Tenure vs. Merit? The Sequential Politics of Reforming Patronage Bureaucracies¹

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Abstract

The recent surge in studies linking reforms of patronage bureaucracies to positive development outcomes has renewed academic interest in the politics underlying such depoliticization efforts. This paper adds to this line of inquiry by exploring why political power holders depoliticize certain personnel decisions ahead of others. In this context, the paper shows, in particular, that, while both de-politicize certain personnel decisions, meritbased recruitment and promotion and tenure protections from dismissal feature distinctive politics of reform. Based on this insight, two contributions are made. First, seeming contradictions in directions of causality of hypotheses posited in prior studies which had conflated merit and tenure in a single 'reform' dependent variable are resolved. Second, a new sequential theory of reform of patronage bureaucracies is generated and tested. The theory posits that merit follows tenure when de-politicizing bureaucracies. It is based on the insight that tenure protections, by shielding the bureaucratic stock from dismissal, tighten the budget constraint for – and thus reduce political power holder's electoral competitiveness based on – private goods provision. Exploiting a recent cross-country expert survey, the paper finds that tenure is indeed a significant determinant of merit. Consistent with theoretical predictions, the number of veto players, political time horizons, per capita incomes and press freedom are also found to be statistically significant contributors to merit. These findings put a premium on incorporating tenure into future research on the politics of merit reforms next to, more generally, paying due attention to the sequence through which personnel decisions are depoliticized.

Keywords

Patronage; Tenure; Merit Reforms

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I. Introduction

An increasing number of studies is linking the professionalization of patronage-based bureaucracies to positive development outcomes, be they economic growth, democratic development, poverty reduction or lowering corruption (see, for instance, Kaufmann et al., 2006, Lambsdorff, 2006, Evans and Rauch, 1999, Kohli, 2010, Linz and Stepan, 1996, Tonon, 2007, Iyer and Mani, 2008, World Bank, 1993, Princeton University, 2007). The resulting consensus surrounding the importance of replacing discretionary patron control over bureaucratic careers with rule-bound public personnel decision-making – or, in short, depoliticizing bureaucratic careers – has renewed academic interest in the politics underlying such reforms. A range of hypotheses linked to socio-economic, political-institutional and external explanatory factors has been put forward by scholars across a range of disciplines to answer two main research puzzles:

- Under what conditions are political power holders willing to give up discretionary control over bureaucratic careers in favor of rule-bound decision making?
- And when willing to give up such control, why are rule-bound personnel decisions introduced first in some parts of the state yet not in others?

The latter, more recent question has thereby emerged out of the recognition that reforms seldom extend to all parts of the state equally, with bureaucracies instead frequently characterized by 'islands of excellence' in a sea of patronage. While research on the conditions underlying the emergence of such 'islands of excellence' has been proliferating (see Leonard, 2010 for an overview), scholars have largely neglected to take note of a second important type of variation in reform scope: political power holders not only depoliticize some parts of the state ahead of others but also some personnel decisions ahead of others. In Latin America, for instance, a subset of patronage bureaucracies feature de facto civil services staffed by layers of employees recruited on the basis of patronage yet protected from dismissals by tenure regulations (Grindle, 2012). In other words, dismissal is depoliticized in such bureaucracies while recruitment, pay and promotion decisions are not. As a result, patronage powers still extend to additions to and ascents within the bureaucracy; the bureaucratic stock, however, may no longer be discretionarily dismissed and replaced with clients by patrons. This illustration then, of course, begs the hitherto unexplored questions:

- Why are political power holders willing to give up discretionary control in favor of rule-bound decision-making for some parts of the bureaucratic career ahead of others?
- Does the de-politicization of certain parts of the bureaucratic career provide incentives in favor of or against the de-politicization of the other parts?

To operationalize the explanandum of de-politicization of distinct parts of bureaucratic careers in patronage bureaucracies, the stylized key features of a Weberian ideal-type administration may serve as a useful heuristic device. Without discounting the range of public personnel decisions affecting bureaucratic careers, merit-based recruitment and promotion on the one hand and lifelong careers with tenure protections from dismissal on the other may be usefully distinguished as the two major Weberian public personnel reforms impinging upon bureaucratic careers (Dahlstroem et al., 2011).² Against this backdrop, the aforementioned research questions may be reformulated to:

- Why do reforms of patronage bureaucracies focus on distinct Weberian ideal-type characteristics (merit-based personnel decisions vs. tenure protections)?
- Do tenure protections from dismissal provide incentives in favor of or against introducing merit-based recruitment and promotion decisions?

This paper will provide an initial examination of these questions, generating and testing in the process a new sequential theory of reform in patronage bureaucracies. Thus directing research on the politics of reforming patronage bureaucracies towards disaggregating merit and tenure is of pertinence for at least three reasons. First and as detailed in section II, prior studies, conflating merit and tenure, have suffered from contradictions in the direction of causality of posited hypotheses. This is not surprising given that the political rationales and thus conditions underlying merit and tenure reforms respectively may differ. Differentiating the dependent variable according to whether reforms focus on merit or tenure may help resolve these contradictions. Second, differentiating whether explanatory factors bring about merit or tenure is of pertinence as the development repercussions of the two reforms are found to differ. In particular, merit-based public personnel decisions have been associated with the aforementioned positive development outcomes – such as growth and lower corruption – while tenure protections

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² A technically-rational wage policy would constitute a third Weberian ideal-type feature. As wage reforms are frequently fiscally-motivated, however, they tend to differ in their politics from other public personnel reforms (Navia and Velasco 2003), and are thus not considered in this paper.

and promotions based on seniority seem not to have any statistically significant effect (Rauch and Evans, 2000, Dahlstroem et al., 2011, Treisman, 2000). Lastly and as theoretically and empirically analyzed in depth in sections III and IV, tenure reforms may potentially foment or hinder the introduction of merit in patronage bureaucracies. The sequence of their respective introduction may thus matter, from both an academic and a public policy perspective. Academically, as tenure may be expected to impinge upon other explanatory variables of merit, studies seeking to account for merit without considering tenure will suffer from omitted variable bias. From a policy perspective, the desirability (or lack thereof) of seeking to introduce tenure – which in and of itself seems not to have statistically significant effects on development outcomes – will be shaped by whether or not it provides incentives for depoliticizing other parts of the bureaucratic career, in particular merit- rather than patronage-based recruitment and promotion.

Against this backdrop, this paper will proceed in three steps. First and to substantiate the aforementioned claim about contradictions in the existing literature, section II will review theory and evidence put forward in prior studies of the politics of reform of patronage bureaucracies. Building on this review, in section III, the paper will present a new sequential theory of the politics of reform of patronage bureaucracies, drawing on the distinction between merit and tenure and potential interactions between the two. Section IV will provide a preliminary empirical assessment of and support for this new theory as compared to theories put forward in prior studies. The paper will conclude with implications of these findings for the study and understanding of the politics of professionalizing patronage bureaucracies.

II. The Politics of Reform of Patronage Bureaucracies: Assessing The Literature

Reforms of patronage bureaucracies have been analyzed by political science, public administration, sociology, history, economics, and organizational theory scholars, to name a few. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to review each of the findings in all of the disciplines³, this section assesses the most prominent causal factors put forward with a view to (i) providing context on the range of variables to be considered when constructing and testing theories of reform of patronage bureaucracies, and (ii) pointing out contradictions among hypotheses stemming from the conflation of merit and tenure in a single dependent variable.

³ A separate paper aggregating and reviewing 40 hypotheses on the politics of reform of patronage bureaucracies is available from the author upon request.

For heuristic purposes, the causal variables identified in the literature may be usefully aggregated into (i) socio-economic demand-side factors; (ii) political and institutional supply-side factors; and (iii) external factors. Socio-economic factors include rising per capita incomes, education levels, urbanization, and ethnic fragmentation/immigration. The hypotheses related to these factors share, for the most part, a common concern with demand-side pressures for reform. To illustrate, rising per capita income and education levels may bring about reform by, at the same time, increasing citizen demand – and thus political payoffs – for public goods provision while reducing citizen demand for patronage jobs and services (Reid and Kurth, 1988, 1989). Related, the industrial development accompanying rising incomes may trigger private sector demands for the impartial conduct of government functions and thus de-politicization reforms (see, most prominently, Weber, 1978), while education-induced increases in skill levels of those marginalized by the system may raise the opportunity costs of patronage systems in terms of foregone bureaucratic efficiency (Hollyer, 2011). In the case of extraordinarily fast rising incomes, Qian (2003) notes – citing the Chinese example – that efficiency-improving reforms such as reforms of patronage bureaucracies can be designed such that they are compatible with the interests of those in power. Moreover, demographic changes that accompany rising incomes, including urbanization, at times allow for a defeat of patronage-based parties by reformist middle-class based parties (Kristinsson, 1996).⁴

As a further and more controversial socio-economic variable, immigration and, concomitantly, ethnic fractionalization has been hypothesized to both promote and thwart reform. Ruhil and Camoes (2003) and Tolbert and Zucker (1983) find evidence for larger foreign born populations inducing reform, by, in the first case, rendering patronage systems ineffective for incumbents due to excessive demands resulting in defections of clients to challengers, and, in the second case, the Anglo-American elite pushing through reform to constrain migrant-dominated patronage machines. In contrast, Ruhil (2003) provides evidence for the opposite effect, arguing that migration thwarts reform as relatively larger patronage constituencies complicate shirking patronage demands by politicians.

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⁴ While the middle-class may be a key, albeit unarticulated pro-reform constituency, middle-class voters would need to behave sociotropically – i.e. basing their electoral decisions on the general state of the economy or society as (accurately) depicted by national media – and represent at least in part a captive constituency for this mechanism to apply. In most cases, however, a variety of parties vie for the middle class vote; most analysts thus tend to deemphasize this variable when accounting for reform of patronage bureaucracies (Pzreworski 1999; Unger 2003).

More prominent in the literature, political and institutional variables operate, for the most part, on the supply side. They include political competition, time horizons and uncertainty, separation of powers and veto players, growth of the bureaucracy, and democratization and political liberalization.

Most controversially, political competition has been argued by authors to underlie either the reform or resilience of patronage systems. Among many others, Folke, Hirano and Snyder (2011) argue that reform takes place when incumbents expect to lose an election. According to these accounts, reform is pursued to, to name a few: preserve the electoral chances of future friendly challengers against a hostile future incumbent (in the context of long time horizons, institutional rigidities and patronage benefits that are disproportionally useful for the incumbent); lock in the incumbent's political agenda by preventing future governments from replacing politically-loyal bureaucrats (next to safeguarding incentives for bureaucrats to invest in competence when political competition thwarts credible future patronage employment guarantees) (Mueller, 2009); and secure continued tenure of the incumbent's clients (Skowronek, 1982). Other studies, however, find the opposite effect. Besley and Persson (2010), for instance, draw on a global sample to argue that electoral competition may thwart reform and other state building measures as incumbents seek to limit the state capacity available to a potentially hostile successor to prevent them from being able to pursue policies detrimental to the incumbent. In a similar vein, Lapuente and Nistotskaya (2008), among others, posit that political competition prevents reform as it shortens the time horizons of incumbents and, consequently, diminishes their expectation to reap the long-term state capacity benefits of reform. A third set of studies in turn suggests that political competitions has no effect at all (Manow, 2002). Rather than focusing on the intensity of political competition per se, Geddes (1996) argues, based on evidence from five Latin American countries, that a party system characterized by parties of equal strength is hypothesized to be more conducive to reform; in such a system, reforms would impose similar costs on patronagedependent parties while allowing for a small electoral gain in terms of improved public goods provision or reputation.

Closely related to political competition, political uncertainty – and, concomitantly, political time horizons – has been hypothesized to underlie reform. Most prominently, Silberman (1993) has argued that uncertainty regarding political succession in interaction with leadership

accountability may account for both reform and their differential content. In particular, high uncertainty in the context of social networks is hypothesized to have contributed to organizationally-oriented and autonomous bureaucracies in France and Japan, whereas high uncertainty in the context of party structures led to more permeable organizational boundaries in the United States and Great Britain. Conceptualizing uncertainty in very different terms, Horn (1988) draws on the U.S. case to conclude that reform was adopted by legislators primarily to enhance the durability of legislative deals. In particular, reform served to reduce the threat of manipulation of laws in their implementation stage by bureaucrats who owed their position to legislators. By contrast, Johnson and Libecap (1994) argue that it was not the desire to thwart legislative control over bureaucrats but rather the increasing inability of Congress and the President to control a patronage-based bureaucracy that drove reform. In their account, the increasing size of the government workforce led both to principal-agent problems as clients (such as local patronage workers) became further removed from the patrons at the top of the pyramid (such as Presidents and legislators) and to rising transaction costs of bureaucratic appointments as they consumed an increasingly unmanageable share of the time of Presidents and legislators.

Rather than on the interests of their principals, Hammond (2003) focuses on bureaucrats' motives, arguing that reform brings about their preferred personnel system. In this context, bureaucrats are hypothesized to be particularly successful in pushing for reform in periods of divided government when the proliferation of principals thwarts their effective control. Gault and Amparan (2003) similarly focus on the relationship between bureaucrats and elected officials. In their account of the Mexican reform, however, it is political outsiders coming to power in the context of long-standing fusion between the bureaucratic and political elite that pursue reform as they are not beholden to bureaucratic allies in the top layers of the executive who would veto reform. Geddes (1996) similarly points to the separation of power, albeit the one between the legislature and the executive, as a driver of reform. Based on the Brazilian case, she argues that a President rising to power independent of a particular party or in spite of the opposition of established party leaders pursues reform to undercut the patronage power base of his opponents in the legislature.

At a more aggregate level, regime changes and, in particular, democratization has been argued to – depending on the author – either promote or hinder reform. At its core, the controversy of

whether democracy or autocracy is more likely to undertake reform revolves around the competing values of responsiveness and autonomy. Fostering responsiveness, democratization is thought to exert pressure on politicians to pursue reform to meet public expectations about better service delivery and transparent government, provided citizens are capable of monitoring incumbents' public policy performance⁵ and are interested in long-term rather than only immediate benefits (see, for instance, Heredia and Schneider, 2003). At the same time, reforms of patronage bureaucracies require a certain level of state autonomy from societal actors; providing such autonomy, autocracy may be better suited to undertake reform (Haggard, 1990). In democracies, by contrast, electoral imperatives may enhance politicians' incentives to politicize the bureaucracy to maximize available patronage resources (Heredia and Schneider, 2003, Stein et al., 2006). Related to these insights, Shefter (1977) argues that democratization institutionalizes rather than alters the level of bureaucratic professionalization or patronage orientation. If bureaucratic autonomy precedes democratization, the lack of access to patronage encourages the formation of programmatic parties; else, clientelist parties are formed and patronage becomes institutionalized in democracy. Based on an analysis of the trajectories of the post-communist Eastern European countries, O'Dwyer (2004) qualifies Shefter's hypothesis by adding that such patronage-based party building takes place in the context of delegitimized states and demobilized societies unless electoral competition is robust and institutionalized. On a theoretical level, Egorov and Sonin (2011) argue that autocracies are less likely to pursue reform as capable bureaucrats are also those most able to launch a coup against the government, while Acemoglu, Ticchi et al. (2011) posit instead that the potential of a democratization episode thwarts reform as it triggers an elite-bureaucracy coalition preserving a low tax, high bureaucratic rents inefficient state equilibrium.

Lastly, external influences have been argued to underlie reform. Governments' access to funding from foreign aid institutions may be conditioned on their willingness to undertake reforms of patronage bureaucracies (Reid, 2010). Related, foreign aid may facilitate policy transfers which for their part may induce mimetic rather than coercive isomorphism, with countries seeking reform to imitate the professional bureaucracies of more advanced economies (Mavima, 2008, Laking and Norman, 2007). As a separate economic external influence, trade and capital market

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⁵ Effective press freedom is thus, next to formal democratization, hypothesized to be a precondition for democracy to underlie reform (see section IV).

integration have been hypothesized to drive reform of patronage bureaucracies. Facing enhanced international competition and volatile capital flows, domestic and foreign investors face incentives to push for reform to reduce transactions costs – for instance for customs and ports – enhance economic predictability, and possibly improve public service delivery, for instance in infrastructure (Heredia and Schneider, 2003, McCourt, 2008).

As this abbreviated review illustrates, a range of incentives and conditions may underlie reform – and thus need to be taken into account when empirically examining the politics of reform of patronage bureaucracies. Next to this equifinality characteristic, however, explanatory accounts of the politics of reform of patronage bureaucracies have also been marked by contradictory directions of causality posited for the same causal factors. Importantly, these competing hypotheses have, in part, been a function of a conflation of the de-politicization of distinct personnel decisions – in particular merit and tenure – in a single 'reform' dependent variable, measuring the linear replacement of patronage with a de-politicized bureaucracy.

Several of the hypotheses associated with political competition, the variable which as has seen – to the knowledge of the author – most studies to-date (see, among others, Besley and Persson, 2010, Folke et al., 2011, Geddes, 1996, Lapuente and Nistotskaya, 2008, Mueller, 2009, O'Dwyer, 2004, Ruhil and Camões, 2003, Skowronek, 1982, Grzymaña-Busse, 2003, Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012), may usefully serve to substantiate this conclusion. In a first set of studies (see, for instance, Mueller, 2009), political competition is argued to drive reform as the latter would enable incumbents to, among others, lock in their political agenda by preventing future governments from replacing politically-loyal bureaucrats. A second set of studies disputes this direction of causality, noting instead that political competition thwarts reform as it reduces time horizons of incumbents and, thus, their expectation to reap the long-term state capacity benefits from reform (see, for instance, Lapuente and Nistotskaya, 2008). These contradictions in causality, however, may be resolved when disaggregating which personnel decisions need to be depoliticized for which hypotheses to come to have an effect. Locking in political agendas and safeguarding positions for clients, for instance, requires tenure only rather than merit. In contrast, reform-induced increases in state capacity tend to require – according to available statistical evidence (Dahlstroem et al., 2011, Evans and Rauch, 1999, Treisman, 2000) - merit only rather than tenure. This then puts a premium on considering merit and tenure as two separate dependent

variables, characterized by separate politics of reform. As a corollary, this disaggregation of merit and tenure as distinct dependent variables also allows for the exploration of (i) the previously neglected reciprocal effects of merit and tenure on each other as well as, concomitantly, (ii) sequential choices power holders make when de-politicizing personnel decisions in patronage bureaucracies. It is with a view to constructing and testing a new theory on the politics of merit reform in patronage bureaucracies that the paper turns to these latter tasks next.

III. A New Sequential Theory of the Politics of Reform of Patronage Bureaucracies

To inform the deductive construction of a theory of the politics of merit reforms in patronage bureaucracies, three assumptions regarding power holders' and two assumptions regarding bureaucrats' incentive structure shall be put forward. First, in view of the 'politician's dilemma' surrounding reform (Geddes, 1996) - a longer-run interest in state capacity building through reform tends to be superseded by an immediate interest in political survival and rent extraction through patronage powers – power holders are assumed to prefer private goods through patronage over public goods through enhanced state capacity, albeit not infinitely so (see Benton, 2007 for a justification of the relevance of this assumption). Second and in line with the aforementioned cross-country evidence (Rauch and Evans, 2000, Dahlstroem et al., 2011, Treisman, 2000), the introduction of merit-based personnel decisions is assumed to enhance bureaucratic capacity and thus public goods provision; by contrast, bureaucratic capacity and public goods provision are unaffected by tenure protections. At the same time, however, tenure protections do impinge upon private goods provision in an inter-temporal sense: they enhance the value of private goods provision by current patrons if tenure protections enable clients to retain their positions after patrons depart from office⁶; concomitantly, tenure decreases private goods provision of future patrons.

Theoretically incorporated due to their ability to veto⁷ the effective implementation of depoliticization reforms, bureaucrats may be assumed to value tenure protections from dismissals: such protections enable them to retain their positions once recruited. Their relationship towards

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⁶ For instance as this may enhance the net present value of rents derived from holding public sector positions with wage premiums over a longer period or provide patrons with continued control over the management of the state in institutions dominantly staffed by their clients.

⁷ Veto players are understood as those actors whose agreement is necessary but not sufficient to produce policy change (see Tsebelis 1995).

merit-based recruitment and promotion is assumed to be more contingent, however. So long as their patrons are in office, bureaucrats may be assumed to prefer patronage-based rather than merit-based personnel decisions as they are likely to benefit from the former. Once the incumbent departs from office, however, bureaucratic incentives change: with their patrons no longer in power, bureaucrats may expect discretion in pay and promotion to harm rather than benefit them; merit is then preferred as it provides them with a safeguard against unfavorable discretion next to competitive opportunities for better pay and promotions.

Based on these assumptions, a probabilistic sequential theory of reforms of patronage bureaucracies may be constructed. In bureaucracies in which all personnel decisions are based on political discretion (i.e. in which neither tenure nor merit have been introduced), political competition-induced electoral uncertainty shifts incentives for power holders towards the introduction of tenure protections. As patronage powers extend to dismissals, patronage private goods benefits tend to outweigh public goods benefits from enhanced state capacity via merit introductions: the entire bureaucratic stock is available for patronage. At the same time, however, power holders confronting the aforementioned uncertain electoral prospects may enhance private goods provision via tenure protections for patronage appointees. As reform beneficiaries, bureaucrats face an incentive to collaborate with power holders in bringing about tenure. In sum then, in a context of politicized bureaucracies and political competition, political power holders and bureaucrats jointly face incentives to hijack civil service reforms – frequently sponsored by donors and civil society actors – to orient them towards enhanced job stability through tenure protections. The result is what donors frequently lament as the "merit trap:" reforms ostensibly designed to enhance bureaucratic capacity end up enhancing bureaucratic autonomy of appointees (from dismissals) only (Shepherd, 2003, p. 16).

Inheriting a bureaucracy staffed with appointees of their predecessors, subsequent administrations face incentives to reverse tenure protections to maximize their patronage powers – including the power to dismiss and replace the entire bureaucratic stock – and thus the private goods they may derive from the bureaucracy. This choice is incentive-compatible for power holders not the least as tenure reversals do not come at the cost of bureaucratic capacity and thus power holders'

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⁸ Then facing a low bureaucratic autonomy environment in which their powers extend to dismissals, power holders may subsequently choose to reinstate tenure protections for their patronage appointees in contexts of high electoral uncertainty.

public goods provision: appointments of preceding power holders were based on private goods rather than public goods considerations. It is not incentive-compatible for bureaucrats, however, who will resist tenure reversals and the concomitant potential for dismissal. Tenure reversals may thus only be expected absent veto players to reversals, be these *de facto* veto players (e.g. highly mobilized labor unions) or *de jure* veto actors (e.g. a concurrence of an independent judiciary enforcing legal protections and legislative opposition to undo tenure laws).

When facing such veto powers and thus lacking the option to reverse tenure, the political calculi of power holders shift. Unable to use the bureaucratic stock for private goods provision – and thus deprived of a large fraction of their patronage powers – and faced with a non-meritocratic de facto civil service - and thus low bureaucratic capacity - merit reform may be incentivecompatible for power holders through two complementary pathways. First, against the backdrop of an inward shift in the budget constraint regarding private goods provision - and thus a decrease in power holders' ability to compete electorally based on private goods – incumbents may seek merit reform to enhance at least the public goods benefits they can derive from the bureaucracy. Such a reform rationale would be incentive compatible in contexts where merit may elicit performance from the inherited bureaucratic stock and political time horizons are sufficiently long for reform-induced increases in public goods provision to materialize and outweigh the private goods loss from forsaking discretionary control over additions⁹ to the bureaucratic stock. A second pathway through which merit may become incentive-compatible thanks to prior tenure introductions relates to its relationship with political competition: eliciting cooperation from appointees of preceding power holders, merit may undercut the patronage bases of prior and competing power holders in the bureaucracy. Both of these pathways are incentivecompatible with bureaucratic interests. With their patrons no longer in power, bureaucrats favor merit as it provides them with rule-bound safeguards against discretionary personnel decisions by the incumbent next to opportunities for career advancement.

In sum then and perhaps counter-intuitively, the initial and much deplored "merit trap" – civil service reforms ostensibly designed to enhance capacity through merit end up introducing tenure

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⁹ Merit-based pay and promotion decisions to elicit performance from inherited bureaucrats are unlikely to be perceived as credible by these bureaucrats unless recruitment is similarly depoliticized. Absent recruits in the bureaucracy who have been politically favored by the incumbent, bureaucrats recruited under previous administrations are likely to perceive a more level playing field to compete for pay and promotion decisions.

protections for patronage appointees only – may shift incentives for subsequent administrations towards introducing merit. Where veto players thwart tenure reversals and (i) time horizons as well as socio-economic demand are sufficient sufficiently pronounced for incumbents to benefit from reform-induced public goods increases or (ii) political competition puts a premium on undercutting the bureaucratic patronage basis of competitors, we should expect merit to follow tenure reforms in patronage bureaucracies. As shall be discussed next, available data provides empirical evidence for this theory and its constitutive elements.

IV. Empirical Investigation

To explore empirically the effect of tenure on merit, ¹⁰ this paper makes recourse to data on merit and tenure from the Quality of Government Survey 2008-2010 (Carl Dahlström et al., 2011). A major recent advance in cross-country data on the structure of government, the web-based survey – undertaken between 2008 and 2010 – is based on over 900 country expert responses covering in a pooled sample 104 countries (with three responses or more per country). For the purpose of this research, merit may be usefully captured by responses (on a 1-7 scale) to the survey question: "When recruiting public sector employees, the skills and merits of the applicants decide who gets the job?" Tenure protections in turn may be usefully approximated by responses to the question: "Once one is recruited as a public sector employee, one stays a public sector employee for the rest of one's career?"

To account for the remaining elements of the theory as well as the range of other incentives and conditions which may underlie reform, socio-economic demand factors, politico-institutional supply factors and external factors are added as controls (table 1). In line with the hypotheses discussed in section II, socio-economic demand factors include per capita GDP, (tertiary) education, urbanization and ethnic fractionalization (as a proxy for migration); these are drawn through the Quality of Government Standard Dataset (Teorell et al., 2011) from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2012), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010) and Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat and Wacziarg's (2003) dataset. Politico-institutional supply side factors in turn include the legislative index of political competitiveness (as a proxy for political competition), the number of veto players in the

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¹⁰ Empirically, this paper solely explores the politics of merit reforms. A separate empirical paper on the politics of tenure reforms is currently under elaboration by the author.

political system, the length of time the party of the chief executive has been in office (as a proxy for time horizons), government revenue as a percentage of GDP (as a proxy for the size of government and, concomitantly, the ability to retain control over patronage), and the index of democracy and freedom of the press (as proxies for political responsiveness to societal demands regarding public policy performance). Again via the Quality of Government Standard Dataset these are drawn from the Database of Political Institutions (Beck et al., 2001), Freedom House (2012), the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy (Kekic, 2006) and the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2012). Lastly, external control factors are added: an index of economic globalization (as a proxy for international trade and capital markets integration) and net development assistance and aid (as a proxy for mimetic and coercive isomorphism). Via the Quality of Government Standard Dataset, these are drawn from Dreher's (2006) Index of Globalization and the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2012).

Table 1: Summary Statistics and Correlations: Merit, Tenure and Controls

	Variable	Source	# of Obs	Mean	Min	Max	Correl with Merit
	Merit	(Carl Dahlström et al., 2011)	107	4.3	1.9	6.6	1
	Tenure	(Carl Dahlström et al., 2011)	107	4.7	1.7	6.8	0.25
Demand	GDP per capita (constant US-\$)	(World Bank, 2012)	178	10184	226	63687	0.61
	Tertiary Education Enrollment (Male; %)	(UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010)	166	22.8	1	106	0.42
	Ethnic Fractionalization	(Alesina et al., 2003)	187	0.44	0	0.93	-0.34
	Urban Population (%)	(World Bank, 2012)	190	53	8.78	100	0.28
Supply	Legislative Index of Political Competitiveness	(Beck et al., 2001)	174	6.2	1	7	0.13
	Number of Veto Players	(Beck et al., 2001)	174	2.8	1	7	0.36
	Party of Chief Executive: How Long in Office	(Beck et al., 2001)	158	9.4	1	53	-0.03
	Government Revenue (% of GDP)	(World Bank, 2012)	141	24.5	5	47.5	0.34
	Index of Democracy	(Kekic, 2006)	165	5.5	1.03	9.88	0.49
	Freedom of the Press	(Freedom House, 2012)	194	45	8	96	-0.51
External	Economic Globalization	(Dreher, 2006)	139	60	27	97	0.49
	Net Development Assistance and Aid (in constant US-\$m)	(World Bank, 2012)	196	375	-82	3370	-0.14

As illustrated in table 1, those explanatory factors where hypotheses discussed in section II pointed to largely uncontested directions of causality are characterized by correlations with merit in line with theoretical predictions. To illustrated, per capita incomes, education and economic

globalization are all positively and relatively strongly (r > 0.4 for all variables) correlated with merit. As predicted by the theory posited in this paper, tenure is similarly positively correlated with merit. Contradicting assumptions underlying prior studies which had conflated merit and tenure, however, this correlation is surprisingly weak (r = 0.25).

While contradicting prior studies' assumptions, the correlational pattern between tenure and merit is, as illustrated with the tabulation in table 2, consistent with the predictions of the theory generated in this paper. Setting a merit and tenure dummy respectively to 1 whenever survey responses exceed the mean value (=4) of the response scale shows that merit is relatively more frequent when tenure is similarly in place. More specifically, merit is five times more frequent when tenure is also in place; vice versa, tenure is only 1.8 times more frequent when merit is also in place. Related, tenure is 2.2 times more frequent without merit (relative to tenure with merit) as compared to merit without tenure (relative to merit with tenure). In other words and solely based on frequencies, merit seems to follow tenure.

Table 2: Tabulation of Merit and Tenure (Based on Proxy Dummies)

		Tenure				
		No (=0)	Yes (=1)	Total		
	No (=0)	19	28	47		
Merit	Yes (=1)	10	50	60		
~	Total	29	78	107		

Against the backdrop of this suggestive evidence for a relationship between tenure and merit, merit is regressed on tenure as well as the aforementioned control variables in, preliminarily, an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression with the following specification:

$$Merit_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Tenure_i + \beta_2 Demand_i + \beta_3 Supply_i + \beta_4 External_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where $Merit_i$ and $Tenure_i$ stand for the key dependent and explanatory variable of interest, β_2 , β_3 and β_4 represent vectors for the aforementioned set of demand-side, supply-side and external control variables respectively, β_0 is the intercept and ε_i the error term. The subscript i represents cross-sectional units, i.e. countries. Table 3 reports the results of this regression exercise.

Table 3: The Determinants of Merit (OLS Regression)

Dependent Variable		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	Merit (OLS Regre	BBIOIL	<i>)</i>	
Independent Variables	Socio-Economic		+ Politico-Insitutional		+ External	
	Demand Variat	oles	Supply Variables		Variables	
Intercept	3.45	•••	3.63	•••	3.85	••
(t-stat)	(6.24)		(2.79)		(2.25)	
Tenure	0.14	•	0.24	•••	0.24	•••
(t-stat)	(1.91)		(2.90)		(2.77)	
GDP per capita (constant US-\$)	0.0005	•••	0.00004	•••	0.0004	••
(t-stat)	(5.04)		(2.72)		(2.51)	
Tertiary Education Enrollment (Male; %)	0.007		0.002		0.0009	
(t-stat)	(1.26)		(0.36)		(0.14)	
Ethnic Fractionalization	-0.093		-0.17		-0.19	
(t-stat)	(0.23)		(0.39)		(0.41)	
Urban Population (%)	-0.01	•	-0.004		-0.007	
(t-stat)	(1.90)		(0.63)		(1.08)	
Legislative Index of Political Competitiveness			0.04		0.002	
(t-stat)			(0.38)		(0.01)	
Number of Veto Players			0.12		0.15	•
(t-stat)			(1.47)		(1.92)	
Party of Chief Executive: How Long in Office			0.02	••	0.02	•
(t-stat)			(2.21)		(1.92)	
Government Revenue (% of GDP)			-0.009		-0.01	
(t-stat)			(0.83)		(1.02)	
Index of Democracy			-0.08		-0.12	
(t-stat)			(0.7)		(0.97)	
Freedom of the Press (t-stat)			-0.02 (2.35)	••	-0.02 (2.09)	••
Economic Globalization			(2.33)		0.009	
(t-stat)					(0.89)	
Development Assistance and Aid (in constant US-\$m)					-0.000	
(t-stat)					(0.44)	
# of Observations	98		82		80	
R-squared	0.42		0.57		0.58	
F-Statistic	13.34	•••	8.44	•••	6.86	•••
(Prob > F)	0.0000		0.0000		0.0000	

The statistical results across the three specifications – a baseline model containing only socioeconomic demand side factors, a model additionally incorporating political-institutional supplyside factors and a full model also including external factors – allow for at least two key conclusions. First, tenure is a statistically significant predictor of merit across all specifications, and reaches a 1% significance level in both the politico-institutional and the full model. 11 This effect is also substantively important. According to the latter two models, a one-point increase in tenure (on a 1-7 scale) leads, ceteris paribus, to a 0.24 point increase in merit. Second, the set of remaining explanatory factors reaching statistical significance is consistent with the predictions emanating from the merit-follows-tenure theory as well as, concomitantly, several existing hypotheses to account for the politics of merit reforms. In particular – and consistent with the idea that only when veto players thwart tenure reversals may we expect tenure to impinge upon merit – the number of veto players is positively associated with merit in the full model (at the 10%-level)¹². Moreover – and consistent with the idea that even when tenure much constrains the executive's budget for private goods, long time horizons are required for power holders to reap public goods benefits from, and thus face incentives to, pursue merit reform – the length of office of an executive is positively associated with merit, at the 5% level (politico-institutional model) and 10%-level (full model). 13 Lastly – and consistent with the idea that even when tenure and veto actors constrain private goods provision and the executive's time horizon is sufficiently long to reap merit-induced increases in public goods provision, power holders need to face incentives to provide public goods in the first place - per capita incomes and freedom of the press are positively¹⁴ associated with merit at the 1% and 5% significance levels across specifications. Following Reid and Kurth (1988, 1989), rising per capita incomes may be assumed to increase citizen demand for public goods provision while reducing citizen demand for patronage jobs and services; at the same time, freedom of the press provides incentives to power holders to respond to this citizen demand by enabling citizens to monitor public goods provision.

In sum, the statistical findings provide important suggestive evidence for the relevance of tenure in accounting for merit, next to evidence on the complementary roles of veto players, time horizons, per capita incomes and press freedom. This runs against both prior academic practice conflating merit and tenure as a single 'reform' dependent variable and prior policy convictions regarding the "merit trap" characteristic of tenure reforms in patronage bureaucracies.

¹¹ This result is robust to the inclusion of an OECD dummy, incorporated to account for the fact that once both merit and tenure are enacted, gradually evolving bureaucratic rigidities may provide incentives to power holders to undo tenure via, for instance, new public management reforms.

¹² An interaction term of tenure and the number of veto players is similarly a statistically significant predictor of merit in the full model (at the 1% level).

¹³ This result is consistent with Lapuente and Nistotskaya (2008)

¹⁴ A lower score in the freedom of the press variable indicates a freer press.

While the findings are suggestive, data limitations – in particular the lack of a broader set of observations and historic panel data on merit and tenure – thwart a more rigorous and definite statistical test which could address a wider set of potential endogeneity concerns, and allow for, among others, the incorporation of historical causes and thus more complete statistical accounts of the variation in merit (R² in the above regressions reaches 0.58). This thus puts a premium on continued data collection on merit and tenure as well as the structure of government more broadly to allow for more rigorous future explorations of the effect of tenure on merit as well as the interrelationship between distinct personnel reforms more generally.

V. Conclusion: Reassessing the Politics of Merit Reforms in Patronage Bureaucracies

There is a strong consensus in the empirical literature that institutions in general and a merit-based bureaucracy in particular matter for a variety of positive development outcomes. For most developing countries, however, the construction of merit-based bureaucracies has been as relevant for their development as it has been historically elusive. Rather than on merit, recruitment and promotion are based on patronage, and the bureaucracy's role in the policy process is limited to the most operative level of simple or routine tasks. Not surprisingly then, patronage is often accompanied by widespread public service delivery failures (Fukuyama, 2007).

Against the backdrop of these findings, research on the politics of reforming patronage bureaucracies has been proliferating in recent years. Existing research has, in particular, usefully underscored the range of domestic socio-economic demand factors, political-institutional supply factors and external factors which may shift incentives of power holders towards forsaking discretionary control over bureaucratic careers in favor of transparent and rule-bound public personnel decision-making. This paper adds to this academic line of inquiry in two ways. First, it takes issue with the common assumption of a linear replacement of patronage with Weberian, rule-bound public personnel processes, noting instead that power holders depoliticize a subset of personnel decisions ahead of others. The paper shows, in particular, that merit and tenure are conceptually as well as empirically distinct, with distinct politics of reform underlying each. Thanks to this distinction, several seeming contradictions in the directions of causality associated with existing explanatory factors may be resolved.

Second, it builds on this distinction to explore both theoretically and empirically how the depoliticization of merit and tenure interact and sequentially relate to each other – a task previously neglected in the literature. Generating a new sequential theory of the politics of merit reforms in patronage bureaucracies, the paper posits that merit follows tenure in the de-politicization of patronage bureaucracies, albeit only under a set of restrictive conditions. Exploiting a recent expert survey dataset, the paper finds empirical support for this theory. Merit is five times more frequent when tenure is also in place, while tenure is only 1.8 times more frequent when merit is also in place. More important, controlling for the range of explanatory factors posited in the literature, tenure is a significant determinant of merit across a variety of OLS regression specifications. Consistent with theoretical predictions, per capita incomes, the number of veto players, length of political time horizons and press freedom are also found to be statistically significant contributors to merit in the bureaucracy.

While data limitations thwart a more rigorous statistical testing of the merit-follows-tenure theory, available empirical evidence suggests that future research on the politics of reform of patronage bureaucracies would do well to distinguish between merit and tenure as two distinct dependent variables, incorporate tenure as an explanatory variable when seeking to account for merit and, more generally, consider the sequence through which power holders choose to depoliticize personnel decisions in patronage bureaucracies. It is hoped that the present paper provides a first contribution towards such a more differentiated consideration of the politics of reforming patronage bureaucracies.

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