

Do Ministers Really Matter? Results from a Longitudinal Data on Senior Bureaucracy in Turkey between 1983-2018.

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Abstract: This study investigates the politicization of senior-level bureaucracy in Turkey by examining how ministerial alternation influences appointment behaviour between 1983 and 2018. Utilizing a novel longitudinal dataset and introducing multiple indicators—namely, the Number of Appointments Total (NoAT), Number of Appointments per day (NoAP), and Number of Appointments per day by first 6, 12 and 24 months (NoAF)—the analysis explores the relationship between ministerial term types and bureaucratic reshuffling. The results reveal that politicization is temporally concentrated, with the first six months of a minister's term representing a critical window for increased appointment activity. Replacement ministers, in particular, exhibit significantly higher appointment frequencies than their incumbent or successor counterparts, suggesting a strategic use of early tenure for administrative restructuring. The study also demonstrates that portfolio status acts as a key moderating variable. Ministers with portfolios are statistically more active in appointments, especially in the early stages of their terms, while ministers without portfolios show minimal and consistent behaviour across categories. Spatial variation further differentiates politicization patterns: Central bureaucracies are more affected than provincial ones, particularly under portfolio-holding replacement ministers. These findings underscore the multifaceted dynamics of bureaucratic politicization, shaped by tenure timing, institutional placement, and ministerial authority. In the Turkish context, these dynamics are intensified by the historically centralized power of the Prime Minister, which has often constrained ministerial autonomy and facilitated top-down control over bureaucratic structures. The study contributes to comparative public administration by offering empirical evidence from a highly politicized administrative system and calls for institutional reforms to enhance bureaucratic neutrality and professionalism.