MORE DELEGATION, MORE POLITICAL CONTROL? POLITICIZATION OF SENIOR LEVEL APPOINTMENTS IN 18 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract:

This paper contributes to the literature on the politicization of appointments to increase political control over public bureaucracies with often substantial managerial and policy autonomy. Using data from a large-scale executive survey from central government ministries and agencies in 18 European countries, the paper provides a comprehensive cross-national and cross-organizational analysis of the autonomy-politicization conundrum and the drivers of the politicization of senior-level appointments. We find that national patterns of politicization correspond fairly well to country families as defined by administrative traditions, with some traditions being more coherent than others. At the organizational level, we find no evidence of efforts by politicians to compensate for extended autonomy by politicizing senior-level appointments, yet we provide evidence of differential effects of both formal and informal organizational characteristics on patterns of politicization. Our analyses show that politicization of senior appointments is lower in organizations with agency status, higher organizational social capital, lower financial autonomy, and limited use of management tools. The paper thereby not only offers comprehensive evidence of cross-country differences in politicization; it also adds to the literature on sub-national variation, by fleshing out an organizational perspective to the study of politicized appointments in the European context.

INTRODUCTION

The exercise of control over a highly specialized apparatus of hundreds or thousands of permanent officials is a formidable challenge for executive politicians, as they must counterbalance the superior expertise and capacity of permanent bureaucracy. A common strategy to ensure political responsiveness is the selection of senior officials on (party) political rather than meritocratic grounds (Dahlström and Holmgren, 2017; Kopecký et al., 2016; Meyer-Sahling, 2008). According to several observers, we have been witnessing an increased involvement of politicians in senior-level appointments (Dahlström, 2009; Page and Wright, 1999; Peters and Pierre, 2004). This development is said to be driven by executive politicians' attempts to compensate for a loss of control over an increasingly decentralized and fragmented bureaucracy. Dahlström et al. (2011) argue that a strategy of 'letting go' through administrative decentralization has had a centrifugal effect on politico-administrative systems, resulting in a loss of coordinative capacity and democratic accountability. To deal with those centrifugal forces, governments have attempted to (re)centralize control, through strengthening the administrative capacity of the prime minister's office (Dahlström et al., 2011), or through the recruitment of political advisors to support ministers in policy-making and political management (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2008). The politicization of senior-level appointments represents another strategy to compensate for a loss of formal control over bureaucracy.

The increase in politicized appointments seems to be especially pronounced in countries with a strong meritocratic tradition, such as Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries (Dahlström et al., 2011). These countries have been among the trailblazers of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in a European perspective (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011), potentially lending credence to the notion of compensation for managerial autonomy by politicized appointments. However, there is little systematic evidence about the scope of these changes, and whether they require an adjustment of our present-day knowledge about cross-national differences in politicized appointments. To address this research gap, we compare the prevalence of politicized senior-level appointments in 18 European countries and ask whether the observed variation corresponds to conventional country clusters in terms of administrative traditions (Derlien, 1996; Kopecký and Mair, 2012; Page and Wright, 1999). The concept of 'administrative tradition' assumes long-term stability of fundamental aspects of politico-administrative relations, including patterns of political influence on bureaucracy (Painter and Peters, 2010).

Any cross-country analysis of politics and administration runs the risk of overestimating national differences while underestimating within-country variation (Aberbach and Rockman, 1987). This observation is especially relevant against the background of the increasingly fragmented nature of modern governments, consisting of multiple ministries, agencies and other public bodies. A growing literature supplements the predominantly national or comparative perspective on politicization

by emphasizing within-country variation between sectors and different types of public organizations (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016; Kopecký and Mair, 2012; Lewis, 2012). The bottom line is that politicians' incentives to exercise control over bureaucracy are not the same for all public sector organizations. This paper provides a unique analysis of the differential politicization of senior-level appointments in different types of public organizations. In particular, we examine whether executive politicians use political appointments to compensate for limited control over specific aspects of public organizations' activities (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016; Niklasson, 2013; Peters and Pierre, 2004). Assuming a zero-sum relationship between bureaucratic autonomy and political control, political superiors have less control over public organizations that have been granted autonomy – broadly defined as discretion in decision-making – over managerial or policy decisions (Bach, 2016). Accordingly, we would expect high levels of organizational autonomy to coincide with a stronger political influence on senior-level appointments, serving as alternative mechanism of political control to hierarchical control over the organization. At the same time, other organizational characteristics might also create disincentives to politicize senior-level appointments, as politicization may have negative effects on administrative performance (Lewis, 2012).

The paper uses data from the COCOPS survey of senior public managers working in central government organizations (ministries and agencies) in 18 European countries (Hammerschmid et al., 2016).[1] This allows us to conduct one of the most comprehensive comparative studies of politicized appointments, adding to existing scholarship based on expert surveys (Dahlström, 2009; Kopecký et al., 2016; Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012), interviews with public officials (Hustedt and Salomonsen, 2014), and biographical analysis (Bach and Veit, 2018; Dahlström and Holmgren, 2017; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016). Moreover, by considering explanatory factors at the organizational level, we contribute to a growing research agenda on subnational variation in politicization research (Kopecký and Mair, 2012; Lewis, 2012).

The next section discusses scholarship on differences in civil service politicization according to administrative traditions. Then we develop hypotheses on politicized appointments at the organizational level, outline the data and methods and report the results of our analysis. Finally, we discuss our findings and draw conclusions for further research.

THE DIFFERENTIAL QUEST FOR POLITICAL CONTROL OVER BUREAUCRACY THROUGH POLITICIZED APPOINTMENTS

The politicization of bureaucracy is at the core of various streams of literature. Scholars of political parties have studied party patronage or 'the power of parties to

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[1] The survey was part of the project 'Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future' (COCOPS), funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (http://www.cocops.eu/).

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appoint people to positions in public and semi-public life' (Kopecký and Mair, 2012: 358; Müller, 2006). This literature finds that party patronage nowadays primarily serves the purpose of exercising control over the public sector, rather than rewarding party loyalists after electoral success (Kopecký et al., 2016; Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012). Executive politics scholars have developed a multi-dimensional perspective on politicization, differentiating between formal politicization, defined as political influence on the (de)selection and promotion of bureaucrats; and functional politicization, understood as (senior) bureaucrats' consideration of the political realities in fulfilling their jobs (Bauer and Ege, 2012; Christiansen et al., 2016; Derlien, 1996; Hustedt and Salomonsen, 2014). More recently, scholars added a third dimension: administrative politicization, which denotes political advisors' interventions offending 'against the principles and conventions associated with a professional and impartial civil service' (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2008: 343). Finally, US scholars in particular have highlighted the problematic effects of recruiting senior officials on partisan grounds (as opposed to recruitment based on competence) on bureaucratic performance (Lewis, 2012; Moynihan and Roberts, 2010).

This paper studies politicians' influence on the appointment of senior officials, or formal politicization, defined as 'the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards and disciplining of members of the public service' (Peters and Pierre, 2004: 2). Formal politicization 'can function as a means for the minister to ensure party-political responsiveness, but also to provide additional competencies as well as providing the minister with an adviser based on a relationship of personal trust' (Hustedt and Salomonsen, 2014: 749). Hence, formal politicization of top-level positions is different from illegitimate (if not outright illegal) patronage practices, which aim at rewarding partisan or personal loyalists through promotion or employment within the public sector (Page and Wright, 1999). Moreover, politicization of appointments is not identical with a lack of professional competence. For instance, top officials in Germany are politically appointed, yet usually have a career civil service background (Bach and Veit, 2018). However, the degree to which executive politicians actually influence the appointment of senior officials has been shown to vary substantially between countries (Kopecký et al., 2016) as well as between organizations within the same country context (Lewis, 2012). The following paragraph proposes an explanation of cross-country variation in politicization based on the notion of administrative traditions.

National Patterns of Politicized Appointments

There is well-established literature on national differences regarding the degree of political involvement in the recruitment of senior civil servants. Page and Wright (1999) identify three main patterns of politicization, each reflecting a different approach towards ensuring the political responsiveness of bureaucracy (see also Derlien, 1996; Müller, 2006). These include a neutral civil service, in which appointments are hardly politicized (e.g. the United Kingdom, Denmark); a civil

service in which appointments to top positions ("commanding heights") are politicized (e.g. France, Sweden, Germany) and systems where party affiliation serves as a key criterion for recruitment and promotion within the civil service, even at lower hierarchical levels (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Spain, Greece). Meyer-Sahling (2008) proposes an alternative typology that both considers whether an incoming government routinely replaces senior officials as well as differences in typical recruitment pools for senior officials. He identifies the replacement of senior officials by recruitment from party political settings or "partisan politicization" as a typical mode of politicization in post-communist countries, such as Hungary. This type of recruitment is clearly different from the mode of "bounded politicization", in which senior officials are recruited from inside the ministerial bureaucracy (either only at the top level or including lower hierarchical levels), which is common in Germany (Bach and Veit, 2018). A third type, "non-politicization", is characterized by the non-replacement of senior officials after government changes and internal recruitment. A strictly party-politically neutral civil service is a key element of the "Whitehall Model" which describes lasting features of the UK civil service and its relations to politics (Page, 2010). Hence, the politicization of bureaucratic careers has many facets, including whether executive politicians enjoy formal powers to replace officials upon taking office, whether formal powers apply to the top level or further down the hierarchy, and from which candidate pool officials are recruited.

This paper focuses on politicians' influence on senior-level appointments, broadly speaking. Taking a macro-comparative perspective, we assume that the degree of political influence on senior appointments is embedded in administrative traditions, understood as persistent patterns of administrative thought and practice shared among country groups or 'families' (Painter and Peters, 2010). According to this literature, the Anglo-Saxon and the Scandinavian tradition are typically characterized by a politically neutral civil service. In contrast, Napoleonic countries and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have been characterized as highly politicized. The Continental countries, belonging to the 'Germanic' tradition, take an in-between position with a fair level of politicization, although not reaching the levels of the Napoleonic and the CEE countries (Derlien, 1996; Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014; Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012; Müller, 2006; Page and Wright, 1999).

Administrative traditions are far from being a perfect predictor of politicized appointments. Hence, we might also expect variation between countries within the same tradition, such as Austria being more politicized than Germany (Müller, 2006; Page and Wright, 1999), Sweden being more politicized than other Scandinavian countries (Dahlström et al., 2011) or France being less politicized than the southern Napoleonic countries (Painter and Peters, 2010). Moreover, despite a common communist heritage, the CEE countries developed quite differently against the background of country-specific conditions, such as differences in patterns of government alternation (Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012) and pre-communist administrative traditions (Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014; O'Dwyer, 2004). However,

despite a non-negligible variation within country families, we propose that administrative traditions are a meaningful proxy in developing expectations about cross-country variation in the prevalence of politicized appointments.

H1:   The political influence on senior appointments is highest in Napoleonic and Central and Eastern European countries, and lowest in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries, whereas Continental European countries take a middle position.

Organizational Patterns of Politicized Appointments

Although international comparisons of politicized appointments have yielded many relevant insights, national bureaucracies are composed of a large variety of organizations performing distinct tasks. There is reason to believe that politicians' incentives to use political appointments are not the same for all public sector organizations (Kopecký and Mair, 2012; Lewis, 2012). The bottom line is that politicization is driven by politicians' desire to control a given organization, but may be attenuated by characteristics of that organization counteracting top-down control. In the following, we develop hypotheses on the drivers and barriers for politicization at the organizational level.

First, executive politicians may use appointments to compensate for a lack of other means of control over public organizations. A key thrust of managerial reforms has been to provide a clearer separation of politics and administration. However, granting bureaucrats more autonomy, while simultaneously strengthening political control over bureaucracy, are inherently contradictory assumptions (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). According to several observers, managerial reforms, which were meant to distance politics from the day-to-day management of public services, have paradoxically resulted in patterns of increasing politicization over time (Dahlström et al., 2011). Administrative reforms have removed many of 'the controls that previously helped to control the actions of bureaucracy' (Peters and Pierre, 2004: 7). At the same time, delegating autonomy to bureaucracy was easier to implement than using managerial, instead of more traditional, instruments of political control (Christensen and Lægreid, 2001). Moreover, even if politicians have formally delegated powers to bureaucracy, they will usually be held accountable for bureaucracy's blunders (Dahlström et al., 2011). These conditions are likely to induce attempts 'to substitute political controls for more conventional forms of control' (Peters and Pierre, 2004: 7).

Most of the literature takes a longitudinal perspective on patterns of compensation at the macro level of the entire government apparatus. As of now, few scholars have empirically tested the compensation thesis at the organizational level, with mixed results. In a study of regulatory agencies, Ennser-Jedenastik (2016) shows that party politicization of senior officials increases with formal agency independence, thus

supporting the compensation argument. In contrast, studying managerial autonomy and the politicization of agency heads in Sweden, Niklasson (2013) finds no empirical support for the compensation claim, yet shows how politicization varies according to organizational characteristics.

According to the compensation thesis, a high degree of organizational autonomy coincides with a high degree of politicization of senior appointments. To test this often-made assumption, we can build on an established body of literature delineating various dimensions of organizational autonomy within the public sector (Bach, 2016; Yesilkagit and van Thiel, 2008). The extent to which public organizations can use financial resources is a key aspect of their management autonomy. Although politicians usually have deliberately granted financial management autonomy to public organizations, they may disagree with how the latter use their financial discretion. Moreover, research on ministry-agency relations suggests that high levels of financial autonomy increase agencies' actual autonomy from parent ministries (Pollitt, 2006). Therefore, we consider financial management autonomy as a particularly relevant dimension to test the compensation argument, assuming that bureaucratic autonomy in the use of financial resources creates incentives for politicians to influence senior-level appointments, through which they can gain (indirect) influence on bureaucracy's use of financial resources.

H2:   The higher the level of financial management autonomy, the higher the political influence on senior appointments.

Another aspect of organizational autonomy is bureaucratic discretion in developing and implementing policy. This dimension taps into the relative power of elected politicians and permanent bureaucrats over policy, which is the key theme of politico-administrative relations. Administrative reforms have aimed at granting more autonomy to bureaucrats in operational matters, while limiting the role of politicians to strategic decisions (Christensen and Lægreid, 2001). However, this separation of roles does not neatly coincide with politicians' incentives to get involved in operational details, especially 'when things appear to be going wrong' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011: 170). According to the logic of compensation, we would expect politicians to appoint politically loyal personnel in organizations characterized by high levels of policy autonomy, i.e. discretion in setting policy priorities and taking a specific course of action in policy implementation (Yesilkagit and van Thiel, 2008).

Having said that, an organization's policy autonomy might reflect politicians' micro-management of policy operations. Accordingly, we would not expect politicians to compensate for a lack of control over bureaucracy, as high levels of autonomy will indicate low levels of political intervention (and hence indifference on the side of politicians). To a substantial degree, though, policy autonomy is a function of how much bureaucratic autonomy is delegated to public organizations by legislation and executive regulations (Ringquist et al., 2003), rather than resulting from political

micro-management, which is contingent upon single issues attracting politicians' attention (Pollitt, 2006).

H3:   The higher the level of policy autonomy, the higher the political influence on senior appointments.

Second, we investigate how the use of managerial instruments as an alternative channel of political control affects the politicization of senior-level appointments. For instance, a number of scholars have pointed at the ambiguous quality of NPM integrating contradictory reform elements (Christensen and Lægreid, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Major tension derives from simultaneously advocating a more autonomous bureaucracy in policy implementation and more political control over policy goals. As to the latter, performance contracts are considered as important control mechanisms to align bureaucratic activities to politicians' policy preferences (Binderkrantz and Christensen, 2009). According to a managerial logic, political control via discretionary decisions can be replaced by strategic planning (ensuring direction-setting in line with political priorities) and performance management (ensuring target setting, measuring achievements, and rewards or sanctions). The use of strategic planning and performance management should, therefore, reduce the incentives for politicians to exert control via senior-level appointments.

H4:   The higher the use of management tools, the lower the political influence on senior appointments.

Third, we elaborate on organizational characteristics that are likely to impede efforts at achieving control via politicized appointments: the degree of organizational institutionalization and vertical specialization. According to Selznick (1957), formal organizations gradually transform into institutions by developing shared norms, values and worldviews. Yet organizations may vary according to the degree of institutionalization. Highly institutionalized organizations display a clear mission, defined as 'a widely shared and approved understanding of the central tasks of the agency' (Wilson, 1989: 182). They are characterized by a collectively shared belief of what the organization does and how organizational members ought to behave to achieve the organization's mission (Selznick, 1957). A coherent mission facilitates internal management, as organizational staff is motivated to achieve a common objective (Wilson, 1989). Likewise, public management scholars associate a high degree of institutionalization with superior organizational performance (Andrews, 2017).

The argument proposed here is that the marginal costs of politicizing highly institutionalized organizations potentially outweigh the benefits of increased control by influencing senior appointments (for a similar argument related to technical complexity, see Ringquist et al., 2003). In such organizations, the appointment of individuals who do not share the organization's norms and values may negatively affect organizational performance. The appointment of officials lacking relevant

expertise (a near proxy of identifying with the organization's norms and values) may lead to a deterioration of organizational capacity (Moynihan and Roberts, 2010) and to a decline in workforce motivation (Lewis, 2012). Arguably, the risk of "mismatch" between senior officials' backgrounds and the organization's norms and values increases with the level of political influence on senior-level appointments. Therefore, all else being equal, we expect that executive politicians are less likely to politicize appointments in highly institutionalized organizations to avoid negative effects on organizational performance.

H5:   The higher the degree of organizational institutionalization, the lower the political influence on senior appointments.

A key question of organizational design is whether tasks are performed within ministerial departments with a political leadership or whether they are delegated to agencies with an administrative leadership (Egeberg and Trondal, 2009). The delegation of tasks to agencies or 'vertical specialization' implies that 'these tasks are dealt with differently than they would have been within a ministerial department' (Egeberg and Trondal, 2009: 675). Top-level agency officials usually manage technical and operational tasks, whereas top-level ministry officials closely interact with executive politicians on a daily basis (Christensen et al., 2014). Although several empirical studies have investigated between-agency variation in terms of politicized senior-level appointments (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016; Niklasson, 2013), only a few authors have assessed differences in politicization between ministerial departments and agencies.

In a recent study, Christensen et al. (2014) find no differences between senior ministry and agency officials regarding the risk of de-selection before reaching the age of retirement, which has increased over time for both groups. In contrast, Kopecký and Mair (2012) show that politicized appointments are generally more prevalent in ministries compared to agencies. Following Egeberg and Trondal (2009), we assume that vertical specialization implies a deliberate de-politicization via organizational design, and we therefore expect politicized appointments to be more prevalent among ministry officials. This does not preclude the possibility for politicization of agency appointments to compensate for a loss of formal levers of influence due to varying levels of formal agency autonomy (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016). Politicians' incentives to influence senior-level appointments are not the same for all agencies, yet assuming that politicians exercise a stronger influence over agency appointments compared to ministry appointments to compensate for limited control would run counter to conventional wisdom, as politicians have both stronger incentives and formal powers to influence senior-level appointments in ministries compared to agencies.

H6:   The level of political influence on senior appointments is higher in ministries than in agencies.

DATA AND METHODS

The paper draws on a survey among senior executives in 18 European countries (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom) conducted between 2012 and 2014 (Hammerschmid et al., 2016). A team of researchers jointly developed the survey, which was subsequently translated by local teams. The survey targeted the entire population of senior executives from central government ministries (three topmost hierarchical levels, full census) and agencies (two topmost hierarchical levels, full census or selection of the most relevant agencies) to ensure a consistent sample based on a detailed mapping of government structure and executive positions. For Germany and Spain, also senior executives from *Länder* and regional-level ministries were targeted, as central government accounts for only 20% of general government employment in those countries.

For the countries included in this paper, the questionnaire was sent to 23,400 senior executives.[2] The overall response rate of 29.2% (n=6,197) is satisfactory, given the high-level positions of the respondents, also considering that the survey is by far the most comprehensive analysis of senior executives in Europe collected until now (Hammerschmid et al., 2016). The distribution of respondents with regard to policy sector, hierarchical level and organization type closely matches the distribution in the full target population (Hammerschmid et al., 2013): 45.9% of the respondents are from ministries and 54.1% from agencies, a clear majority of 62.3% is male and 21.1% are positioned at the top hierarchical level. A test for non-response bias comparing early and late respondents via time-trend extrapolation indicated no significant differences between these groups.

The influence of executive politicians on senior-level appointments is difficult to measure empirically and has been operationalized in different ways (Kopecký et al., 2016; Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012). In contrast to research based on expert surveys, we rely on the perceptions of those actors who arguably are closest to the phenomenon at hand: senior officials themselves. An ideal research design would probably also target executive politicians, but this group of respondents was not included in the survey. To measure our dependent variable, we use respondents' rating of the statement: 'Politicians regularly influence senior-level appointments in my organization' on a seven-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

The first set of independent variables, the respondents' perceived autonomy, was measured using composite indices, including the following items: For financial management autonomy the respondents were asked to assess their degree of decision-making autonomy with regard to 'budget allocations' and 'contracting out services'

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[2] The questionnaire, a method description, and the dataset are available open access through the *GESIS Social Science Data Archive* (https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/).

on a seven-point scale from very low (1) to very high autonomy (7) (Cronbach's α=.776). For operational policy autonomy respondents rated their perceived autonomy relating to 'policy choice and design' and 'policy implementation' on the same scale (Cronbach's α=.757). To operationalize the implementation of management tools, the survey included a seven-point scale question asking respondents about their use of various management instruments. The three most commonly used instruments, business/strategic planning, quality management systems and management by objectives and results, were aggregated to an additive index (Cronbach's α=.702).

The degree of organizational institutionalization is measured through the related concept of organizational social capital, reflecting the character of social relationships within an organization (Leana and Pil, 2006). In particular, we refer to the cognitive aspect of social capital, which emphasizes collective interpretations of organizational goals and values and shared interpretations of the organizational mission (Andrews, 2017). These elements are central to Selznick's (1957) understanding of institutionalized organizations. We operationalized this variable via three items previously used in organizational research (Leana and Pil, 2006): 'People in my organization (1) share the same ambitions and vision for the organization; (2) enthusiastically pursue collective goals and mission and (3) view themselves as partners in charting the organization's direction' (Cronbach's α=.898).

Finally, whether a respondent works in a ministry or an agency was measured by directly asking the respondent through closed answer questions. In addition, we included a number of control variables: policy sector (reference category: general administration); organizational size (dummy coding, less than 100 employees=0); the respondent's public sector experience (dummy coding, less than 10 years of experience=0); subject of university studies (reference category: law) and hierarchical level (dummy coding, below top hierarchical level=0). The latter variable is particularly important to account for potential 'echelon effects' which may bias information about organizational practices due to differences in respondents' perceptions, depending on their position within the organization (Enticott et al., 2009).

RESULTS

In the following, we first explore the variation of our dependent variable across countries and administrative traditions and discuss our findings in view of existing scholarship. Second, we test our hypotheses on how organizational factors drive the politicization of senior appointments. As explained above, both the dependent and several of the independent variables reflect the respondents' perception of practices within their own organization.

Administrative Traditions and Politicized Appointments

Figure 1 plots the prevalence of politicized senior-level appointments by country, based on all valid responses to this survey item (n=5,368). The perceived politicization of senior-level appointments differs significantly across countries (Kruskal-Wallis, $\chi^2(17)=994.614$, $p<0.01$). For further investigation, we created country families based on the literature on administrative traditions (Bach et al., 2017; Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014; Painter and Peters, 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011): Anglo-Saxon (Ireland, the United Kingdom), Scandinavian (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Continental European (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands), Central and Eastern European (Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania) and Napoleonic (France, Italy, Portugal, Spain). Again, we find a statistically significant difference in perceived politicization between the different country families (χ^2 (4)=539.536, $p<0.01$).

These statistical tests contain no information about the relative position of different (families) of countries in terms of politicized appointments. A comparison of measures of central tendency (mean, median) for the five country families supports our theoretical expectations regarding relative levels of perceived politicization. On a seven-point scale, Napoleonic countries score highest with a median of 6, followed by CEE (5), Continental European (5), Scandinavian (3), and Anglo-Saxon (2) countries. A two-group comparison between 'neighbouring' country families using the Wilcoxon rank-sum test shows that differences are statistically significant, except for CEE and Continental European countries. Figure 1 further illustrates those differences, which also contains information on country-level differences.

<FIGURE 1>

Those findings correspond fairly well to existing scholarship on the differences in the politicization of the 'commanding heights' of government bureaucracies (Dahlström et al., 2011; Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014; Page and Wright, 1999). The observation that countries belonging to the Napoleonic tradition are characterized by the highest levels of politicization is supported by our data: Spain, Portugal, Italy and France rank among the top third of our sample (Dahlström et al., 2011; Page and Wright, 1999). Likewise, we hypothesized CEE countries to be highly politicized, while also expecting a non-trivial level of between-country variation reflecting different post-transformation developments (Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014; Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012; O'Dwyer, 2004). We find good empirical support for this assumption, with all except one CEE country (Estonia) scoring above the country average. Indeed, prior research suggests that politicization is largely absent for the top civil service in Estonia (and Lithuania, which scores similar to other CEE countries in our study) (Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012).

In contrast, Scandinavian countries, together with Anglo-Saxon countries, are typically considered the least politicized in Europe (Müller, 2006). Again, this finding

is generally supported by our data, although we find a more mixed pattern here, with Sweden scoring only slightly below Germany, which is typically considered to be fairly politicized (Page and Wright, 1999). However, Sweden has been described as the most politicized country within Scandinavia, and our results support this assessment (Christiansen et al., 2016; Dahlström et al., 2011). Moreover, Hustedt and Salomonsen (2014) as well as Kopecký and Mair (2012) report a higher level of politicization in Denmark compared to the UK, whereas we find the opposite pattern in our dataset. In line with our findings, Müller (2006) notes the outright absence of political influence on top-level appointments in Denmark, while indicating political influence on top-level positions in the UK (and Sweden). A possible explanation for the surprisingly high degree of politicization reported by UK respondents is that the COCOPS survey was conducted shortly after the change in government, in 2010. In addition, as indicated by the larger confidence intervals, UK respondents are more equivocal in their assessments of politicization than respondents from other countries are.

Another interesting observation is that those countries typically placed within the Continental Rechtsstaat (Bach et al., 2017) or 'Germanic' tradition (Painter and Peters, 2010) can be found both at the lower (the Netherlands) and the upper end (Austria) of the politicization spectrum, with Germany taking a middle position. This finding corresponds to what we know about patterns of politicization in those countries (Derlien, 1996; Page and Wright, 1999), yet it illustrates that there may be substantial variation within 'country families' belonging to the same administrative tradition as to executive politicians' influence on senior-level appointments. In that sense, our findings resonate with previous research indicating cross-country variation in terms of another aspect of politico-administrative relations, namely agency chief executives' accountability to their superiors (Bach et al., 2017). Likewise, and contrary to our expectations, we find no significant difference between perceived politicization in CEE and Germanic countries. As can be gleaned from Figure 1, this overlap is driven by rather high levels of politicization perceived by executives in Germany and especially in Austria, but also by relatively low levels of politicization in Estonia. The key finding is that administrative tradition is a moderately reliable predictor of politicization in Europe but needs to be complemented by other explanatory factors. Although we find significant differences between country families, there is also considerable (and statistically significant) variation within all five country families.[3] Keeping this in mind, differences between country families are generally in line with H1.

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[3] We also studied (families of) country differences separately for respondents working in ministries and agencies, with substantially similar results. Although some countries changed their position relative to others in terms of mean values, confidence intervals indicate that mean differences of 'neighbouring' countries are not significant.

Organizational Characteristics and Politicized Appointments

Moving beyond cross-national comparison, we now analyse the effect of organizational factors on the dependent variable. In Table 1, we report five hypothesis-specific models and a full model. To address cross-country heterogeneity and issues of intra-class correlation, we use fixed effect least squares dummy variable models (LSDV). There is reason to believe that the country differences mediate the effect of our explanatory variables. However, we can estimate the direct effect of the independent variables by adding country dummies because each dummy is absorbing the effects particular to each country. Since the inclusion of country-specific, fixed effects may not fully control for country correlation and heteroscedasticity, we apply country-robust standard errors.

<TABLE 1>

The first two models test the assumption that politicians exercise influence on senior appointments to compensate for limited influence over public organizations' managerial (H2) and policy implementation autonomy (H3). According to the compensation argument, we expect higher levels of autonomy to coincide with higher levels of politicization. Model 1 tests the relationship between the respondents' perceived financial management autonomy and the dependent variable. At odds with our assumption, the level of financial management autonomy has a statistically significant negative effect on the level of politicization. Model 2 tests the relationship between the level of operational policy autonomy and the dependent variable, indicating a small and insignificant effect. The findings for both independent variables are corroborated in the full model.

Hence, we find no evidence for the argument that the politicization of senior-level appointments is used to compensate for a lack of political control over routine managerial and operational decisions. Instead, the observed pattern indicates that more organizational autonomy goes together with less political control via senior-level appointments. A plausible alternative explanation for such an empirical pattern could be that bureaucratic autonomy over the use of financial resources and political influence on senior appointments are driven by politicians' differential incentives to exercise control over (or grant autonomy to) a given organization (Lewis, 2012). Some organizations are more politically salient than others and will stand in the spotlight of political control (Pollitt, 2006), affecting all aspects of the organizations' relationship to executive politicians. We included proxies for political salience in our models, yet these are coarse measures that only partially gauge the relative importance of the respondent's organization to politicians who might influence appointment decisions.

The third model empirically tests whether the use of managerial instruments works as an alternative channel of political control over bureaucracy. This assumption follows the idea that politicians can choose between different instruments of control over

bureaucracy and only resort to politicized appointments if other instruments of control are inefficient from their point of view. According to our analysis, there is a negative and statistically significant relationship between the use of management tools and the politicization of senior appointments, in accordance with H4. The relationship also holds true for the full model, although the size of the effect is somewhat smaller. The lesson to be drawn is that managerial tools might indeed function as an alternative instrument of political control, thereby reducing politicians' incentives for exercising control via other channels, such as politicized appointments. The observed pattern adds some nuances to our findings reported above, which suggested that politicians' incentives to exercise control over bureaucracy would result in an alignment of either strong or weak control efforts along various channels. If this were true for the use of control instruments, we would observe a positive relationship between the use of managerial tools and politicized appointments. The negative relationship seems to indicate that politicians are weighing the benefits and costs of using different types of control instruments.

In the remaining models, we test the effect of organizational characteristics that are likely to impede efforts of political control on the level of politicization of senior appointments. We hypothesized that the degree of institutionalization will function as an effective barrier to politicization, as politicization will engender negative effects concerning performance and staff motivation that outweigh the potential benefits of political control (Lewis, 2012; Moynihan and Roberts, 2010). Model 4 indicates a significant negative relationship between organizational social capital (our proxy measure for the degree of institutionalization) and the politicization of senior appointments, corroborating H5. This effect also holds true for the full model, including all independent variables. Thus, based on our results, we conclude that politicians are less likely to influence appointments of senior officials in highly institutionalized organizations (and vice versa). Our finding is also consistent with the social capital literature, according to which high organizational capital reduces the reliance on control procedures and more generally serves as a proxy for high performance (Andrews, 2017), thereby reducing the need for political intervention.

Finally, model 5 tests the effect of vertical specialization – whether a respondent works for a ministry with a political leadership or an agency with an administrative leadership – on the politicization of senior appointments. As expected, we find a significantly higher level of politicization in ministries than in agencies, corroborating H6. The positive and significant effect of vertical specialization holds true for the full model, too. A noteworthy observation is the substantial size of the marginal effect of vertical specialization on the dependent variable compared to the other independent variables. All else being equal, a one-unit change in the vertical specialization variable (i.e. working for an agency instead of a ministry) leads to a decrease in politicization of approximately 0.8 units (on a 1-7 scale). For the sake of comparison, a change from the minimum (1) to the maximum value (7) in organizational social capital leads to a decrease in politicization of 0.9 units (calculations based on model

6). In sum, our findings resonate well with the existing scholarship on how "agencification" effectively shields bureaucrats from politics in general (Egeberg and Trondal, 2009) and on how ministries are usually subject to higher levels of politicization in particular (Kopecký and Mair, 2012).

With regard to the controls used in our analysis, we find that top-level executives consistently perceive lower levels of politicization than other employees do. In technical terms, this finding provides evidence for echelon effects, indicating that only surveying executives from the top-level would have biased the results (Enticott et al., 2009). These effects are unproblematic in our analysis, however, as we do not aggregate individual perceptions on the organizational level. In substantial terms, we find that individuals, who allegedly have better insights into what is actually happening, seem to have a more sober view of politicians' influence on senior appointments.

CONCLUSION

The main thrust of the paper was to investigate the claim that the delegation of autonomy to public sector organizations leads to higher levels of political control through the politicization of senior-level appointments (Dahlström et al., 2011; Niklasson, 2013; Peters and Pierre, 2004). A causal examination of this assumption at the country level would obviously require a longitudinal strategy of data collection. As we rely on cross-sectional data, we cannot track developments over time. Instead, we opted for a more careful approach by comparing the prevalence of politicized appointments with established country classifications according to administrative traditions. This allowed us to gauge potential changes in the relative position of countries in terms of politicized appointments in relation to a hypothesized 'starting position'.

The cross-country analysis suggests that countries indeed cluster in terms of administrative tradition, yet with a substantial degree of variation within country families, and several outliers. Likewise, we observed that trailblazers of managerial reforms – the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries – still exhibit the least politicized senior officials in Europe. If compensatory control is taking place, it clearly has not turned existing patterns of politico-administrative relations upside-down. That said, we also find variation in patterns of politicization between countries with an allegedly neutral public service. These observations obviously warrant further, in-depth comparative research into patterns of politicization in meritocratic contexts. For instance, research could compare formal rules for the (de)selection of top officials (and whether these vary between different organizations in the same country) and biographical analysis of career trajectories (Bach and Veit, 2018).

Following an organizational pattern perspective, we assumed variation in politicized appointments between different types of public sector organizations. Given the methodological difficulties involved in providing rock-hard evidence for or against the compensation thesis at the macro level, we studied whether politicians influence senior-level appointments to compensate for autonomy at the organizational level, but did not find empirical support for this relationship. Thus, contrary to research on a sub-set of public organizations (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016), we find no evidence for a compensatory logic of politicization. Quite the opposite, our findings suggest that politicians either show low or high interest in public organizations, which is reflected in converging patterns of high autonomy and low control (or vice versa) on different dimensions. Those findings merit further investigation, as they resonate with research on how US federal agencies' political salience affects the appointment of loyal (versus competent) top officials (Lewis, 2012). Further research should aim to combine organizational data (e.g. on political salience, technical complexity, formal autonomy, regulatory vs. executive agencies) and individual level data in order to move the research frontier forward.

Having said that, we find that politicians possibly use management instruments as alternative mechanisms of exercising political control over bureaucracy. In terms of factors potentially limiting politicians' incentives to politicize, high levels of institutionalization (as operationalized by a measure of organizational capital) have shown the expected effect. The latter findings suggest that explanations from the world of management studies might be of high interest for future research on politicization. Finally, the analysis indicates a substantial effect of vertical specialization on levels of politicization: politicization is much more prevalent in ministries than in agencies. This insight gives empirical credence to the idea that agencification indeed leads to a clearer separation between politics and administration than other measures of administrative reform.

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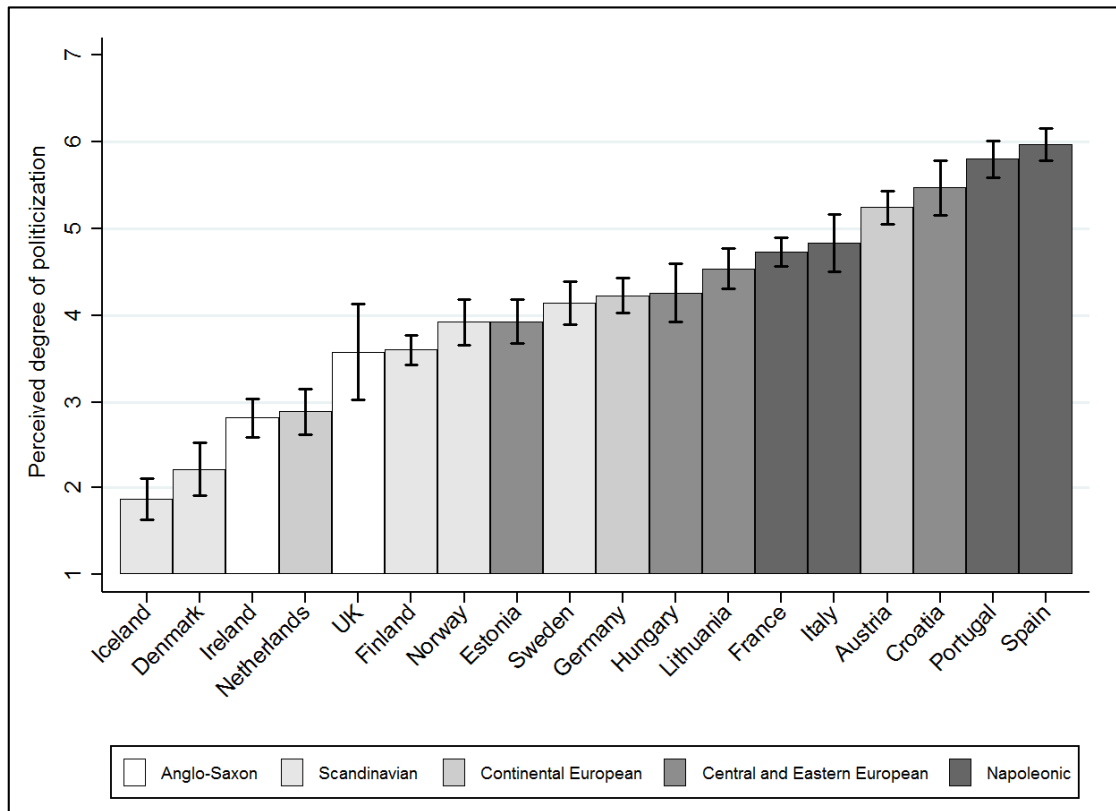
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Table 1: Organizational Explanations for Politicization of Senior Appointments

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Explanatory Variables						
Operational financial autonomy	-0.125**					-0.093**
	(0.030)					(0.027)
Operational policy autonomy		-0.028				-0.005
		(0.021)				(0.022)
Management tools			-0.210**			-0.073*
			(0.045)			(0.032)
Organizational social capital				-0.205**		-0.154**
				(0.028)		(0.024)
Agency					-0.952**	-0.828**
					(0.205)	(0.202)
Control Variables						
Economics & Finance	-0.435**	-0.415**	-0.300**	-0.396**	-0.297**	-0.217
	(0.090)	(0.096)	(0.091)	(0.092)	(0.101)	(0.107)
Social & Welfare	-0.211	-0.218	-0.112	-0.178	-0.021	-0.037
	(0.138)	(0.137)	(0.120)	(0.132)	(0.133)	(0.120)
Security & Justice	-0.099	-0.093	-0.009	-0.101	-0.008	0.042
	(0.082)	(0.088)	(0.111)	(0.090)	(0.094)	(0.092)
Over 100 employees	0.136	0.139	0.143	0.095	0.091	0.012
	(0.100)	(0.108)	(0.118)	(0.110)	(0.080)	(0.091)
Public sector experience: More than 10 years	-0.100	-0.049	0.024	0.003	-0.111	-0.002
	(0.104)	(0.100)	(0.094)	(0.101)	(0.112)	(0.107)
Top hierarchical level in organization	-0.750**	-0.835**	-0.806)**	-0.810**	-0.763**	-0.583**
	(0.239)	(0.247)	(0.264	(0.258)	(0.231)	(0.195)
Business & economics	-0.050	-0.042	-0.048	-0.088	-0.036	0.038
	(0.098)	(0.110)	(0.108)	(0.090)	(0.097)	(0.108)
Social sciences & humanities	-0.153	-0.135	-0.146	-0.178	-0.185	-0.071
	(0.102)	(0.101)	(0.105)	(0.087)	(0.094)	(0.108)
Sciences & engineering	-0.331**	-0.365**	-0.282**	-0.355**	-0.202**	-0.131
	(0.069)	(0.072)	(0.080)	(0.072)	(0.066)	(0.071)
Constant	4.528**	4.046**	4.656**	4.583**	4.281**	5.661**
	(0.181)	(0.154)	(0.233)	(0.160)	(0.151)	(0.215)
R²	0.24	0.24	0.25	0.25	0.26	0.28
N	3,825	3,814	3,545	3,854	3,914	3,376

Notes: Estimates for country dummies suppressed. Adjusted standard errors in parentheses.
Significance levels: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01.

Figure 1: Politicization of senior-level appointments in 18 countries

Note: The error bars above and below the mean values define the 95% confidence interval.