



UNIVERSITY OF
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THE POLITICS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DESIGN IN SWEDEN 1960-2014

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The Cliff's Notes Version

The question

- Why are bureaucracies organized in the way they are?

The answer?

- Because they are designed to advance the political agendas of the parties in power across policy domains and over time.



The Logic of Delegation

Delegation refers to when a person or group relies on another person or group to act on their behalf

- E.g. the parliamentary chain of delegation: electorate delegates to parliament, parliament to cabinet, cabinet to ministries, ministries to civil service

Can help political actors overcome a variety of frequently recurring political problems, but can also bring problems of its own

- Hidden information and hidden action
- Conflicts of interest



The Theory of Institutional Choice

Institutions can help ignorant politicians become enlightened and assure common interests with unruly bureaucrats

- **Ex-ante**, they can allocate authority and resources, define administrative procedures, and design personnel systems.
- **Ex-post**, they can send out police patrols, listen to fire alarms, and veto decisions via appointments, appropriations, and legislative overrides.

Yet, precisely because institutions are instruments of political control, partisan conflict over policy outcomes can also generate partisan conflict over institutional arrangements.



The Story So Far

Most of the available evidence is drawn from the (fairly peculiar) US case

- The small problem: few robustness checks on the generality of the findings
- The big problem: developing theory within a fixed setting is inherently limited because it precludes us from considering how the setting itself affects behavior

The evidence from Sweden

- Swedish scholars have mostly studied “metagovernance” and “micromanagement” (e.g. Jacobsson, Pierre and Sundström 2015).
- Politicization is comparatively low in Sweden, and some students of Swedish administration therefore underestimate its importance.
- Mainly case studies, which makes it hard to estimate partisan conflicts over time.

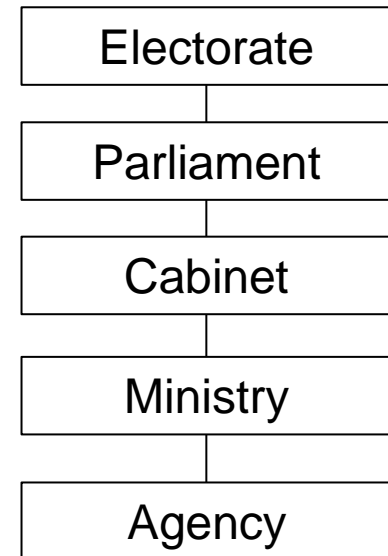


The Empirical Setup

The sample includes all administrative agencies in the Swedish central bureaucracy between 1960 and 2014.

- With annual information on agency appropriations, executive appointments, general functions, organizational forms, and survival times.
- ~16000 yearly observations on ~2200 agency heads in ~700 agencies.

Offers a rare opportunity to probe how changes in the partisan composition of governing coalitions over time affect agency characteristics.





Four Papers

1. Partisan Politics and Institutional Choice in Public Bureaucracies
2. The Politics of Bureaucratic Appointments
3. Structural Reorganization as Personnel Management
4. The Link between Appointments and Appropriations in the Politics of Administrative Design



Agency Creations and Terminations by Year

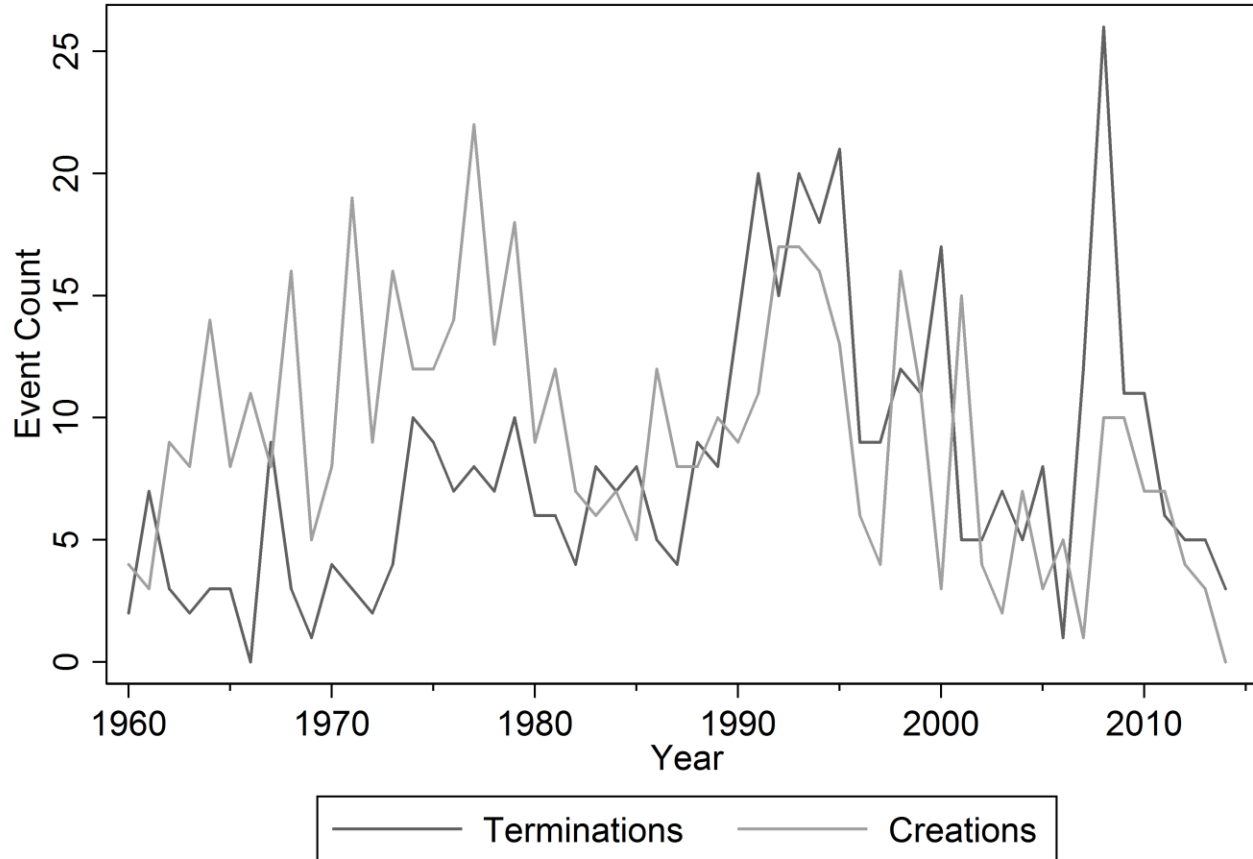
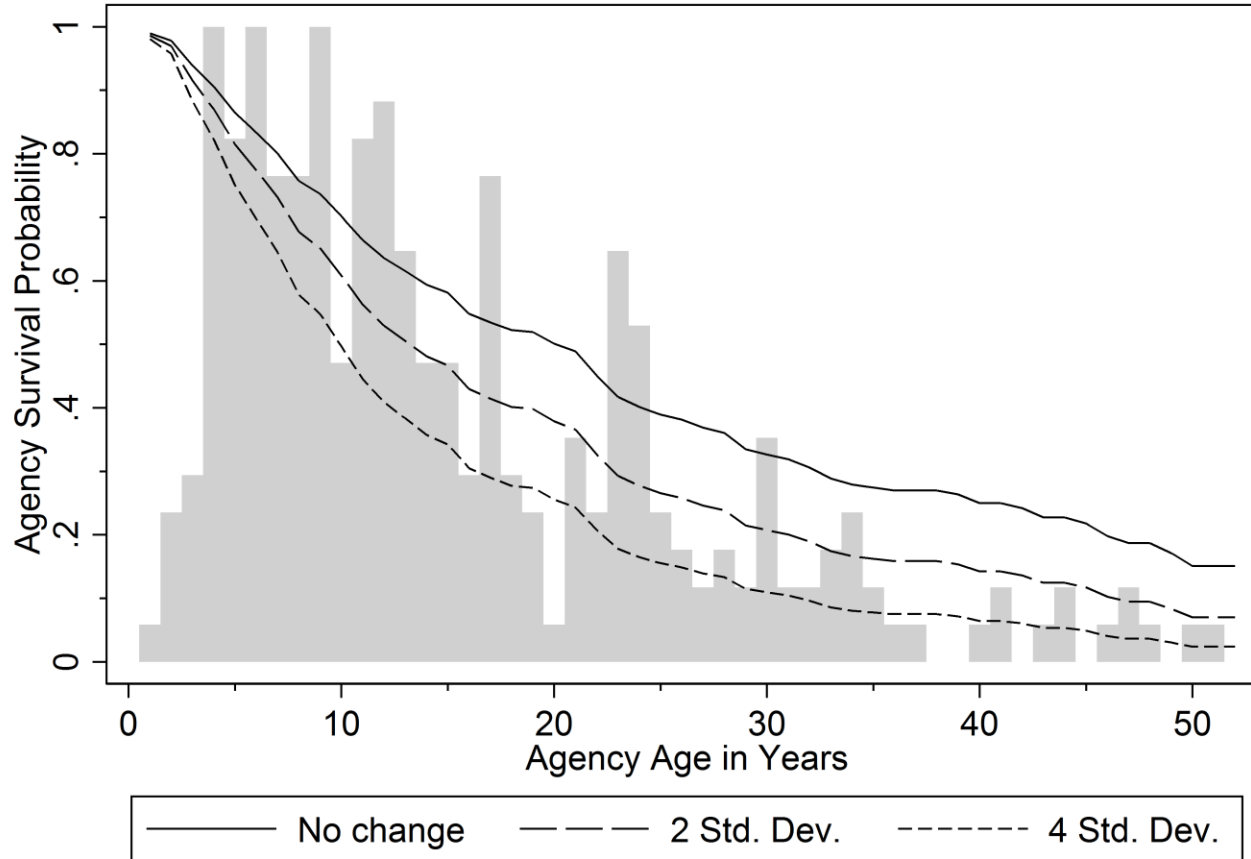




Figure 2. Survival Function by Ideological Change





Agency Head Replacements by Year

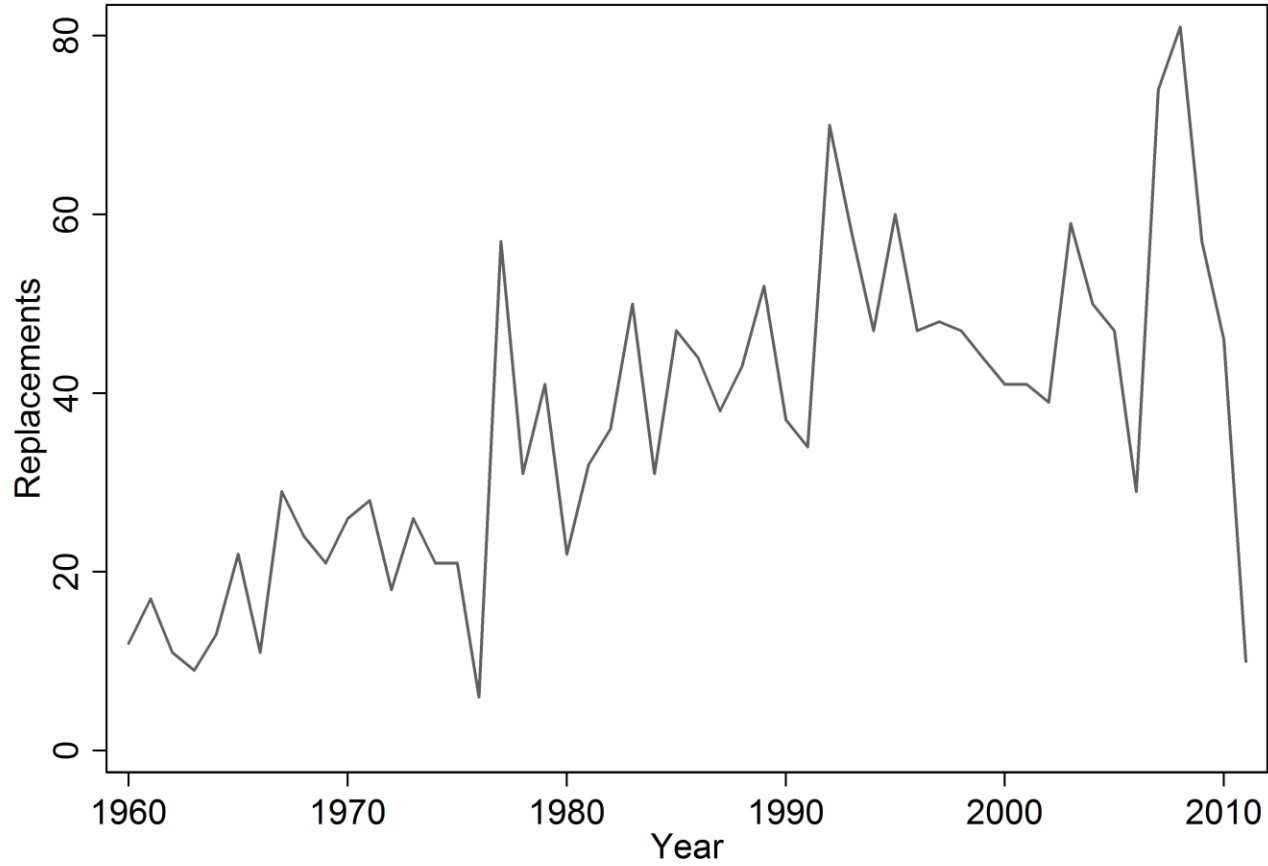
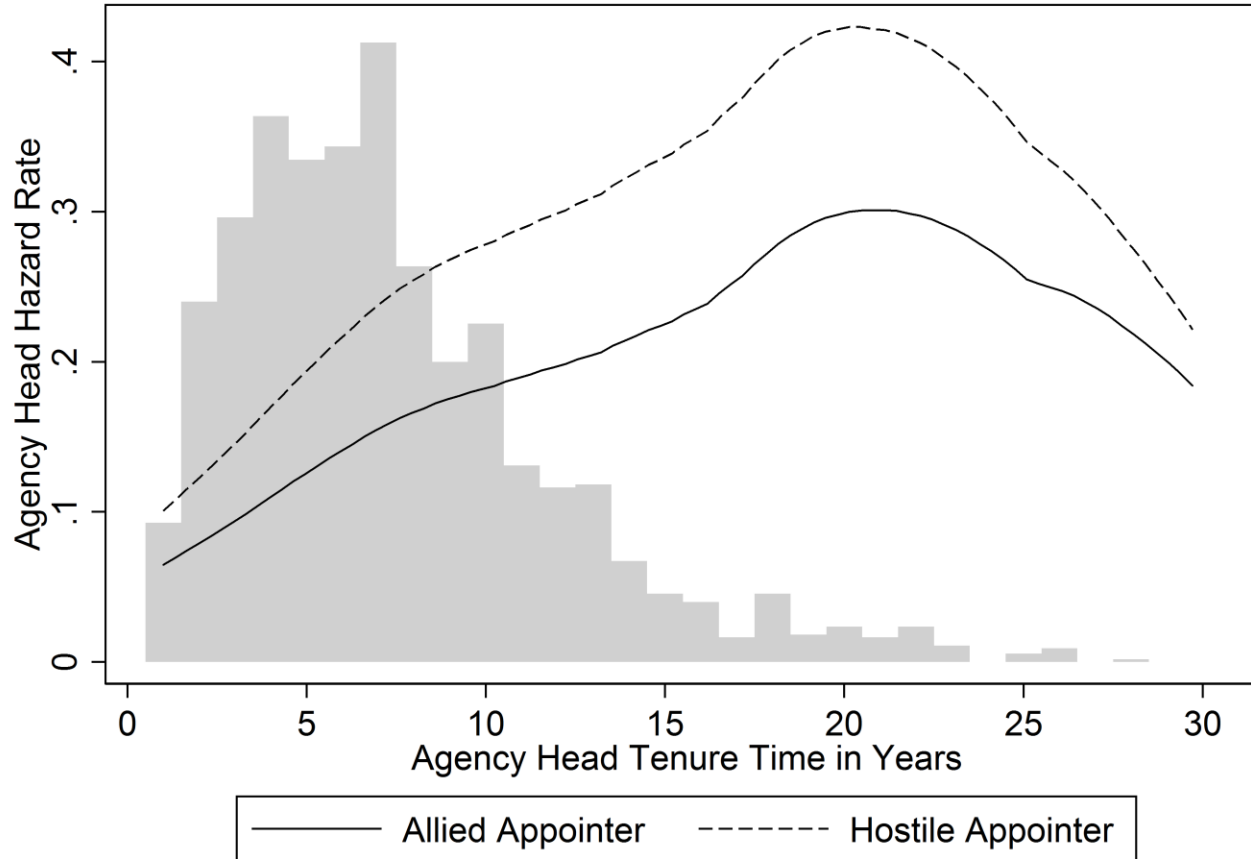




Figure 2. Bureaucratic Hazards by Cabinet Turnover





Conclusions So Far...

Partisan politics can fundamentally shape not only the substantive contents of public policies, but also:

- the organization of public agencies;
- the composition of public personnel; and
- the distribution of public appropriations.

Put differently, public administration is not a special snowflake!