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Examining the Gendered Regime of Slovak Cabinet Appointments Using a Feminist Institutional Perspective

In this study, I am applying the feminist institutionalist model developed by Annesley et al. (2019) to analyze cabinet formation in three Slovak governments by focusing on the actors, formal and informal rules, and the process of ministerial selection. By interviewing political actors who participated in the cabinet formation, I am uncovering which type of criteria—experiential, affiliational, or representational—are decisive in selecting a ministrable. It is the affiliational criteria that were decisive in most of the cases of ministerial selection in Slovakia, as the need for experience is a prescriptive but very flexible criterion that can be disregarded when needed. On the other hand, representational criteria played no role in cabinet formation in Slovakia. Consequently, this study reveals how the interplay of formal and informal norms and rules maintains a gendered regime of ministerial selection that conserves the political disadvantage of women in Slovak cabinets. The characteristics of an institutional setting, such as that of the party system, play an important role in the gendered regime as well. A small number of portfolios and a high number of parties in coalitions create conditions where only a few party leaders are usually appointed to the cabinet. Weak party organizations, lack of women's organizations within parties, and the absence of conviction among the selectors highlighting the benefits of gender equality offer little hope for the future improvement of gender balance in Slovak cabinets.

Key words: gendered regime, Slovak government, cabinet appointments, Feminist institutionalism

Introduction

The prime minister is the most important component in a government that determines political development in parliamentary democracies. A minister's personality, values, and policy goals are essential to what rules and policies will be eventually adopted as laws. Men historically dominated the government cabinets as the institution was created by males and for males. This privilege continues to this day, although gender-parity cabinets in the world are not uncommon anymore. There is abundant scientific evidence that cabinet formation and the government itself are gendered institutions that are hindering women's nomination to the cabinet.

There has never been a gender parity government in Slovakia, although there is a weak-positive overall trend in the share of women in the cabinet. The number of women in 3 recent Slovak governments ranged from 0 to 5. Though Slovakia recently had governments with 5 women ministers (35.71%), there were no women ministers in the years 2014–2015. The sharp increase in female representation in the cabinet has happened without any known or objective changes in the rules such as being the introduction of a gender quota. The variance can be *prima facie*, explained by the relatively high political agency of the selector, the prime minister, who, at least according to the formal rule in the constitution, can appoint whomever she wants. How can the variance be explained when applied to the Slovak government?

To better understand the process of ministerial selection in Slovakia, in this study I employ the feminist institutionalist model developed by Annesley et al. (2019), focusing on the process of government formation and the biases of the selectors who directly influence and decide who will be a part of the next cabinet. I aim to understand the selectors' motivation, ideas, constraints, and norms that guide their decision-making during cabinet appointments. The aim of this study is twofold: Firstly, I aim to explain the variance in the number of female ministers in Slovak cabinets. Why were there female ministers nominated to some cabinets while none in others? Why are male ministers still prevalent in every Slovak government? This study investigates how formal and informal norms interplay, hindering women's nomination to the cabinet. Secondly, I want to shed light on the selection process; who are the selectors deciding on who becomes a minister in Slovakia? In order to reveal the gendered regime of cabinet appointments, my goal is to identify formal and informal rules that guide these selectors during ministerial selection. To meet this end, I conducted semistructured interviews with 8 respondents from 2 Slovak coalition governments. This study aims to contribute not only to the feminist scholarship on executives but also to the wider political science scholarship in Slovakia and beyond.

Gendered Political Representation and Feminist Institutionalism

The feminist theory recognizes that political positions are imbued with gendered meanings, excluding women from the political sphere, positioning them as outsiders and second-class citizens. Feminist political scientists focus on how gender and political power intersect and influence each other—in our case, in the process of ministerial appointment. The feminist approach allows political scientists to understand the context of patriarchal forces that function within the process of cabinet formation and explain why women are still left out of cabinet membership, determining under what conditions they will be granted a cabinet seat. Processes that exclude women from governmental institutions are widely documented in political science scholarship (e.g., Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson 2009; Chapell & Waylen 2013; Campbell & Child 2013).

Many studies have been written about women in Slovak politics; however, there is a paucity of studies that have touched upon women in executive positions. A scientific work by sociologists Filadelfiová, Radičová, and Puliš (2000) included detailed statistics of women's descriptive representation at all levels of the Slovak executive, including government and bureaucracy at

ministries.¹ Until recently, there were no publications that were systematically focused on the representation of women in Slovak cabinets. The application of the feminist institutionalist approach in this study has a lot to offer to better explain the gender gap in female nominations to Slovak cabinets.

Feminist institutionalists postulate that institutions are intertwined with gendered norms and rules that can either be formal or informal. They focus on how norms affect actions and strategies of institutional actors and how they approach these rules (Staab & Waylen 2014; Mackay et al. 2010; Mackay & Meier 2003; Krook 2010; Kenny 2013; Mackay & Waylen 2009). Researching executives using the feminist institutionalist approach means addressing the structural factors and masculinist construction of the cabinet that affect opportunities for women's access (Beckwith 2020, p. 136).

Formal institutions can be characterized by codification in a written form (Lauth 2000, p. 24) where they are "*consciously designed and clearly specified*" (Lowndes 2005, p. 292). They require the ability to identify that a rule has been broken and come up with ways to find and punish the violator (North 1990, p. 47–48). Informal institutions usually incorporate unwritten codes in doing things such as traditions, cultural norms, customs, moral values, or religious beliefs. Informal rules are enforced through self-assertion or social pressure on internal actors, not through third parties (Chappell & Waylen 2013).

The volume of research that uses the feminist institutionalist approach has been growing in recent years (Annesley & Gains 2010; Annesley et al. 2014; Waylen 2016; Annesley et al. 2019) and has been also applied to the executive positions. The latest significant publication is a monography by Annesley, Beckwith, and Franceschet (2019) that examined 142 governments in 7 post-industrial democracies with various political systems. The methods outlined in this cross-national and longitudinal study inspired this paper as well.

The feminist Institutional Model by Annesley et al. (2019)

Annesley et al. (2019) developed a model that allows researchers to examine ministerial nominations over time and cross-nationally by focusing on the process of ministerial selection. Their model has three dimensions: "*(1) ministerial appointment is a dynamic process (2) involving two sets of actors, namely, selectors and ministrables, both of which are (3) governed by rules (many of which are unwritten)*" (Annesley et al. 2019, p. 17). According to the authors, the process of selecting ministers begins right after elections and can take place either within the political party, in coalition negotiations, or in both (p. 17). In the case of a coalition government, this process is strongly placed in a context where the political party negotiates with coalition partners about the allocation of a certain number of portfolios to a party and to their respective nominees. Annesley

¹ Sociological publications are predominant, but in political science, there are several publications about women in politics (see Bitušiková 2005, 2011; Bútorová 2008; Maďarová 2011; Filadelfiová, Pulíš, Radičová 2000); municipal politics (Sloboda 2014; Klimovský 2015; Maškarinec & Klimovský 2017); and even in ministerial departments (Sloboda, Valkovičová, Šupáková 2020).

et al. (2019) label the actors who have the competence to select ministers by the term *selector* and the potential ministers by the term *ministrables*. The most important actor is the prime minister in both the presidential and parliamentary political systems. In countries with coalition governments, the prime minister is more restrained in her political agency by the selectors from opposing parties.

According to the model, the last ingredient in the appointment process are *rules* that either empower or constrain the power of selectors to choose autonomously their nominees. Annesley et al. (2019) borrow the concept of rules from E. Ostrom (1986) who identified three types of effects that impact rules on political decision-making: *prescriptive*, *prohibitive*, and *permissive*. The authors also introduced the *degree of institutionalization* of a rule: if it is high, the rule is expected to be adhered to. Another important attributes of rules are their *flexibility*; some rules must always be adhered to, and some are more open to interpretation.

Annesley et al. (2019) show how rules, their interaction and specific application, produce different effects on women and men. There are usually no formal rules on the eligibility criteria for ministrables. However, who gets selected as a minister is not random at all; it is navigated by a plethora of informal rules that are not necessarily disadvantageous to women. They are like a double-edged sword: they can be used to suppress female representation very efficiently, or if the selector is motivated to pursue gender equality and use her political agency to meet this end, she can significantly improve women's representation in the cabinet.

Based on their inductive analysis of cabinets in 7 countries, Annesley et al. (2019, p. 22) analyzed the hierarchy of these criteria in the decision-making of the selectors. As a result, they divided informal rules into three categories: *experiential*, *affiliational*, and *representational*.

Experiential criteria encompass political skills, political experience, policy expertise, or education. A ministrable is expected to be prepared for her position. This can mean previous experience in a political position, policy expertise, good public communication skills, managerial experience, formal education, or academic career. Ministers are usually highly educated. However, this rule is very flexible and open to *post-hoc* interpretation, and therefore, almost everyone can be regarded as sufficiently qualified. It is, therefore, a ubiquitous minimal criterion, but on the basis of experiential criteria, it is usually not decided who will eventually become a minister. Experiential criteria are, thus, prescriptive and flexible rules for selectors.

Affiliational criteria, on the other hand, refer to the personal relations of the selector with the ministrable; the selector is looking for a loyal minister to eliminate risk because ministers need to defend the governmental agenda. Personal connections with the selector are highly relevant because selectors prefer candidates whom they can trust, whose behavior they can predict, and whom they can control. It is, therefore, not surprising that selectors prefer the party members that they know, although, in certain and specific cases, selectors can choose a ministrable that is nonpartisan. Appointing a loyal person whom the selector knows from the past is a permissible rule, even though selectors only seldomly present it openly.

Lastly, representational criteria include various socio-demographic factors that can matter in a country. The ministrable can benefit from being a member of a certain group—region, language, age, minority, religion, race, gender, or party faction. When appointing a team of ministers, it can be expected by the public, political party, journalists, etc., that the cabinet will represent certain

groups. If the selector disobeys this informal rule and does not appoint the expected groups, she can expect sanctions such as public backlash, intraparty resistance, or international criticism. The representational rule is, thus, a prescriptive rule and an inflexible rule; being a member of a certain demographic group is objectively given, and there is not a lot of space for improvisation (Annesley et al. 2019, p. 156).

Annesley et al. (2019) argue that ministers are not appointed as isolated personalities but rather as a part of a cabinet team. Moreover, they challenge the notion that cabinet appointments are based on merit, that they should be studied by analyzing objective meritocratic criteria such as education, policy expertise, etc. They argue that the selection of ministers does not even resemble an objective process of finding the best-qualified ministers; rather, it is based on a need to create a team that balances experience and loyalty and represents various groups (Annesley et al. 2019, p. 99).

Moreover, Annesley et al. (2019, p. 175) claim that they have found that representational criteria mattered in all the seven countries examined, although to various degrees. It was introduced by three processes: First, the pressure by the feminist bodies in political parties that pushed for a higher representation of women broadly in the party ranks but also in the ministerial appointment. Second, the conviction of the party leaders that the inclusion of women is just and would be beneficial. Third is the growing pressure from outside influences by the norm of how a balanced cabinet should look like. As these forces interact, they create a new informal rule where the exclusion of women from the cabinet becomes unacceptable. The authors find that the presence of representational criteria for women's inclusion is a key factor prohibiting selectors to only use affiliational criteria in appointing all-male or nearly all-male cabinets (Annesley et al. 2019, p. 250).

The Slovak Case Study

To meet the aforementioned research goals, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selectors and people who participated in the selection process of Slovak cabinets. I intended to interview former ministers, prime ministers, political party elites, and political party employees. The selection of respondents was based on the criteria of whether they directly and personally took part in coalition negotiations. Respondents who were negotiators themselves and had a direct experience in the coalition negotiations were preferred. If it was not possible to interview direct negotiators, I opted out for respondents who were very close to those negotiations. Two ideologically diverse coalition governments were chosen to be studied: the government of SDKU, SMK-MKP, ANO, and KDH of Prime Minister M. Dzurinda, which ruled between 2002 and 2006 and the government of SMER-SD, SNS, Most-Híd, and Siet' of Prime Minister R. Fico, which ruled from 2016 to 2020.

Eventually, interviews with 8 respondents who were divided into two groups were secured. Category 1 respondents were direct negotiators (4 respondents) and Category 2 respondents were not directly involved with the negotiations (4 respondents); however, they have observed the process of cabinet formation closely as they were ministers, party advisors, members of the presidential party, or party employees who had direct access to leaders.

An interview with a respondent from each coalition party from the government of M. Dzurinda was secured; in some cases, more than one respondent was even interviewed. Despite my efforts, it is unfortunate that neither the representatives from the party SMER-SD and SNS responded positively (see Annex 1). So the respondents will not be afraid to talk about sensitive personal and political issues, they were granted anonymity.

In the interviews, the focus was only on the nominations of ministers that took place directly after the elections; thus, the nominations that occurred after one of the originally appointed ministers left office were left out. The respondents were not informed before the interview that the gender aspect of government nominations would be highlighted, as this might have antagonized some of them.

Results

Formal Rules

The government of the Slovak Republic is one of the two branches of executive power in the parliamentary democracy. Part of the executive power, including the responsibility of appointing the government, is carried out by the president, but most of it belongs to the government, which according to the constitution is the supreme body of the executive power (Article 108 of the Constitutional Act No. 460/1992 Coll). The government consists of the prime minister, vice-chairmen, and ministers.

Formal rules that delineate the creation of the government are established in the sixth head of the Slovak constitution and are quite brief. The constitution and other laws establish only a few rules for the selection of a minister, among which there are no representational, affiliational, or experiential criteria.

The only formal step in the formation of the government is the appointment of the prime minister by the president. The prime minister proposes cabinet members who are subsequently appointed by the president. Therefore, the president has the freedom to entrust practically anyone and no one in the formation of the government, but if this person is to become the prime minister, she must meet the basic formal criteria according to Art. 110 (2) of the Slovak Constitution: “*She must be a citizen of the Slovak Republic and she must be eligible for election to the National Council of the Slovak Republic.*”²

Since the Slovak government is not directly elected, it is accountable to the National Council; therefore, after its appointment by the president of the Slovak Republic, the government must appear before the National Council, present its program, and ask for a vote of confidence.³ For

² That means that she turned 21 on the day of the election at the latest, has a permanent residence in the territory of the Slovak Republic, and there are no obstacles to the execution of the passive right to vote, e.g., unconditional execution of a prison sentence and a final conviction for an intentional crime, if the conviction has not been expunged and limitation of legal capacity. See Art. 74 (2) of the Slovak Constitution together with Section 6 of the Act No. 180/2014 Coll. on the conditions for the exercise of the right to vote.

³ Art. 113 and 114 (1) of the Slovak Constitution.

that reason, the government needs to have an absolute majority of votes in the parliament, at least at the given time, i.e., at least 76 deputies. Besides these formal limitations, there are no formal regulations of the course of the negotiations on the cabinet formation. There are also no laws enacted in Slovakia that would codify rules on government composition with regard to gender on the national level or on the party level.

The Informal Rules of Negotiation of Governmental Policy Priorities

In both cases, the coalition negotiations start by amalgamating common policy priorities that the respondents agree with, which is better to define them before the portfolio distribution. For instance, during the 2016 negotiations, there were 10 policy priorities, and each party was instructed to propose a proportionate number of priorities based on their electoral result.

All the respondents also agreed that the most usual format of negotiations was the meetings of triplets who were chosen by the party leader. This rule had exceptions, though; sometimes there were quadruplets and other times, only party presidents. The basic negotiation team was usually composed of the party president, the leader of the future party club in the parliament, and a third person who differed in various accounts. *“They are really the most trustworthy, even the most intimate friends of the political leader, close allies and comrades-in-arms, in whom I could have confidence...”* (interview with a Category 1 respondent, 2022).

As women are very scarce at the very top of the Slovak political party leadership, and since the party president decides autonomously who is going to sit at the negotiation table with him, the triplets are an informal rule that hinders women’s advancement to the cabinet. Moreover, the members of the negotiation team were able and often succeeded in securing a cabinet seat for themselves: *“In that pre-phase, they select party priorities that are close to them and declare party policy and values, but in reality it is them fending for themselves. Because suddenly if you get two portfolios, which have nothing to do with you personally, you realize that you cannot go there. Those policy demands of the party are always shaped by those strong party players who in reality play on themselves in this”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

Division of Portfolios and Political Positions

When it comes to the division of numbers of portfolios among coalition parties, a very strongly institutionalized informal rule is the proportional distribution according to the electoral results. Respondents from both governments unanimously recognized this informal rule, and they differed only in the details of its application. The number of portfolios in the examined period ranged between 12–15, and the average number of governing coalition parties in Slovakia is 3.11. That means parties usually receive about 3–4 portfolios. This leaves only a limited space for nominations that go beyond the most powerful people of the party who negotiate from the beginning in triplets. If a woman is not at the highest level of the party leadership, it is unlikely for her to receive an appointment.

According to respondents, the first two key positions that are always determined in negotiations in the first place are the positions of the prime minister and the speaker of the parliament. Usually, the prime minister becomes the leader of the strongest party in the coalition, and the speaker of the parliament the leader of the second strongest party. The position of the vice president of the cabinet usually does not have a real political impact besides signalling which of the ministers of the coalition parties is the most important. Due to the absence of real political significance of vice-presidential posts, they will not be discussed further. The next round of negotiations focuses on the most important portfolios. There is a slight difference on the opinions of various actors on which portfolios are the strongest and which ones are the most important. There is a consensus that the Ministry of Finance is the strongest, or at least in the top 2. However, the topic of importance might differ in time and also on what the political party wants to achieve politically.

After the first round, where the most important portfolios were distributed, the negotiation on second-order portfolios or on those that receive European funds followed. *“Key portfolios have their substitute portfolios, which serve in the negotiation. If it is a power department, the solution when someone has not managed to get the Ministry of the Interior is the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Justice. And then there are the so-called ‘economic’ portfolios, the Euro fund departments, (...) education, environment, and agriculture”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

In the end come portfolios that are the weakest; they do not have many subordinated organizations, they do not receive European funds, and they do not have much influence. *“...healthcare and the economy, I don’t want to say that B-class portfolios, but no one fights for culture, (...), nor transport, and social affairs”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022). All respondents agreed that the least popular sector is health care, and nobody wants it, with the exception of ANO in 2002. Some respondents also labeled the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family as undesirable because it deals with union dialogue and strikes.

Selection and Veto of Ministers

Some political parties specialize in certain portfolios—SMK-MKP and Most-Híd, for instance, in agriculture and the environment; however, that only emphasizes the fact that such parties have ministrables for these portfolios. *“In principle, serious candidates were already there before the elections, it was always known that if a portfolio was given to us, who would we probably nominate there”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

Who are these ministrables, and how do they rise to their powerful positions before the elections? A respondent and also a selector wrapped up the characteristics of an ideal ministrable this way:

*“I can’t send someone to the health department who won’t be respected among doctors. Or to the economic ones, that is, *conditio sine qua non*, that is a necessary but insufficient condition. And then come other attributes. And that is, let’s say, the ability to manage to assert the erudition that you have in you (...) there must also be the managerial-political dimension. And finally, in*

the third row, personal. The minister should be loyal and should not screw up at the first setback (...). You know the politically important thing is that the adept understands that I will not give away, I will save, that I am a rather conservative person when it comes to values, but very liberal when it comes to state administration” (interview with a Category 1 respondent, 2022).

Obviously, this statement includes both experiential and affiliational criteria. However, it does not specify which one is more important and which aspect decides whether the ministrable will be selected over others.

According to the gathered data, approximately one-fourth of the parties do not have a prepared ministrable in advance of the government creation. Due to the fact that Slovak political parties are small in number and often split, disappear, and reemerge, the pool of their ministrables is limited. Therefore, in certain situations, when an expected candidate cannot be nominated, the contest for the cabinet position occurs. In such cases, it is possible to see more clearly which criteria really mattered in the ministerial selection. In this section, such situations in the two studied governments will be examined by focusing on how experiential, affiliational, and representative criteria were applied in the real scenarios.

Vetoing can be performed either by a coalition partner or a prime minister. The most important constraint of a prime minister is a strong prescriptive informal rule that overwrites the formal rule that is imbued in the constitution; in coalition governments, she cedes her selection rights over a large portion of the cabinet seats to other coalition partners. In certain situations—for example, when the ministrable is unacceptable for good reasons—there is another informal rule: the veto. If the prime minister finds objective reasons not to appoint a candidate, she can prohibit the nomination. However, this rule does not yield sufficient power, and it depends on the strength of the position of her party in the coalition. Subsequently, the president appoints ministers; however, Slovak presidents have never used this strong, formal, prohibitive rule against a ministrable before 2018. All the selectors in the examined governments agreed that they were not influenced in their selection by the future decision of the president.⁴

Other actors who can constrain or empower the selectors are their political parties. Their strength in shaping the selectors' decisions can depend on various factors. Firstly, some political parties, such as ANO in the abovementioned coalition governments, were basically owned by their leaders. Others, such as SMK-MKP, had elaborate internal democracy with stronger party bodies that were theoretically able to change the selectors' will. However, there was no account or recollection by the respondents that the competence of the party bodies ever turned out to be a real constraint on the selector in the appointment of ministers. It stems from the fact that the selector is elected by those party bodies, and her position depends on the party's support. Her position should be stable after the elections as she was able to enter the parliament and is in the coalition negotiations, which is objectively a success. Therefore, in fact, the presidency or other bodies do not usually exert their will against their party president during coalition negotiations. In the examined political parties, there were also no strong women's organizations that would have forced a selector to appoint more women to the cabinet.

⁴ The presidential veto appeared for the first time only in 2018 after the murders of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová, when Andrej Kiska refused to name nominees of the SMER-SD party (TASR, 20.3. 2018).

Selecting Ministers in 2002

In 2002, three out of four parties continued in the coalition government from the previous term; therefore, there were not many surprises in appointments. It was only a newly formed party, ANO, that could have brought in new personalities.

In SDKÚ, I. Mikloš and E. Kukan continued as ministers. I. Šimko was not a surprising name among the ministers as a party vice president; however, due to the portfolio balancing, he could not become the Minister of Interior again and, against his will, became a Minister of Defense instead. I. Šimko did not have a background in defense; however, he was the founder of SDKÚ. *“Ivan Šimko, he was a specific case, he and Dzurinda, the two of them co-founded SDKÚ, and I think he [M. Dzurinda] felt some commitment that it was important to give Ivan some executive position”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

SDKÚ also received two portfolios from the lower tier: The Ministry of Transportation where they nominated P. Prokopovič, and the Ministry of Social Affairs, where they nominated Ľ. Kaník. For both of these portfolios, SDKÚ nominated ministers who were unexpected from the experiential point of view; however, they had crucial affiliational characteristics as both of them were former presidents of the parties that had merged with SDKÚ.

Before the elections, Ľ. Kaník was a leader of the Democratic Party that had a chance to enter parliament and was a rival of SDKÚ. Not long before election day, Kaník ceded the campaign and publicly supported SDKÚ, which came as a surprise to everyone and significantly helped SDKÚ to win the elections. A selector has said about Kaník: *“He had studied the pension systems of Chile. (...) We perceived how he is fundamentally interested in this topic. (...) In our discussion, the idea came up that when he was such a bloke that he did what he did, we will reward him a little. But this was not the idea from the start, I promise, the first thing was that we had a talented wizard for the portfolio”* (interview with a Category 1 respondent, 2022).

In the case of P. Prokopovič, a similar pattern occurred. Without previous explicit experience in this field, he became the Minister of Transportation, being the former president of a party that had merged with SDKÚ. *“Basically he (...) ran a patisserie in Stropkovo and this was where the entire competence of the Minister of Transportation came from—from the confectioner”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

SDKÚ originated from the government of 1998, when it was formerly known as SDK, a big coalition government that was composed of 11 parties. In short, Dzurinda managed to create SDKÚ from the former SDK by merging the number of these parties and their personalities into one. As a result, it was difficult to balance between party factions: *“Balancing the situation within the SDKÚ and then within the government coalition meant that some kind of professional background was not a decisive criterion, it was always sought that the leaders of those parties, the leaders of the factions, would be satisfied and, in principle, a portfolio was sought for that person, so that it would be felt that there was some kind of professional closeness. (...) Great care was taken to keep all those factions happy”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

The situation in KDĽ was more straightforward, which can be explained by the long tradition the party had been practicing since 2002. The party president, P. Hrušovský, was appointed as the deputy speaker of the parliament. V. Palko, as a co-founder of the party, the vice president, and

a member of the negotiation team, knew other top party leaders from the communist times and had powerful experience from previous political positions. Being appointed as the new Minister of Justice, D. Lipšic might have been a surprise because of his young age; however, by the time that he became minister, he was also a vice president of the party, was publicly well-known, and knew the portfolio from within. He also had a previous experience as the chief of staff of the former Minister of Justice. The third minister of KDH became M. Fronc, the Minister of Education. This was obviously the last portfolio that KDH obtained, and Fronc was not at the top of the party leadership; however, he was party presidency member, a long-term member, and the policy leader for education in the campaign.

In the SMK-MKP, the president of the party, B. Bugár, also left the cabinet to others and pursued a parliamentary career; however, most of his nominees were also not a surprise: P. Csáky was the vice president and the party founder. L. Miklos and L. Gyurovsky had a strong affiliation with the party leadership and had been experienced. It was for the first time when SMK-MKP obtained the Ministry of Agriculture, and SMK-MKP did not have a ministrable prepared for this position. Therefore, the party made an internal tender where four candidates applied. Eventually, Z. Simon was selected. *“He did not win the first round in the party, he was only second, we had Mr. Farkaš, who was the chairman in both cases in the parliament, the budget committee and was an economist, he was better. We just did not know at the time that he had a shady background, he was Mr. Világi’s person. Lobbying decided, which we underestimated at that time”* (interview with a Category 1 respondent, 2022).

The most complicated was the situation in ANO, the party that was established only a while before elections by a TV tycoon P. Rusko. The second founder was Ľ. Lintner. None of them became ministers. P. Rusko eventually ended up as the vice-chairman of the parliament, and Ľ. Lintner, too, ended up in the parliament. ANO wanted the Ministry of Finance; however, it obtained the Ministry of Economics. R. Nemcsics, its new minister, was a party expert in economy, but more importantly, he was a close confidant of P. Rusko. The second portfolio the party received was the Ministry of Health Care. ANO had an expert prepared beforehand whom they promoted during electoral campaign—medical doctor R. Zajac, who was willing to enact reforms in the department. The third portfolio the party managed to negotiate was the Ministry of Culture. P. Rusko was unable to become its minister because of his conflicts of interest. The obvious choice became Ľ. Lintner, the vice-chairman of the party, party co-founder, and a TV personality himself. However, due to an internal party veto, he was not nominated eventually. The party started to look for a suitable ministrable in its membership ranks and came up with an ordinary member, R. Chmel, a well-educated writer who was known on the cultural scene. The leadership of ANO did not object to his nomination, and he became the minister (interview with a Category 1 respondent, 2022).

Representational criteria played no role in this government. When asked whether the selectors considered representation criteria, the respondents gave a universally negative answer. The prime minister, M. Dzurinda, said to the media that he is sorry that no women are represented in the new government; however, things just turned out that way (SITA, October 8, 2002). A respondent from Category 1 said, *“There were no women, so what was I supposed to create one? If one appeared, I would be just happy.”* All the factors that are usually present when women

receive a nomination described by Annesley et al. (2019) absented: Coalition parties did not have women's organizations that would pursue such nominations. Selectors also refused the concept of gender representation in the government. "No, I did not think in this way," said one respondent from Category 1. Another respondent said, "No, no, no, nothing like that, I don't have any gender equality in my head, it did not make sense to me. I honestly declare that gender is not one of my criteria, and I cannot even think of any other criteria." The third respondent also expressed that representation of women was not considered: "No women were actually considered, the nominations were quite clear from the start. We had three women in the leadership. Not one of them was there, nor did any of them have the ambition to be a minister, only maybe if some ambition was there, (...), then not in front of me" (interview with a Category 1 respondent, 2022).

The experiential criteria turned out to be so flexible that even minister Prokopovič and Kaník were rationalized as suitable. Thus, it is obvious that the experiential criteria were not the ones that were decisive in the selection of ministers to this cabinet. It was not primarily a competition

Table 1: Credentials of ministers appointed after 2002 elections to the cabinet.

Political Party	Coalition Ministers 2002- 2006	Party founder	Top party position	Negotiation Team	Minister in previous government	Faction leader	State Secretary in Previous Government	Party expert before elections	Donor backing
SDKÚ	I. Mikloš (M)		-	-	-			-	
	E. Kukan (M)	-	-	-	-	-		-	
	I. Šimko (M)	-	-		-				
	L. Kaník (M)					-			
	P. Prokopovič (M)					-			
KDH	V. Palko (M)	-	-	-				-	
	D. Lipšic (M)		-	-				-	
	M. Fronc (M)						-	-	
SMK	P. Csáky (M)	-	-	-	-				
	L. Miklós (M)	-			-	-		-	
	L. Gyurovsky (M)	-				-		-	
	Z. Simon: Contested seat (M)								-
ANO	R. Nemcsics (M)	-	-						
	R. Zajac (M)							-	
	Contested seat: R. Chmel								

Source: Author. Note: M = Male; F = Female.

for the most-informed expert but rather an appointment of trusted party politicians, a careful balancing between various party factions, and satisfying various party interests. Affiliational criteria that are the permissible type of informal norms prevailed in the cabinet appointments of 2002, which resulted into a hostile situation for the appointment of women.

Selecting Ministers in 2016

In 2016, there were more possible coalition combinations. SMER-SD dominated the elections; similarly, its close partner, SNS, entered the parliament, garnering them 64 seats in the parliament together. That was, however, the end of natural coalition partnerships. In order to reach a stable majority, SMER and SNS needed partners to form a coalition, provided that they have declared they would not form a coalition with fascists. Most-Híd and Siet' eventually agreed to form a coalition with SMER and SNS (aktuality.sk, March 16, 2016).

Ministerial nominations of SMER-SD were not surprising; they were all seasoned ministers from the previous single-party government of SMER-SD. With one exception: the Minister of Health Care: *“That responsibility was huge. And no party wanted to bear political responsibility for it, especially when they knew the state of it. It is mainly a matter of communication that a person who is not a member of a political party is appointed, who declares himself to be a manager, and thus the party gives it to him. And that person became T. Drucker”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

SNS received three portfolios, two of them “economic”—education, defense, and agriculture. I was not able to secure an interview with the respondent from SNS; however, according to respondents from the other coalition parties, SNS had a very strange selection model that is also apparent as seen on Table 2 below. The party president, A. Danko, selected his three ministers completely outside the party ranks. According to a respondent from Category 2, he sold the portfolios to oligarchs. The fact that the nominees were nonpartisan caused a huge power boost for him. *“He became the only link between the executive and the party, and of course, the party felt completely rightfully spit on, but he could have afforded it, because at that time he was already the owner of the party, as he paid off all its debts. On the one hand, he could fire those ministers at any time without angering the party, see the case of Plavčan, and on the other hand, as soon as the party wanted to arrange something, it was up to him whether it would be communicated to the ministers or not”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

Most-Híd received two ministerial seats, and unsurprisingly, its vice presidents were appointed to the positions. A new vice president of Most-Híd was L. Žitňanská, the former Minister of Justice from KDH and SDKÚ-DS. Moreover, B. Bugár stayed in the parliament.

Siet' went through a split right after the elections and lost three MPs, which resulted in its weakened position in negotiations. It also caused the replacement of some of its remaining MPs with opposition MPs should they leave the parliament to take positions in the cabinet. The leadership of Siet' was, therefore, unable to take positions in the executive. In the beginning, Siet' was supposed to have two smaller portfolios and wanted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was not granted to it. Eventually, Siet' opted for one large portfolio—the Ministry of Transportation.

The first ministrable that was proposed to the prime minister was R. Auxt, who was a party expert on economics. The selectors started a scrutiny process on him as he was publicly not well known. *“They scrutinize for two reasons—they want to have ammo for the fights within the coalition and they also want to make sure he will not put them at risk if it turned out he was a cretin. But he had a real position within Siet’ that was given by economic interests. So he eventually ended up as the Director-General of the NDS, which is economically even stronger as the Minister of Transportation”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022). In the end, SMER-SD managed to veto the appointment of Auxt.

According to the respondent from Category 2, another power struggle started at Siet’ because it was the only portfolio the party had received and the only chance to get some political and economic benefits. All these unusual circumstances resulted in the fact that the new minister became R. Breceľy, an expert in energetics who did not expect it and had no experience in transportation.

Table 2: Credentials of ministers appointed to the Cabinet after the 2016 elections.

	Coalition (2016 – 2020)	Party founder	Top party position	Negotiation Team member	Previous Minister	Faction leader	Previous State Secretary	Party expert before elections	Party donor backing
Smer-SD	R. Kaliňák (M)	-	-	-	-			-	
	P. Kažimír (M)		-		-			-	
	P. Pellegrini (M)		-		-			-	
	M. Lajčák (M)				-			-	
	P. Žiga (M)		-		-			-	
	J. Richter (M)				-			-	
	M. Maďarič (M)		-		-			-	
	T. Drucker (Contested seat) (M)								
SNS	P. Plavčan (M)								-
	G. Matečná (F)								-
	P. Gajdoš (M)								-
Most-Híd	L. Žitňanská (F)		-	-	-	-		-	
	L. Sólymos (M)	-	-	-					
Siet’	R. Breceľy – (Contested seat) (M)							- different area	-

Source: Author. Note: M = Male; F = Female.

“And that fight was waged by two wings, the wing that stood by Procházka won, and the nominee was also selected based on that. He was the 27th person on the voting list and no one knew him, and it could have been justified by the fact that he was a former manager at ČEZ” (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022). There were more candidates for the position, and the party presidency was supposed to vote on who will be nominated. The main reason that his nomination was eventually supported was because he was backed by the party’s sponsors.

According to the respondents from the two coalition parties, the representational criteria were absent in this cabinet formation too. Counterintuitively, this was the cabinet that, at a certain point of time, around the year 2018, reached the historical record: 35.71% proportion of female ministers. Interestingly, one respondent explicitly stated that at the level of the whole coalition, the question of female representation was completely out of place. *“It is not dealt with at all....”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

As previously mentioned, the case of the nomination of the SNS minister, G. Matečná, can be explained by this account: *“Those nominations are exactly the image of the power interests of that party, and if the interests are masculine, so will be the government. If in some parties women participate in power, this will also be reflected in those nominations”* (interview with a Category 2 respondent, 2022).

According to a respondent from the first category, Most-Híd genuinely cared about the representation of minorities, but not on the cabinet level. The balancing of various minorities started at the level of state secretaries and lower. The party considered regional representation and national minorities. In Siet’, representational criteria played no role as it had only one portfolio.

Conclusion and Discussion

This qualitative analysis that expose the ministerial-selection process and the factors affecting which selectors decide who can become a minister is a contribution to political science and feminist scholarships in Slovakia and beyond. I partially corroborated the conclusions of Annesley et al. (2019) that in Slovakia, too, the selection of ministers does not resemble an objective process of finding the best-qualified ministers to the cabinet. Among the experiential, affiliational, and representative criteria, it is the affiliational category that was decisive in most cases of ministerial selection. The vast majority of ministers in Slovak cabinets are nominated mostly because they are party founders, are already very high in party ranks, were ministers in previous governments, have the support of party donors, are important faction leaders, or were members of the negotiating team of their political party.

The experiential criterion is prescriptive but can be very flexible. In almost every case, a vindication for a ministrable nomination can be found using the argument of her previous experience. However, it is very rare to receive a cabinet appointment based only on experiential criteria. Parties usually resort to it when they receive an unexpected portfolio or lose a ministrable whom they had prepared for the post. Experiential criteria allow selectors to nominate based on affiliational criteria and publicly disguise it by asserting the experience of a ministrable. Experiential criteria are not even a *conditio sine qua non* in obtaining a ministerial nomination in

Slovakia. Therefore, nominees are supposed to be already in the highest party leadership to be appointed to cabinet positions, which is a difficult endeavor since Slovak political parties have no quota nor strong women's organizations that would have forced a selector to appoint more women to the cabinet.

I have found that representational criteria play no role in cabinet formation. Every single respondent I interviewed confirmed that representational criteria were not applied. Political parties as organizations that could constrain a selector in advanced democracies are generally weak in Slovakia. Therefore, within her portfolios, the party selector—the party president/leader—has relatively unconstrained political agency.

The assumption of Annesley et al. (2019) that cabinets are constructed as a team is not applicable to Slovakia either. After the division of portfolios, the Slovak prime minister cedes a large portion of her appointment power to her coalition partners, who are very autonomous selectors of their ministrables. The prime minister can attempt to veto a ministrable in serious circumstances if she is utterly unfit for the job; however, her chances for the veto are uncertain. There is an informal, strongly institutionalized, and prescriptive rule that each party nominates their ministers to their portfolio without interference.

Annesley et al. (2019, p. 250) have found that cross-national variation in women's representation in cabinets cannot be explained by institutional settings, such as a political system. I contest this finding; the party system and other institutional characteristics matter, to a great extent, for the prospects of Slovak female ministers. Firstly, Slovakia has a low number of cabinet seats, which historically ranged between twelve and fifteen. In a coalition government, which is the prevalent model of government in Slovakia, the average number of coalition members in government is 3.11. Thus, a coalition party has only a very limited number of cabinet positions, and they are usually filled by high-rank party officials. In each of the examined governments, there were only some places that were not decided based on affiliational criteria beforehand. There is often not enough places left for the application of representational criteria where affiliational criteria has already been applied. Secondly, as found in our previous study that focused on portfolio allocation in Slovak governments, based on an expert survey, 10 out of 16 Slovak portfolios are gendered masculine, which negatively influences women's opportunity to receive an appointment there (Hudáčková & Malová 2022). Third, Slovakia has an atomized party system (Casal Bértoa 2022), and Slovak political parties are not institutionalized enough. Their frequent splits, downfalls, and merges result in detrimental conditions in establishing strong women's organizations within them that would push forward female candidates and the idea of gender equality.

These characteristics of Slovak institutions have profound consequences for the chances of women becoming ministers. For future theory development, I recommend a cross-national study of formal and informal rules in democracies with various coalition practices and various party systems. Moreover, this would be beneficial in expanding the explanatory power of the theory when also focusing on ministerial selection during replacements.

Against all odds, Slovakia has had female cabinet ministers; however, when a woman became a Slovak minister, it was not because selectors wanted a more gender-balanced cabinet. The reason they received a nomination was not their gender; it was despite their gender. The high variance in the number of female ministers in Slovak governments can be explained by the fact

that representational criteria are not institutionalized in Slovakia. Therefore, zero women representation in the cabinet can easily happen again because the penalty for their exclusion is low or nonexistent. For all the above mentioned reasons, I am negative about the prospects of gender parity in Slovak cabinets in the near future.

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Appendices

Annex 1: Interview log.

Interviewee Category: (1) Member of the Negotiation Team: Former Prime Minister, Party Leader, or Minister; (2) Not a Member of Negotiations Team but followed the negotiations: Former Minister; Advisor to the Party/Leader/ Prime Minister, Member of the Party Leadership, or Highly Positioned Party Employee.	Date of the Interview	Government	Location	Type of Interview	Recorded (Yes/No)	Confidentiality assured (Yes/No)
Category 2	25.4.22	2002-06	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes
Category 2	23.2.22	2002-06	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes
Category 1	25.5.22	2002-06	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes
Category 1	8.6.22	2002-06	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes
Category 1	16.6.22	2002-06	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes
Category 1	13.6.22	2016-20	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes
Category 2	14.6.22	2016-20	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes
Category 2	24.6.22	2016-20	Bratislava, Slovakia	In person	Yes	Yes

Source: Author

Annex 2: Interview Questionnaire⁵

INTRODUCTION

Brief description of the political situation after the specific elections in order to refresh respondent's memory - election results, no. of ministers of her party, names of ministers.

QUESTIONS

PROCESS

Coalition negotiations:

- What was your role in negotiating the nominations for ministerial positions - in the party / in the coalition negotiations, to what extent did you observe the process / participated in it? What came first - was it the division of the number of departments between the parties? By what mechanism? Or were the departments divided according to what each party was interested in? Were some departments dealt with first?
- What did the coalition negotiations look like? - format, frequency, etc.
- Did the coalition negotiations regarding the filling of ministerial posts concern only ministers or did the various compensations between the coalition parties cover a wider package of nominations for different institutions? (state secretaries, administration bodies, state enterprises, etc.?)
- Has there been a problem in the entire government to fill some of the ministerial seats with ministers? Which ones? If so, why?
- Has someone vetoed / tried to influence the nominations of other parties?

Party level negotiations:

- Which departments was your party primarily interested in and which ones did it eventually receive? Describe the process.
- Selection of people in the party for each ministerial position - description of the process.
- Who participated in the selection of ministers in your political party and to what extent? What was the position of these people? Was it obvious who is a ministerial candidate before elections? How did you pre/select the candidates who had the chance to become ministers?
- When someone was selected for a ministerial department, what procedure was followed within the party? Was there an approval mechanism for nominations, such as the presidency / party council or other bodies? Or was it just the party President who had a freedom to choose?

⁵ Questions were slightly adapted for each interview according to the position of the respondent in the negotiating process and the level of her political agency and insight.

- Did the ministerial candidates lobby for themselves?
- Some nominations may have been clear in advance according to the party's programmatic focus and visible personalities. Which departments / which people were like these?
- Were there any departments your party obtained for which your party did not have a straightforward nominee before the elections? Describe such cases.

Experiential criteria

- Why were these nominees chosen for the ministerial seats of the political party?
- Analysis of individual party nominations: What were their qualities? What was their qualification for this post? Continuity / party positions / party factions / merits / expertise / popularity, other ...
- If more candidates were considered for a ministerial post, what factors were decisive for the successful nominee?
- Were there any nominees in the government / party who did not have sufficient qualifications / experience for the department? Has there been a debate about it?

Affiliational criteria

- Of those people who were eventually nominated to the cabinet, were any of the president's personal friends before politics? Or was it more about political friendships? Do you remember where they met?
- Were any non-partisans nominated? How did the party find them? Why did it reach out to them?

Representational criteria

Do you remember that it would be addressed in the party / coalition negotiations that:

- not all ministers should be from Bratislava?
- the question of the age of nominees?
- should someone be a representative of a minority / other group?
- are there enough women in government?
- Was there a discussion about these aspects?

When the individual candidates for ministerial posts were being selected, was it considered whether the President would be willing to appoint them? Were there cases where there were such concerns? Did it affect the nominations in any way?

Source: The author.