Mobilizing Rural Support: Targeted Government Spending and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary

Supplementary Material

A Appendix: Policy Background

A.1 Rural CSOK

The Rural Family Housing Allowance Program, or Rural CSOK (from the Hungarian abbreviation), was introduced on July 1, 2019, to support married couples with children residing in rural areas. Rural CSOK was first regulated by Government Decree 109/2019 (V. 13.) as an amendment to Government Decree 17/2016 (II. 10.) and Government Decree 46/2019 (III. 12.), accessible in the Hungarian Gazette (Magyar Közlöny).

This program includes two core components: (1) a non-refundable state subsidy for purchasing, renovating, or expanding a house or flat, and (2) an optional capped-interest loan to supplement the subsidy. The capped-interest loan was an optional choice for Rural CSOK applicants.

Rural CSOK builds on the existing Family Housing Allowance Program (CSOK). CSOK was initially launched on July 1, 2015, and has since been expanded several times, with increases in subsidy amounts and modifications to eligibility requirements. Unlike CSOK, which can only be used for purchasing new or used homes, Rural CSOK includes options for renovating, modernizing, or expanding newly purchased older homes, with up to 50% of the subsidy allowable for renovation. Additionally, in eligible rural settlements, Rural CSOK can be applied to the improvement of already-owned homes, an option unavailable under CSOK. Figure A1 shows that before Rural CSOK's introduction, per capita CSOK funding was consistently lower in eligible settlements, suggesting that wealthier settlements were more likely to access funds for purchasing homes. However, the introduction of Rural CSOK led to an immediate increase, with per capita funding doubling in 2019 compared to prior years. As a result, for the first time, funding in Rural CSOK eligible settlements surpassed that of Rural CSOK non-eligible ones, suggesting that residents in smaller settlements may lack the resources for new home purchases and instead focus on renovating or improving existing properties.

The distribution criteria of Rural CSOK, that shape the allocation of resources, are public and objective. The main elements of the subsidies, together with eligibility criteria for Rural CSOK, are detailed in Table A1. The subsidy amounts range from HUF 600,000 (USD 2,000) to HUF 10 million

(USD 34,000), depending on the property type and number of children. The maximum benefit for married couples with three or more children includes a grant of up to USD 34,000, major tax deductions, and a capped-interest loan for a portion of the home value. The sum of these benefits range between USD 50,000 and USD 80,000, which is significant in the Hungarian context. For comparison, based on the average Hungarian salary of USD 11,000-15,000, an equivalent benefit in the U.S. would be between USD 40,000-55,000.

Rural CSOK offers significant subsidies for both buying and improving existing homes. Married couples with one child are eligible for a non-refundable subsidy of HUF 600,000 (USD 2,000); with two children, HUF 2.6 million (USD 8,900); and with three or more children, HUF 10 million (USD 34,000). For those improving already-owned homes, the subsidies are HUF 300,000 (USD 1,000) for one child, HUF 1.3 million (USD 4,450) for two children, and HUF 5 million (USD 17,000) for three or more children. Eligible families can also apply for a capped-interest mortgage loan (3%) if they have or plan to have at least two children.

The mortgage loan for purchasing and upgrading an older home is up to HUF 10 million (USD 34,000) for families with two children, and HUF 15 million (USD 51,000) for those with three or more. For upgrading already-owned homes, the loan amount is up to HUF 5 million (USD 17,000) for families with two children and HUF 7.5 million (USD 25,500) for those with three or more children.

A.2 Hungarian Village Program

In 2019, the Hungarian Village Program (HVP) issued 15 calls for applications, each addressing a distinct issue area (see Table A2). The applications were submitted by local governments and their mayors, while the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office held discretionary authority over evaluations and funding decisions. The Prime Minister's Office was allotted up to 60 days to make a decision after receiving a complete application, and once beneficiaries were announced, it was required to transfer funds to the local government within 5 days.

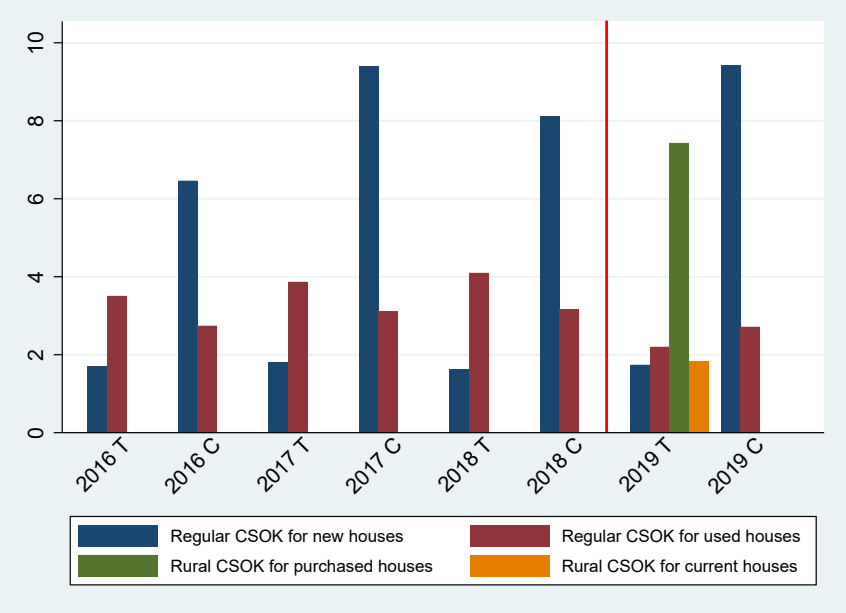

Figure A1: Total Per Capita CSOK and Per Capita Rural CSOK Disbursement by Year and Eligible vs Non-Eligible Settlements (1,000 Hungarian Forints)

Note: Data are from the Hungarian State Treasury. T (treated group) refers to Rural CSOK eligible settlements, C (control group) stands for non-eligible settlements. Means are population weighted. The sample includes settlements with less than 10,000 population to make the comparison of treated and control group meaningful (large settlements are excluded).

Table A1: The Rural Family Housing Allowance Program (Rural CSOK) for Pre-owned Houses

Children	Type	Buying and modernising houses	Modernising own houses
1	Subsidy	HUF 600,000	HUF 300,000
2	Subsidy	HUF 2,600,000	HUF 1,300,000
	Mortage loan	HUF 10,000,000	HUF 5,000,000
3+	Subsidy	HUF 10,000,000	HUF 5,000,000
	Mortage loan	HUF 15,000,000	HUF 7,500,000

Note: In addition to the number of children, the following eligibility criteria are imposed regarding the size of the house/flat: it must be 1) at least 40 m^2 with one child; 2) at least 50 m^2 with two children; 3) at least 60 m^2 with three children; and 4) at least 70 m^2 with four or more children.

Table A2: Hungarian Village Program – Objectives and Funds

Objective	Number of beneficia-ries	Amount of funds	Minimum amount of funds	Maximum amount of funds
Investment in church-owned graveyards (FVT)	217	1,281	0.97	30
Renovation of mayor offices (HPH)	144	2,525	1.02	50
Development of church-owned community spaces (EKT)	492	7,285	0.28	45.5
Strengthening national and local identity (NHI)	461	6,000	0.78	22.8
Medical equipment (AEE)	776	2,000	0.005	14.5
Medical centers (HOR)	186	3,998	0.11	12.5
Vehicles maintaining public spaces (KKE)	503	4,232	0.32	15
Building and improving pavement (BJA)	376	1,658	0.45	4.99
Building and improving local government-owned roads (ÖTU)	411	8,619	3.10	30
Investment in government-owned apartments for health workers (FOL)	13	3,089	200	274
Investment in kindergardens (FOR)	217	5,356	1.55	100
Investment in graveyards (FFT)	365	2,175	0.51	30
Investment in kindergarden yards (OUF)	658	2,930	0.37	5
Supporting village public servants (TFB)	338	4,789	8	15
Investment in government-owned apartments (SZL)	93	1,853	4	30

Note: Amount of funds is in millions of HUF (1 mn HUF = 3,300 USD). The number of beneficiaries within the category of *"Investment in church-owned graveyard"* and *"Development of church-owned community spaces"* are number of churches in eligible settlements, thus we aggregated these funds to settlement level.

B Appendix: Comparing CSOK and Rural CSOK

The CSOK program aims to support families with children and address Hungary's demographic decline. Specifically, CSOK targets married couples with children through two main components: (1) a non-refundable state subsidy for purchasing, renovating, or expanding a house or flat, and (2) a significant value-added tax deduction per home, along with a capped-interest loan. In 2019, the program was expanded with additional measures to further encourage family growth, including: (1) interest-free, all-purpose loans for eligible women; (2) an extension of CSOK to include used homes and increased grant amounts; (3) mortgage deductions for families with two or more children; (4) personal income tax exemption for women with four or more children; (5) a car purchase grant for large families; (6) construction of 21,000 new nursery places by 2022; and (7) a childcare allowance for grandparents who are still in the workforce.

Table A3 outlines the main elements of Rural CSOK compared to CSOK. Rural CSOK provides similar subsidy amounts but allows up to 50% of the grant to be used for purchasing pre-owned homes, with the remainder designated for modernization and renovation. It also enables recipients to use the funds for upgrading, renovating, or enlarging already-owned houses in eligible rural areas.

C Appendix: Hungarian Local Elections

In Hungarian local elections, turnout and party vote counts are significantly affected by the competitiveness of the mayoral and settlement assembly elections. When an election is expected to be close, the perceived utility of voting increases, leading to higher turnout rates (Geys 2006; Matsusaka and Palda 1993).[36] The outcomes of the mayoral and settlement assembly elections—which address local matters such as education, healthcare, and public services—are generally more relevant to voters than the composition of the county assembly. Consequently, turnout rates in Hungarian local elections are more often driven by preferences for the mayor and assembly members than by partisan loyalty. Table A4 presents the distribution of settlements by the number of mayoral

[36] Matsusaka and Palda (1993) refer to this as the Downsian Closeness Hypothesis.

Table A3: The Family Housing Allowance Program (CSOK) and the Rural Family Housing Allowance Program (Rural CSOK) for Pre-owned Houses

Children	Type	**CSOK** for New Houses	**CSOK** for Pre-Owned Houses	**Rural CSOK** for Pre-Owned Houses
1	Subsidy	HUF 600,000	HUF 600,000	HUF 300,000 + 300,000
2	Subsidy	HUF 2,600,000	HUF 1,430,000	HUF 1,300,000 + 1,300,000
	Mortage loan	HUF 10,000,000	HUF 10,000,000	HUF 10,000,000
3	Subsidy	HUF 10,000,000	HUF 2,200,000	HUF 5,000,000 + 5,000,000
	Mortage loan	HUF 15,000,000	HUF 15,000,000	HUF 15,000,000
4+	Subsidy	HUF 10,000,000	HUF 2,750,000	HUF 5,000,000 + 5,000,000
	Mortage loan	HUF 15,000,000	HUF 15,000,000	HUF 15,000,000

Note: **"CSOK for new houses"** category is designed for buying or building new houses (within the category of one child, a house must be 70 m^2 or larger and a flat must be at least 40 m^2 or larger; within the category of two children, a house must be 80 m^2 or larger and a flat 50 m^2 or larger; within the three or more children category, a house should be 90 m^2 or larger and a flat 60 m^2 or larger). The **"CSOK for pre-owned houses"** is for buying or enlarging pre-owned houses (the house/flat must be 1) at least 40 m^2 with one children; 2) at least 50 m^2 with two children; 3) at least 60 m^2 with three children; and 4) at least 70 with four or more children). Finally, the **"rural CSOK for pre-owned houses"** category is either for buying and modernising/renovating/enlarging pre-owned houses or for modernising/renovating/enlarging the owned house (the house/flat must be 1) at least 40 m^2 with one children; 2) at least 50 m^2 with two children; 3) at least 60 m^2 with three children; and 4) at least 70 with four or more children).

candidates in the 2019 local elections, revealing that in 909 out of 3,010 settlements with fewer than 10,000 residents, there was only one candidate (approximately 30%).

Table A5 shows the effects of having a single candidate (Column 1) and two candidates (Column 2) on turnout rates, and the impact of a single candidate (Column 3) and two candidates (Column 4) on Fidesz's vote share. Average turnout in single-candidate settlements was 38.8%, compared to 52.5% in multiple-candidate settlements, suggesting that voter participation was much lower in areas where the mayoral outcome was effectively pre-determined.[37] This lower turnout in single-candidate settlements is reflected in the substantial negative coefficient in Column 1 of Table A5.

[37]The turnout rate at the *EP elections* in the same groups of settlements (with single and multiple candidates in the *local elections*) was 40.4% and 38.4%, respectively.

We also examine whether the presence of a Roma candidate influences turnout in settlements under 10,000 residents. Results indicate that average turnout is significantly higher in places where a Roma candidate, supported by a Roma party or civic organization, is on the ballot.[38] Finally, we find that Fidesz's vote share in county assembly elections is higher in settlements with a Fidesz-supported mayoral candidate, suggesting that Fidesz mobilized voters more effectively in these areas.

Table A4: Number of Mayor Candidates Running in the Hungarian Local Election in 2019 by Municipality Bins

Population Range	Share of Municipalities with One Mayor Candidate	Share of Municipalities with Two Mayor Candidates	Share of Municipalities with at least Three Mayor Candidates	Number of Municipalities
0-1000	31.1%	33.8%	35.1%	1801
1000-2000	28.4%	30.5%	41.1%	615
2000-3000	23.1%	34.2%	42.8%	276
3000-4000	26.6%	35.9%	37.5%	121
4000-5000	25.8%	33.9%	40.3%	72
5000-6000	14.6%	44.6%	40.8%	42
6000-7000	15.5%	37.7%	46.7%	32
7000-10000	13.3%	48.8%	38.0%	51
10000-15000	9.0%	32.5%	58.5%	58
1000-5000	26.2%	33.0%	40.8%	1084
5000-15000	11.8%	39.4%	48.8%	183

Note: Data are drawn from the Hungarian *National Election Office*. Means are population weighted.

[38]This may be due to widespread prejudice against the Roma minority, particularly in rural areas, which likely increases voter participation if there is a possibility of a Roma mayor.

Table A5: The Effect of the Number of Mayor Candidates on Voters Turnout in 2019 Local Election as well as on Changes in Fidesz Vote Share in Hungary

	2019 Local Turnout Rate		Changes in Fidesz Vote Share	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	One Candidate	Two Candidates	One Candidate	Two Candidates
0-1000	-0.180	-0.002	-0.133	-0.023
1000-2000	-0.173	-0.024	-0.116	-0.017
2000-3000	-0.165	-0.011	-0.098	-0.012
3000-4000	-0.151	-0.038	-0.089	-0.016
4000-5000	-0.175	-0.045	-0.101	-0.029
5000-6000	-0.105	-0.006	-0.042	-0.022
6000-7000	-0.103	-0.025	-0.037	0.017
7000-10000	-0.110	-0.049	-0.045	-0.024
10000-15000	-0.137	-0.011	-0.071	0.004
1000-5000	-0.167	-0.028	-0.104	-0.019
5000-15000	-0.113	-0.021	-0.047	-0.004

Note: Data are drawn from the Hungarian *National Election Office*. Columns 3 and 4 show changes in Fidesz vote share between May (EP elections) and October (Local elections) in 2019. Regression results are population weighted. Robust standard errors are used.

Table A6: Election Results and Turnout Rates in Settlements with less than 10,000 Residents in Percent of Eligible Voters

Month and Year	Elections	Fidesz–KDNP	Turnout rate
April 2014	National	27.69	57.02
May 2014	European Parliamentary	14.29	24.56
October 2014	Local	26.52	48.49
April 2018	National	35.97	65.55
May 2019	European Parliamentary	23.35	38.85
October 2019	Local	29.50	49.12

Note: Means are weighted by the number of eligible voters.

D Appendix: Descriptive Statistics of the Main Variables

Table A7: Descriptive Statistics

	Number of Observations	Mean	Standard Deviations	Minimum	Maximum
Changes in Fidesz vote share	3,131	0.0411	0.0723	-0.2371	0.5727
Per capita HVP subsidy (10000 HUF)	3,154	0.7374	2.1198	0	249.8199
Per capita Rural CSOK for pre-owned houses (10000 HUF)	3,154	0.2332	0.5983	0	37.4468
Per capita Rural CSOK for newly bought houses (10000 HUF)	3,154	0.0575	0.1757	0	8.2609
Population (ln)	3,154	9.1784	1.7408	2.3026	12.2124
Change in population rate (between 2003 and 2019)	3,144	0.9680	0.1637	0.2985	3.0531
Per capita labour income (ln)	3,154	7.1772	0.2273	5.2709	8.7621
Share of settlements with one mayor candidate	3,154	0.1378	0.3448	0	1
Share of settlements with two mayor candidates	3,154	0.2941	0.4557	0	1
Share of settlements with Fidesz mayor candidate	3,154	0.6346	0.4816	0	1
Share of settlements with Roma mayor candidates	3,154	0.0024	0.0488	0	1
Margin of victory at the local election	3,154	34.1862	32.1217	0	100
Share of foreigners	3,154	0.2433	0.4292	0	1
Per capita government subsidies (CSOKU) in 10000 HUF	3,154	0.5904	0.8740	0	32.2230
Per capita government subsidies (CSOKH) in 10000 HUF	3,154	0.2342	0.1599	0	2.9184
Per capita government subsidies (TAMHIT) in 10000 HUF	3,154	1.2371	1.4506	0	53.2403
Fidesz vote share at the European Parliament election	3,154	0.2255	0.0505	0.0447	0.8846
Share of women (18–54 age)	3,154	0.2458	0.0129	0.0833	0.3600
Share of children (0-17 age)	3,154	0.1757	0.0298	0	0.4981
Share of unemployed	3,154	0.0471	0.0345	0	0.4217
Share of population with primary education only	3,153	0.5014	0.1130	0.077	0.8730
Share of population with no education	3,153	0.0557	0.0359	0	0.6920
Share of atheists	3,153	0.0112	0.0075	0	0.1001
Share of protestants	3,153	0.1194	0.1217	0	0.8635
Share of catholics	3,153	0.3990	0.1693	0	1
Share of evangelists	3,153	0.0221	0.0492	0	0.6971
Share of Roma residents	3,153	0.0336	0.0566	0	0.9429
Distance to Budapest (km)	3,154	153.8094	75.9380	19.33	335.67

Note: Means are population weighted.

Definition and sources of the variables:

- *Fidesz vote share*
  - *Definition*: The number of Fidesz votes relative to the number of eligible voters.
  - *Source*: National Election Office
- *Population*:

  - *Definition*: Population at the middle of the year.
  - *Source*: Databank of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies – Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

- *Changes in population (determinant of Rural CSOK eligibility)*:
  - *Definition*: The proportion of the population at the middle of the year in 2019 relative to the population at the middle of the year in 2003.
  - *Source*: Databank of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies – Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

- *Income per capita*:
  - *Definition*: Total personal income tax base in 2018 to population at the middle of the year in 2018.
  - *Source*: Databank of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies – Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

- *The number of candidates at the 2019 local election*:
  - *Definition*: The number of mayor candidates at the 2019 local election
  - *Source*: National Election Office.

- *Fidesz candidate*:
  - *Definition*: A binary variable that equals one if any of the running mayor candidates was supported by Fidesz, and zero otherwise.
  - *Source*: National Election Office.

- *Roma candidate*:
  - *Definition*: A binary variable that equals one if any of the running mayor candidates was supported by a party with a name including the word of *Roma*, and zero otherwise.

- *Source*: National Election Office.

- *Margin of victory*:
  - *Definition*: Winner's margin at the local election of mayors in 2019, expressed in percentage points.
  - *Source*: National Election Office.

- *Foreign residents*:
  - *Definition*: This variable is defined based on the proportion of foreigners in the 2019 local elections as well as on the number of foreigners in the 2019 local elections. The binary variable equals 1 if the proportion of foreigners – as calculated by the number of eligible voters in October 2019 (where foreigners are eligible to vote) relative to the number of eligible voters in May 2019 (where foreigners are not eligible to vote) – is larger than 10%, *and* if there are at least 150 foreigners in a given settlement.
  - *Source*: National Election Office.

- *Family Housing Allowance Program or CSOK*:
  - There are three categories within the Housing Subsidy for Families (CSOK) scheme:
    - Per capita Family Housing Allowance Subsidies for the purpose of building or purchasing new flats.
    - Per capita Family Housing Allowance Subsidies for purchasing old flats or the enlargement of existing dwellings.
    - Per capita subsidised loan for buying or building new homes or purchasing old apartment.
  - *Source*: Hungarian State Treasury.
  - More details on the Family Housing Allowance Program are in Section 2.

- *Share of women (18–54 years)* :

  - *Definition*: Proportion of 18-54 year old females among permanent residents.
  - *Source*: Databank of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies – Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

- *Share of children (0–17 years)* :
  - *Definition*: Proportion of 0–17 year old children among permanent residents.
  - *Source*: Databank of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies – Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

- *Share of unemployed*:
  - *Definition*: Number of individuals registered as unemployed, relative to the number of the working-age population. Working-age population is the number of permanent residents between the ages of 18 and 59.
  - *Source*: Databank of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies – Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

- *Level of education*:
  - *Definition*: The share of population with primary education only/no education, secondary education and tertiary education.
  - *Source*: T-STAR Database.

- *Religion*:
  - *Definition*: Proportion of atheist/protestant/catholic/evangelical to the population.
  - *Source*: T-STAR Database.

- *Ethnic minority*:
  - *Definition*: Proportion of Roma people to the population.
  - *Source*: T-STAR Database.

- *Distance to Budapest*:
  - *Definition*: Distance to Budapest (capital city of Hungary) in the fastest way possible in kilometer in 2019.
  - *Source*: T-STAR Database.
- *Public work share*
  - *Definition*: The share of public work program participants, relative to the working age (18-59) population.
  - *Source*: T-STAR Database.

E Appendix: Political Determinants of the Distribution – Robustness Check

We run cross-sectional linear probability regressions where the probability of receiving a particular type of HVP is the dependent variable and the main explanatory variable is Fidesz performance in past elections, and we include other control variables as well. We estimate the following equation:

$$HVPk_i = \alpha + \beta FIDperf_i + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i, \tag{A1}$$

where HVPk_i is a dummy that settlement i ($i = 1, \ldots, 3,000$) received a HVP subsidy in sub-program or program area k ($k = 1, \ldots, 18$), FIDperf$_i$ is the performance of Fidesz in previous elections (either estimated settlement Fixed Effects or residual for the 2018 elections), and X_i are other control variables that might have influenced the subsidy allocation. We find that in 17 out of the 18 estimated equations, the estimated β is positive, and in 10 equations it is significant at least at the 10% level.

Importantly, among the explanatory variables of the linear probability model of Equation (A1), we have variables that are related to the particular issue areas that the individual HVP programs belong. For example, in case of programs that provide medical subsidies (AAE, FOL and FOR), we included variables like the per capita number of patient visits in primary and advanced care (both in children and adult care), the number of family doctors and family doctor districts, and the number of health institutions at the settlements. For programs related to kindergartens (FOB and OUF), we added variables on the share of kindergarten-aged children (both total share and share of disadvantaged), the number of kindergarten institutions and buildings. And for programs on infrastructure and renovation (BJA, HPH, KKE and ÖTU), we included the surface of settlements, as well as the total length of paved and unpaved roads and pavements.

F Appendix: Eligibility Distribution by Population Size for HVP and Rural CSOK Programs

If we weight settlements by their population size, the proportion of HVP- and Rural CSOK-eligible settlements is 78.7% and 63.3%, respectively. We note that all Rural CSOK-eligible settlements were automatically eligible for the subsidies of the Hungarian Village Program as well; while some HVP-eligible settlements (the ones with increasing population) were not eligible for Rural CSOK.

Table A8: Eligible Voters (1,000-s) in Eligible *versus* non-Eligible Settlements

	Rural CSOK		**Total**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	No Rural CSOK	Rural CSOK Recipients	**Total**	**Ratio (%)**
Non-eligible settlements	1,166	15	1,181	36.7%
Eligible settlements	379	1,660	2,039	63.3%
Total	1,545	1,675	3,220	
Ratio(%)	48.0%	52.0%		
	Hungarian Village Program		**Total**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	No HVP	HVP Recipients	**Total**	**Ratio (%)**
Non-eligible settlements	687	0	687	21.3%
Eligible settlements	334	2,200	2,534	78.7%
Total	1,021	2,200	3,220	
Ratio(%)	31.7%	68.3%		

Note: Data are from the Hungarian State Treasury. Number of eligible voters are in thousands.

G Appendix: The Effect of Public Work Scheme in the Local Elections

Figure A2 shows the share of public workers – defined as the proportion of public work program participants relative to the working-age population (18-59) at the settlement level in the month before each election – in eligible (treated) versus non-eligible (control) settlements across different elections. This figure shows a notable increase in public work program intensity by the Hungarian government just before the October 2014 local elections, with a significantly higher share of public workers in eligible settlements compared to non-eligible ones. Consequently, we account for the potentially differing effects of public workers on Fidesz support in local elections by estimating a heterogeneous public work effect on vote share. To isolate the causal effect of policy eligibility on Fidesz support, we control for these heterogeneous effects of public work programs, mitigating any bias from vote-buying incentives associated with the PW program, as documented by Mares and Young (2019) and Gáspár, Gyöngyösi, and Reizer (2023).

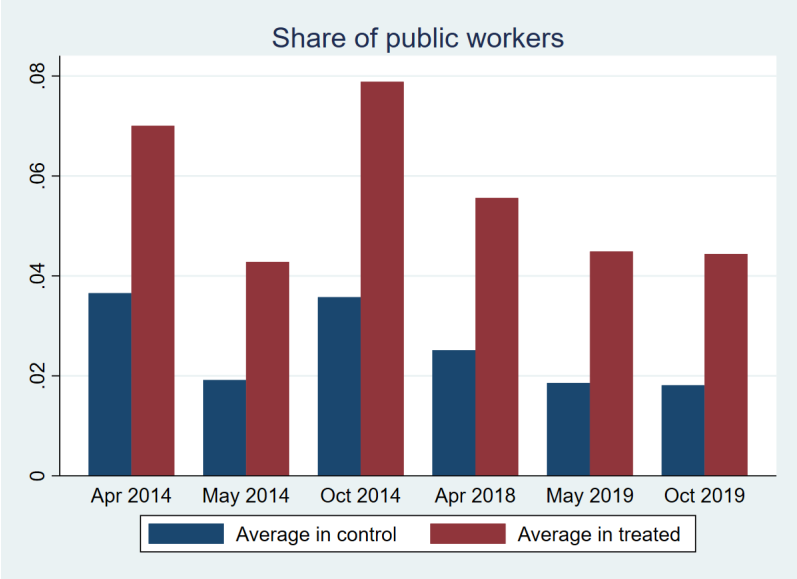

Figure A2: Average Share of Public Workers in Rural CSOK Eligible and Non-eligible Settlements, One Month Before the Elections

Note: Monthly, settlement-level public work share data are drawn from T-STAR Database. Means are population weighted.

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