

Selection Criteria for Top Government Officials: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: This paper reports the results of a systematic review examining how governments balance political responsiveness with administrative expertise in top official appointments. Through analysis of more than 3,000 articles and working papers published between 1985 and 2024, we examine appointment practices across different governmental systems, exploring the complex interplay of motivations, objectives, and criteria that influence selection processes.

Following PRISMA guidelines, we conducted an extensive search of Scopus and Web of Science databases, complemented by reference snowballing to ensure comprehensive coverage. The selected studies are systematically analyzed along multiple dimensions, including research methodologies, country, type of position, appointment criteria and their prioritization, appointment processes and actors, and observed outcomes.

The review synthesizes current knowledge about the antecedents, criteria, and effects of the selection of top government officials. By systematically categorizing these studies, we provide scholars and practitioners with a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research in this area. The paper concludes by identifying critical gaps in the existing literature and proposing a future research agenda that addresses understudied aspects of public sector leadership appointments.