

AT THE PLEASURE OF THE CROWN

The Politics of Bureaucratic Appointments

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Introduction

The power of appointment in government ... steals the stage. It clearly lays down who wins and who loses. It also helps the centre to keep a lid on things ... This gives the centre enormous power and influence.

– *Donald J. Savoie*, *Governing from the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics* (1999, 361–62)

Following closely from the strategy of changing behavior is a political strategy of attempting to change the attitudes and culture of the public service.

– *B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre*, *Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective: The Quest for Control* (2004, 5)

Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master; – obey!

– *Mary W. Shelley*, *Frankenstein* ([1818] 1965, 178–79)

This time the entourage was stopping in Halifax, Nova Scotia, but John Gray already knew the message he was going to hear. In the summer of 1983, the *Globe and Mail* had assigned Gray to follow the campaign trail of Brian Mulroney, as he sought the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. If the Conservatives were to beat Pierre Trudeau's Liberals in the next federal election, many believed that the party needed someone more zealous than current leader Joe Clark – someone whose potent ideas would be matched by personal vigour and an assertive leadership style.

While each stop saw new faces in the crowd of gathered supporters, Mulroney's message, as well as the colourful language he wrapped it in, stayed the same. Time and again, Gray heard Mulroney describe Ottawa as a "bureaucratic-infested administration" that was "[un]responsive to the needs of ordinary Canadians." He heard Mulroney proclaim that, if he were prime minister, he would not be "bamboozled by a bunch of foggy-brained civil servants." Although his way of doing things would likely produce "cardiac-arrest for half the bureaucrats in Ottawa," Mulroney further promised listeners that he would swiftly hand a "pink slip and a pair of running shoes" to any bureaucrat who got in his way (Gray 1983, 1).

The message would have been troubling to any public servant who happened to be listening, but it would not likely have come as too much of a surprise. Animosity toward the public service was an increasingly common sentiment of the times. Only a few years earlier, American president Ronald Reagan spoke of the need to "drain the swamp" of Washington's bureaucracy (Savoie 1994, 4). Meanwhile, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher openly professed her distrust of the public service, as well as her intention to fill Whitehall's top offices with individuals who were openly committed to her ambitious reform agenda (Hennessy 2000, 403).

Quite simply, by the early 1980s, the men and women of the public service – whose work had been essential in developing the pension, health, and education policies that defined the postwar welfare state and improved the lives of millions of citizens – had fallen out of favour. With increasing ferocity, politicians were blaming public servants for wasteful spending and were citing them as the reason why so many citizens had become dissatisfied with the way government was being run. Things had not always been so bleak for the public service. But, then again, they had also been much worse.

During the early period of Canada's history, public service jobs were generally filled on the basis of partisan patronage, rewarding party supporters with public employment. By the end of the Second World War,

however, things had begun to improve. The effect of two world wars, alongside the most severe economic depression in modern history, had led citizens to question the adage “That government is best which governs the least.” Citizens now expected governments to not only protect their civic and political rights – such as owning property and voting in elections – but also to ensure a minimum level of social and economic security (Marshall [1949] 2006).

Governments therefore embarked on developing policies in new areas such as health and education. In Canada, this was especially the case for provincial governments, which have the constitutional jurisdiction for overseeing such social policies. But developing and overseeing these policies and programs was complex. Governments quickly realized that the quality and nature of the public service needed to change, and that it would no longer be desirable for a bureaucrat’s chief qualification to be their partisan loyalty. Expertise and a willingness to provide frank and fearless advice were now the top qualities that governments wanted in their senior public servants. The recipe to achieve this was simple: replace political criteria with merit when appointing senior bureaucrats.

Yet, by the 1970s, things had once again begun to change. Isolating officials’ careers from political interference had led the bureaucracy to develop not only a high level of expertise but also a great deal of influence. During this time, with public servants’ power in mind, Robert D. Putnam (1973, 257) asked, “Can there really be much doubt who governs our complex and modern societies? Public bureaucracies, staffed largely by permanent civil servants, are responsible for the vast majority of policy initiatives taken by governments ... In a literal sense, the modern political system is essentially ‘bureaucratic’ – characterized by ‘the rule of officials.’”

The knowledge public servants acquired from holding the same position for so many years, cherished in the earlier postwar period for improving the quality of governance, was now blamed for usurping the ability of democratically elected parliamentarians to rule. Reminiscent of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, governments felt as if their creation had turned into a disobedient monster; the bureaucracy had become master over its creator.

And so, by the early 1980s, the time had come for the people’s representatives to reinstate their central place in governance. Fortunately for governments, the prerogative to appoint and dismiss senior public servants had remained theirs. Thus, on September 5, 1984, Brian Mulroney, the newly elected prime minister of Canada, vowed that he was going to transform the

way things were done in Ottawa. Just as he had done on many occasions since the Progressive Conservative leadership race almost a year and half before, Mulroney promised that the first item on his agenda was to hand new footwear to any public servant with an unfriendly disposition toward his policy agenda, as he showed them the door.

The Politics of Bureaucratic Turnover

Although the narrative above comes from Canada, the story is common to many countries. In the postwar period, a permanent public service staffed according to merit replaced the practice of patronage, but, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, governments and citizens alike had begun to see the bureaucracy as harmful to good governance – the cause of government inefficiency and citizens’ declining trust in public institutions. Like Prime Minister Mulroney, governments saw their power to appoint senior bureaucrats as an effective way to take hold of the bureaucracy and introduce their agenda of reform.

Over the past ten years, many observers have suggested that governments’ hunger to control the bureaucracy has become insatiable. The ubiquity of social media and the phenomenon of the permanent campaign, where political parties continue to electioneer even between elections, have led some observers to claim that governments’ preference for bureaucrats who are committed, above all else, to pursuing the government’s policy agenda has never been more marked (Marland, Giasson, and Small 2017). Governments want to be certain that the actions of public officials conform to the overarching message of the party in power – a feat that is made more difficult in an age of digital governance, where citizens often interact with public officials through social media (Clarke 2019).

Taking particular aim at the Westminster countries of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, Peter Aucoin claims that governments’ desire for control is now so strong that it marks a new era of governing, which he terms “new political governance.” In this era, the push for control has “transformed into a form of politicization that explicitly runs counter to the public service tradition of impartiality in the administration of public services and the nonpartisan management of the public service” (Aucoin 2012, 178). Aucoin, as well as other observers (e.g., White 2005; Zussman 2013), allege that the situation is particularly noticeable in Canada’s provinces: “The tradition of the federal public service is ... seen to stand in sharp contrast to the more partisan-political traditions or practices in some, if not all, provincial governments” (Aucoin 2006, 302).

Opening a newspaper in Canada in the weeks, or even days, that follow a change in government, one frequently faces headlines such as “Tory Policies Weed Out 16 Deputy Ministers”, “La haute fonction publique retourne au rouge,” and “Deputy Ministers Shuffle Revealing.”¹ Reading past these headlines, one hears governments justifying their actions as a way to strengthen bureaucratic loyalty to their leaders’ policy agendas. For instance, despite being from the same party that had governed the province since 1971, Alberta premier Alison Redford (2011–14) defended her decision to appoint new deputy ministers by stating that, “with the movement of deputies, the change most of our staff will notice will be a change in government culture, characterized by a more collaborative way of doing things and working together ... not as individual departments but as a single government team” (Alberta 2011). Meanwhile, Prince Edward Island premier Robert Ghiz (2007–15) justified appointing his own deputy ministers to “reflect emerging priorities for the new Government” and “bolster and strengthen [the] Government’s focus” (Prince Edward Island 2011).

A New Political Explanation of Bureaucratic Turnover: Challenging the “Quest for Control”

Shortly after the arrival in the 1980s of reform-minded governments brandishing promises to revamp what they perceived to be an increasingly out-of-touch and inefficient public service, scholars turned their attention to understanding the politics underpinning the ostensible increase in bureaucratic turnover (Bourgault and Dion 1989; Weller 1989). The dominant explanation put forward by academics and pundits has been an increased desire on the part of governments to control the bureaucracy. New governments, we have been told, appoint more senior bureaucrats than in previous eras, because they now want more control over bureaucratic behaviour.

For instance, in their book *Steering from the Centre: Strengthening Political Control in Western Democracies*, Carl Dahlström, B. Guy Peters, and Jon Pierre (2011, 11) claim that, since the 1980s, a central strategy of governments “is to take political control of important recruitments into the public sector. It is powerful because it secures loyalty among centrally placed bureaucrats, and thereby increased political control over policy and implementation.” Meanwhile, in their highly influential book *Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective: The Quest for Control*, Peters and Pierre (2004, 7) assert that “politicians are, the literature (both popular and academic) argues, investing more time and energy in politicizing the civil service now than in the recent past ... The most obvious reason [for this] ...

is that politicians want to be able to control what their government organizations do.”

Although the “quest for control” theory is unquestionably the most popular explanation analysts use to account for the large number of appointments that governments now make to the public service, it mistakenly simplifies a more complex relationship between bureaucratic appointments and the government’s desire to control the public service. It overlooks an important aspect running through the historical narrative recounted in this chapter’s opening pages: governments have always wanted to control the behaviour of bureaucrats, and this has persistently influenced their decision to retain or remove senior officials.

Challenging the quest for control explanation, this book argues that the influence of politics on the turnover of senior bureaucrats is not so much about the degree of control that governments seek as it is about the professional qualities that governments try to cultivate among these senior officials. This study shifts the discussion away from *how much control* governments want over bureaucrats to focus instead on the *type of behaviour* that governments are seeking to control. In doing so, this book offers a new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover that contextualizes the decisions of governments to appoint, dismiss, or retain senior public servants during the past hundred years.

This new approach pushes us to ask larger questions about the strategic actions of government – *What is the nature of governance? What professional qualities do governments want to see in senior bureaucrats? How have these qualities changed over time?* Importantly, this new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover does not dispute the fact that the 1980s marked a radical shift in the politics of bureaucratic turnover. Rather, in contrast to the quest for control perspective, which emphasizes the increased appetite for control, it claims that what happened in the 1980s was a shift in the *type* of behaviour that governments wanted senior bureaucrats to display. Moreover, this book shows that this was not the only time such a shift took place.

The twentieth century witnessed profound industrial, technological, and social revolutions, and these fundamentally affected our system of governance. As the nature of governance evolved from a small, limited state, to a larger welfare state, and into the contemporary era of managerialism, so too have governments prioritized different qualities in senior public servants, specifically shifting from partisan loyalty, to expertise and candid advice, and then to an unquestioning commitment to the government’s policy agenda.

By reformulating the question from “how much control do governments desire” to “what type of behaviours are governments trying to cultivate,” this book offers a fuller political explanation of bureaucratic turnover that situates the efforts of governments to control the bureaucracy within a social and historical context. This approach can account for why, throughout history, new governments have differed in the frequency with which they appointed administrative elites and in the types of individuals they favoured. It helps explain why, during some periods over the past hundred years, a change in government has led to a significant rise in bureaucratic turnover, while at other times there is hardly any change at all. It also helps us understand why, within the contemporary era, so many incumbent public servants leave their position immediately following the election of a new premier, even when that leader is from the same party as the previous government.

But, more than this, the new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover put forward in this book provides insight into the different ways that we have governed ourselves over time. It tells us something about how we have answered some of the most fundamental, long-standing, and contentious questions that have been asked by political philosophers from Plato and Thomas Hobbes to Hannah Arendt: *Who should rule? Should political decisions be based upon the wishes of the people’s representatives or the opinions of unelected experts? What is the proper relationship between democracy and bureaucracy?*

The remainder of this introductory chapter is organized into four sections. It begins by explaining why bureaucratic turnover is not merely a topic of interest to academics, but an issue of paramount importance with implications for both the quality of government as well as the integrity of representative democracy. The next section then briefly outlines the new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover, an explanation that is developed more fully in Chapter 2. I then describe the various types of data and research methods that I have used to test the validity of this new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover. Finally, the introduction closes by providing a brief overview of the contents of subsequent chapters.

Why Is the Turnover of Senior Public Servants So Important?

You may respond with skepticism to the claim that the turnover of senior public servants is a subject of great importance. Perhaps you are thinking that the appointment and dismissal of officials to the top offices of the public service is hardly the stuff of front-page news, especially compared to a change in the governing party, the head of government, or a cabinet minister.

After all, we live in a representative democracy, and if we should be paying attention to the turnover of any public office holders, shouldn't it be those whom we elect to power?

It is certainly true that the arrival and departure of elected representatives is an issue of fundamental importance. It reflects the great virtue of our democratic system – that we the people hold the power to choose our government. And for well over sixty years, political scientists have exerted an enormous amount of effort to better understand the motivations that lead citizens to either re-elect or replace their elected representatives (Blais and Daoust 2020). It is equally true that political scientists have paid much less attention to the appointment, dismissal, and retention of public servants.

Yet, although senior public servants are not elected by the people but appointed by governments, one would be misguided to dismiss the turnover of bureaucratic elites as a frivolous and unimportant matter. The turnover of senior public servants is an issue of paramount importance and has, at times, been the subject of government reports as well as front-page news. There are two good reasons for this. First, the turnover of senior public servants affects the organizational performance of our public institutions. Second, the politics of bureaucratic turnover goes to the very heart of the long-standing issue as to the proper relationship that politicians should have with bureaucratic officials in a representative democracy. In this way, understanding the politics of bureaucratic turnover tells us something about the different ways we, as a democratic society, have approached governing, including fundamental issues such as who should rule and whether our most important policy decisions should be guided by the opinions of experts or the voice of the people.

Practical Implications: Turnover and Organizational Performance

Since Chester Barnard's *The Functions of the Executive* (1938) challenged Frederick Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) by insisting that an organization's efficiency depended on the behaviour of executive personnel more than how tasks were broken down into smaller steps, researchers have been interested in how the individuals occupying an organization's top offices affect its performance. Importantly, many of the positive effects that senior personnel can have on an organization are lost when their turnover is too high. Identifying, hiring, and training replacements place great demands on an organization's financial and human resources. Turnover can deplete organizational memory, impede long-term

planning, and direct attention away from ongoing projects (Cornell and Lapuente 2014). For instance, in a recent census of Canadian public servants, over 35 percent of respondents (that is, approximately 60,000 employees) claimed that high staff turnover “often” or “always” hindered the quality of their work.²

With specific reference to the public sector, when these new appointments are politically motivated, turnover can be very expensive and the consequences even more grave. Dismissed deputy ministers frequently receive hundreds of thousands of dollars in severance payments. For instance, when Christy Clark replaced Gordon Campbell as premier of British Columbia in 2011, the government spent over two million dollars in severance to dismissed officials, much of which went to deputy ministers (CBC News 2011).

Even more problematic, many former public servants have voiced concern that the growing number of appointments that new governments make is reducing the willingness of officials to provide frank and fearless advice. John Green, a former deputy minister in Prince Edward Island, reflecting on Premier Pat Binns’s (1996–2007) appointments, stated that “the public is not well-served when officials fear for their jobs, not for performing poorly but for performing too well. Officials who may be required to give ministers unwelcome advice ... require protection in the security of their jobs” (Green 1997, A7). Likewise, shortly after retiring from New Brunswick’s public service, Jeff Patch claimed that the growing number of political appointments effectively signals to public servants that echoing the government’s policy agenda is necessary for their career advancement, and this has contributed to a growing “sycophantic culture” of yes-men and yes-women within the bureaucracy (CBC News 2014).

Normative Debate: The Proper Relationship between Politics and Administration

What is the proper relationship between politics and administration? What should be the nature of the relationship that elected representatives have with appointed public servants? The government’s ability to appoint bureaucrats goes to the heart of these long-standing questions, which all representative democracies face.

On one side of this matter are proponents contending that politics and administration are distinct realms, and that political interference in administrative affairs is a sure way to reduce the quality of governance. Twenty-six years before becoming the president of the United States, in one of the earliest treatises on the study of public administration, Woodrow Wilson (1887,

210) declared: “Most important to be observed is the truth already so much and so fortunately insisted upon by our civil service reformers; namely, that administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices.”

Many of the reforms leading to the development of the modern professional bureaucracy, including the United Kingdom’s Northcote-Trevelyan Report (1854), the United States’ *Pendleton Act* (1883), and Canada’s McInnes Commission (1882), spoke of the need to restrain the government’s ability to appoint and dismiss administrative personnel. In the opening of their report, Northcote and Trevelyan ([1854] 1954, 1) claimed:

It may safely be asserted that, as matters now stand, the Government of the country could not be carried on without the aid of an efficient body of permanent officers, occupying a position duly subordinate to that of the Ministers who are directly responsible to the Crown and to Parliament, yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability, and experience to be able to advise, assist, and, to some extent, influence, those who are from time to time set over them.

Although newly established civil service commissions in the early twentieth century restricted the power of governments to appoint administrative personnel, these reforms never made their way to the very top of the bureaucracy. In countries with a Westminster tradition of government, the prerogative to appoint senior bureaucrats has largely remained the first minister’s. This has not stopped debate, however, over whether governments should continue to enjoy this power.

A more recent public example comes from Canada’s Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities (the Gomery Commission), established in response to a scathing report from Auditor General Sheila Fraser, which chastised several senior public servants who “broke just about every rule in the book” by illegally awarding public contracts to Liberal-friendly firms (Saint-Martin 2003, 451). To prevent similar misconduct from happening again, the Gomery Commission recommended eliminating the prime minister’s power to appoint and dismiss deputy ministers.

The belief that the quality of government improves when the careers of bureaucrats are sheltered from political interference is popular among

scholars of government. In his seminal book, *A Government of Strangers*, American political scientist Hugh Heclo (1977, 69) remarked that “personal or programmatic politicizing are no less dangerous to the integrity of government institutions than party politicizing. Ultimately, they all imply a system of government machinery that must be dismantled and restaffed every time a political representative is installed to exert leadership and take responsibility for setting directions.”

Kenneth Meier (1997, 196), a leading voice in contemporary public administration, has suggested that “our basic problem of governance is that the long-running interplay between bureaucracy and expertise on one hand, and responsiveness and democracy (read electoral institutions) on the other hand, has swung too far in the direction of democracy.” Meanwhile, Canadian scholar Lorne Sossin (2005, 2) claims that

civil servants are the guardians of a public trust underlying the exercise of all public authority. Their ability to maintain the integrity of that trust and, when called upon, to “speak truth to power” depends on a measure of independence from undue political influence. Neutrality, integrity, professionalism, and trust, on this view, are inextricably linked to the norm of bureaucratic independence.

Yet not all scholars share the belief that administrative officials’ careers should be isolated from politics. Believing that those who have been democratically elected are the most legitimate authority in a representative democracy, others emphasize the rule of the elected government over the rule of the appointed official. Concurring with the early writings of Dwight Waldo ([1948] 2007) and Paul Appleby (1947), which rejected Wilson’s claim that political and administrative matters are easily separated, these proponents are uncomfortable with the antipathy toward politics underlying the arguments of those trying to isolate administration from politics. Michael Spicer (2010, 5) supports this position in his aptly titled book *In Defense of Politics in Public Administration*:

There is reason to worry, in my view, when those who would seek to advise and educate our public policy-makers and administrators so often express what is clearly an anti-political attitude. There is a danger here that the public administrators we help train might internalize such an attitude and actually come to see themselves as somehow superior to or above politics.

Proponents of this view see the government's right to appoint senior public servants as a necessary instrument in order to ensure that the democratically elected can govern as they so desire. An excellent example of this position is found in an open letter addressed to Prime Minister Stephen Harper reproving the Gomery Commission's recommendation that the prime minister's power to appoint deputy ministers be revoked. Signed by a group composed of academics, consultants, business people, political advisers, politicians, and even deputy ministers from federal and provincial governments, the letter stated:

We ... believe that the selection of these officials [deputy ministers], who will be a key source of support to you and your Cabinet colleagues, is too important a task to entrust to any kind of independent selection system detached from the political process. You [the prime minister], as the head of the government, need the ability to organize it in ways that best respond to your objectives, and to place in the most senior positions the professionals who, in your judgment, are best able to meet the needs of a particular department and agency. It is difficult to contemplate how any large business organization would survive if vice presidents and senior officers were selected by a group independent of the CEO. (Canada 2006)

Clearly, as an important factor affecting organizational performance, and touching on the proper relationship that politics should have with administration within a representative democracy, it is well worth understanding the politics of bureaucratic turnover.

Fostering Loyalty and Competency in Public Service Bargains

This book advances a new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover by drawing upon a body of research, which, like the quest for control literature, emerged from an effort to make sense of changes in the political-administrative relationships that were beginning to occur in the early 1980s. But rather than trying to explain when and why governments seek to control the bureaucracy via bureaucratic appointments, these works have instead described changes over time in the character and role of elite public servants. Important examples of this research include Page and Wright's (1999) *Bureaucratic Elites in Western European States*, Rhodes and Weller's (2001) *The Changing World of Top Officials*, Bourgault and Dunn's (2014) *Deputy Ministers in Canada*, and Hood and Lodge's (2006) *The Politics of Public Service Bargains*.

In this book, I use the concept of a “public service bargain” (PSB) to offer a new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover that focuses on the type of behaviour that governments want senior personnel to display. The PSB approach conceptualizes the relationship that governments have with senior bureaucrats as an exchange between the competency and loyalty that public servants provide to governments and the rewards that governments give public servants in return (Hood and Lodge 2006). In this book, I take this insight one step further and claim that, on taking power, new governments strategically appoint, or retain, senior bureaucrats to foster particular types of loyalty and competency. But because the type of competency and loyalty that governments have desired has changed throughout the twentieth century, so too have new governments differed in the extent to which they have appointed bureaucrats.

In the following chapters, I examine the politics of bureaucratic turnover across three distinct public service bargains that have characterized different periods during the twentieth century, specifically, the “spoils” bargain, the “Schafferian” bargain, and the “managerial” bargain.³ Under the spoils bargain, the nature of governance is relatively minimal, with few specifications concerning the bureaucracy’s competency. Instead, the most important matter in staffing personnel is partisan loyalty. Within this bargain, bureaucratic turnover rises sharply following a transition in the governing party as governments seek to reinforce loyalty to the party. Without a change in party, a simple change in the head of government does not lead to any increase in turnover among senior public servants. Moreover, almost all of those deputy ministers who leave their position exit the public service altogether.

Under the Schafferian bargain – named after Bernard Schaffer’s (1973) seminal descriptions of political-administrative relationships in his book *The Administrative Factor* – a change in government no longer brings about an increase in administrative turnover. Governments want elite bureaucrats to possess in-depth knowledge of issues. And more than this, they also want bureaucrats, on the basis of their expertise, to advise them in a frank and fearless spirit. To foster expertise, and encourage frank and fearless advice, new governments intentionally leave senior bureaucrats in their positions.

The third type of bargain is the managerial bargain. According to this bargain, a change in government once again leads to a rise in administrative turnover. Yet, in contrast to the spoils bargain, not only does a change in party lead to an immediate rise in bureaucratic turnover, but so too does turnover increase following the election of any new first minister, even when he or she is from the same party as the previous government. Because

the first minister in the managerial bargain has an essential role in setting the policy agenda, newly elected first ministers who are from the same party as the previous government also want to ensure that public servants are committed to *their* policy agenda.

Turnover does not increase, however, when a new but unelected first minister takes power. These trends are consistent with the competency and loyalty prioritized within a managerial bargain. In contrast to the spoils bargain, where above all else governments value loyalty to the party, in the managerial bargain, governments want elite bureaucrats who can successfully manage resources toward accomplishing the government's policy agenda. Governments want men and women who not only accept the government's policy agenda but who are committed to making it happen. Accordingly, a large percentage of removed deputy ministers take up another deputy ministerial position within the public service. Not interested in repaying partisan loyalty, governments seek to identify personnel who will not only accept the government's policy agenda, but who are committed to making it happen. Often, this is accomplished by selecting personnel already within the public service.

Testing the New Politics of Bureaucratic Turnover

In this book, I use a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to test the strength of this new approach to explaining the politics of bureaucratic turnover in the Canadian provinces. This study's first empirical component, which measures the year-to-year turnover of deputy ministers in Canada's provincial bureaucracies between 1920 and 2013, reveals the extent to which changes in the governing party and in the premier have led to a rise in turnover. While this quantitative component provides a highly systematic way to assess change in the politics of bureaucratic turnover throughout the twentieth century, it does not provide evidence of the causal mechanism that I posit as responsible for variation over time – that is, change in the types of competency and loyalty that governments seek to cultivate among bureaucratic elites. To better connect the statistical results with the theoretical explanation, I conducted a qualitative analysis to uncover whether the decision to remove or retain elite bureaucrats flows from a desire to induce particular behaviours in them. This qualitative analysis involved analyzing hundreds of primary and secondary sources produced throughout the past hundred years in Canada's provincial bureaucracies. Primary sources examined include first-hand written accounts from various political actors, such

as politicians, public servants, and political staffers, as well as government-mandated public inquiries and newspaper articles. These documents, along with various secondary sources, provide insightful descriptions of the bureaucracy's loyalty and competency over the past century, as well as glimpses into the motivations of governments when staffing senior offices.

Overall, the assembly of data from the qualitative analysis paints a consistent picture. When it comes to the turnover of bureaucratic elites, politics matters, but the dominant political variables that lead to a stark rise in turnover vary across historical periods. Importantly, the data show that shifts in the politics of bureaucratic turnover stem, in part, from the fact that, over time, governments have prioritized and sought to foster different types of competency and loyalty in senior administrators.

This is not to say that no exceptions exist among the voluminous mass of data. As will be detailed in the discussion in subsequent chapters, some exceptions have been found; however, these are notable because they stand out from a clear trend that conforms to the political explanation of bureaucratic turnover put forward in this book.⁴

The specific periodization of each public service bargain, where one bargain ends and another begins, was conducted by drawing upon research studying the Canadian provinces. Generally, this research suggests that a spoils bargain existed until approximately 1950, a Schafferian bargain between the postwar period and 1979, and a managerial bargain from 1980 until the present day.

While periodizations are an important analytical tool allowing the social scientist to make sense of changes over time, I have been mindful in this analysis that shifts between periods are not always clear and sometimes contestable. As Daniel Wincott (2010, 150) maintains:

Periodizations play a substantial, but often hidden and undertheorized, role in social science research. When, without questioning them, we work within conventional periodizations, we often imbibe theoretical propositions without recognizing it. We should remember that the division of history into periods is neither given naturally nor theoretically innocent: such periods can be fruitfully viewed as *ideas* about history. (emphasis in the original)

Therefore, while my empirical analysis has followed the predominant ideas found in the literature in periodizing the public service bargains, it has also

been cognizant and investigated alternative interpretations, which are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Why Canada's Provincial Governments?

The Canadian provinces offer an ideal case selection for generating a better understanding of the raw strategic behaviour of governments unfettered by institutional constraints. Because the provinces have so much in common, we can, when studying them, control for not only the potential influence of formal institutions but also the effect that political culture may have on bureaucratic turnover (Imbeau et al. 2000; Tellier 2011).⁵

Some readers may be surprised that a work focusing on bureaucratic turnover would leave the federal government untouched. However, the federal government is different from the provinces in some important ways. For one, the shift away from the spoils bargain did not occur at the same time in the two levels of government. In *The Ottawa Men*, J.L. Granatstein (1982, 26) remarked that whereas, in 1929, federal deputy ministers regularly “reached their posts only because of faithful, uninspired service in the ranks, or because they had served in high political office and were owed something by the party,” by the mid-1930s, the federal civil service had transformed into a professional meritocratic bureaucracy. Ken Rasmussen (2016, 429) claims that differences between the provinces and the federal government still remain:

Historically, provinces lagged [behind] the federal government when it came to creating ... a model of professional public service, and they remain behind to this day ... The only caveat is that provinces tend to allow for some forms of political appointments in the senior ranks of the public service, whereas this is extremely rare in Ottawa. What this means, however, is that changes in the provincial governing party usually result in turmoil in the senior ranks of the public service.

Outline of the Book

The remainder of this book is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 begins by identifying who exactly these bureaucratic elites are. It explains why the appointment process of these powerful public servants makes them highly vulnerable to political control at levels that are not found among the thousands of men and women who make up the remainder of the public service. The chapter then turns its attention to what we know about the causes of

bureaucratic turnover. After briefly reviewing explanations from organization and management studies, it considers what research in public administration and political science has told us about the *politics* of bureaucratic turnover. After looking at the role of political culture and formal institutions, the chapter then turns to the more popular political explanation of turnover, focusing on governments' desire for control. The quest for control explanation assumes that governments universally want bureaucrats who are committed to their policy agenda, and it thus tends to explain a rise in bureaucratic turnover as stemming from an increase in the *degree of control* that governments desire. Yet, as this chapter discusses, commitment to the government's policy agenda is not the only type of behaviour that governments have wanted to see in senior bureaucrats. This fact is clear even though political explanations of bureaucratic turnover have not yet seriously considered variation in the type of behaviour that governments desire.

Chapter 2 develops a new way to think about the politics of administrative turnover that pays attention to the qualities that governments want to cultivate among senior bureaucrats. Drawing on the concept of a public service bargain, this chapter outlines three ideal-type bargains – the spoils, the Schafferian, and the managerial – each varying in the type of competency and loyalty that governments want bureaucrats to demonstrate. The chapter reconsiders the relationship that a change in party and a change in the head of government have with bureaucratic turnover within these three ideal types.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 empirically test the political explanation of bureaucratic turnover developed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 uses descriptive statistics to explore the relationship between politics and turnover over the past century. Chapter 4 uses more advanced statistical methods to further test these relationships while controlling for additional factors that may also affect turnover. Both chapters reveal meaningful differences across public service bargains in the politics of bureaucratic turnover.

Chapter 5 moves beyond statistics and conducts a qualitative analysis to uncover the qualities that provincial governments have demanded from senior bureaucrats throughout the twentieth century. The analysis not only finds that governments have wanted senior bureaucrats to display different types of loyalty and competency over time, but it uncovers evidence tying governments' desire to foster these qualities to their decision to appoint or retain senior bureaucrats.

The concluding chapter discusses how the political explanation of bureaucratic turnover presented in this book challenges previous knowledge about

how governments control the bureaucracy. It considers how the politics of bureaucratic turnover has changed throughout the twentieth century and whether we should be concerned about the high level of bureaucratic turnover that now follows the election of any new premier, regardless of whether the governing party changes or not. The conclusion also considers what change in the politics of bureaucratic turnover says about the perennial question regarding the proper relationship between politics and administration, and the different ways we have answered this question, and governed ourselves, over the past hundred years.

1

To the Victor Go the Spoils Traditional Explanations for Bureaucratic Turnover

If they are to be understood, political theories must be constructed in relation to their material environment and ideological framework ... For despite occasional claims that public administration is a science with principles of universal validity ... [it] has evolved political theories unmistakably related to unique economic, social, governmental, and ideological facts.

– *Dwight Waldo*, *The Administrative State*
([1948] 2007, 3)

They occupy the most powerful senior positions in the bureaucracy. In every government ministry, directly under the cabinet minister, sits a department head who manages hundreds of employees and oversees the spending of large sums of public tax dollars. In each country they go by a different name: in the United Kingdom, they are permanent secretaries; in Australia, they are departmental secretaries; in New Zealand, they are chief executives; and in Canada, they are deputy ministers (DMs). And unlike the vast majority of jobs in the public service, which are isolated from government influence, these senior bureaucrats are, in most cases, political appointments.

The political nature of these appointments is especially evident in Canada's provinces, where no institutional constraints prevent premiers from appointing or dismissing deputy ministers: such lieutenant-governor Order in Council appointments are at the exclusive "pleasure of the Crown." Although premiers retain the power to appoint senior bureaucrats, it is common practice for the head of government to consult with others from political and administrative milieus. In the initial days after forming a government (or even before), the premier receives advice from the clerk of the Executive Council – the head deputy minister of the civil service, who is appointed by the premier – as well as members of the government and partisan advisers from the premier's entourage. The nature of this consultation, however, remains strictly advisory.¹ The final decision over the appointment, retention, and dismissal of any deputy minister is the first minister's. As Ken Rasmussen (2016, 430) affirms:

In all provinces the senior public service is treated differently, and appointments at this level remain the prerogative of the premier. While all provinces promote the value of neutrality and non-partisanship in their senior administration, appointment does reflect the interests of the premier; the premier of the province appoints all deputy ministers, the key role in the senior civil service.

This chapter reviews the most prominent explanations of administrative turnover. It first reviews the primary reasons identified by organization and management studies. Finding that this research has overlooked the role of power, it turns to what researchers from political science and public administration have said about the politics of bureaucratic turnover, specifically, the role of political culture, formal institutions, and governments' desire for control. It finds that political explanations relying on political culture and formal institutions are hard-pressed to explain the politics of bureaucratic turnover in Westminster countries who share the same administrative tradition, and where the first minister's power to appoint senior bureaucrats is largely unfettered. Political culture and formal institutions tell us very little about why new governments sometimes lead to a large rise in bureaucratic turnover while at other times, they do not.

The chapter then considers the more dominant "quest for control" explanation, arguing that although this approach correctly draws our attention to the preferences of governments – and more precisely, their desire to control the bureaucracy – it, too, has erred. Assuming that governments

want to cultivate commitment to their policy agenda among their senior public servants above all else, the “quest for control” explanation focuses too much on the degree of control that governments desire, and has largely overlooked the behaviours that governments want to cultivate among the bureaucratic elite. Finding all of these explanations wanting, this chapter turns to a new political explanation of bureaucratic turnover that puts the spotlight on the different forms of loyalty and competency that governments are trying to encourage.

What Are the Causes of Administrative Turnover?

Organization and Management Studies

For over thirty years, academic analyses in the fields of organization and management studies, and even a few government reports, have voiced concern over what they perceive to be alarming levels of turnover among public sector employees in Canada (Osbaldeston 1989; G. Lewis 1991; Public Service Commission of Canada 2008). Although these works frequently discuss the causes of turnover, regularly absent from their analysis is any mention that turnover may be affected by politics.

Instead, these studies tend to concentrate on how turnover is affected by employees’ personal characteristics, the nature of the organization public servants work for, and the broader conditions of the labour market. For instance, their findings show that the time public servants have worked within an organization, as well as their age, affects turnover. Higher portions of new employees quit their jobs because the responsibilities associated with these job have failed to meet their expectations. Employees remaining in their jobs after this initial period, however, are generally satisfied with their employment and tend to remain in their positions for a long period of time. Yet toward the end of their career, as employees approach retirement, time served once again has a positive association with turnover. Conventionally, men have lower levels of turnover than women (Sousa-Poza and Henneberger 2004), although some suggest that, as the prevalence of the male-breadwinner family model has lessened, the strength of the relationship between gender and turnover has weakened (Moynihan and Landuyt 2008). Other factors that have been shown to affect turnover include employees’ satisfaction with their pay and their power to make decisions, both of which reduce turnover (Arcand, Tellier, and Chrétien 2010).

In addition to the individual characteristics of a public servant and the nature of their job, economic growth has also been shown to affect turnover

(Bertelli and Lewis 2013). Because economic growth creates more jobs, employees are more confident that they can find employment elsewhere. Beyond demand, the supply side of the labour market can also affect turnover. When the pool of candidates is small, employers are more likely to provide generous remuneration and may be less willing to dismiss staff. Conversely, when the supply of qualified personnel is large, employees may receive less generous salaries and may work for employers who are more willing to dismiss them (Grissom, Viano, and Selin 2016). Similar trends can also be seen within organizations: turnover tends to be higher in bigger organizations because employers can draw upon a larger pool of internal staff to replace personnel (Fredrickson, Hambrick, and Baumrin 1988).

Where's the Power?

Despite its contributions to our understanding of turnover, organization and management studies suffer from two shortcomings. First, works in these areas rarely measure actual levels of turnover. Instead, they frequently measure turnover by asking employees whether they intend to leave their position in the near future. An obvious limitation of this method is that, when it comes to human nature, just because someone said they are going to do something doesn't mean they'll actually do it. A large number of studies show that intention is not a very good predictor of actual behaviour (Cohen, Blake, and Goodman 2016).

A second shortcoming of organization and management studies is that focusing on an employee's intention to quit leaves a central cause of turnover among senior bureaucrats – involuntary departure – unexamined. While voluntary withdrawal is a predominant cause of turnover among staff at lower levels of the bureaucracy, there are good reasons for believing that it accounts for far fewer departures at the top echelon.

Bureaucratic elites generally not only exhibit personal traits that are connected to lower intentions to voluntarily quit, but they also hold jobs whose characteristics reinforce this tendency. Still true today as it was in the past, studies have found a high level of homogeneity among administrative elites in Canada. As a group, bureaucratic elites are less diverse and more “male, pale and stale” than the population they serve (Porter 1958; Gidengil and Vengroff 1997). In their recent survey of federal and provincial deputy and assistant deputy ministers, Evans, Lum, and Shields (2014) found that 68 percent of executive bureaucrats were male and over 65 percent were at least fifty years old.

Generally, analysts believe that elite public servants have a high level of satisfaction with their jobs (Camilleri 2007) and are generally relatively unlikely to voluntarily step away from their position (Podger 2007). As former Clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the federal cabinet, Alex Himelfarb (2002–06) stated in his address at the 2013 Public Policy Forum dinner, “My hunch is that I can speak for all the former clerks here this evening that for us public service was deeply satisfying, a privilege, a source of pride, an opportunity to make a difference. Public service was more often than not fulfilling, and, believe it or not, even fun” (Himelfarb 2013, par. 2). Based on his time as deputy minister in Newfoundland, sociology professor John D. House (1999, 75) noted, “Whenever there is a change in government, particularly when a new party comes into power, the established senior bureaucrats fear for their jobs. The transition period between the old regime and the new regime is when they are most likely to be replaced.” Speaking of the phases undertaken by the “Old Guard” of deputy ministers following a change in government, House (1999, 76) remarked:

The first and most fundamental was *survival*. They were quick to disavow any particular political affiliation with or personal loyalty to the old regime. They presented themselves as being loyal public servants to whichever party was in power and whoever was premier. While often critical of the premier and various ministers behind their backs – sometimes scathingly so – the Old Guard were always careful to be completely obedient, supportive, and loyal to their faces. (Emphasis in the original)

Beyond demonstrating that bureaucratic elites value their powerful and well-paid positions, House’s observations point to the central place of power and politics in bureaucratic turnover, which is largely overlooked by organization and management studies. Fortunately, scholars in political science and political administration have been more attentive to this dimension.

Political Explanations: Culture and Formal Institutions

Political Culture

One popular explanation for differences in the frequency with which governments appoint bureaucratic elites points to the importance of political culture. Such explanations claim that the values of some societies are more open than others to government interference in bureaucratic appointments.

Such analysts frequently claim that political appointments are more acceptable in Southern European countries than in the Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway, and Finland or in Westminster countries (Sotiropoulos 2004).

In Canada, there is a strong tradition of explaining political behaviour, including patronage appointments (Noel 1987), as stemming from regional or provincial political culture (Simeon and Elkins 1974; Henderson 2004). A problematic issue with using culture to explain the politics of bureaucratic turnover, however, is that studies often claim that the particular province *they* are examining has a political culture favourable to political appointments. With so many provinces ostensibly having a cultural penchant for political appointments to the public service, cultural explanations cannot account for differences between provinces, nor can they say much about why within the same province new governments sometimes lead to a rise in bureaucratic turnover while at other times they do not. Appealing to political culture effectively offers a “just so” political explanation of bureaucratic turnover that fails to examine other possible factors, such as the preferences of governments or the institutional rules that possibly constrain their strategic behaviour.

Formal Political Institutions

Another popular political explanation of bureaucratic turnover focuses on how formal institutions limit the power of governments to appoint senior bureaucrats. Traditionally, the fusion of the legislative and executive branches of government, as well as the custom of party discipline – ensuring that members toe the party line – has meant that the heads of governments within the Westminster tradition have a great deal of power to appoint personnel to several political and administrative positions, including, ministers, senators, judges, ambassadors, partisan advisers, and senior bureaucrats (and, in Britain, even the head of the Church of England!).

In the past twenty years, however, some Westminster countries have introduced reforms limiting the first minister’s power to appoint senior bureaucrats. Presently, we can distinguish between two different types of appointment processes – the decisional body model and the advisory body model – which are summarized in Table 1.1.

In the decisional body model, which is found in New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, in the United Kingdom, an administrative body is involved at various stages of appointing administrative executives, including advertising, searching, interviewing, shortlisting, and, most essentially, selecting the

TABLE 1.1

Typology of executive appointment model in selected Westminster jurisdictions

State	Appointment model	Role of third party	Head of the public service	Role of first minister	First minister must justify decision	Transparency of process
New Zealand	Decisional body	State Services Commission: advertises for, interviews, and selects appointee	Advisory	Able to veto decision by commission	Yes	High
United Kingdom	Decisional body	Civil Service Commission: advertises for, interviews, recommends candidates; approves final selection	Advisory	Able to accept or veto decision by commission	No	Moderately low
Australia	Advisory body	Public Service Commission: advises first minister	Advisory	Appointment and dismissal	No	Low
Canada	Advisory body	Committee of Senior Officials: advises clerk of executive council of talent within civil service	Advisory	Appointment and dismissal	No	Low
Canadian provinces	Advisory body	Advises clerk of executive council of talent within civil service	Advisory	Appointment and dismissal	No	Low

Sources: Aucoin (2006); Matheson et al. (2007); Institute for Public Policy Research (2013); Paun, Harris, and Magee (2013).

successful candidate. In the United Kingdom, this decisional body is the Civil Service Commission, made up of commissioners and non-executive directors from outside the civil service. In New Zealand, this body is the State Services Commission. Although the chief executive of this commission consults with members of the government and the civil service, this person is solely responsible for searching for, shortlisting, interviewing, and selecting the successful candidate.

While the decisional body in these states completes most of the steps involved in hiring senior bureaucrats, the first minister retains the final say over who is appointed. In the United Kingdom, the prime minister must approve appointments and dismissals and is not obligated to justify his or her choice. In New Zealand, the final appointment of chief executives does not need the explicit approval of the prime minister, although the latter office retains the power to veto appointments. Unlike in the United Kingdom, however, the prime minister in New Zealand must publicly justify any decision to not appoint a recommendation put forward by the decisional body. To avoid the embarrassment of having a selection vetoed, the decisional body consults the prime minister and the minister of the relevant department while undertaking its work. While the decisional body model limits the first minister's involvement, these restrictions are not definitive: at any time, the prime minister can override the decisional body's choice.

In Australia and Canada, senior public servants are appointed according to an advisory body model. In this model, the advisory body, whose membership is fluid and selected by the first minister, provides the first minister with assistance in identifying and selecting candidates. The nature of this assistance, however, is strictly advisory. This body does not have the power to present the first minister with a final decision. In this system, the final selection is firmly in the first minister's hands. Whereas in the decisional body model, the process of identifying and selecting a candidate is outside the first minister's direct oversight (although the first minister is consulted), in the advisory body model, the first minister determines his or her own involvement in the process.

Ultimately, regardless of the selection process model, any constraint on the first minister rests upon that individual's good will to accept a limited role. Richard Rhodes's (1999, 353) proclamation that "there is no constitutional constraint on that executive [i.e., the first minister] beyond those it chooses to accept" remains an accurate description of that office's power to appoint senior bureaucrats in Westminster countries.

Accordingly, because formal institutions within Westminster countries do not effectively tie the hands of first ministers from appointing or dismissing senior public servants, explanations focusing on formal institutions cannot explain why some new governments in Westminster countries appoint a large number of senior bureaucrats while others do not. With so much power invested in first ministers, political explanations instead need to look at the preferences of governments to understand what motivates their actions.

Government Preferences: The Desire for Control

One of the most popular and efficient tactics at the disposal of governments to control the bureaucracy is the power to appoint senior bureaucrats. Beginning with Richard P. Nathan's (1983) *The Administrative Presidency*, and continuing with David E. Lewis's (2008) more recent *The Politics of Presidential Appointments*, most research studying the politics of bureaucratic appointments comes from the United States. In the United States, the president makes over 3,000 appointments to the bureaucracy, the vast majority of which are recruited from outside the civil service – a process that Heclo (1988) famously refers to as an “in-and-outer” system.

Although they have fewer appointments at their disposal, the power to appoint senior bureaucrats is also an important tactic of control for governments in parliamentary countries. Studying deputy minister turnover following a change in the governing party in Canada, Bourgault and Dion (1989, 126) claimed that, while there were some dismissals, most turnover was a mixture of horizontal reappointments, demotions, and promotions, all of which was a deliberate game of “musical chairs” aimed at signalling to bureaucrats that “their survival in office depends on the survival of the government.”

In theorizing about what motivates governments to appoint senior bureaucrats, researchers have heavily drawn on a particular theory of human behaviour – principal-agent theory (or agency theory, as it is also referred to) – which has led them to assume that a government wants senior bureaucrats who are, above all else, strongly committed to its policy agenda. This has led researchers to explain any rise in bureaucratic turnover following a change in government as stemming from governments' desire to control the behaviour of the bureaucracy. For these scholars, bureaucratic turnover is due to governments' “quest for control.”

Yet the assumptions that the quest for control perspective make about government preferences are problematic when we step back and try to understand the politics of bureaucratic turnover in historical periods prior

to the 1980s. We can understand better where the quest for control approach has gone wrong, and the assumptions it makes about the preferences of governments, by taking a closer look at the origins of principal-agent theory.

Agency Theory and Bureaucratic Turnover: Information Asymmetry, Goal Conflict, and the Ally Principle

First surfacing in political science in the 1970s (Mitnick 1973), principal-agent theory had, by 1980, become a prominent way to explain the relationship in which one actor (the principal) delegates responsibility for completing a task to another (the agent). Scholars quickly applied agency theory to one of the most vital instances of delegation in representative democracy: from the elected government to the unelected official.

Importantly, when used in analyses of the public sector, agency theory makes several assumptions about the preferences of governments, as well as the relationship that politicians have with public servants, which come from a body of economics research known as “public choice theory” (Parkinson 1957). A first assumption of agency theory is that politicians and civil servants want different things. Describing this goal conflict, William Niskanen (1971) pointed out that, by wanting to be re-elected, politicians seek to deliver policies that reflect the public’s interest, but unelected bureaucrats do not. Refuting the notion that administrators are primarily motivated by a desire to serve the public, Niskanen famously claimed that bureaucrats were “budget maximizers”:

It is impossible for any one bureaucrat to act in the public interest, because of the limits of his information and the conflicting interests of others, regardless of his personal motivations ... A bureaucrat who may not be personally motivated to maximize the budget of his bureau is usually driven by conditions both internal and external to the bureau to do just that. One should not be surprised, therefore (as I was initially), to hear the most dedicated bureaucrats describe their objectives as maximizing the budget for the particulars service(s) for which they are responsible. (39)

A second assumption of agency theory is that bureaucrats possess more information than do politicians. Describing this “information asymmetry,” Max Weber ([1946] 1958, 233) famously asserted:

Every bureaucracy seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intentions secret ... In facing a

parliament, the bureaucracy, out of pure power instinct, fights every attempt of the parliament to gain knowledge by means of its own experts or from interest groups. Bureaucracy naturally welcomes a poorly informed and hence a powerless parliament.

A third assumption of agency theory, known as the “ally principle,” is that governments want bureaucrats who will loyally execute tasks in conformity with the principal’s preferences. Governments thus look for allies who want to see the same type of policies as they do.

When these three assumptions – goal conflict, information asymmetry, and the ally principle – are brought together, agency theory leads us to believe that governments appoint bureaucrats to reduce goal conflict and information asymmetry, all the while strengthening loyalty to themselves and their policy agenda. As Anthony Downs (1967, 71–72) stated:

Personal loyalty to one’s superior, and from one’s subordinates, plays vital functional roles within a bureau. Its first role stems from the rarely discussed fact that all top-level officials (and many others) are frequently in danger of being embarrassed by revelations of their illegal acts, failures, lack of control over their subordinates and sheer incompetence. If their subordinates are *personally loyal* to them, they can rely upon those subordinates to be discreet in the handling of information dealing with these potentially scandalous matters. Therefore, in order to protect themselves, they tend to select subordinates who exhibit such loyalty ... Because superiors value *personal loyalty* in their subordinates, such loyalty is one of the qualities they look for when deciding whom to promote. (Emphasis added)

By paying attention to the preferences underpinning the actions of governments, agency theory has advanced our understanding of how governments control the bureaucracy. The problem is that this theory assumes that, when it comes to the bureaucracy, governments covet, above any other factor, bureaucrats who are committed to their policy agenda. Agency theory has thus led researchers to focus too much attention on trying to understand what factors increase a government’s appetite for control, while overlooking important matters such as the type of behaviour that governments are trying to cultivate.

Richard Waterman and Kenneth Meier (1998, 177) highlight the potential pitfalls of principal-agent theory:

While this principal-agent model has been well articulated, its assumptions rarely have been analyzed. The principal-agent literature in political science has paid little attention to these key elements, contending only that they exist and then going on to the other empirical questions at hand. Information and goal conflict both are treated as constants in the model, with little change over time or across settings. As a result the theory becomes static rather than dynamic and may force the analyst to frame questions in an inappropriate manner.

Further, when it comes to the politics of bureaucratic turnover, the quest for control perspective has generally continued to use a static version of agency theory that portrays governments as ubiquitously wanting, and trying, to cultivate commitment to their policy agenda among senior public servants.

In doing so, researchers overlook variation in the type of behaviour that governments are trying to cultivate, and focus instead on identifying those factors – such as a transition in government or the ideology of the governing party – that heighten governments' desire for control.

Political Dynamics and the Desire for Control

Change in Party

In his history of the British civil service, Harry Parris (1969, 27) explains the meaning of permanency in the Westminster tradition, claiming that “permanence in a civil servant means something more than security of tenure or the mere retention of a job for a long time. It means the retention of that job during a change in government.” A major tenet of research into the politics of bureaucratic turnover, however, is that new governments tend to question the willingness of officials, who, but a short time ago, had worked for another party, to provide enthusiastic and impartial service. Thus, from the quest for control perspective, a change in party is alleged to be a central factor leading to a rise in bureaucratic turnover.

Change in Premier

Since the writings of John Mackintosh (1962) and Richard Crossman (1963) first alleged that power within government was moving away from the cabinet and the party caucus and toward the first minister, research on parliamentary systems has observed a centralization of prime ministerial power

(Thomas and Lewis 2019). In *The British Cabinet*, Mackintosh (1962, 451) asserted:

The position and power of the PM has been the focal point of modern cabinets. This has not been due to the personality of any particular premier or to any personal desires to arrogate power. The explanation lies in several aspects of the British political system. The Prime Minister has a leading place in the eyes of the public and has increased his control of appointments and promotions within the government.

The reasons for the centralization of first ministerial power are multifaceted and varied. In addition to globalization, the expanded size of the state, the weakening of partisan cleavages in society, and the era of the 24/7 news cycle, a key factor is the personalization of politics and the amplified responsibility party leaders now shoulder for the electoral performance of their party (Aarts, Blais, and Schmitt 2013). In *Governing from the Centre*, Donald J. Savoie (1999, 80) states that

winning candidates on the government side know full well that their party leader's performance in the election campaign explains in large measure why they themselves were elected ... It should come as no surprise then that if the leader is able to secure a majority mandate it is assumed that the party is in his debt, and not the other way around.

In keeping with the assumption that they are due a great deal of credit for the electoral success of their party, first ministers are more likely to unilaterally make policy decisions (Cross and Blais 2012). Newly elected first ministers are therefore more likely to seek increased control within the executive. With an individualized style of governance centred on the first minister, being a member of the same party as the previous premier is no longer enough of a guarantee that a bureaucrat will automatically be loyal to a new premier. According to this view, even when the party remains unchanged, a change in the head of government has just as much of an effect on bureaucratic turnover as a change in party (Christensen, Klemmensen, and Opstrup 2014).

Variation on a Theme: Differences in the Type of Government Change

While a transition in the governing party and a change in the head of government are the most prominent political variables believed by some

researchers to augment governments' desire for control, and therein to lead to a rise in bureaucratic turnover, other analysts have focused on differences in the type of government change – specifically, the political ideology of the new government and the number of years the previous government was in power.

Ideology

Some analysts claim that the extent to which a new government seeks to control bureaucrats depends on its political ideology. Preferring that goods and services be provided via a free market rather than being state controlled, governments on the ideological right are more suspicious of bureaucrats whose careers are linked to state programs. Blais, Blake, and Dion (1997) examined the relationship that public sector employees in Canada, Britain, France, and the United States have with political parties and found that governments on the left treat bureaucrats more favourably than do governments on the right. That said, studies investigating the link between ideology and bureaucratic turnover have not found much of a relationship between these factors outside of the United States (Rouban 2004; Dahlström and Niklasson 2013).

Time since a Change in Party

For some observers, the degree to which new governments embark on a quest to control the bureaucracy depends on how long the previous party was in power. Years of dominance by the same governing party can lead opposition parties to view the bureaucracy as being closely tied to the political agenda of the government, resulting in a large rise in bureaucratic turnover once a change in party finally takes place (Derlien 1988). An example of this thinking is found in a memorandum that a political operative sent to Brian Mulroney shortly after he took power:

The Liberal Party, in office for 20 years out of 21 up to 1984, built the public service that we have inherited ... It is idle to think that these men and women, who have spent most of their public service careers designing and implementing the Trudeau-Pitfield approach to government, could suddenly become strongly committed to radically altering their own creation. (Quoted in Newman 2005, 545)

Studying deputy minister turnover in Canada's federal bureaucracy, Bour-gault and Dion (1989) note that, after decades of rule by the Liberal Party,

Prime Minister Mulroney did indeed remove thirty-two incumbents: “This series of transfers was seen as a way of quickly establishing political control of bureaucrats. Administrative officials judged too imbedded with the thinking of the previous government or too compromised by some of the government’s policies were expelled from their lairs” (144).

The Theoretical Shortcomings of the Quest for Control

The central problem with the quest for control explanation of bureaucratic turnover is that the strategic appointment of senior bureaucrats has not always been aimed at cultivating commitment to the government’s policy agenda. Nor is it accurate to say that governments began to strategically appoint senior bureaucrats only in the 1980s.

Governments have always been interested in the behaviour of bureaucrats. But the type of behaviour they have wanted senior bureaucrats to display has shifted over the course of the twentieth century. Reflecting Dwight Waldo’s insights, found in this chapter’s epigraph, about the close rapport between our theoretical explanations of public administration and the larger social context, the accuracy of the quest for control theory to explain bureaucratic turnover is therefore limited, at best, to the contemporary managerial era of governance in which it developed.

There is a need for scholars to rethink the politics of administrative appointments that moves beyond trying to understand the factors that lead governments to desire more control. To better understand the political motivations of governments, we need a theory that pays greater attention to the social and historical context in which governments formulate their preferences. The next chapter does just this, by developing a new political explanation of administrative turnover that considers the different behaviours that governments have tried to cultivate among senior bureaucrats upon taking power by deliberately appointing, dismissing, or retaining senior public servants.

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