

**Pre-mayoral Career and Incumbency of Local
Leaders in Post-Communist Countries: Evidence
from Lithuania and Slovenia**

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Abstract:

Political careers emerge when individuals develop patterns of mobility between offices in the political realm. These patterns provide useful clues about the expected activity of an individual leader. Patterns of political tenure can be revealing because individuals who aspire to long-term service seem more committed to the autonomy of their institutions, as well as more active and effective within them. The mayoral career is created in a continuous process of mayoral position implementation where a unique combination of ambition and opportunity intertwine. A political career is therefore necessarily associated with time and defined by two key points: the starting point and the termination point of mayoral function. Between them, the mayoral career takes place. The article focuses on the career development and mayoral incumbency in post-communist countries such as Lithuania and Slovenia. Authors particularly focus on the direct mayoral elections conducted in Lithuania for the first time in 2015 and introduced in Slovenia already in 1994. Career of local leaders was analysed in terms of pre-mayoral career, where authors discovered that the largest share of mayors were municipal council members. Both countries had a relatively high proportion of political newcomers. In Lithuania, the first direct elections finally also enabled the elections of non-partisan candidates, a trend seen in Slovenia since 1994.

Key words:

pre-mayoral political career, incumbency, direct elections, non-partisans, Post-communist countries

Introduction

An important question when speaking about political careers in the political science framework is: ‘Why do some people become and stay politicians while others do not?’ To gain

insights into this question, Verhelst, Reynaert and Steyvers (2013: 27) claim that one must scrutinise the processes by which certain individuals enter, move within and remain in office. Per Marvick (1972), political careers emerge when these individuals develop patterns of mobility between offices in the political realm. Other studies (Barber 1965; Ehrenhalt 1991) suggest that dominant political career patterns provide useful clues about the expected activity of an individual leader. Patterns of political tenure can be revealing, because individuals who aspire to long-term service seem more committed to the autonomy of their institutions, as well as more active and effective within them (Barber 1965; Ehrenhalt 1991; Scarrow 1997).

In our study, the political realm is set at a local level, where the local leader (i.e. mayor) is at the top of the career system. This article focuses on the particular part of career development, i.e. pre-mayoral career, and incumbency of mayors in post-communist countries. Per Haughton (2005), post-communist countries are characterized by the domination of politics and a normative-institutional framework. The political system in these countries often unilaterally penetrates the remaining subsystems, which degrades their complexity and lowers their ability to self-regulate and adapt to the changing environment. All interactions between subsystems are coordinated through a central political system; hence, direct inter-connections between subsystems are often difficult. The relational hierarchy between functional subsystems provides a high degree of integration of the entire system and high predictability of an event within the system. Political leadership (especially for local authorities who are closest to the citizens) remains quite uncharted territory in post-communist countries;¹ however, rare partial studies point to interesting patterns of leadership. For the use of the following comparative analysis, we selected two post-communist countries, i.e. Lithuania and Slovenia. Despite the fact that Lithuania has almost three times bigger territory than Slovenia (in square kilometres), both countries are a similar size according to the population criterion. From historical and political point of view, both countries are republics, established in early 1990s after the transition from previous communist regimes. Furthermore, after independence, both countries set up the same goal to enter European Union; they joined the Union together in 2004. Even though Lithuania

¹ For example, the extensive international study ‘The European Mayor: Political Leaders and the Changing Context of Local Democracy’ was carried out in 2003 and 2004 by the European Association EUROLOC and the European Urban Research Association (EURA), mainly due to the numerous reforms and changes in the European systems of local authorities. The study, which included over 2,700 mayors from 17 European countries, included only 3 post-communist countries: Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Complete study results have been published in a book *The European Mayor: Political Leaders in the Changing Context of Local Democracy* (Bäck et al. 2006).

and Slovenia developed political systems and internal structure of authorities separately, following their own path dependency, as well as political and administrative culture, both opted for a single level of local government with many similarities, which are thoroughly explained in the following chapter. Therefore, Lithuania and Slovenia represent natural choice for a comparative study.

The main aims of this article are to analyse the pre-mayoral career of local leaders and incumbency in connection with the introduction of direct mayoral elections and to uncover similarities in local political leaders from the selected post-communist countries. The article, which is written in head-to-head comparative approach, starts with an overview of the context of the local government systems in Lithuania and Slovenia, where several similarities have been highlighted. The direct mayoral elections conducted in Lithuania for the first time in 2015 are the focus; while in Slovenia, the legislature introduced direct mayoral elections immediately upon the establishment of a new system of local government in 1994. The importance of direct mayoral elections and their correlation to mayoral career paths was noted in a study by Wollmann (2014) who analysed changes that occurred after the introduction of direct mayoral elections in Germany. He noticed the evolution professionalization of mayors. Per Wollmann (2014: 334), ‘the professionalization of mayors is encouraged by local voters who tend to elect mayoral candidates whom they consider prepared and trained for doing a good job as mayor’. Based on these findings, we assumed that, in Lithuania, the change of the normative framework for mayoral elections which empowers voters, also changed mayoral career and established trends regarding the incumbency of local leaders. According to described consideration, our research follows main hypothesis: “Directly elected mayors will lead to shorter mayoral incumbency”. This paper aims to evaluate how direct elections of mayors changed the composition of Lithuanian mayors in terms of their political careers and to determine whether these changes were similar to those experienced by Slovenian mayors who participated in local elections in 2014 for the sixth time. We analysed similarities between the development of the career of local leaders from two viewpoints: pre-mayoral career and mayoral incumbency. To our knowledge, this is the first and only comparative study on both trends of local political leaders in Lithuania and Slovenia.

The context of local government in Lithuania and Slovenia

To establish a clear picture, we start our analysis of the political careers of Lithuanian and Slovenian mayors with a brief description of the local government systems and roles of mayors in the analysed countries.²

Both Lithuania and Slovenia are unitary states and each have only one level of local self-government, which is based on the principle of subsidiarity guaranteed in both countries by their constitutions. Lithuania is divided into 60 municipalities, while Slovenia is divided into 212 municipalities.³ By territory (65,300 km²) and number of inhabitants, the municipalities in Lithuania are quite large, with the average population being 48,400. The smallest municipality is Neringa, with 2,900 inhabitants, and the biggest is the capital city of Vilnius (540,000). Vilnius does not enjoy the special legal status of the capital city despite the rather unique position it holds in providing services to nearly one-fifth of the country's population. In contrast, the average size of the Slovenian municipalities is 9,500 inhabitants, and the average scope of the territory is 95 km². The smallest Slovenian municipality is Hodoš, with 340 inhabitants, and the largest is Ljubljana (290,000), which is the capital of Slovenia. It does have special legal status. Regardless of size, in both countries, every municipality must perform the same functions and services.

The representative body of local government for both countries is the municipal council. In Lithuania, the municipal councils range in size from 15 to 51 members, while in Slovenia the range is from 7 to 45 members, depending on the population. The rights to both vote and be elected to the council are granted to permanent residents of the municipality based on universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. After the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990, local elections were held eight times: in 1990, 1995, 1997, 2000 and, since 2003, every four years, with the most recent occurring in March 2015. After Slovenia gained independence in 1990, both the comprehensive reform and new establishment of local self-government were performed in 1994. Since that time, local elections have been held every four years, usually in the fall.

² For more details for Lithuania, see Šaparnienė & Lazauskienė (2012). For more details for Slovenia, see Kukovič (2015).

³ Out of 212 municipalities, 11 municipalities are named 'city municipalities', which affords them with special status and thus urban administrative centers, and 201 municipalities are ordinary (rural) municipalities.

The political head of the municipality in Lithuania is the mayor. There are many parties in local politics, and the mayor's party seldom holds an absolute majority on the council. Hence, most mayors in Lithuania govern with the support of a coalition of several parties, usually two to four. Based on the recommendation of the mayor, the council elects the deputy mayor for the council's term of office. Mayors and deputy mayors should be citizens of the Republic of Lithuania. The candidacy age for a councillor or a mayor is 20 years old, which is higher than the age of entitlement to vote (18). The positions of mayor and deputy mayor are considered full-time jobs. Another important position in Lithuanian municipalities is the director of administration. He/she acts as an individual institution, with responsibility for the implementation of national and local legislation as well as acting as the head of the municipal administration. The director of administration is appointed and dismissed by the council upon the mayor's proposal. Thus, in most cases, this post is filled with someone from the ruling coalition. The municipal council may also establish the position of the deputy director ([Republic of Lithuania, Law on Local Self-Government 1994](#)).

In accordance with the organization of a municipality's work and the distribution of competences between the three main bodies of the municipality,⁴ concerning the municipality's tasks, the role of mayor in Slovenia is simultaneously executive and coordinative. One of the mayors' more prominent competencies is the political and legal representation of the municipality and the municipal council. The mayor summons and presides over sessions of the municipal council, yet he/she has no right to vote. As an executive body, the mayor primarily executes the decisions made by the municipal council and has the right of legislative initiative because he/she proposes the draft budget, municipal decrees and other legal acts for adoption by the municipal council. The mayor is the 'master' of the municipality as he/she looks after the municipality's assets, replenishes them and provides for an increase in their value on a daily basis, namely by signing various contracts, overseeing public tenders, conducting the rational and economical implementation of the budget and through strict consideration of the principles of good management ([Kukovič & Haček 2013: 91](#)). His/her tasks also include the summoning of the assemblies of citizens and the adoption of emergency measures when the lives and/or property of citizens are endangered ([Prašnikar 2000: 46](#); [Brezovšek & Kukovič 2012](#)). The most

⁴ Per The Local Self-Government Act (Article 28), there are three main bodies in every municipality: municipal council, mayor and supervisory board.

important competences of the mayor are the proper running and management of the municipal administration. The mayor also appoints the director of the municipal administration (as well as dismisses him/her) (Haček 2006: 166) and the deputy mayor(s).⁵ The mayor is sovereign and practically untouchable throughout his/her entire term of office. Through the administration, of which he/she is the head, the mayor can pursue an extremely independent policy, regardless of the policy pursued by the legislative body. The mayor of the municipality plays a central role in the Slovenian local self-government system and, because the mayor is a one-person governing body, the citizens find that he/she is the most recognizable person in the municipality (Kukovič & Haček 2013).

Direct election of mayors

In Lithuania, a big shift towards democracy was made with the introduction of direct mayoral elections. The direct election of mayors had been the subject of a lively debate in the Lithuanian Parliament for more than twenty years, i.e. since independence (Mažylis & Leščauskaitė 2015: 33–56). The main discussion centred on the role that should be played by an elected mayor. Should the mayor be the chairperson of a council or the head of the executive body? And, if the latter, what would the consequences be for the director of administration whose term of office is either conterminous with that of the mayor or lasts until the next election (Astrauskas 2013)? During the pre-electoral campaigns before each parliament election, most of the candidates indicated a favourable attitude toward this subject, but most of them reverted their position immediately after the elections as the first ever policy change was introduced only in 2014. With the Law on Local Government amendment introduced in June 2014, a directly elected mayor would receive slightly increased power as the head of the municipality council; however, the local executive institution remained in the hands of the director of municipal administration.

Per the Law on Elections to Municipal Councils, a mayor in Lithuania is to be elected via direct elections for a four-year term through secret ballots cast by voters who have permanent residence in the municipality. A person may either declare himself/herself to be a candidate for mayor or may be declared so by a party or election committee. A person who declares

⁵ Deputy mayors can be appointed as municipal councillors. A municipal councillor is a symbolic position rather than a professional one, while mayors and deputy mayors can decide whether or not they want to perform their positions as full-time jobs.

himself/herself must be supported in a relevant municipality by not less than 20% of its voters, but not less than 100 voters of that municipality.⁶ The right to be elected as mayor is granted to any permanent resident of a particular municipality who is on the polling day at least 20 years old and who is a citizen of the Republic of Lithuania.⁷ Mayoral elections use a double-round, absolute-majority vote system; the candidate who gets a majority of all the votes cast is elected. If no candidate receives an absolute majority, a second round is held for the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round.

The first direct mayoral elections in Lithuania were held on the 1st of March 2015. The councils were elected at the same time. The voter turnout was expected to be higher than usual; however, it was similar to previous local elections. In 2011, the voter turnout was 44%; in 2015 it was 47% (first round) and 39% (second round). Nineteen mayors were elected in the first round and, for the first time, five non-partisan mayors were elected (8%).⁸ This was a new phenomenon in Lithuania. The ruling Lithuanian Social Democratic Party won 16 mayoral posts. The second party, in terms of the number of mayors, was the opposition Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats (conservatives), who had victories in 11 municipalities. The conservatives were closely followed by the opposition Liberal Movement (ten mayors). The changes to the electoral system, i.e. direct mayoral elections, significantly changed the ‘profile’ of the municipalities. Twenty-five new mayors were elected (42%), whereas 35 were re-elected. In the 2011 election, there were 17 newly elected mayors (28%).

Slovenia’s direct mayoral elections were introduced (without any opposition) in 1994 in a package with the local government re-introduction reform. Per the Local Self-Government Act,⁹ the mayor is an individual body – a political official elected through a direct election for a term of four years via secret ballots cast by voters who have permanent residence in the municipality. The rights to both vote for and to be elected as mayor are granted to every citizen who has the right to vote for the municipal council. The candidacy procedure is simple because political parties and groups of voters can propose candidates. Elections for mayor use a double-round, absolute-majority vote system; the candidate who gets a majority of all the votes is elected. If none of the candidates receives an absolute majority of the votes, a second round is held for the

⁶ Republic of Lithuania Law on Elections to Municipal Councils, Article 34.

⁷ Republic of Lithuania Law on Elections to Municipal Councils, Article 2.

⁸ Four of them are mayors of major cities: Kaunas (the second largest city, 300,000 inhabitants), Šiauliai (the fourth largest city, 160,000), Panevėžys (the fifth largest city, 100,000) and Alytus (the sixth largest city, 57,000).

⁹ The Local Self-Government Act, Article 42.

two candidates who received the most votes in the first round. The second round should be held no later than 21 days following the day of the first round (Brezovšek & Kukovič 2012; Kukovič & Haček 2013).

Due to differences in Slovenian and Lithuanian local electoral systems, the statistics are slightly different. Voter turnout at Slovenian local elections has been steadily decreasing since 2002;¹⁰ at the latest local elections in the fall of 2014, it was 45% in the first round and almost 44% in the second round. Empirical data concerning local elections since 1994 strongly confirm that non-partisan candidates were convincing winners of the last three mayoral elections, having the highest share of municipalities where at least one candidate for mayor ran as a nonpartisan. The number of elected mayors formally running as non-partisans has been rising sharply since 1998, and most municipalities have had a mayor who was not put forward by a political party during that time as well; 43 non-partisan mayors were elected at local elections in 1998 (out of 192 municipalities), 59 in 2002 (out of 193 municipalities), 66 in 2006 (out of 210 municipalities), 70 in 2010 (out of 210 municipalities) and 115 at the local elections in 2014 (out of 212 municipalities). At the last local elections in 2014, non-partisan mayoral candidates ran in 75% of all municipalities (159 out of 212) and were successful in 72% of those (115 out of 159 municipalities). This was by far the highest success rate for non-partisans (or any political party) at any local election in the two-decade history of Slovenian local democracy (Kukovič et al. 2015: 700). When the five mayoral elections from 1998 to 2014 were compared, the percentage of re-elected mayors in Slovenia increased.¹¹ Additionally, there was less space for new faces within every local election.

Mayoral political career

Prinz (1993: 12) explains that the mayoral career is created in a continuous process of mayoral position implementation, where a unique combination of ambition and opportunity intertwine. A political “career path”¹² is therefore necessarily associated with time and defined

¹⁰ Voter turnouts at local elections in Slovenija were 61% in the first round and 50% in the second round in 1994; 58% and almost 52% in 1998; 72% and 67% in 2002; 58% and 53% in 2006 and 51% and 49% in 2010 (Kukovič et al. 2015: 699-700).

¹¹ At local elections in 2014, 177 out of 211 mayors decided to re-run for the mayoral office. Electoral success was high: 84%, with 149 mayors re-elected.

¹² Authors would like to explain that we realize that mayoral “career paths” are dependent not only from pre-mayoral political career, but also from many different variables such as gender, age, educational background, family roots and political activity of the family members, social origins of the mayors etc. However, we intentionally chose pre-mayoral career, since we argue that the most important factor for political career is the last position before the present one.

by two key points: the *starting point* and the *termination point* of mayoral function. Between them, the mayoral career takes place. However, these two points do not constitute the absolute beginning and end of a political career; rather, they are open to other directions because, before the starting point, there was some form of pre-mayoral career, and, after the termination point, there has usually also been some form of post-mayoral political career (Kjær 2006: 76). Hibbing (1993) says that an effective description of the mayoral career focuses on two different types: the *internal* and the *external* careers. An internal political career exists within local authorities, including the municipal council and the mayor. An external political career can include, for example, a seat in the parliament or another position in the government. As shown in Table 1, there are at least six different aspects of the mayoral career.

Table 1. Different aspects of the political career of a mayor

	Internal career	External career
Beginning of mayoral career	Number of years at the council	Pre-mayoral political career
Occupying mayoral office	Seniority	<i>cumul des mandats</i>
Termination of mayoral career	Returning to the council	Post-mayoral political career

Source: Kjær (2006: 77).

Our analysis¹³ highlights the internal career (number of years on the council), external pre-mayoral political career and incumbency.

Pre-mayoral career: last position determines the present one

If we follow Kjær (2006: 76) and consider that a pre-mayoral career influences mayoral leadership, we must analyse one’s mayoral career prior to him/her becoming a political leader. In the first section, we were interested in individuals’ pre-mayoral career before they were elected as mayors. We particularly focused on the *internal political career* of mayors, i.e. number of years at the council before first election to the mayoral office, and *external political career*, i.e.

¹³ Data on Lithuania were taken from research project No. MIP-031/2015 “Mayors in Lithuania: Political Leadership in Local Government” (Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University, Social Research Center), which was founded by the Research Council of Lithuania. Data on Slovenia were based on research conducted among Slovenian mayors in spring 2014. The response rate was 106 out of 212 mayors (50% of the population). For more information on the research project ‘Styles of local political leadership’, see Kukovič (2015).

holding some other publicly elected office in which they learned the skills of political manoeuvring.

Our analysis of internal political careers showed that most of the mayors followed the path to their career through the position of council member. Most Lithuanian mayors (45 out of 60, i.e. 75%) who were directly elected in 2015 were council members before assuming the mayor's office for the first time; only 15 out of 60 mayors (25%) had no prior experience in this position. The average period of time spent serving as a council member prior to becoming a mayor was 5.4 years (SD = 5.7).¹⁴ Deeper analysis of Lithuanian mayors showed that mayors were usually local party leaders and branch chairpersons; however, sometimes they were politicians who had reached vertically higher positions in the party hierarchy.¹⁵ The analysis also revealed that, in some cases, these individuals even changed their political orientation and their party to become mayors.¹⁶ In addition to political experience as municipal council members, the Lithuanian mayors had diverse amounts of internal (political) experience, i.e. they either spent some time in other political positions,¹⁷ had served as elders in the municipal administration¹⁸ or worked as a department head in a municipality; several mayors had worked in municipal companies or institutions etc.

¹⁴ The mayor of the Ignalina municipality is an interesting case: He waited 24 years for his 'turn'. This case is extraordinary rather than typical. Henrikas Šiaudinis was appointed as the mayor due to favourable circumstances that arose when his predecessor, who had led the municipality since 1990, was elected to the European Parliament in 2014. The council then elected Šiaudinis as the mayor and, in the direct elections the following year, he was elected by the citizens as well. Šiaudinis had been elected to the council in 1990 and, starting from 1995, had been the deputy mayor (both he and the mayor belong to the same party). Thus, the 'eternal' deputy replaced the 'eternal' mayor.

¹⁵ For example, the assistant of Rolandas Paksas (party chairperson).

¹⁶ For example, the mayor of Raseiniai—from the Order and Justice to Labour Party, the mayor of Kalvarija—from the Homeland Union to Order and Justice, the mayor of Šilutė—from the Order and Justice to the Social Democratic Party etc.

¹⁷ Three mayors that were newly elected in 2015 had held the office of mayor a few years prior (for 13 and 9 years, respectively), two had held the office of the deputy mayor (for 4 years each), one worked as the Director of Municipal Administration (for 4 years) and one served as the Deputy Director of Municipal Administration (for 4 years).

¹⁸ An *elder* is not a political position; however, an elder's duties are 'close' to citizens. Three new mayors had served as elders for 2, 4 and 11 years, respectively.

Table 2. Pre-mayoral career: Comparison between Lithuanian and Slovenian mayors

		Lithuania	Slovenia
INTERNAL POLITICAL CAREER	Local council members (in %)	75	52
	Number of years at the council	5.4 years	3.5 years
EXTERNAL POLITICAL CAREER	Members of the national parliament (in %)	5	7
NEWCOMMERS (in %)		35	48

Source: own elaboration.

As shown in Table 2, compared to their Lithuanian colleagues, the share of Slovenian mayors who served as municipal councillors before becoming mayors was somewhat lower. The survey showed that a little more than half of the Slovenian mayors (52%) had already been municipal councillors before being elected to the mayoral office; a notable proportion of those mayors had previously been deputy mayors (19%) or members of supervisory boards (8%).¹⁹ Based on participant responses, we found that Slovenian mayors, on average, were (before being firstly elected to the mayoral office) municipal councillors for 3.5 years, which was also less than that of Lithuanian mayors (Kukovič 2015).

Having an external political career means that mayors had held some other publicly elected office beyond the municipality before they were elected as mayor. Out of 60 mayors in Lithuania, only three (i.e. 5%) were members of parliament prior to the 2015 mayoral elections,²⁰ and one had worked as a vice-minister; others were either assistants to members of the parliament or ministry advisers. Conversely, some new Lithuanian mayors from the 2015 elections were relatively unknown but managed to win; they had not held any political positions but belonged to one of the main political parties (the Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian

¹⁹ Although the latter is an expert and not a political position, he/she could still become acquainted with the local community and acquire local government experience.

²⁰ One of them was a parliament member from 2008–2012 who later worked in business. The other two gave up their parliament member mandates for the position of mayor (Varėna and Vilnius municipalities). The mayor of Vilnius had been a member of parliament for three years; before that, he had held the position of Minister of Justice (for four years).

Democrats); one mayor had served as the deputy director of municipal administration; some mayors came from police structures.²¹

Likewise, in Slovenia, a rare transition from the national level was evident, since only a small proportion of the mayors had any experience in national politics before entering a mayoral office. Only 7% of Slovenian mayors had gained political experience as MPs in national parliament before being elected to the mayoral office, and only 1% of mayors had been members of the National Council. Nevertheless, one should not overlook that a significant proportion (48%) of mayors were still *newcomers*, i.e. individuals that had never occupied a public office and were elected to the mayoral office without any local political experience. The gathered data (Kukovič 2015) showed that the largest share of Slovenian mayors (before they were elected to public office) occupied leading positions in private and public enterprises (41%). In second place, we found special professions, such as health professionals, teachers and the liberal professions (26%), followed by technical professions (19%).

The re-election of mayors and mayoral incumbency

The following section focuses on both the period of mayoral office occupancy (i.e. incumbency phenomenon) and the re-election of mayors. Many scholars (McKelvey & Reizman 1992; King & Zeng 2000; Leoni et al. 2004; Kukovič & Haček 2013) have stated that incumbent politicians may be successful in re-election because of comparative advantages, such as access to campaign channels, media exposure, personal recognition, previous achievements etc. According Sloboda (2014), incumbents are, on average, seven times more successful than non-incumbents for two primary reasons. First, incumbents often serve citizens better. Through the instrument of elections, they receive incentives to promote the interests of ‘their’ voters. An incumbent’s connection with a constituency is critical to voters, because many of them demand that their

²¹The mayor of one of the largest municipalities (Alytus City), Vytautas Grigaravičius, had spent no less than seven years as the Police Commissioner General of Lithuania and had occupied various positions in the police system. When he was 58, he was elected as a nonpartisan candidate with support from the public electoral committee. There was a very similar case in the municipality of Anykščiai: the winner there was Kęstutis Tubis, who had been nominated by the Liberal Movement. He had no political experience in local self-government but had worked in a managerial position in the police commissariats of various cities, and he spent four years (2004–2008) working as the Deputy Police Commissioner General of Lithuania. In 2008, he ended his office in the system of the interior (Lithuania’s laws foresee the possibility for police officers to retire after 20 years of work; some of them look for another job). Tubis became the mayor when he was 54 years old.

representatives act in a responsible manner.²² Incumbents are a more desirable species in terms of the quality of democracy, because they tend to be more open to the demands and desires of their voters, especially compared to short-lived, single-term politicians. The second argument states that more experienced politicians with a longer political career are more efficient and can therefore better represent the interests of their constituencies. A career politician assists his/her constituency in becoming more institutionalised and professional, as well as in having a stable membership, internal structure and clear rules (Polsby 1968). In this way, career politicians, whose objective is to achieve a longer political tenure, devote more of their time to both public policy making and implementation (Botero 2008: 6; Kukovič & Haček 2013).

In Lithuania, 72% of mayors were re-elected at local elections in 2011, and 58% were re-elected in 2015, when direct mayoral elections were implemented for the first time. Interestingly, the share of re-elected mayors has dropped just as citizens gained a replacement tool for the mayors in office. In Slovenia, the picture is somewhat different. Statistical data show that, at every mayoral election from 1998 onwards, between 80% and 90% of incumbent mayors have decided to run for office again, which indicates that mayors are highly motivated to stay on in their positions and to build their political careers in this way. In Slovenia, the atmosphere is strongly in favour of mayoral re-election; when five mayoral elections from 1998 to 2014 were compared, the percentage of re-elected mayors steadily increased (Kukovič et al. 2015). The electoral success rate²³ of re-elected mayors has increased with every subsequent mayoral election (from 77% in 1998 to 84% in 2014).²⁴

Next, we will discuss the incumbency of Lithuanian and Slovenian mayors. Our analysis of Lithuanian mayors showed that 23–26% of incumbents were in office for one term, i.e. four years. On average, Lithuanian mayors have remained in office for five years (mean = 5.07, SD = 5.73) before the introduction of direct mayoral elections in 2015.²⁵ Based on empirical

²² Voters can inform their representatives of considerations and demands individually as well, or they can use various forms of petitions or exert pressure on them via their parties' leadership. However, casting a vote at elections remains a powerful tool in the hands of a voter; receptive representatives can be rewarded, and inefficient ones can be punished (Botero 2008: 5).

²³ Electoral success is computed as a quotient of the number of municipalities in which incumbent mayors have been re-elected and the overall number of proposed candidacies of incumbent mayors in all municipalities.

²⁴ The electoral success of incumbent mayors was 77% in 1998; 79% in 2002; 82% in 2006; 83% in 2010 and 84% in 2014. Note also that the number of municipalities analysed during that period increased from 192 in 1998 to the current number of 212 in 2014.

²⁵ Incumbent politicians who occupied mayoral positions for the longest periods of time before re-election in 2015 were the mayors of Pasvalys (22 years, intermittently, since 1990), Druskininkai (16 years), Rietavas (15 years) and Šakiai (15 years). These mayors are members of different parties (Homeland Union, Lithuanian Social Democrats,

data, we can state that Slovenian mayors perceive the mayorship as a long-term position, with the average period in office at 8.62 years, which is slightly more than two terms in office.²⁶ Additionally, the following statistics indicate that the atmosphere in Slovenia is indeed quite favourable for the re-election of mayors: first, in 97 Slovenian municipalities, the incumbent mayors are now at least in their third consecutive term of office; second, 11 municipalities have had the same mayors since 1994 (hence, they are currently serving their sixth term); third, in four municipalities, former mayors were again elected after an interval of at least one term; and fourth, of the current 212 municipalities, there are no municipalities in which every election so far has seen a victory by a different candidate mayor. This means that, in all 212 municipalities, at least one mayor has repeated his/her term of office.²⁷

Long-time mayors often adjust their political behaviour to satisfy their electoral base and thus further their careers (Kukovič & Haček 2013). However, the opposite view also exists – inexperienced mayors contribute fresh ideas and new energy. Putnam (1976: 66) emphasizes that, the more inexperienced the local leader, the lower the level of professionalism and efficiency but also the greater the degree of innovation and flexibility in local politics. From this perspective, it is therefore difficult to find a balance between ‘new blood’ – someone with fresh ideas and new approaches – and someone with valuable experience and continuity. Regardless of the high share of Lithuanian and Slovenia re-elected mayors at the latest local elections, a relatively high proportion of political *newcomers*, i.e. mayors, who had no political experience before their first election to the office of mayor, is evident. In Lithuania, 35% mayors lacked prior experience in local government before their first election; in Slovenia, the proportion of mayors who lacked political experience prior to their first election was even higher (48%).

Per Kjær (2006), the average length of a time a mayoral position was held among European mayors was seven years. As previously discussed, Lithuanian mayors held a mayoral position on average for five years, which is more than one term of office; among Slovenian mayors, average incumbency was even longer (8.62 years), i.e. more than two consecutive terms of office. If we compare Slovenian mayors with other mayors from European countries, directly

Liberal and Centre Union and the Peasant and Greens party, respectively). It is impossible to claim that one particular party has the largest number of incumbent mayors. Two mayors have served two terms in office, i.e. eight years. Six mayors have served as mayors before 2015, but for a very short period of time, i.e. incomplete term, between six months and three years.

²⁶ Among the respondents, the shortest mayorship was two years, and the longest was twenty years. The vast majority (98%) also responded that they had occupied a mayoral office without any interruption.

²⁷ The youngest municipality, Ankaran, held its first local elections in October 2014.

elected Slovenian mayors have occupied the mayoral office for a longer period (Slovenia is above the European average), while Lithuanian mayors are under the European average, even though they were directly elected at the most recent local elections (before that they were elected indirectly, i.e. among council members).

Concluding remarks

We chose to emphasise the pre-mayoral career and incumbency of mayors in two former communist countries—Lithuania and Slovenia—which have opted for a similar system of a single-tier, local government, with Slovenia doing so two and half decades ago. We particularly analysed direct mayoral elections, which have been carried out regularly in Slovenia since 1994 and in Lithuania only since 2015. The career of local leaders were first analysed in terms of pre-mayoral career, where we discovered that the largest share of mayors (52% in Slovenia and 75% in Lithuania), prior to their election, were members of municipal councils. The average period for performing as a municipal councillor was 3.5 years in Slovenia and 5.4 years in Lithuania. Our analysis also revealed that, in both countries, only minor transitions from the national level could be observed because small shares of the mayors studied had any prior experience in national politics. It is also interesting to note that both countries had a relatively high proportion of newcomers to the world of politics (Lithuania 35%, Slovenia 48%).

We proceeded from the assumption that the change in the electoral system from indirect to direct mayoral elections impacted the composition of mayoral political careers. A full data analysis confirmed our assumption on two levels.

First, in the analysis of mayoral re-election and related incumbency, we found that the direct mayoral elections in Lithuania reduced the proportion of re-elected mayors; in 2011, the share of re-elected mayors was 72%, while in 2015 the figure fell to 58%. Unlike in Lithuania, in Slovenia the share of re-elected mayors is slowly growing. Indeed, we found that the Slovenian mayors and voters were favourable towards mayoral re-running, which enables long mayoral political careers. Per the analysed data, the average incumbency of a Slovenian mayor is 8.62 years, which is more than two consecutive terms. Based on the analysis, we can confirm the initial hypothesis “Directly elected mayors will lead to shorter mayoral incumbency” only for the Lithuanian, but not also for the Slovenian case.

Second, in Lithuania, the first direct elections in 2015 also enabled the elections of non-partisan candidates, a trend seen in Slovenia since 1994. In Slovenia, the power of non-partisan mayors particularly increased at the latest local elections in 2014, when 115 non-partisan and only 97 partisan mayors were elected. This trend can be linked to the phenomenon of rising distrust towards political parties, which is a particularly common trend in post-communist countries. This is presumably because of the traditions stemming from the previous socialist system (Haughton 2005). Eurobarometer (2004; 2016) data show that, in both Slovenia and Lithuania, trust towards political parties is extremely low. When both countries entered the EU in 2004, 74% of Lithuanians and 77% of Slovenians (Eurobarometer 2004) expressed distrust towards political parties; this changed for the worse in the latest Eurobarometer (2016) survey, when 87% of Lithuanians and 89% of Slovenians expressed distrust towards political parties.

The differences between both cases can be partly explained with the differences in the electoral system used for the mayoral elections and influences in the recent history of the direct voting on the local level. Furthermore, the reasons could also lie in the differences of administrative and political traditions between the countries.²⁸ Another question to observe is whether Lithuanian voters will continue to use the mechanism of direct mayoral elections and thus, at least in the local government, avoid voting for distrusted political parties, induct more newcomers into the political arena and adorn their local political elite with longer incumbency, thereby following the trends set by the Slovenian local leadership realm, remains to be seen.

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²⁸ In Slovenia post-napoleonic administrative tradition is prevalent with some influences of the Germanic tradition (Brezovšek & Kukovič 2015). In Lithuania mixed of three historical influences can be observed: heritage of independent statehood, Soviet legacy and constructed European administrative tradition (Pivoras 2013: 138).

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