in Western democracies (e.g. Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2007, 2010; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008).

These findings have wider implications for the study of ministerial stability and post-communist developments more generally. The paper shows that political attributes shape patterns of ministerial stability in post-communist Europe in much the same way as in Sweden and Germany (Bäck et al. 2009; Fischer and Kaiser 2011). However, the context of regime change changes the mix of individual attributes that matters for the tenure of ministers. In particular, political experience associated with the communist regime shapes patterns of ministerial stability during the first decade after the change of regime. Thereafter, post-communist political experience becomes more influential, indicating “normalisation” of ministerial stability. At least insofar as career attributes are concerned, our findings suggest that post-communist institutions increasingly shape political behaviour. This is contrary to sceptical arguments in the literature that, for example, executive institutional configurations have remained unstable (Dimitrov, Goetz and Wollmann 2006) and subject to perennial conflict (Sedelius and Mashtaler 2013).

Our analysis nonetheless falls short in determining whether recent “democratic backsliding” of the region could disrupt the developing “Western-like” patterns of ministerial stability in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the weakening of checks on the executive power, and the prevalence of illiberal nationalism in the region more recently (Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018), it seems reasonable to expect that – as long as de-democratizing does not throw CEE countries into outright autocracies – “backsliding” alone would not entirely undermine the value of post-transition experience for ministerial tenure. For example, even in the context where new populist parties rise to prominence, while parliaments polarise, the value of post-transition political experience for minister should remain unaffected. For example, both PiS and Fidesz rely on the strength of their political organisations, thus potentially continuing to offer their party members and parliament deputies relevant expertise and networks – something that would have been barely available to

post-communist ministers amid institutional and personal “chaos” immediately after transition.

Notes

1. But see Blondel, Mueller-Rommel, and Malova (2007) on post-communist governments; Fettelschoss (2009), Fettelschoss and Nikolenyi (2009) on socio-economic and career backgrounds of post-communist ministers.
2. In addition, both career attributes are among the most common in post-communist ministers. According to the data we collected, less than 3% of all ministerial appointments came straight from private or other public sector without holding any concurrent positions in politics or bureaucracy. In turn, 80% were elected parliamentarians and 12% appointed bureaucrats.
3. For the same approach, see Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding (2007) and Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008).
4. Whenever more than one source was available, we preferred the information documented in the official sources, such as official government and parliamentary sources.
5. In an online appendix, we show that our results are robust to coding post-transition experience regardless of the time when it was acquired.
6. In the Appendix, we also show that our results are robust to an un-stratified model.
7. In Poland, we use the 2001 election as a cut-off.
8. In the robustness section below, we show that the substantive findings are robust to alternative cut-off years.
9. Given that all career experiences are binary indicators, the mean values refer to proportions.
10. In Poland, we use the 1997 and 2005 elections for cut-offs.
11. We prefer this approach to running the models separately for each country, which would put a hefty demand on the size of each country sample.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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