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**A New Approach to Measure Politicization:  
The Example of Shifting Patterns of Politicization in Germany**

*Sylvia Veit and Stefanie Vedder, University of Kassel, Germany*

**ABSTRACT**

In the extensive body of literature on politicization, two different dimensions of politicization are intensely discussed: politicization as a change in the criteria applied for the selection and deselection of civil servants and politicization as behavioural aspect (e.g., politically biased policy advice by civil servants). This article contributes to the first perspective and defines politicization as an increase in the relevance of political criteria for personnel decisions (selection and deselection) in the public service. The main objective of the article is to propose an innovative concept for measuring politicization of bureaucracy with individual-level career data by distinguishing two core types of political experience that top civil servants might have acquired during their career: *frontstage political experience* (FPE) as elected politician and *backstage political experience* (BPE) in political management positions. For each core type, two subtypes are defined.

The empirical measurement of the four different types of political experience is illustrated by the analysis of an original dataset of more than 1,500 top civil servants in Germany in the time period 1949 to 2017. The analysis includes the two highest hierarchical ranks in German federal ministries and the Chancellery. The dataset comprises comprehensive information on the top civil servants' sociodemographic background, career and political engagement.

The proposed article addresses two research gaps in existing scholarship on politicization of bureaucracy. First, the majority of existing studies focuses mainly on party political attachment, leaving out civil servants' professional background. Second, if professional political experience is considered in empirical studies on politicization, there is often no or too little reflection on *different types* of political experience. In this article, the 'black box' of politicization is opened by describing how the importance of frontstage and backstage political experience changes over time. The approach presented in this article thus offers the opportunity to get a more nuanced picture of politicization and its development in different countries and at different times.

Contact: sveit@uni-kassel.de