
Original Article

Partisan and professional control: Predictors of bureaucratic tenure in Germany

Julia Fleischer

Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen, P.O. Box 7802, 5020 Bergen, Norway.

E-mail: julia.fleischer@uib.no

Abstract This paper analyses the patterns of bureaucratic tenure of the German federal bureaucratic elite. It applies a delegation theory and a Public Service Bargain perspective and argues that partisan and professional determinants influence the bureaucratic tenure. Our survival analysis shows that partisan features matter, yet differently than suggested by existing research: top officials affiliated with the minister's party have a significant higher risk of dismissal than those affiliated to other parties and non-partisans. In contrast, the temporal proximity between ministerial and top official appointments has no significant effects on bureaucratic tenure. In addition, professional determinants shape bureaucratic survival. Whereas the minister's office experience is insignificant for bureaucratic survival, the top official's office experience has significant and negative effects on the risk of dismissal: individuals with prior experience in managing bureaucratic apparatuses survive longer than those without such office experience. We conclude that German ministers are more likely to dismiss senior civil servants due to their unsatisfying office experience than their incongruent or lacking partisan affiliation.

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Introduction

A common way for politicians to control the permanent bureaucracy is to appoint top officials balancing their political requests with bureaucratic expertise (Dogan, 1975; Aberbach *et al.*, 1981; Page and Wright, 1999). Yet ministers are limited in monitoring how senior civil servants carry out their important role in executive



politics. Public administration scholars argue that administrative institutions shape successful delegation, either considered as rather hierarchical interactions (Rouban, 2003; Dahlström and Niklasson, 2013) or as public service bargains (Hood, 2002; Hood and Lodge, 2006). Coalition researchers emphasise the relevance of political parties for the scope and depth of patronage in civil service systems as a control and a reward mechanism at the bureaucratic top level (Kopecký *et al.*, 2012). From both perspectives, party membership of senior officials facilitates interactions because it informs on preferences and loyalty. However, we lack systematic evidence about the relevance of partisan features for the delegation between ministers and top officials, particularly in contrast to other determinants. This paper aims to provide such a systematic analysis, examining the German federal bureaucratic elite as a crucial case most likely to experience partisan and professional determinants in bureaucratic survival.

This paper adds to the scholarly debate on the politics of bureaucratic elite delegation in three ways. Firstly, it applies a theoretical argument from the delegation literature that is increasingly used for parliamentary systems (e.g. Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014) but stresses also the importance of actors' capabilities involved in the delegation relationship. Secondly, it focuses on bureaucratic tenure as a very suitable phenomenon for studying the partisan influence on the delegation between ministers and top officials. The literature on bureaucratic survival is growing (Wood and Marchbanks III, 2008; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014) but many studies on bureaucratic elites focus on their selection and turnover (Bertelli, 2007; Lewis, 2007, 2008). Lastly, this paper analyses bureaucratic tenure in the German federal bureaucracy as a crucial case where partisan features are expected to matter alongside other determinants because senior civil service positions are rather uncontested areas for political appointments and officeholders are permitted to join political parties while at the same time the German bureaucracy is regarded to follow the Weberian ideal type emphasising the relevance of expertise and professionalism at all levels (Derlien, 2003).

Following delegation theory and the public service bargain perspective, we argue that partisan features as well as the office capabilities of ministers and top officials influence bureaucratic tenure. Our survival analysis shows that the partisan affiliation of top officials and their distinct office experience have significant effects on their tenure. By contrast, the temporal distance between ministerial and top executive appointments as well as the minister's office experience are less relevant. More importantly, the affiliation to the minister's party shows opposite effects on bureaucratic survival than argued in the existing literature, i.e. officeholders affiliated with the minister's party are more likely to be removed than those lacking such an affiliation. Although this result contradicts existing scholarship on public managers' survival (e.g. Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014), it can also serve as an indicator for the relevance of links between ministerial and top official careers – and senior civil servants affiliated with the minister's party may fail earlier than others



because their political patrons leave office. Moreover, it shows that German ministers are more likely to dismiss senior civil servants because of their deficient office experience rather than due to an incongruent or lacking partisan affiliation.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section introduces the theoretical argument, based upon the delegation literature but emphasising also actor-oriented characteristics. The third section outlines the research design and data used for this analysis. The fourth section presents the empirical findings on bureaucratic survival in the German federal bureaucracy. The paper concludes that bureaucratic tenure is influenced by the party affiliation as well as the office experience of top officials, revealing the importance of both partisan and professional determinants for bureaucratic survival.

Theoretical Framework

It is almost a truism in comparative politics and public administration research that ministers and top officials are interdependent, as principals and agents in the chain of delegation in democratic systems (Huber, 2000) or as negotiation partners in a public service bargain (PSB; Hood, 2002; Hood and Lodge, 2006). In the classical repetition of delegation theory, ministers as principals aim to diminish potential conflicts of interest and asymmetries of information by selecting top officials as their agents that are compliant to their preferences (Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991). From this perspective, the dismissal of senior civil servants is understood as the ultimate sanction for non-compliant behaviour or as a way to make room for a new agent with comparatively stronger compliance to the minister's needs (see Bertelli, 2007; Lewis, 2007, 2008; Dahlström and Niklasson, 2013).

The PSB perspective pays more attention to the two actors and their skills and capabilities, claiming that the sanctions-and-rewards orientation may be less pronounced than predicted by the delegation literature. Although such 'agency type bargains' may exist, intrinsic motivations as well as dominant role perceptions of civil servants as guarantors of the common good are argued to diminish potential interest conflicts to an extent where competence and loyalty are equally if not more important goods that are conveyed in 'trustee type bargains' (Hood, 2002; Hood and Lodge, 2006, pp. 24–25). Here, loyalty not only relates to the minister but also to the distinct office. Furthermore, this approach emphasises the occurrence of blame games and thus adds another motive for bureaucratic dismissal, namely to pin blame and, *inter alia*, secure ministerial survival.

Following delegation theory, ministers are interested in selecting and keeping top officials for controlling the permanent bureaucracy according to their preferences, which can be best expressed by an affiliation to their own party (Müller, 2000; Lewis, 2007, 2008). These dynamics are further strengthened in

parliamentary systems with changing coalition partners where cabinets are collectives of individual ministers leading ministerial departments (Andeweg, 1997). So far, the effects of these dynamics on delegation relationships within the executive have been studied in the context of divided government (Epstein and O'Halloran, 1996, 1999; Lewis, 2007, 2008). If we assume that top officials are not only appointed for patronage but also for controlling the permanent bureaucracy, it is plausible that ministers influence bureaucratic tenure in order to reduce their own agency loss, even though the coalition party may face these consequences (similarly: Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014). By contrast, officeholders affiliated to another governing party (in coalition governments), an opposition party or without any party affiliation are more likely to depart from the minister's preferences and thus are less suitable agents for controlling the permanent bureaucracy. In a similar vein, the patronage debate argues that ministers and top officials engage in patron–client relationships in order to exchange office rewards with partisan loyalty (Meyer-Sahling and Jáger, 2012; Kopecký *et al.*, 2012).

From the PSB perspective, favouring top officials affiliated to the minister's party can be regarded as a 'party-political bias in selection' (Hood, 2002, p. 161), diluting the established bargains over loyalty, competency and rewards. Disregard which type of bargain is in use, the partisan alignment of top officials turns attention towards partisan loyalty and can be argued to be rewarded by ministers, e.g. with bureaucratic tenure (see Peters and Pierre, 2004). It follows that top officials affiliated to the minister's party should face a lower risk to be removed than those lacking such an affiliation. Hence,

H1 Top officials are less likely to be removed if they are affiliated with the minister's party.

In addition, the patronage debate highlights the explanatory relevance of personal allegiances shaping the delegation between ministers and top officials. These authors claim that office rewards are also given to individuals because of their personal ties to their political masters (Meyer-Sahling, 2006; Kopecký *et al.*, 2012). As a consequence, top officials with strong personal loyalties are argued to survive longer in office than those without personal allegiances to the minister. Also the PSB perspective discusses personal loyalties and stresses that these may affect bureaucratic survival up to a point where it is fully linked to the minister and her fate in government, thus reiterating the argument made above that interactions between ministerial and bureaucratic careers shape bureaucratic survival (Hood and Lodge, 2006, p. 112).

The scholarly debate on patronage and politicisation is still discussing reasonable measurements for such personal connections (see Kopecký *et al.*, 2012). We follow the politicisation debate and argue that the temporal proximity between ministerial and bureaucratic appointments may not only indicate politicisation in general but also such personal loyalties in particular. To be sure, ministers may be motivated to



appoint personal allies throughout their ministerial tenure. However, it is reasonable to assume that patronage appointments related to personal ties are most likely after the minister came into office, *inter alia* because ministers cannot predict how long they will serve and thus how many opportunities for such appointments they may have. Thus,

H2 Top officials are less likely to be removed if they are appointed shortly after the minister took office.

The delegation literature highlights not only the principal's costs in screening and selecting agents but also her costs in monitoring the agent's behaviour (Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991; Wood and Marchbanks III, 2008). The usual response to these costs is relying upon other actors and their monitoring of the agent, either on a regular or situational basis (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984). In addition, the checks and balances in a political system may provide additional means to ensure the agent's compliance. For the delegation between ministers and top officials, one could discuss similar means for monitoring the compliance of senior civil servants to the minister's needs, once the delegation has been established. Next to other ministry officials in the same portfolio as well as other senior civil servants from other portfolios offering rather situational monitoring, audit offices provide regular accounts of bureaucrat's behaviour. However, one of the most straightforward means is arguably the minister's own capability to monitor bureaucratic behaviour. One may argue that ministers' capacities are heavily spent on other business than monitoring their immediate bureaucratic subordinates (Müller-Rommel, 1984). Yet, ministers differ in their exercising of political leadership and particularly their individual capacities to formulate their demands towards senior civil servants but likewise to assess whether these demands have been met (see Peters and Helms, 2012). If ministers gathered such experience in taking political responsibility for bureaucratic organisations prior to the top official's appointment, they can draw upon this experience in monitoring their agent and are better equipped of detecting non-compliant behaviour themselves, which they may sanction with bureaucratic dismissal. In contrast, ministers without office experience have to rely upon other monitoring mechanisms which may work as sufficient but do come with additional costs.

So far, the wide-ranging literature on ministerial selection discusses ministers' office experience primarily 'upwards', *i.e.* ministers are examined as agents selected by political parties or prime ministers as their principals and their office experience is argued to satisfy requests emerging from the negotiations between governing parties over offices and policies as well as from prime ministers balancing their cabinets (Dowding and Dumont, 2009). The similar 'downwards' effect of office experience within the general chain of delegation has not been discussed so far, but is likewise reasonable: in our study ministers' office experience shapes their delegation interactions with top officials, facilitating monitoring and increasing the likelihood of bureaucratic dismissal. Therefore,



H3 Top officials are more likely to be removed if the minister holds office experience.

The office experience of senior civil servants can be regarded as particularly relevant to ministers, especially if we presume that ministers aim to control the permanent bureaucracy with their appointments at the top echelons of ministerial departments. Given the primacy of office experience for bureaucratic authority (Weber, 1921/1980) and the importance of knowledge over bureaucratic structures and procedures for running the machinery of government, top officials with such skills are arguably requested by cabinet ministers who are held accountable for their ministries (Page and Wright, 1999).

In a similar vein, the PSB perspective discusses actor capabilities with a focus on the skills, abilities and experiences of civil servants (Hood and Lodge, 2006, p. 86). They argue that top officials exchange their office experience with ministers in ‘competency bargains’ and as the notion of a bargain already suggests, ministers demand the office competencies in order to compensate for shortage of their own competencies in this regard. It is reasonable to assume that senior civil servants holding strong office experience are, by and large, more attractive officeholders to ministers. Consequently, we assume that the top civil servants’ office experience in managing bureaucratic apparatuses is a major determinant of bureaucratic survival. Hence,

H4 Top officials are less likely to be removed if they hold office experience.

Research Design and Data

To study the relevance of partisan effects in comparison to other determinants for survival at the top level of ministerial bureaucracies, we analyse the tenure of senior civil servants in Germany between 1949 and 2013. In Germany, cabinet ministers exercise individual ministerial responsibility, providing them with wide-ranging responsibility for their own portfolio (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1975). This principle covers also the selection and de-selection of senior civil servants, although formally the government decides about the appointments (§15 GOBReg [2002]; see below). Moreover, an analysis throughout the complete post-war period in Germany allows variation in the partisan composition of governments, covering the traditional coalitions between one of the two catch-all parties CDU/CSU or SPD with one of the smaller parties, the FDP or the Greens as well as the two Grand Coalitions between CDU/CSU and SPD during the late 1960s and the mid-2000s.

The appointment of ‘political civil servants’ (politische Beamte) in Germany dates back to the 1848 revolution in Prussia when administrative officials at the top level were politically appointed because the newly established parliament aimed to



increase its political control over a permanent bureaucracy that was allegedly disconnected to the new government's political programme (Kugele, 1976, pp. 20–24; Derlien, 1996, p. 157). This cadre of political appointees was re-introduced at the top level of the German federal ministerial bureaucracy in spring 1950 after severe discussions in cabinet, also due to Chancellor Adenauer's strong requests, later exerting considerable influence on the first recruitments (Wengst, 1984, pp. 150, 157). Soon, the individual cabinet ministers became involved in the recruitment and dismissal of political civil servants in federal ministries, although all appointments must be formally submitted to the federal government for approval in advance (§15 GOBReg [2002]; Goetz, 1997, p. 771). More importantly, these political civil servants can be put on temporary retirement at any point in time and without justification because their senior position inside the federal bureaucracy is argued to require their full agreement with the goals of the government (Kugele, 1976, pp. 10–11; Steinkemper, 1979; Mayntz, 1984, p. 183).

Since 1953, the members of this group of political civil servants are defined by the Federal Civil Service Law, comprising approx. 150 officeholders (§54 BBG [2009]), including all administrative state secretaries and division heads in federal ministries, high-ranking civil servants in the foreign service, ambassadors and top officials in the intelligence services (§54 BBG [2009]). Political civil servants are not appointed as such but move into this special category by promotion or recruitment to the corresponding pay grade and rank (Kugele, 1976; Steinkemper, 1979; Mayntz, 1984, pp. 183–184). By and large, the majority of top officials is recruited by internal promotion and thus enjoys considerable office experience in running the bureaucratic apparatus (Derlien, 2003).

In practice, the turnover of German administrative state secretaries after changes in the party composition of federal governments appears not to follow a series of 'nights of the long knives' (see Table 1). Whereas after the government turnover in 1969 the new coalition of Social Democrats and the Liberal Party replaced almost 70 % of all officeholders (see also Dyson, 1979, p. 135; Derlien, 1984), a slightly lower share has been replaced after the general election in 1998, when both governing parties left office for the new coalition of Social Democrats and the Green Party. For all other government changes, the turnover of top officials was

Table 1: Bureaucratic turnover after party changes in government, 1949–2013

	1969	1982	1998	2005	2009	2013
No. of appointments	13	10	15	14	14	9
No. of positions	19	20	23	24	24	24
Turnover	68.4 %	50.0 %	65.2 %	58.3 %	58.3 %	37.5 %

Note: The length of the transition period is nine months. The figures include all administrative state secretaries in German federal ministries.

Source: Own dataset.



rather moderate, between 50 and 60 % of all administrative state secretaries were sent to temporary retirement. Although these total numbers and shares do not account for the type of dismissal and thus also include officeholders who reached the formal pension age, the average age of those top officials dismissed after a party change in government is not considerably lower (or higher) than the overall average across all officeholders in our analysis.

The dataset for our analysis was constructed by collecting individual-level data on all administrative state secretaries serving in German federal ministries. We excluded the administrative state secretaries in the Office of the Federal President and the Federal Chancellery and the Federal Press and Information Office, which service no departmental ministers but the Federal President and the Federal Chancellor, respectively. We gathered information on the individuals' tenure, their party affiliation and additional socio-demographic data, based upon civil service directories, governments' bulletins and annual handbooks as well as biographical archives. Similarly, information on the appointing ministers was collected from governments' official bulletins as well as biographical handbooks and archives.

The dependent variable in our analysis is the tenure of top officials in their first appointment measured in days, defined as their uninterrupted first spell that may span across several ministries and cabinets. We included all administrative state secretaries who were appointed for the first time into this office between 1949 and 2013. The observations have been right censored if an individual administrative state secretary did not leave office by the end of our time period of analysis when the current grand coalition of the conservative CDU/CSU and the Social Democratic Party took office in late 2013.

In total, 373 individuals had been appointed as administrative state secretary at the federal ministries, experiencing 316 first spells. Although 49 individuals served in more than one ministry during their first spell, only seven of those headed three or more – which shows the empirically dominant portfolio orientation in German top officials' bureaucratic careers. Only ten individuals have been revitalised after they had been sent to temporary retirement, thus experiencing a time gap between their first and a subsequent spell. These revivals occur more often under recent governments, arguably related to the more frequent changes in governing parties after general elections since the late 1990s. However, we included those officeholders in our analysis only with their first spell.

A first descriptive overview shows that more than a third of all administrative state secretaries left office by the end of their fourth year, which equals the average length of a legislative period in Germany (see Figure 1). The rest of the officeholders stay longer in office; a larger number of senior civil servants leave office after approx. 5.5 years.

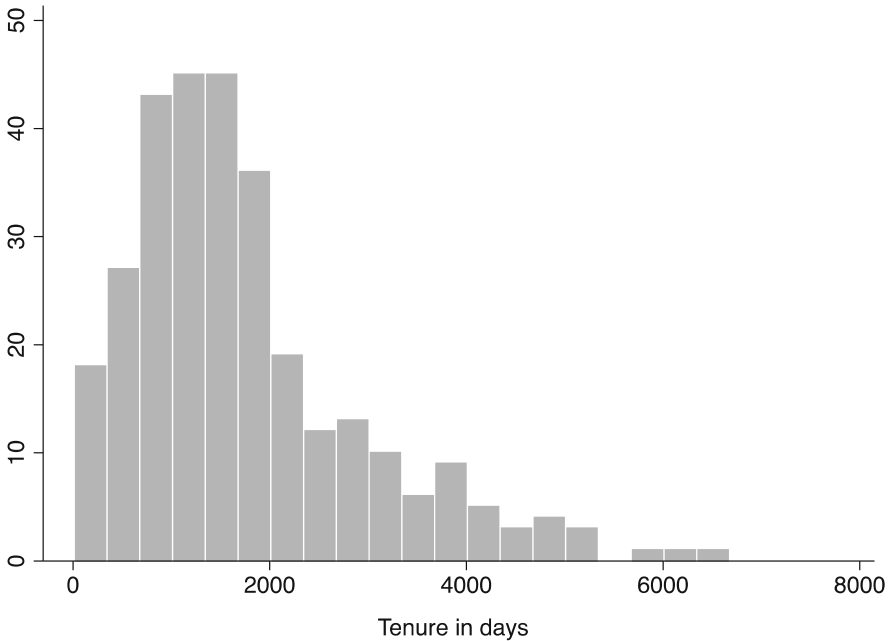


Figure 1: Distribution of bureaucratic tenure.

Note: Mean = 1740.61 days; standard deviation = 1187.51 days.

The independent variables related to partisan and professional determinants of bureaucratic survival have been measured as follows (see Table 3). To identify the party affiliation of officeholders, we followed previous research and considered not only formal party membership but included also those individuals who had worked in party headquarters and party bodies or for parliamentary parties prior their appointment (see Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014). The affiliation with the minister's party was measured as a dummy variable. Of all administrative state secretaries in our study, approx. 46.1 % were affiliated to the minister's party, another 12.6 % were affiliated to the coalition party, and 40.2 % were non-partisans; only three individuals were affiliated to an opposition party. Regarding the group of officeholders with discernable party ties, 86 individuals were affiliated to the conservative CDU/CSU, 70 to the SPD, 20 to the liberal FDP and four to the Green Party. The temporal distance between the minister's first appointment and the appointment date of the top official was calculated in days. A first descriptive look reveals the high standard deviation of this variable, which is arguably related to the variation in ministerial tenure in Germany (see Fischer *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, we standardised this variable by performing a z -transformation.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of independent variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Affiliation with the minister's party (yes = 1)	301	0.46	0.50	0.00	1.00
Distance to minister's first spell (days)	301	1,102.71	1,730.48	0.00	9,908.00
Minister's office experience (yes = 1)	301	0.72	0.45	0.00	1.00
Top official's office experience (yes = 1)	301	0.86	0.35	0.00	1.00
Control variables					
Age (years)	301	52.37	6.57	32.70	67.63
Gender (female = 1)	301	0.04	0.20	0.00	1.00

The office experience of ministers was measured as a dummy variable, assessing whether the minister held a senior public sector position prior to her appointment (Bäck *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, the office experience of top officials was measured as a dummy variable, determining whether the individual held top positions in federal or state public sector organisations before her appointment as an administrative state secretary. The descriptives of these two independent variables show that the German federal government organisation is populated by 'bureaucratic experts', i.e. approx. 72.1 % of all ministers have previous office experience in leading ministerial departments or agencies at federal or state level. For senior civil servants, approx. 85.6 % have previous office experience in managing bureaucratic apparatuses before their first appointment to a federal ministry, most often as division heads in federal ministries or as administrative state secretaries in state ministries (Manow, 2005, p. 260). As control variables, we specified age and gender (Table 2).

Empirical Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the party affiliation of all newly appointed administrative state secretaries across cabinets, defined as governments led by a particular prime minister (Lijphart, 1999), shows several dynamics over time (see Figure 2). Across cabinets, the share of non-partisans fluctuated and dropped only under 50 % during the 1960s and 1970s as well as during the late 1990s, in both time periods the Social Democratic Party came into office after a longer period of Conservative governments. In addition, no general trend emerges regarding the party affiliations of top officials in Germany. If any, the share of non-partisans increases during the more recent legislative periods – which may indicate that if patronage occurs, it will be less oriented towards party affiliation and more towards personal allegiances (see John and Poguntke, 2012, p. 132).

Moreover, the partisan affiliation of administrative state secretaries corresponds to the coalition parties in power, i.e. after general elections with government

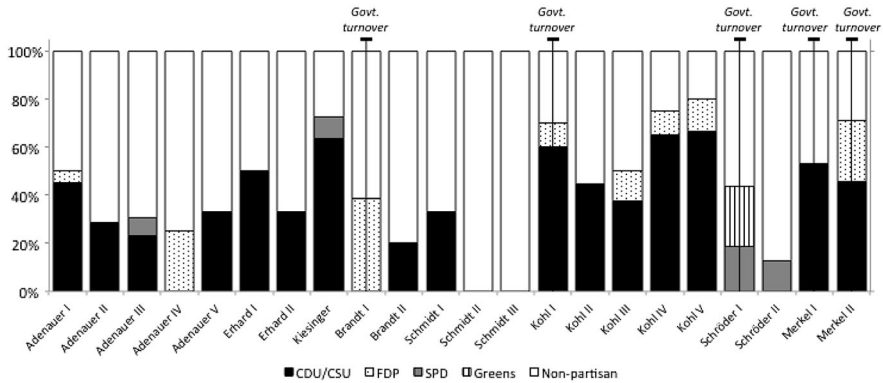


Figure 2: Party affiliation of newly appointed top officials, 1949–2013.

turnover, the number of newly appointed administrative state secretaries with a party membership of one of the two coalition parties is comparatively high. Yet, these figures have to be further distinguished between the larger and the smaller coalition partner, which usually form the minimum-winning coalitions in Germany. Whereas the Liberal Party (FDP) as the smaller coalition partner of the conservatives managed to have at best 20 % of all administrative state secretaries with a party membership in office, the Greens, coalescing with the Social Democrats, brought only less than 10 % of party members into the top level of German federal ministries.

Following this analysis, one may expect a rather dynamic interplay between partisan and other motives in bureaucratic survival in Germany. Put differently: given the comparatively larger number of officeholders without a party membership, partisan dismissal motives alone are not a convincing explanation – especially since in principle all offices are available for partisan appointment. It is reasonable to assume that bureaucratic survival is also related to professional characteristics of the two actors involved.

To gauge the effects of our explanatory features on the instantaneous probability that a top official is dismissed, we estimate different Cox proportional hazard regressions (Cox, 1972). We censored observations if top officials survived the last general election in 2013. The Cox approach allows us to perform the analyses by providing sufficient estimates of the regression coefficients close to the results that would have been generated by the correct parametric model and thus we did not have to specify the parametric shape of the baseline hazard over time a priori (see Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn, 2001). Cox regression assumes that hazards are proportional over time, i.e. the effects of the covariates do not change over the time period of our analysis. We performed a test of all covariates showing that no variables violate this assumption.



Our first model relates to the partisan determinants of bureaucratic survival and indicates that, all else being equal, the affiliation to the minister's party has a significant yet positive effect on the likelihood of top officials to be dismissed (see Table 3). In contrast to our hypothesis drawn from delegation theory and the existing literature on bureaucratic survival, the hazard of removal is approx. 48.6 % higher for officeholders affiliated to the minister's party in comparison to those lacking such a party affiliation. Put differently: top officials with a discernable formal party congruence with their ministers have significantly shorter tenure than those without such party congruence. By contrast, the temporal proximity between the minister's first spell and the appointment of the senior civil servant, which we used as a proxy for personal allegiances, has no significant effects on the risk of dismissal, although the coefficients show the predicted positive sign.

To provide a more intuitive presentation of the major finding emerging from model 1 on the effects of the affiliation to the minister's party on bureaucratic survival, we plotted the survival function for different groups of officeholders over time (see Figure 3). All estimations are based on model 1, with all remaining covariates held at their means. The curve for the top officials affiliated to the minister's party and the curve for the non-partisans are almost identical, revealing that we could not detect significant differences in our analysis. However, the third survival curve of officeholders affiliated to the coalition party shows some differences to the other two groups, especially if we consider the individuals with longer tenure. All else being equal, 75 % of officeholders affiliated with an opposition party stay 834 days longer in office than 75 % of their counterparts affiliated to the minister's party or lacking any identifiable party ties.¹

Table 3: Predictors of bureaucratic tenure: Cox proportional hazard regressions

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Affiliation with the minister's party	-0.316*** (-0.122)		0.253*** (0.125)
Distance to minister's first appointment	-0.002 (-0.001)		-0.002 (0.001)
Minister's office experience		0.075 (0.131)	0.102 (0.138)
Top official's office experience		-0.471*** (0.162)	-0.396*** (0.166)
Age	0.046*** (0.012)	0.042*** (0.011)	0.049*** (0.011)
Gender	0.520 (0.325)	0.519 (0.324)	0.496 (0.325)
<i>N</i>	301	301	301
Log likelihood	-1429.9	-1417.8	-1415.6

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

Note: Entries are coefficients from Cox proportional hazard regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses.

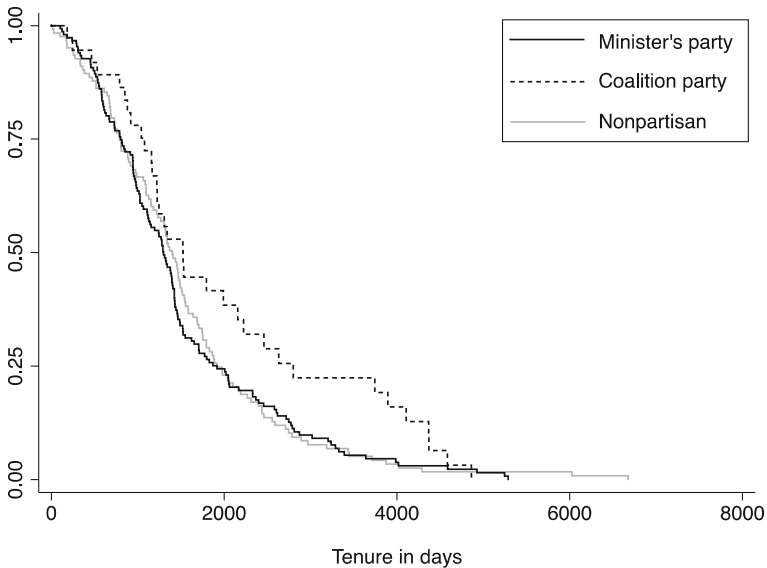


Figure 3: Survival functions contingent upon party affiliation.

The second model shows the results for the professional determinants of bureaucratic survival and addresses the professional capabilities of ministers and top officials. All else equal, the ministers' office experience at the time of the top official's appointment has no significant effects, although the coefficient shows the predicted positive sign. By contrast, the top official's office experience has a significant negative effect on their survival, i.e. senior civil servants with office experience in managing bureaucratic apparatuses prior to their first appointment have approx. 45.6 % less likelihood to be dismissed in comparison to the group of senior officials lacking such an office experience when they have been recruited into the administrative top jobs.

Our final model combines the partisan and professional determinants for bureaucratic survival and supports the results of our previous two models. It shows that both partisan and professional features maintain their relevance as strongest and robust predictors for top official survival. All else equal, the affiliation to the minister's party has a significant and positive effect on the likelihood of dismissal, i.e. top officials affiliated to their minister's party are approx. 39.7 % more likely to be removed than those officeholders affiliated to the coalition party, an opposition party or those without any discernable party ties. Similarly, the office experience of senior civil servants has a significant negative effect on the risk of dismissal: individual officeholders with prior knowledge of how to run a bureaucratic apparatus have approx. 32.8 % less likelihood to be dismissed than their colleagues lacking such office experience.



By contrast, the other partisan and professional determinants show also in our final model no significant effects. In more detail, the temporal proximity between the minister's first appointment and the bureaucratic appointment has no significant influence on bureaucratic survival although the coefficient shows the predicted positive sign. Likewise, the minister's individual office experience in leading public sector organisations shows no significant effect on the likelihood of dismissal although the coefficient shows the predicted negative sign.

The analysis of bureaucratic survival of German administrative state secretaries shows that partisan features do have an influence but also professional characteristics of senior civil servants matter. Therefore, the patronage literature emphasising the relevance of partisan features and the PSB perspective highlighting the competencies and skills of actors involved are both relevant explanatory perspectives to understand the complex nature of bureaucratic survival. It is striking, though, that both predictors of bureaucratic survival in the German federal bureaucracy maintain their significant effects across all models, suggesting that indeed only a combination of both can explain the politics of bureaucratic de-selection.

The basic traits of the German federal bureaucratic elite are rather similar to others in European parliamentary systems, i.e. they work for cabinet ministers exercising ministerial responsibility, *inter alia* by selecting and dismissing top officials, and they are formally permitted to join political parties. Therefore, our empirical findings on bureaucratic survival at the top echelons of the German ministerial bureaucracy present a crucial case and it is reasonable to expect that our major findings, namely that partisan and professional determinants matter for bureaucratic survival, are likewise significant elsewhere.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the growing literature on delegation relationships within ministerial bureaucracies. It adds to the debates in comparative politics and public administration research by contrasting the relevance of partisan features with professional characteristics of the two key actors involved. Its aims to explain bureaucratic survival in Germany and its large-N analysis of German top officials reveal that partisan and professional features influence bureaucratic survival. However, the top official's affiliation to the minister's party influences bureaucratic survival with the opposite direction than expected by the theoretical literature on delegation: a congruent party affiliation of administrative state secretaries and their ministers have a significant and robust positive effect on the risk of being removed: those individuals affiliated with their minister's party are more likely to be dismissed than those without such a party congruence, i.e. those affiliated to the coalition party, to an opposition party or the non-partisans.



Two interpretations seem plausible. First, the party congruence of top officials and ministers matters less because of the German tradition of minimum-winning coalitions, presuming that also party members from the coalition party satisfy German ministers as top officials, especially if they are appointed as a mean to exert political control over the permanent bureaucracy. Second, the plotted survival functions of the three largest groups of officeholders, i.e. administrative state secretaries affiliated to their minister's party, affiliated to the coalition party and non-partisans, show a larger difference in survival patterns for those affiliated to the coalition party in comparison to the other two groups. This finding may indicate the relevance of top official appointments and dismissals as additional inter-party controls in coalition governments in Germany (see Thies, 2001). Accordingly, ministers are restrained by coalition politics to dismiss those top officials affiliated to their coalition partner. However, we lack more qualitative knowledge about these dismissal events and the empirical relevance of coalition parties therein. The institutional context requires that these decisions are put on cabinet agendas but the dominant principle of ministerial responsibility should act as a considerable barrier to pressures on such decisions by other ministers, disregarding of whether they are in the same party or the coalition party. Nevertheless, the puzzling negative effect of top officials' affiliation to their minister's party is a key result of our study calling for further empirical investigation, especially in a cross-country analysis.

More importantly, our study contrasts the explanatory relevance of such partisan features with professional characteristics, most notably the individual competencies and skills of the political and bureaucratic officeholders. The analysis shows that the office experience of ministers has no significant relevance for bureaucratic tenure. In contrast, the professional capabilities of senior civil servants have significant and robust negative effects on the risk of bureaucratic de-selection: those individuals with office experience have significantly lower risks of dismissal compared to those lacking such experience in managing bureaucratic apparatuses. Giving the considerable number of ministers with office experience themselves, this finding also shows that ministers deliberately decide to select and keep a second actor with profound office experience to the top level of ministerial departments – presumably because they are aware that such knowledge over bureaucratic structures and procedures is a key resource in executive politics.

About the Author

Julia Fleischer is an Associate Professor at the Department of Administration and Organization Theory at the University of Bergen. She conducts comparative



research on bureaucratic elites and the structural and procedural dynamics within central government organisations as well as executive-legislative relations across Europe.

Note

- 1 We also specified a model on top official's affiliation with the coalition party but it showed no statistically significant effects.

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