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Politicization, bureaucratic closedness in personnel policy, and turnover intention

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Abstract

Previous studies have identified individual and organizational factors that influence the turnover intentions of bureaucrats. However, they have overlooked how the type of national bureaucracy influences turnover intention. Combining data sets on macro-level bureaucratic structures and individual civil servants, we examine how bureaucratic politicization and closedness are associated with the turnover intentions of bureaucrats in 36 countries. Our analysis indicates that there is large cross-national variation in turnover intention, and that bureaucratic structures matter as one of the predictors of turnover intention. Public servants working in more closed and regulated bureaucracies exhibit lower turnover intention. We also find that public servants working in more politicized bureaucracies (in which personnel decisions are made via political connections) have lower turnover intention than those working in more merit-based systems. Such low turnover intention in politicized bureaucracies may be explained by the characteristics of patronage appointments in which public jobs are distributed based on personal or political loyalty.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, voluntary turnover and turnover intention among bureaucrats have been significant issues for public organizations (Moon, 2017; Pitts et al., 2011; Selden & Moynihan, 2000). Previous studies have identified various factors influencing bureaucrats' intentions to leave their organizations and the consequences of employee turnover (Hur & Abner, 2023; Sowa, 2021). However, the level of analysis in previous literature has been limited to individual, organizational, and managerial factors, with turnover considered as a HRM (human resource management) outcome. Few studies approach bureaucratic turnover and turnover intention from a macro or international comparative perspective. In particular, political factors have been under-examined in studies of employee turnover.

This lack of studies on turnover that take a macro-level approach is unfortunate given the significant implications of bureaucratic turnover for governance and the quality and stability of public administration (Boyne et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2018; Meier & Hicklin, 2008; Mor Barak et al., 2001). While turnover can bring positive changes to organizations, such as new ideas, training, and creativity (Bradbury et al., 2013; Jung, 2010, 2014; Kellough & Osuna, 1995; Sun & Wang, 2017), excessive turnover can have adverse effects. It can disrupt service delivery, create additional costs, and undermine the quality and stability of public services.¹ This can lead to negative publicity and unfavorable views of the public sector (Leland et al., 2012), as well as harm the effective implementation of foreign aid programs (Cornell, 2014). When we examine turnover as an indicator of governance, we need to investigate different levels of variables.

This article investigates the association between two macro-level institutional factors, politicization and bureaucratic closedness, and the turnover intention of bureaucrats. "Turnover intention" is defined as the "[c]onscious and deliberate willfulness to leave" one's organization (Matz et al., 2014, p. 234). We define "politicization" as the recruitment of civil servants through political connections rather than merit-based procedures (Meyer-Sahling, 2006; Peters, 2013), and "bureaucratic closedness" as personnel systems with tenure protection, formal rules and regulated personnel systems, and limited mobility between public and private sectors (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017).

The study is particularly timely given the increasing populism and political interventions in public administration in many countries (Bauer et al., 2021; Peci, 2021), including ongoing debates in the United States regarding Schedule F, which grants the president or appointees the power to fire potentially thousands of career officials at will (Moynihan, 2022). Despite such global trend, we still have little understanding of the relationship between political influence in bureaucracy and employee turnover intention from a comparative perspective.

We use data from the International Social Survey Program 2015 (ISSP) (Issp Research Group, 2017) and the QoG Expert Survey (Dahlström et al., 2015), drawing on data from 36 countries to examine this understudied link. We argue that degree of politicization and closedness of the civil service system emerge as important determinants of turnover intention when comparing public servants across countries. We hypothesize that civil service systems that allow politicians to arbitrarily interfere in personnel matters are associated with higher turnover intention. We also hypothesize that highly closed civil service systems are linked to lower turnover intention. The results of our multilevel model provide empirical support for the second hypothesis. Surprisingly, we find that the opposite is true for the first hypothesis. Civil servants working in more politicized contexts show lower turnover intention than those working in more meritocratic bureaucracies.

This article makes two contributions to literature on employee turnover intention and comparative studies of bureaucracy. First, we apply a comparative and institutional perspective to the study of turnover intention, which has been lacking despite increasing scholarly interests

in contextual and institutional-level factors in public management (Milward et al., 2016; O'Toole Jr & Meier, 2015; Peters et al., 2022).² Second, we examine how political factors are associated with turnover intention, which has often been overlooked in studies of employee turnover. While previous studies have investigated the role of political factors in bureaucratic turnover (Bertelli & Lewis, 2012; Doherty et al., 2019a, 2019b, Dahlström & Holmgren, 2019), their focus has been on senior executive turnover, leaving a gap in knowledge regarding how politicization and closedness of bureaucracy affect the turnover intentions of rank-and-file public servants across countries.

This article first explains the theoretical framework for this study. The second section discusses our hypotheses while highlighting how variations in turnover intention are associated with the characteristics of various civil service systems. The third section presents the data and methods of this study, followed by a section containing results and analysis. The article ends with discussion, conclusions, and limitations.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Turnover literature has identified several factors associated with employee turnover and turnover intention. For instance, past work has found positive relationships between job characteristic variables (i.e., role conflict, exhaustion, role ambiguity, and job stress) and turnover intention (Bacharach & Bamberger, 1990; Jung et al., 2017; Kim, 2005), as well as negative relationships between employee attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, affective commitment) and human resource management practices (e.g., performance appraisal/feedback, training/development) and turnover intention (Campbell & Im, 2016; Kim & Wright, 2007; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Rosenblatt, 2009).

However, these previous studies primarily focus on managerial factors influencing bureaucrats' turnover intentions and consider turnover as a human resource management (HRM) outcome. Turnover as an indicator of governance, in contrast, has been under-examined. In particular, political factors have often been overlooked. A limited number of studies examine the political environment as a factor in bureaucrats' turnover intentions; political factors investigated include changes in ruling party, the perceived policy influence of bureaucrats, and ideological mismatch between civil servants and new presidents (Bertelli & Lewis, 2012; Bolton et al., 2021; Doherty et al., 2019a, 2019b, Richardson, 2019). The results of these studies suggest that political leadership changes or interference increase the turnover intentions of bureaucrats.

The above studies generated valuable insights and empirical findings. However, these studies primarily focus on how political factors affect top public officials, not rank-and-file civil servants. Thus, we still do not know enough about how the majority of public employees respond to increasing political influence in bureaucracy in terms of turnover intention. In addition, much of this prior literature takes the form of a single case study of a U.S. government agency. Turnover rates and intentions likely vary not only between individuals and organizations but across countries. This cross-national perspective has been missing from studies of employee turnover intention.

3 | THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

While a robust literature examines the determinants of turnover intention in the public sector, individual and organizational variables are the main targets of scholarly interest, resulting in a

failure to relate these variables to macro factors (such as political factors, closedness of recruitment, or country-level institutional factors). Hence, while much of the previous turnover literature has studied the inner workings of civil service and public employment, there have been few studies considering the larger macro factors influencing turnover intention.

The classic Weberian model of bureaucracy consists of 1) a formal structure, 2) administrative procedures and processes, and 3) a personnel system (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017; Gualmini, 2008). Similar to prior studies (Dahlström et al., 2012; Evans & Rauch, 1999; Schuster et al., 2020), this study focuses on characteristics of bureaucracies' personnel policies. In particular, we examine two key dimensions of staff policy: the degree to which the recruitment and promotion systems of public servants are influenced by political interference, and the degree to which recruitment and promotion systems are open or closed.

3.1 | The politicization-turnover intention link

Although politicization takes a number of forms and has been defined in various ways (Halligan, 2021), politicization here refers to “the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards, and disciplining of members of the public service” (Peters & Pierre, 2004, p. 2). We define politicization as recruiting civil servants through political connections rather than staffing via merit-based procedures (Meyer-Sahling, 2006; Peters, 2013). Patronage, which is the selecting and hiring of public servants on political grounds, represents one form of the politicization of the public service (Peters & Bianchi, 2020). Although there exist more conceptual discussions of politicization and patronage (Panizza et al., 2019; Peters, 2013), we can say that a high degree of politicization in a bureaucracy leads to the increased practice of patronage over more meritocratic methods of personnel selection.

The potential negative consequences of politicized administrative systems have often been discussed (Peters, 2013; Peters & Pierre, 2004). A growing number of recent empirical studies have confirmed such consequences, showing that, for example, a higher degree of political interference (or lower emphasis on meritocratic recruitment) is negatively linked with socio-economic development (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Nistotskaya et al., 2015), corruption prevention and whistleblowing (Charron et al., 2017; Cooper, 2022; Dahlström et al., 2012; Oliveros & Schuster, 2018), innovation (Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020; Suzuki & Akif Demircioglu, 2019), public service motivation (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2021), job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2021), and regulatory quality and entrepreneurship (Nistotskaya & Cingolani, 2016). See also Oliveira et al. (2023) for a systematic review of meritocracy.

While several studies have suggested a link between politicization in public organizations and bureaucratic behavior, the mechanisms by which the selection of bureaucrats via either political appointments or merit-based procedures lead to different outcomes remain elusive (Meyer-Sahling et al., 2018; Oliveros & Schuster, 2018). How can we explain a link between politicization and bureaucrats' turnover intentions? We argue that civil servants working in highly politicized bureaucracies tend to have higher turnover intention based on bureaucrats' motivations to influence public policy and commitments to procedural justice.

We argue that turnover intention is a function of bureaucrats' perceived influence over policy making (Bertelli & Lewis, 2012; Doherty et al., 2019a, 2019b). The opportunity to influence policy outcomes is one of the driving forces for people choosing to enter the public sector. Bureaucratic discretion to influence public policy can be understood as part of the compensation for agency personnel (Dahlström & Holmgren, 2019; Downs, 1967; Gailmard & Patty, 2007).

Procedural justice concerns fair decision-making processes (Deutsch, 2006; Kim & Siddiki, 2018), and perceptions of procedural justice involve judgments about the fairness of decision-making processes (Lind & Tyler, 1988). We argue that valuing political allegiances over merit in hiring or promotion criteria leads to lower perceived procedural justice for public servants and higher turnover intention. Leventhal's (1980) six "justice rules" create a framework for comprehending procedural justice (Colquitt, 2001). Leventhal suggests six components of procedural justice. People believe that a decision-making process is fair when it is consistent (consistency rule); impartial and unbiased (bias-suppression rule); based on precise information (accuracy rule); changeable if errors are found (correctability rule); founded on moral principles (ethical rule); and reflective of all stakeholders' voices in decision-making (representative rule) (Pedersen et al., 2017). Past research has shown that violations of these rules are negatively related to employee job performance and satisfaction (Choi, 2011; Rubin, 2009), organizational commitment (Hassan & Rohrbaugh, 2011), and collaborative policy-making (Kim & Siddiki, 2018).

We argue that prioritizing political or personal connections over merit-based factors such as hard work, initiative, and ability goes against the principles of neutrality and unbiased decision-making. Using political connections to recruit civil servants may be perceived as violating the representativeness rule, as it gives an advantage to applicants with political contacts rather than equally qualified applicants without such connections (Pedersen et al., 2017). Similarly, recruitment processes that don't thoroughly evaluate candidates may be seen as breaking the accuracy rule. When political criteria overrides merit-based criteria, public servants may feel that the process is inconsistent, and it violates the consistency rule. Furthermore, the use of political criteria in hiring and promotion may go against expectations that rules apply equally to everyone, which can lead to the violation of the bias-suppression rule. These perceived violations of organizational and procedural justice can cause public servants to reduce their voluntary commitments and attachments to their organizations, ultimately leading to higher turnover intention. Based on our analysis of existing evidence and theories, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Politicization is positively associated with bureaucrats' turnover intentions.

3.2 | The closedness/openness personnel system-turnover intention link

The second dimension of personnel policies examined in this article is the closedness/openness of personnel systems. Scholars have long noted a distinction between "open" and "closed" civil service systems (Auer et al., 1996; Bekke and Meer, 2000). Closed bureaucracies are legalistic: entry and promotion are highly formalized; internal candidates fill job openings and follow seniority rules; job mobility is limited; and working conditions are subject to specific labor laws different from those of private sector employees. In contrast, in "open" (or less legalistic) systems, bureaucrats join the civil service through less formalized exams, lateral entries are common, and job vacancies are advertised outside the administration, leading to greater job mobility (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017; Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020).

We expect that three practices grounded in closed personnel systems—1) tenure protection, 2) formal rules and regulated personnel systems, and 3) limited mobility between public and private sectors—are linked with lower turnover intention. In closed civil service systems, lifelong tenure protection is typically guaranteed, and public servants are expected to enter the public

service at the lowest level and advance gradually to higher positions. Such lifelong tenure protection gives employees high job security. Previous studies on bureaucratic turnover show that job security (or tenure protection) reduces the probability of employees leaving their organizations. When employees feel that their jobs are secure, they exhibit more positive work attitudes and behavior, including increased job satisfaction and commitment, and a reduced probability of leaving the organization (Colquitt et al., 2014; Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012; Lu et al., 2017). Therefore, bureaucrats in a closed system are likely to exhibit low turnover intention.

We also expect that formal rules and highly regulated personnel systems lead to a higher sense of procedural justice among civil servants, dissuading public servants from leaving their organizations. In highly formalized systems, little flexibility exists in determining how a personnel decision is made or the outcomes of a given situation; procedures and rewards are dictated by stipulated rules (Schminke et al., 2000). We expect that strict adherence to written rules, valuing competition and careful evaluation of qualities in the hiring process, and limited discretion for arbitrary decision-making enhance civil servants' perceptions of impartial treatment (Pedersen et al., 2017; Tyler, 1988), encouraging civil servants to remain committed to their organization.

Finally, limited public and private sector mobility in closed bureaucracies leads to higher intention to remain in these organizations, as the lack of employment alternatives is linked with higher perceived costs associated with leaving (Bertelli & Lewis, 2012; Suzuki & Hur, 2020; Whitford and Lee, 2014). In countries with more closed recruitment systems, public officials spend their entire careers in the public sector and invest time and resources into acquiring public-sector specific skills and knowledge. We expect that such investments in non-transferrable skills should deter bureaucrats from leaving their organizations. Therefore, based on the arguments above, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. A closed personnel system is negatively associated with bureaucrats' turnover intentions.

4 | DATA AND METHODS

This study utilizes two cross-national data sets. The first, the International Social Survey Program 2015 - Work Orientations IV (Issp Research Group, 2017), includes 6055 public servants from 36 countries, and the second, the QoG Expert Survey Dataset II (Dahlström et al., 2015), contains characteristics of national bureaucracies. Our dependent variable and individual-level controls are taken from the ISSP dataset, while our national-level independent variables are obtained from the QoG Expert Survey. Combining these two data sets helps to avoid the problem of common source bias (Jakobsen & Jensen, 2015).

The ISSP is a cross-national survey that has been conducted since 1985 on various social science topics. The Work Orientation 2015 module focuses on respondents' work attitudes, such as employment arrangements, job characteristics, subjective experience of the job, work satisfaction, work-life balance, and other work-related attitudes and values (Issp Research Group, 2017). We limit our sample to those currently working in the public sector, excluding those who work in the private sector and the unemployed. Although we cannot confirm the positions of these public servants, most of the respondents are rank-and-file employees rather than senior bureaucrats, including teachers, nursing professionals, general office clerks, cleaners, and assistants. Occupations of our sample respondents are listed in Table 9A.

The QoG Expert Survey provides a quantitative assessment of Weberian bureaucracy. The Expert Survey II was carried out in 2014. This survey collected data from 1294 experts in 159

countries. The survey asks for expert perceptions of the current status and characteristics of the nation's public bureaucracy such as recruitment and career systems, replacement, compensation, transparency, and gender representation. Many scholarly publications utilize both data sets separately, demonstrating the reliability of the data sets. See appendices for the data sets and variable operationalization.³

4.1 | Variable operationalization

4.1.1 | Dependent variable

The dependent variable is the turnover intention of public servants. This is an individual-level variable measured by respondents' answers to the question, "All in all, how likely is it that you will try to find a job with another firm or organization within the next 12 months?"⁴ Respondents were asked to select an answer from "Very likely," "Likely," "Unlikely," "Very unlikely," "Can't choose." We excluded "Can't choose" and then reversed the scale. The variable is ordinal, ranging from 0 to 3, with higher values indicating higher turnover intention. Figure 1 and the left graph in Figure 2 show cross-national variations in turnover intention, with Mexico, Philippines, Venezuela, France, and South Africa having higher values while Spain, Japan, Slovenia, Croatia, and Germany score lower.

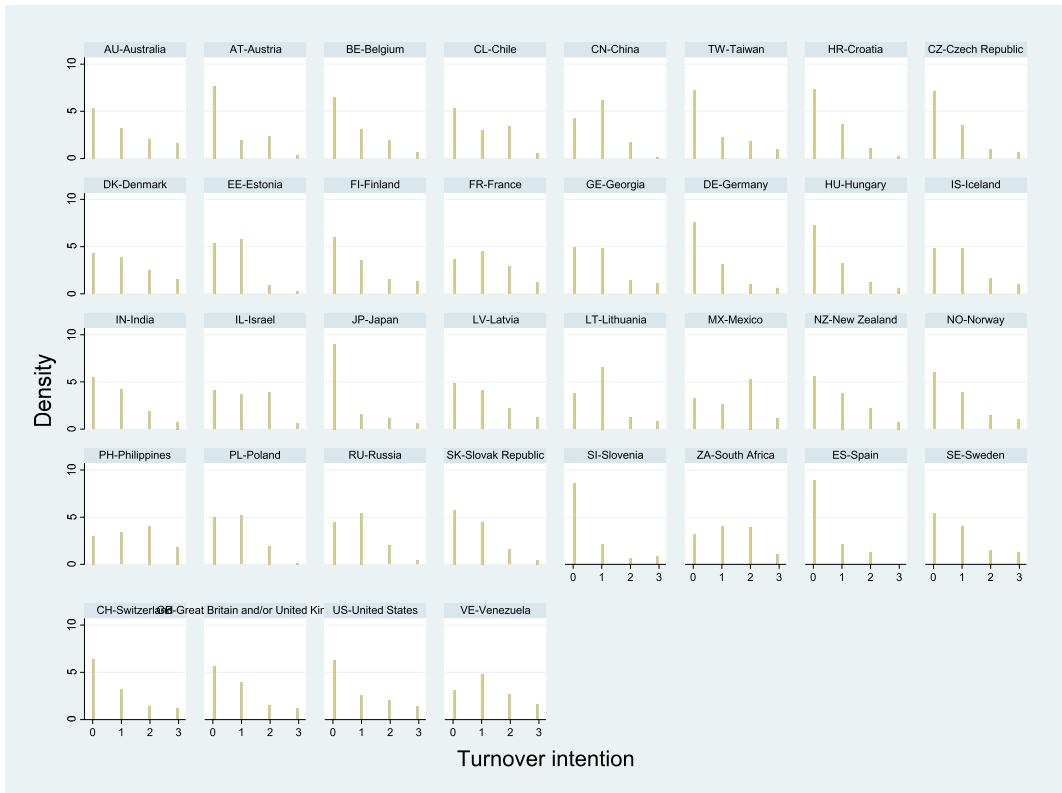


FIGURE 1 Variations in turnover intention across sample countries. Aggregated values of turnover intention at the country level. Survey design weights are used to calculate means.

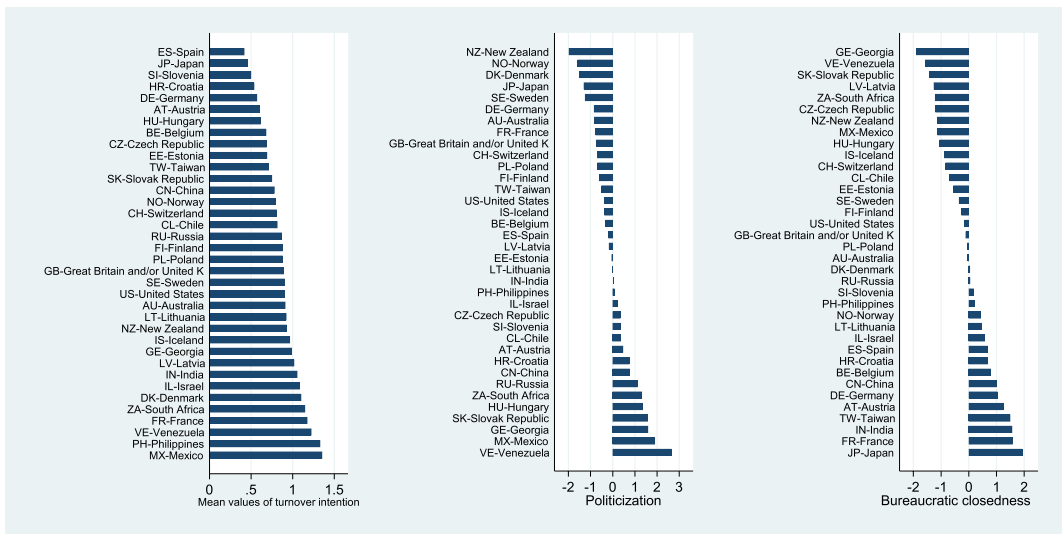


FIGURE 2 Variations in turnover intention, politicization and bureaucratic closedness across sample countries. Turnover intention values are average values at the country level. Survey design weights are used to calculate means.

4.1.2 | Independent variables

Two independent variables, (1) politicization and (2) bureaucratic closedness, are country-level variables collected from the QoG Expert Survey Dataset II. These two variables are country-level aggregated measures of two dimensions of Weberian bureaucracy focusing on the personnel system. These two measures, including with slight modifications, have been widely used in previous studies (Cooper, 2022; Cronert, 2022; Dahlström et al., 2012). Politicization measures the degree to which the recruitment and promotion systems of public officials are influenced by political interference. This variable comes from the following three questions: (1) “When recruiting public sector employees, the skills and merits of the applicants decide who gets the job”; (2) “When recruiting public sector employees, the political connections of the applicants decide who gets the job”; and (3) “The top political leadership hires and fires senior public officials.”⁵ We ran a principal component analysis to construct the politicization index (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88). This variable was then multiplied by -1 to show that higher values indicate politicization while lower values indicate more merit-based recruitment and promotion, then the variable is standardized as a z-score ranging from -1.98 – 2.64 . Figure 1a in the appendices displays bivariate graphs of the politicization index and survey item values, while Figure 2 highlights variations in political influence across the countries in our sample. Countries such as Venezuela, Mexico, Georgia, Slovakia, Hungary, and South Africa have highly politicized personnel decisions, while New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, Japan, Sweden, and Germany have established meritocratic and non-politicized personnel policies.

The second independent variable is bureaucratic closedness in the personnel system. As in previous literature, we base the index of the principal component analysis (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.70) on the following three questions: (1) “Public sector employees are hired via a formal examination system”; (2) “Once one is recruited as a public sector employee, one remains a public sector employee for the rest of one’s career”; and (3) “Senior public officials are recruited from within the ranks of the public sector.”⁶ The variable is standardized as a z-score ranging

from -1.90 – 1.93 . Higher values indicate an increasingly regulated or “closed” system, with greater public-private distinctions, limited mobility for bureaucrats, and higher tenure protection and job security for employees. Figure 2a in appendices show bivariate graphs of the closedness index (Y-axis) and each survey item value (X-axis). Figure 2 reports variations in the degree of bureaucratic closedness. More closed, regulated public bureaucracies can be found in countries such as Japan, France, India, Taiwan, Austria, and Germany while bureaucracies in Georgia, Venezuela, Slovakia, Latvia, and South Africa are the least closed.

4.1.3 | Control variables

This study controls for several potential confounding factors featured in previous literature on turnover intention. The relatively small number of countries in our sample ($N = 36$) prevents us from including country-level confounders, allowing us to keep the model parsimonious. We use political stability from Coppedge et al. (2022) as a country-level confounder; political stability measures perceptions that the governing power will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional and/or violent means. As a robustness check, we include alternative country-level controls.

The ISSP data set does not allow us to include organizational-level variables. However, we include several individual-level perceptions of organizations and factors involving relationships between individual respondents and their organizations (Sowa, 2021). One demographic factor, gender, is controlled for. Although results are inconsistent, past studies often treat gender as a demographic factor affecting turnover (Sowa, 2021). For parsimony, we elected not to include other demographic variables often used in turnover literature. We include age in our robustness check model. We utilize other individual-level variables, including perceived income level, outside options, and voting in the last general election. Previous studies have found that employee salary influences turnover (Currall et al., 2005; Singh & Loncar, 2010) and that the availability of outside career options affects turnover intention (Bertelli & Lewis, 2012). We include voting as a proxy for the respondent's relationship with politics. Finally, we control for several variables related to the respondent's relationship with their organization, including perceived job security, job autonomy, job satisfaction, workplace relations with colleagues and managers, public-service-oriented motives, organizational commitment, and opportunities for advancement. These factors are typically included in research models as they are expected to influence turnover (Campbell & Im, 2016; Kim, 2005; Sowa, 2021). All variables are z-score standardized, with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one except for binary variables for ease of interpretation and parsimony.

Table 1A in the Appendix presents the details of the variables in our models. Table 2A presents descriptive statistics of all variables in the analysis. Table 3A shows the correlation matrix. No variable is highly correlated. Based on our Main models, we conducted collinearity diagnostics using Variance Inflation Factors (VIF). The mean values of VIF are less than 1.45 in all main models, suggesting that the models do not have serious multicollinearity issues.

4.2 | Empirical strategies

As our hypotheses concern how macro-level institutional factors are related to individual-level turnover intentions, we elected to test the hypotheses empirically by employing an observational, multilevel design, using a large survey of 6055 civil servants in 36 countries. One of the assumptions of the ordinary least squares (OLS) model is the independence of the observations.

Our data set, however, has a hierarchical structure, with public servants (Level 1) nested within country-level macro factors (Level 2). This violates the OLS assumption, leading to incorrect estimations of the SEs (Robson & Pevalin, 2016). We also found significant variation across countries (Figures 1 and 2). Thus, a multilevel analysis is appropriate for this study.

With only 36 countries in the level 2 variable, we elected not to use cross-level interactions interaction models to analyze how the impact of macro-level factors on turnover intention changes as a function of individual factors (Stegmueller, 2013). We instead focus on direct country-level variable effects on individual-level turnover intention. The unit of analysis is the individual public servant. We use random intercept models with an ordered logit model due to the ordinal nature of our main dependent variables. The standard errors are clustered at the country level, and survey design weights are included in all models. Our sample is limited to public employees currently in paid work, resulting in 7841 samples out of 51,668. We use the 6055 samples with both individual- and country-level variables. Our sample mostly consists of rank-and-file civil servants, such as teachers, healthcare workers, and office clerks rather than senior bureaucrats.

5 | RESULTS

Our scatterplots (Figure 3) illustrate the bivariate relationship between politicization and bureaucratic closedness and turnover intention within 35 countries. The Y-axis represents the aggregated turnover intention values for each country, with higher values indicating higher turnover

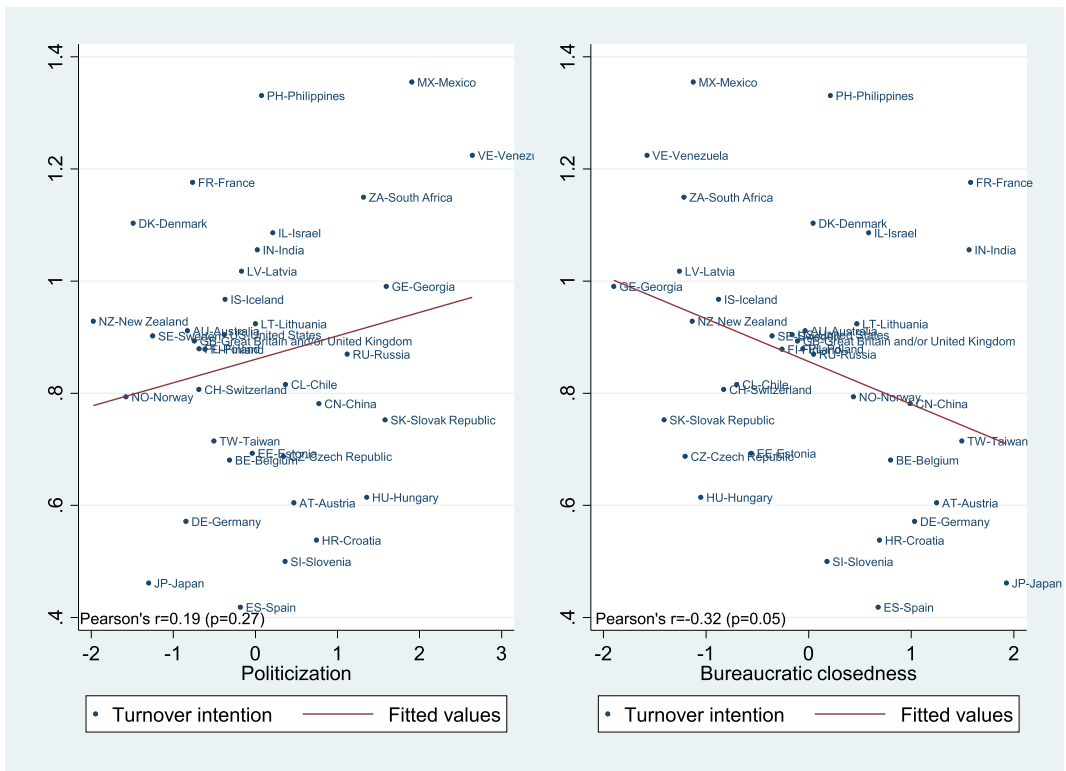


FIGURE 3 Average values of turnover intention and politicization and bureaucratic closedness. Turnover intention values are average values at the country level. Survey design weights are used to calculate means.

intention. The relationship between politicization and turnover intention is positive but not statistically significant ($p = 0.27$), while closedness has a negative relationship with turnover intention ($p = 0.05$). However, these results do not consider individual and contextual factors. Thus, we refer to the multilevel analysis results in Table 1.

Model 1 is a null model with only the dependent variable (Table 1). The ICC (Intraclass correlation coefficient) is 0.07, meaning that 7% of the variance in turnover intention is explained by between-country differences, with the remaining differences occurring within countries. Thus, the multilevel, random effects intercept approach is appropriate. Model 2 adds individual-level controls and finds that gender and income level do not influence turnover intention, as opposed to the findings of previous studies (Kiyak et al., 1997; Tai et al., 1998; Udechukwu et al., 2007). However, perceived outside career options have positive influences on turnover intention, consistent with the findings of Bertelli and Lewis (2012). Voting in the last election is negatively associated with turnover intention. Consistent with previous studies (Hwang & Hopkins, 2012; van Eetveldt et al., 2013), perceived job security, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment decrease turnover intention. Respondents who think that opportunities for advancement and promotion are important were likely to show higher turnover intention. Public-service-oriented motives, one of the characteristics of PSM, did not have any impact on turnover intention.

Model 3 adds political stability as a control and politicization as the sole independent variable. Model 4 examines bureaucratic closedness rather than politicization. Model 5 includes both politicization and closedness to explore whether one of the independent variables still influences turnover intention when controlling for the other independent variable. In Models 3–4, in which we examine the impact of politicization and bureaucratic closedness separately, only bureaucratic closedness has a statistically significant negative impact ($p < 0.05$). As we hypothesized, a higher degree of bureaucratic closedness reduces turnover intention. This means that civil servants working in more closed civil service systems show lower turnover intention when controlling for individual-level variables and other contextual factors. Political stability has a negative impact on turnover intention ($p < 0.001$), meaning that political stability leads to lower turnover intention. This result makes sense, as instability in political contexts (such as violence and terrorism) should increase turnover intention. In Model 5 ($p < 0.001$), in which we examine the contextual effects of politicization and bureaucratic closedness together, the negative impact of closedness still holds and has a higher statistical significance. This provides empirical support for H2. Surprisingly, Model 5 shows that politicization also has a negative impact on turnover intention ($p < 0.001$). Contrary to our hypothesis, civil servants working in more politicized civil service systems are likely to show lower turnover intention than those in more merit-based systems.

Next, we visualize the predicted probabilities of dependent variables to help interpret the results of the multilevel-ordered logit model. Figure 4 shows predicted probabilities for each of the four outcomes of turnover intention (very unlikely, unlikely, likely, and very likely to find a job with another firm or organization within the next 12 months) by degrees of political interference. Note that we interpret selecting “very unlikely” as indicating that the respondent has a strong intention to stay in his/her organization; “unlikely” indicates a moderately strong intention to stay. On the other hand, selecting “very likely” indicates that the respondent shows a strong turnover intention; “likely” indicates a moderately strong turnover intention.

The probability of selecting “very unlikely,” a strong intention to stay, increases as the degree of political influence increases. The probability of showing a strong retention intention is around 30% when the level of politicization is -2 (New Zealand's level). It increases as the politicization variable increases, reaching around 60% when the value of politicization is more than 2 (Mexico's

TABLE 1 Multilevel model results for a link between politicization, bureaucratic closedness, and turnover intention.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent variables					
Politicization			−0.13 (0.11)		−0.32*** (0.10)
Bureaucratic closedness				−0.17* (0.08)	−0.31*** (0.08)
Country-level control					
Political stability			−0.43*** (0.10)	−0.35*** (0.08)	−0.55*** (0.10)
Individual-level control					
Gender		0.03 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)
Income level		0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Outside options		0.49*** (0.03)	0.50*** (0.03)	0.50*** (0.03)	0.50*** (0.03)
Voting		−0.34*** (0.07)	−0.35*** (0.07)	−0.34*** (0.07)	−0.34*** (0.07)
Job security		−0.36*** (0.05)	−0.36*** (0.05)	−0.36*** (0.05)	−0.36*** (0.05)
Job autonomy		0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)
Job satisfaction		−0.54*** (0.06)	−0.56*** (0.06)	−0.56*** (0.06)	−0.55*** (0.06)
Workplace relations		−0.02 (0.04)	−0.02 (0.04)	−0.02 (0.04)	−0.02 (0.04)
Public-service-oriented motives		0.05 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)
Organizational commitment		−0.18*** (0.05)	−0.17*** (0.05)	−0.16*** (0.05)	−0.17*** (0.05)
Importance of opportunities for advancement		0.11** (0.03)	0.10** (0.03)	0.10** (0.03)	0.10** (0.03)
cut1	−0.17 (0.09)	−0.64*** (0.13)	−0.68*** (0.11)	−0.66*** (0.11)	−0.66*** (0.11)
cut2	1.25*** (0.09)	1.01*** (0.13)	0.99*** (0.12)	1.01*** (0.13)	1.01*** (0.12)
cut3	2.59*** (0.10)	2.53*** (0.12)	2.51*** (0.14)	2.53*** (0.14)	2.53*** (0.13)
Country-level variance	0.26*** (0.05)	0.36*** (0.09)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.21*** (0.05)	0.15*** (0.03)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
ICC	0.07	0.10	0.06	0.06	0.05
AIC	17,041.3	13,606.9	13,282.4	13,280.1	13,273.2
BIC	17,068.9	13,707.9	13,396.5	13,394.1	13,394.0
Log likelihood	−8516.7	−6788.4	−6624.2	−6623.0	−6618.6
N. of individual-level observations	7247	6219	6055	6055	6055
N. of countries.	37	37	36	36	36

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. Survey design weights are included in all models. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

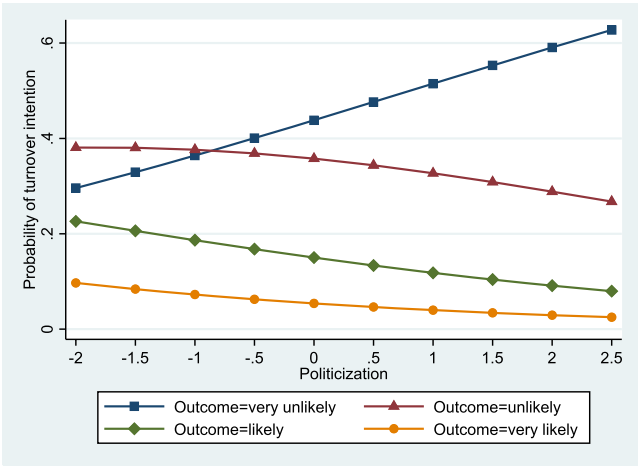


FIGURE 4 Predicted turnover intention by degree of politicization. Samples are based on model 5 in table 1.

level). Furthermore, in a politicized bureaucracy, the probability of showing strong and moderately strong turnover intentions is much lower than that of showing strong retention intention. The probability of having strong and moderately strong turnover intentions gradually drops as the value of politicization increases. Thus, the figure suggests that politicization is positively associated with strong intentions to stay in organizations and negatively linked with strong and moderately strong turnover intentions. However, the result of a moderately strong intention to stay (“unlikely”) is interesting, showing a negative relationship with politicization. Respondents who think they are unlikely to find a job with another organization (i.e., likely to stay in their organizations) are dropped as the level of politicization increases. This mild level of retention intention is negatively influenced by politicization.

Figure 5 visualizes predicted probabilities of turnover intention outcomes by degree of bureaucratic closedness. The figure shows that the impact of closedness has a similar pattern as the impact of politicization. The probability of having a strong retention intention (“very unlikely”) increases as the degree of bureaucratic closedness increases, holding other contextual and individual factors constant. Probabilities for “very unlikely” are around 30%–40% when the level of bureaucratic closedness is low, or between −2 and −1 (Georgia and Hungary-level). The probabilities increase more than 50% when the degree of closedness is above 1 point (China and

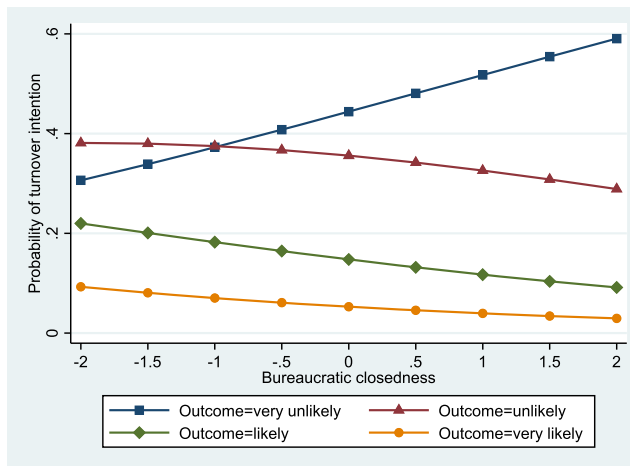


FIGURE 5 Predicted turnover intention by degree of bureaucratic closedness. Samples are based on model 5 in Table 1.

Germany-level). Probabilities for turnover intention (“likely” and “very likely”) are reduced as civil service systems become more regulated and closed. However, mild retention intention actually slightly drops as the level of closedness increases. This result is somewhat puzzling. Overall, however, the results show that closedness is negatively associated with turnover intention.

The results of our multilevel models show that characteristics of the employment systems of civil servants matter for levels of turnover intention even after controlling for other contextual as well as individual factors, but not necessarily in the ways that we expected. Civil servants working in more politicized and closed personnel systems tend to show higher intentions to stay in their current organizations.

5.1 | Robustness checks

We conducted several robustness checks to see if our findings as reported in Table 1 were robust. First, we checked to see if adding another country-level contextual factor altered our main findings. We re-ran model 5 in Table 1, adding different country-level controls one by one. Those variables include public-private gap in turnover intention, GDP/capita, polity score, government effectiveness, OECD dummy, and public sector salary. We found that the results of politicization and closedness were robust in all cases (see table 4A). Second, we split samples into OECD-member and non-member countries to check if the results were driven by observations from non-OECD member countries (table 5A). We found that politicization and bureaucratic closedness have negative impacts on turnover intention in relatively homogeneous OECD country samples. For non-OECD samples, the politicization effect lost statistical significance, but the closedness effect still held. However, this country-level sample size is only 11 nations. Nothing definitive can be concluded from the results of an analysis based on such a small sample. Third, we re-coded the dependent variable as a binary variable indicating turnover intention or no turnover intention (table 5A). We re-ran Model 5 with a binary dependent variable, employing a multilevel logit model. Politicization still had a negative impact on turnover intention ($p < 0.05$). The statistical significance of bureaucratic closedness dropped from $p < 0.001$ but was still significant at $p < 0.1$. Fourth, we checked to see if any of our results were driven by observations

from a single country; we re-ran Model 5 using a country-wise jackknife to test the robustness of the results, excluding a different country each time. We found that in all cases, the results were robust (Table 6A). Fifth, we re-ran the analysis using non-standardized variables. The results still held (Table 7A). Sixth, we added several alternative individual-level controls expected to influence turnover intention according to previous studies (Sowa, 2021). We found that adding these variables did not change our main findings (Table 8A). Finally, we tested if our results changed when using each component of the politicization and closedness indices. We found that the results did not change (Table 10A & 11A).

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article is (to our knowledge) the first cross-national study investigating national-level determinants of bureaucratic turnover by focusing on politicization and closed personnel systems. Politicization and bureaucratic closedness were predicted to be significant country-level predictors of turnover intention. Surprisingly, the results show that political interference is negatively associated with turnover intention. Civil servants in more politicized contexts are likely to have higher intentions to stay in their organizations. This positive influence of politicization on retention is contrary to previous studies. We also argued that bureaucratic closedness would reduce turnover intention. Our multilevel model provides empirical support for this hypothesis.

Why do public servants in highly politicized bureaucracies have a strong retention intention? The concept of patronage may explain this result. Patronage recruitment and appointments represent an alternative to merit-based systems, where public sector jobs may function as a reward for clients who provided political support to a patron (Peters & Bianchi, 2020). The low turnover intention among public servants may be attributable to their loyalty to the political patrons who provided them with their public service jobs in the first place. Figure 4 shows that the probability of a strong intention to stay significantly increases as the level of politicization increases.

The concept of “self-enforcing patronage” proposed by Oliveros (2021) may explain this result. Using data from low- and mid-level public servants in Argentina, Oliveros argues that patronage employment continues because patronage contracts become self-sustaining when they are distributed to supporters whose career outcomes are then permanently tied to the careers of the politicians who hired them. Those who receive patronage jobs often feel a strong motivation to remain loyal and committed to their benefactors, even after obtaining the job. This is because patronage workers typically believe that their own fate is linked to the political fortunes of their patrons, which creates a sense of ongoing support and dedication to these patrons.

The strong intentions of rank-and-file civil servants not to leave their organizations may be interpreted as one manifestation of the patronage employee's strong commitment and loyalty to their patron. Thus, increased politicization may increase civil servants with low turnover intention. However, negative consequences of increased politicization, such as those seen in the U.S. and elsewhere, should also be considered. Previous studies suggest negative effects of decreased meritocracy and increased politicization on individual, organizational, and macro-level outcomes (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017; Nistotskaya, 2020). Future research should examine the underlying mechanisms for the impact of politicization on retention intention, particularly in highly politicized contexts.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, we couldn't include certain individual-level factors like recruitment procedures, political connections, positions within organizations, years of working, and ethnicity due to a lack of data. However, we checked the robustness of our findings by including different available individual variables that were expected to influence turnover intention based on previous studies.

Second, the ISSP data set does not include organizational-level variables such as types of public organizations, organizational size, or other organizational traits. Instead, we utilized respondents' perceptions of organizational characteristics. Third, the two data sets we used are observational cross-section data, which means that we do not make any causal argument for how changes in the degree of political influence and closedness affect the turnover intentions of bureaucrats. Future studies and data collection should be undertaken to examine the causal effects of politicization and closedness on turnover intention. Fourth, the country selection of the ISSP represents a limitation of this research. Our samples do not include all OECD countries, and the selection of non-OECD countries is somewhat limited.

Although we checked the robustness of our findings using a country-wise jackknife for regression estimation and separate sample analysis, we do not exclude the possibility that the country selection influenced the results of this study. Despite these limitations, the results of this study contribute to our understanding of the relationships between politicization and bureaucratic closedness and turnover intention from a cross-national perspective. Scholars are still in the early stages of data collection for comparative bureaucratic research (Van de Walle et al., 2016). As more data becomes available, future research should further the comparative study of bureaucratic systems including the impact of politicization on turnover intention of bureaucrats.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Replication data is available from the following website. <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/AJDWTC>

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ENDNOTES

¹ See, for example, An (2019), Bostashvili and Ujhelyi (2019), Boyne et al. (2011), Hausknecht et al. (2009), Lee (2018), Wynen et al. (2019).

² However, see recent efforts to cross-nationally synthesize studies on bureaucratic politics and the quality of government literature (Dahlström & Lapuente, 2022; Nistotskaya, 2020).

³ The ISSP data set has been used, for example, in Bullock et al. (2015) and Cho and Moon (2019). The QoG Expert Survey is used, for example, in Cooper (2022); de Avila Gomide (2022); Mulaphong (2022); and Steinebach (2022).

⁴ Turnover intention is measured differently across studies, with past research using one of three methods: asking if participants are currently considering quitting, if they have considered quitting in the past or plan to look for other work, or if they intend to quit within a specified time frame (e.g., six or 12 months) (Caillier, 2013; Ertürk, 2014; Jung, 2014; Wynen & Op de Beeck, 2014).

⁵ The original professional bureaucracy index (reversed measure of politicization) in Dahlström et al. (2015) contains these three items and another item, "Senior public officials are recruited from within the ranks of the public sector?" However, we elected not to use this item, as we think this item is a better theoretical fit for the bureaucratic closedness index as we defined it.

⁶ These survey items are selected based on the index of bureaucratic closedness in Dahlström et al. (2015), with a slight modification. The original index used a third item, “The terms of employment for public sector employees are regulated by special laws that do not apply to private sector employees.” We elected not to use this item, as it does not significantly capture the closed characteristics of bureaucracy as we defined them. Instead, we included the item, “Senior public officials are recruited from within the ranks of the public sector?” to create our bureaucratic closedness index.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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