

# **BUREAUCRATS**

*Comparative Politics*

Guillermo Toral

IE University

# What we'll cover today

- Research design assignment

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- How bureaucrats matter

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- Case and group exercise: Regulating big tech

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- **Be ambitious with your empirical strategy** – remember you don't need to execute it. It needs to be something that could be feasible with a research budget and much more time. If you can test your theory with an experiment or quasi-experiment, your empirical plan should include it



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- Ask me questions! **I'm here to help**

## How bureaucrats matter

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- **Bureaucracy is often equated to rigid, unresponsive, and unaccountable organizations**, rules, or actors
- In a context of polarization, declining trust, and party system transformation, **political entrepreneurs sometimes turn to attacks on bureaucracies**
- The erosion of bureaucratic capacity **can fuel a feedback loop of declining performance and trust**



# Yet bureaucrats are key to order, state capacity, and development

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  - Order is ultimately produced by police officers, soldiers, etc.

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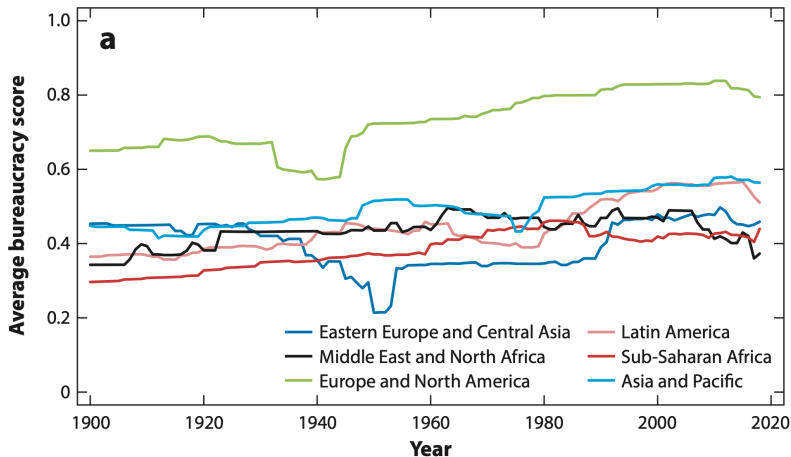
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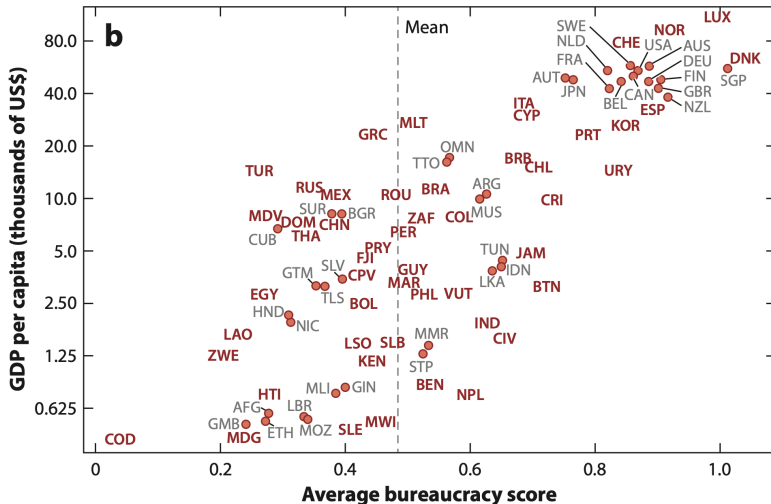
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- How do we improve the quality of our bureaucracies?

# Bureaucratic quality is persistent

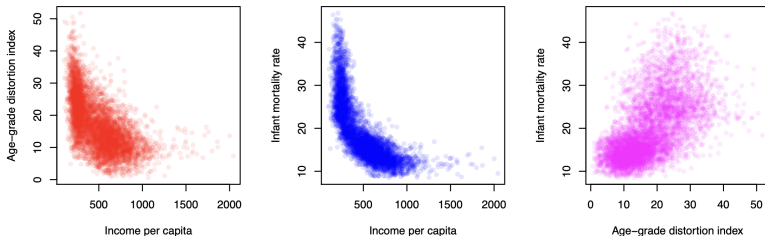


# Bureaucratic quality is correlated with economic development



# But bureaucratic performance varies a lot

## *Human development outcomes across Brazilian municipalities*



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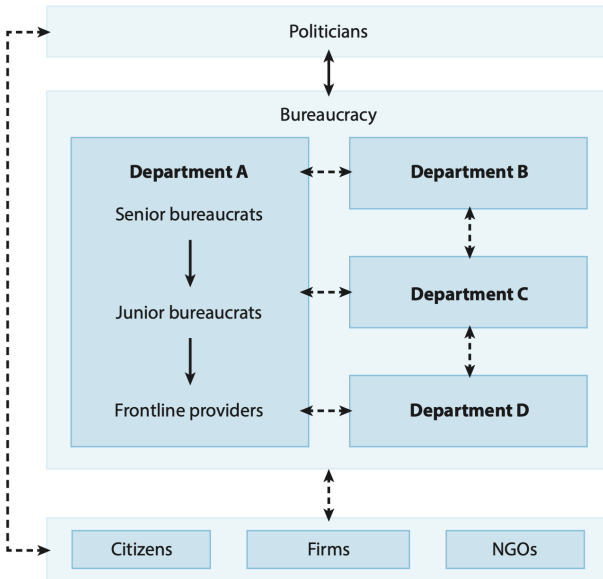
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  - Bureaucratic governance
  - Relations with non-state actors

# Models of the bureaucracy

# Bureaucracies as embedded hierarchies



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- Both make some **assumptions** that do not always hold true

# Weberian models of the bureaucracy

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  - Bureaucrats are **tenured**
- By having capable and autonomous bureaucrats with authority, organizations will achieve **speed and efficiency**



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- **Give bureaucrats tenure:** hire bureaucrats for the long-term, and protect public organizations from turnover
- **Protect politicians from political interference:** politicians' interventions in the bureaucracy are harmful

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- **Politicians are not always ill-intentioned** when seeking to intervene in the bureaucracy

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  - **Information asymmetries**: the agent knows things that the principal ignores, which hinders monitoring



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- **New public management:** set up material incentives, decentralize, and promote competition

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- **Principals may not be capable or able to hold agents accountable**

## Patronage and what to do about it

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- A more precise definition of patronage is **the discretionary hiring and firing of bureaucrats based, at least partly, on political criteria**
- An extreme version of patronage is the so-called **spoils system**, where most of the administration is changed with the winner's political supporters after political turnover

# Where do we find patronage?

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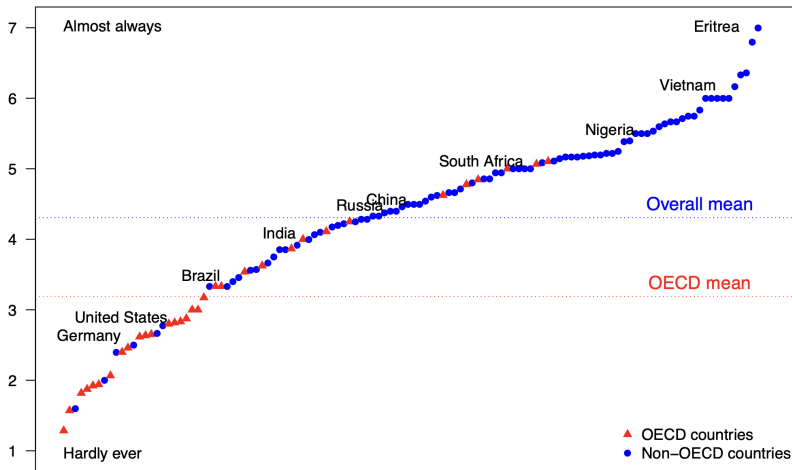
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  - Political appointees help keep public administration accountable to democratic mandates
- But **there are very wide variations in the prevalence and nature of patronage across and within countries**

# Where do we find patronage

Figure 1-1: Average country-expert responses to the question  
*How often do the political connections of the applicants decide who get the job?*



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- Derive a hypothesis, i.e. a statement we could test
- Come up with an empirical design, i.e. a way to test that hypothesis



# A possible research design

**Table 1**    **Bureaucracy score and economic growth**

	Outcome: log of GDP per capita				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Lag (meritocratic recruitment)	0.025** (0.012)	–	0.023* (0.012)	–	–
Lag (rigorous and independent administration)	–	0.013 (0.011)	0.004 (0.012)	–	–
Lag (average bureaucracy score)	–	–	–	0.024* (0.013)	0.041** (0.016)
Observations	1,602	1,634	1,602	1,634	1,634
Lag (log of GDP per capita)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country FE × linear trend	–	–	–	–	✓

The asterisks denote the levels of statistical significance: \*\* indicate  $p < 0.05$  and \* indicates  $p < 0.1$ . The regressions relate log of GDP per capita to the presence of meritocratic recruitment (Column 1), a rigorous and independent administration (Column 2), their combination (Column 3), and the average bureaucracy score (Column 4). Column 5 augments the specification of Column 4 by including country-specific linear time trends. All regressions include country and year fixed effects (FE). The independent variables are standardized to have mean zero and a standard deviation of one. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. Sample is collapsed to 5-year means, and the regressions control for the lagged (log) GDP per capita.

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  - Deploying connected people to more desirable / better paid jobs
- Patronage can **depress bureaucratic effort**
  - If government jobs are used to transfer public money to the pockets of political supporters, government employees would work less on actual tasks



# The costs of patronage: Quasi-experimental evidence from the British empire



FIGURE 1. TERRITORIES ADMINISTERED BY THE COLONIAL OFFICE - 1905

A **study** by Xu (2018, AER) on how political connections hurt bureaucratic performance

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# Results: Quasi-experimental evidence from the British empire

TABLE 5—FISCAL PERFORMANCE AND CONNECTEDNESS TO SECRETARY OF STATE

Panel A: Revenue	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Colony-level Public Finance			
	Public revenue			
	Overall		Trade	Internal
Mean of dep. var	12.31	12.31	11.47	11.59
Connected	-0.040 (0.017)	-0.055 (0.021)	-0.053 (0.026)	-0.043 (0.032)
Connected × Reform dummy		0.061 (0.033)		
Connected + Connected × Reform dummy	-	0.005 (0.026)	-	-
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Governor-Colony FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spell length FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time-varying controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,510	3,510	2,670	2,657

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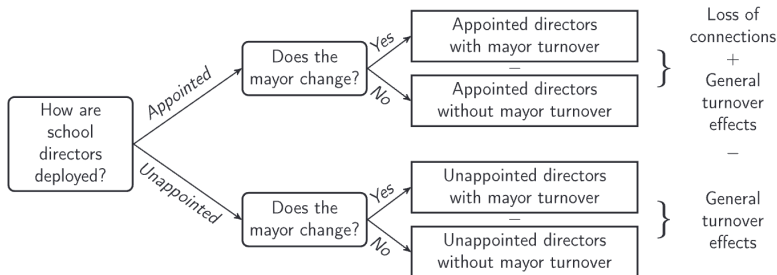
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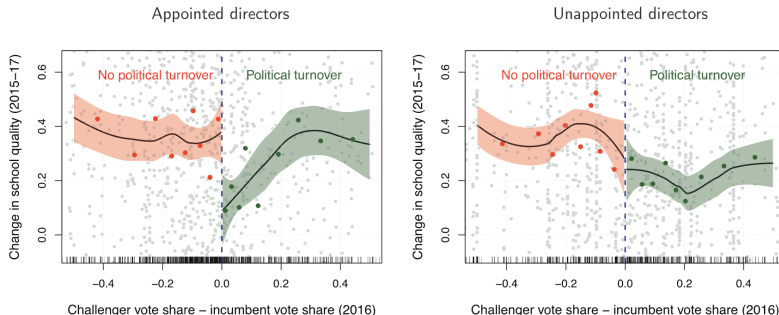
# Results: Quasi-experimental evidence from Brazil



*Notes:* The design exploits three sources of variation in performance: within-bureaucrat changes from before to after the election, between appointed and unappointed bureaucrats, and between localities with and without political turnover.



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*Notes:* Colored dots are local averages for equally-sized bins. Lines are loess regression lines estimated at both sides of the threshold with no controls. Shaded regions denote 95% confidence intervals.

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## Case: Regulation of big tech

# Platform firms have become dominant in the global economy



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- What is the best strategy to promote competition, privacy, and political equality of opportunity in the era of the platform economy?
- Traditional anti-trust legislation and frameworks do not travel well to the platform economy



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- **Big tech often count on “platform power”** – direct connection to consumers, which they leverage to mobilize support against regulation (e.g., Uber in California)

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  - National authoritarian governments (e.g., China) constraining entry into domestic markets, censoring content

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- **Collective action problems** (domestically and internationally)
- Middling support from **political leaders** (and exposure to political turnover), especially in the midst of party system change



# The challenge

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- Your client country can be a hypothetical democracy, or a specific one you choose



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