

THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF BUREAUCRATIC TURNOVER

Abiha Zahra¹

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¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Governance and Global studies, Information Technology University, Lahore.

ABSTRACT

The study examines how political transitions shape administrative turnover, particularly within hybrid meritocratic systems which are defined by a higher degree of political patronage and greater reliance on responsive competence. We focused on the two top civil service groups/cadres—Pakistan Administrative Service and Pakistan Police Service. Drawing on comparative insight, the research analyzes the issue of bureaucratic turnover as an indicator of governance rather than merely a human resource phenomenon. The research used both quantitative and qualitative data to explain the turnover trends. Our findings reveal a strong symbiosis between political and administrative careers at senior positions within the bureaucracy. Evidence suggests that political changes disrupt administrative continuity and therefore, institutional performance. The study asserts re-thinking politicization and political dynamics by including the role of non-political actors in administrative turnover. Qualitative data gave contextual grounds to the quantitative results—numbers and trends need to be understood and contextualised for guiding policy reforms. By focusing on Pakistan, the study fills a critical research gap in contextualizing bureaucratic turnover during political shifts, including caretaker transitions, and provides empirical evidence to guide civil service reforms and enhance governance practices in the country.

PREFACE

This research report is the outcome of an endearing interest in understanding the complex relationship between politics and bureaucracy in developing countries like Pakistan. The study was motivated by the recognition that bureaucratic careers, particularly their vulnerability to political influence, serve as a critical lens through which the broader questions of governance, state capacity and institutional resilience can be explored.

This research has been shaped by extensive engagement with existing scholarship on politicization, bureaucratic turnover as well as civil service reforms, especially given the complexity of Pakistan evolving governance realities. The pursuit of this research, has sought to bridge theoretical arguments with empirical evidence in a way that not only adds to academic discourse but also offers practical insights which will prove to be relevant and extremely useful to policy-practitioners who are grappling with the challenge of reforming the civil service for increased professionalism, adaptability and responsiveness.

I am extremely thankful to my mentor(s)- Mr. Mohsin Mushtaq Chandna and Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad, colleagues and peers who have provided guidance, support and constructive feedback throughout the process of this research thus far. I am also grateful for the research assistance of Rabail Anjum, whose valuable support in data analysis and thoughtful contributions to writing and interpretation greatly strengthened this study. I would also express gratitude to the institutions and individuals who facilitated access to data and resources that made this scholarly endeavor possible. Most importantly, I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of RASTA CGP for enabling and supporting this research project.

I hope that this research will contribute meaningfully to the betterment of governance and public administration in Pakistan, especially with regards to civil service reforms. It is also hoped that the findings of this research can also serve as an invaluable resource for scholars and practitioners interested in enhancing performance and the spirit of meritocracy within the public sector. With this hope, I conclude the preface, expressing that this study will provide valuable insights into enhancing efficiency, institutional continuity and resilience in public services of Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the contention between political control and bureaucratic expertise has significantly gained potency in public administration research. Literature supports that political leaders tend to use agency positions as rewards for those aligned with political ideologies, often at the cost of merit. Woodrow Wilson's seminal work on bureaucracy and meritocratic institutions emphasizes the separation of political and administrative structures, to foster a stable and professional civil service. Wilson's assertion particularly focuses on shielding the bureaucracy from (direct) political control - a principle that underpins modern governance reforms across political systems, including those in developing countries like Pakistan.

To shield bureaucrats from political interference, governments often create public sector agencies with fixed terms and legally defined merit criteria for the incumbents. In Pakistan, almost all the governments, especially since 2007, have emphasized on civil service reforms to enhance stability of bureaucratic tenure and protect them from political interference. Nevertheless, despite repeated efforts at these reforms, the situation has not improved, especially as bureaucratic turnover (often related to political change) still remains a persistent challenge. Political principals continue to use senior appointments as instruments of patronage, thus, undermining institutional stability and administrative performance.

Therefore, this research aims to address a crucial gap, pertaining to the meaningful realization of reform efforts in relation to persistent political interference, by exploring the relationship between political and administrative turnovers in Pakistan. It argues that the instability of tenure at senior positions not only weakens administrative efficiency but diminishes the long-term capacity of the state to deliver. Therefore, the findings of this study can help to rationalize the patterns of bureaucratic turnover and its plausible causes. An understanding of these factors will help policymakers to develop targeted reforms to improve administrative performance and efficiency in the country.

Moreover, the project also contributes theoretically by extending debates on patronage, in the form of functional politicization in bureaucracies, to a South Asian context. Empirically, the research leverages a novel time series dataset on senior civil servants in key administrative positions thus, offering systematic evidence on recruitment patterns during regime changes in Pakistan. The project's statistical analysis is bolstered by qualitative insights - derived from (retired) civil servants' experiences with political stakeholders - which reflect on how administrative careers are shaped by shifting political realities.

Specifically, the project explores the dynamics of bureaucratic turnover as regimes change post-care-taker governments - in terms of whether the incumbents continue their service in the same position as a new government takes charge. The central question guiding the inquiry are: 1) How do changes in political governments affect the conditions likely to lead to bureaucratic turnover at key positions in bureaucracy? 2) How do senior bureaucrats perceive the interplay between politics and bureaucracy during changing regimes?

The study employs 'turnover' in a broader sense, which includes (patterns of) appointments, transfers, promotions, as well as strategic exits of senior administrative leadership. By answering the questions above, our research provides both academic and policy contributions. It advances the

understanding of the politico-administrative dynamics in fragile democracies (such as Pakistan) while offering evidence-based recommendations for personnel reforms in the public sector. Overall, this study endeavors to provide policymakers with a direction, to strengthen governance and enhance bureaucratic efficiency as they navigate through Pakistan's turbulent political landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A change in the government is a stress test for the relationship between political principals and their bureaucratic agents (Askim et al., 2024). As the modern governance system becomes overly bureaucratic (Doherty et al., 2019), it is imperative to understand how political changes affect bureaucratic turnover. This is especially pertinent for politicized systems in which political sensitivity (i.e. responsive competence) is a core recruitment criterion. This underscores the inevitability of relying on political patronage, more prominent in hybrid meritocratic systems, especially in the form of functional politicization, where politicians seek to ensure bureaucratic responsiveness to their (politicians) policy preferences (Bach, 2025).

Understanding administrative careers, especially in relation to their political counterparts, act as a powerful lens that provides insights to how politics and the state machinery interact with each other, and how deeply the former permeates the latter (Bach, 2020). It can be conceptualized as a proxy to rationalize the underlying forces which determine public sector recruitment trends. Particularly, it aids in understanding patterns of politicization, its depth and direction as well as explains how some bureaucratic positions are more vulnerable to reshuffling as compared to others. It also establishes a link between senior leadership in the bureaucracy with organizational performance and institutional continuity.

The operationalization of the above one can utilize an important yet common denominator in the political-administrative equation, which fundamentally relates to turnover – emphasizing how incoming political principals (re-)shape the bureaucracy (Toral, 2024). With new political governments assuming power, the incoming minister often questions the ‘ability [as well as the] willingness’ of the existing bureaucrat to serve them loyally (Askim et al., 2024) or at least ‘equally well’ as they did with their predecessors (Bach, 2025). This makes civil servants more susceptible to being replaced, a phenomenon that is formally termed as ‘administrative turnover’.

Turnover can take different forms and simply refers to the end of an individual’s appointment in a position of service (Bach, 2020). Turnover may occur through political marginalization – when incoming ministers extend patronage to hire favorable bureaucrats (Colonnelli et al., 2020) and/or remove incumbents through dismissal or transfer. Voluntary/strategic exits by bureaucrats themselves also come under the purview of the same. Turnover is particularly prevalent at top positions in the bureaucracy – those which exert more authority over policy matters (Doherty et al., 2019). Most research has primarily focused on turnover as an issue of human resource management while rarely any has explored it as ‘an indicator of governance’ (Suzuki & Hur, 2024), focusing on political factors as drivers of administrative turnover. Prominent among these factors are political transitions and ideological differences between politicians and their bureaucratic agents.

Many studies explore trends in bureaucratic turnover as a consequence of changes in political careers. In their study on the Swedish bureaucracy, Dahlström & Holmgren (2017) show that despite serving on a constitutionally protected term, Swedish agency heads left their posts at a greater rate following ‘partisan’ shifts in the government. They conclude that even in institutional systems which are designed to insulate bureaucratic expertise from political control, political changes can still influence the composition of agency personnel. Boyne et al. (2010) conduct an empirical analysis of

local authorities in England. They also conclude that political change and bureaucratic turnover are 'not independent events' as replacing bureaucrats in senior positions is a way to assure adherence to policy preferences of the politician(s).

Askim et al. (2024), in their study of Denmark and Norway, found similar results. Particularly, in the case of Norway (a hybrid meritocratic system), they note that the presence of 'political appointees' (such as special assistants/advisors to ministers) is a potent factor that destabilizes the permanence of career bureaucrats – thus contributing to turnover. This is because ministers do not need to rely (solely and primarily) on career civil servants for policy advice. Instead, they have an alternative in the form of political appointees who provide consultation which is technically sound and politically relevant.

The above, then, reflects starkly at the need as well as prevalence of politicization that underlies bureaucratic turnover. Politicization can be defined as recruitment of civil servants on the basis of 'politically-defined' competencies rather than (neutral/independent) merit-based procedures (Peters, 2013). While some scholars assert the perils of erosion of merit for administrative careers, others (Bach & Veit, 2017; Goetz, 1997; Hollibaugh Jr, 2015; Oliveira et al., 2024) highlight the necessity of 'political sensitivity' that chiefly underlies responsive competence. The outcomes of such studies indicate the inevitability of political considerations for public sector recruitment even though political interference is a breeder of distrust between principals and agents. These studies also signify the importance of rationalizing bureaucratic behaviors, specifically in relation to turnover, as consequences of political actions (Van Thiel & Yesilkagit, 2011) rather than arising out of innate motivations.

In this regard, Suzuki & Hur (2024) study how 'closedness' of a bureaucratic system affects turnover, specifically 'turnover intention' of bureaucrats, in addition to the degree of politicization. They define a closed bureaucratic system as one that provides (legal) protection of tenure and is based on 'formal rules and regulated personnel systems'. They find that turnover intention is higher in open systems; meaning that civil servants tend to continue their service more if their tenures are protected and rules govern recruitment procedures. Interestingly, their findings also assert a lower turnover intent in patronage-driven systems as political appointees feel bound to their political patrons.

Moreover, Staronova & Rybar (2021) assert that administrative turnovers are equally likely regardless of the ideological inclinations of the incoming government. This is also true for different levels of government. For example, in their study on the impact of turnover on quality of public services, Akhtari et al. (2022) find that political turnover leads to a decline in the quality of municipal schools (versus non-municipal schools), primarily due to disruptions in the education bureaucracy. Using a regression discontinuity design (RDD), their results exclusively link personnel turnover to poor performance of municipal schools.

Furthermore, some scholars focus on how institutional quality plays a role in determining the relationship between political and bureaucratic turnovers. Brassiolo et al. (2024) show that mayoral elections trigger a large spike in turnovers while federal recruitment remains stable through its own election cycle. They assert that this difference can be explained by the quality of institutions, which in their case, was the key driver of local bureaucracy's vulnerability to political changes.

It is also important to note that politicization and its effect on bureaucratic turnover (and performance) also vary across contexts in terms of meritocratic and hybrid bureaucratic systems, between developing and developed countries. While most scholarship has focused on developed (institutional) contexts, developing counterparts remain underexplored, even though the impacts of politicization are more potent and impactful in these contexts (Dasandi & Esteve, 2017).

In their study on exploring the politics-bureaucracy relationship in developing contexts, Dasandi & Esteve (2017) highlight an important nuance in politicization of bureaucratic recruitment. In what they label as 'collusive model' of bureaucratic appointment, they assert that while some political hirings occur in almost all institutional contexts, politicization in a collusive sense (often occurring in weaker institutional settings) is often considered a 'norm'. They state that in such contexts loyalty is skewed heavily towards the political principal – that is to the individual rather than their policy preferences or political goals – which exacerbates inefficiencies and rent-seeking behaviors.

Brierley (2021) in her work on Ghana finds that there is a 'dual hiring strategy' in developing democracies which combine merit and patronage depending upon the type of job. Accordingly, she asserts that hirings on professional positions are mostly meritocratic because political principals avoid the risk of poor performance that can negatively influence electoral outcomes. Menial positions, on the other hand, are more likely to be filled through patronage as they are used as a means to reward and sustain clientelistic ties. Similarly, Ayee (2013) also finds political and bureaucratic careers interlinked in Ghana's hybrid system of governance. This study asserts that in spite of the democratic reforms expanding accountability, appointments and promotions are still determined by political considerations. The responsiveness of bureaucrats under this context is more akin to subservience.

In the South Asian context, Abdullah (2020) notes that political interference in Nepal also dates back in history. While the bureaucracy was hired solely on the basis of their loyalty towards the king, after democratization, political principals instrumentalized politicization to maintain their control over the civil service. Also focusing on politicization in Bangladesh, this study asserts that the Bangladeshi civil service too is politicized, which rewards loyalty through promotions. In India, Iyer & Mani (2012) find that even with strong constitutional provisions safeguarding bureaucrats from political interference, there is a surge in turnovers (primarily due to transfers) with the coming of the new Chief Minister of the state. They further assert that turnovers are twice as likely when the incoming Chief Minister is from a different political party.

In his study on public sector appointment and political influence in Pakistan, Ashraf (2017) focuses on the effect of political influence on bureaucratic performance, perception and morale. Findings from his study reveal that many bureaucrats saw political influence as the chief determinant of appointments and therefore, turnovers. Similarly, Cyan & Pasha (2017) find that political transitions increase the frequency of bureaucratic transfers. They further assert that bureaucratic turnovers are not only imposed by the political actors but are also co-produced by the bureaucracy, as they participate in and benefit from the (spoils) system.

Therefore, by presenting cases from multiple contexts and institutional settings, the above aids in understanding administrative turnovers and their relation with political careers. It takes into account

turnovers holistically, as a political instrument, not just in the context of elected governments coming and going from power. Thus, adopting this broader approach towards understanding administrative turnover allows for richer analysis. This is especially pertinent in the context of South Asia as emerging scholarship focuses on the question of the effect of political careers on administrative turnover – and by extension of the argument, its effect on bureaucratic performance.

This study explores the interplay between the complex political tug-of-war during regime changes – between caretaker setups and elected regimes – and bureaucratic careers in a South Asian context. Focusing on Pakistan, this research examines how political careers influence bureaucratic turnover in the country at the key administrative positions. The research aims to inform the ongoing debates on civil service reforms in Pakistan. Its outcomes provide empirical insights into the roles (and boundaries) of key stakeholders in the administrative state, and highlight the underlying reasons for persistent governance inefficiencies – arising specifically out of issues with public sector recruitment practices. Such evidence will enable policymakers to develop targeted reforms to strengthen governance in the country.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Quantitative Analysis

To study the dynamics of bureaucratic turnover empirically, we have gathered and organized a time-series dataset with information on the key aspects of the terms in office for six key positions of Pakistan's bureaucracy, serving in Punjab and Sindh, from 2007 till 2025². Specifically, the data focuses on the following positions from two high-ranking cadres of the Civil Service of Pakistan - Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS), and the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP). Table 1 provides a glimpse of the details.

Table 1: Selected Cadres and Positions for Research Study

Pakistan Administrative Service	Police Service of Pakistan
Commissioner	Inspector General of Police (IGP)
Deputy Commissioner (DC)	Deputy Inspector General (DIG)
Assistant Commissioner (AC)	Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP)

Source: Author's compilations.

The two provincial capitals of Punjab and Sindh are selected for being analytically suitable to study politicization and turnover. Both capitals are huge in terms of the size of administration, and the two key political parties (PMLN and PPP) of the country belong to these provinces and provincial capitals. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) has been ruling Punjab since 1980's with brief interruption periods. The bureaucracy in Punjab is known for being allies with the PMLN. In Sindh, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been a dominant political force since 1990's with even less interruption in recent years compared to the case of Punjab. Long periods in power and stability gives time to both bureaucracy and politics to be allies.

This dataset includes information on three senior positions from the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) and the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP), (table 1). The data for all the six positions was gathered through contacts in the police and administrative offices combined with web scraping and websites. The data for the position of Commissioners and Inspector General Police was accessible online on the respective websites while for all other positions it was almost impossible to gather data without contacts and visits to the offices. The data was taken from the incumbency boards in the relevant offices and was coded against the political turn-over for the quantitative analysis. The exact position wise classification of the data can be found in table 1.

² Specifically, August 2025, which was the cutoff month for analysis.

The data was then arranged under specific variables which the team realized were needed for statistical analysis. The list of those variables, and the rationale for using those variables, is encapsulated in table 2.

Table 2: Details and Rationale of Variables Used for Statistical Modelling

Variable	Notes
Name	First and last names of appointees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Used for cleaning and organizing data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to assess reappointments, segregation of tenure over multiple (a discontinuous) political regimes
Agency Head (Code)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unique identifiers assigned to each incumbent in ascending order (starting from 2007) ● To maintain anonymity
Tenure	Start and end dates (day, month, year) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To determine the exact dates of service (in a position)
Regime at Start (Hiring Authority) and End of Appointment (Terminating Authority)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To segregate between regimes, ● Identify recruitment trends ● Map individual tenure with political tenure ● Gauge tenure continuation in new regimes
Number of Months worked under New and Appointing Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To create a distributed tenure of civil servants ● Quantify individual tenure with political tenure (under respective regimes) ● Gauge turnover with regime change
Total Term of Appointment	Aggregated tenure - number of months served in a particular position
Tenure Continuation	Binary indicator tracking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Whether appointments continued as across political transitions ● Exited (0), Continued (1)

*Notes: *: If the individual did not survive the transition. **: If the individual continued service in the same designation for at least the first month of the new government. This is adjusted to accommodate the average time when incoming governments reshuffle the bureaucracy - which usually happens within the first few days after oath-taking.*

Source: Author's compilations.

The analysis is based on the following methods which we deem were necessary to provide a longitudinal perspective on recruitment patterns and leadership turnover. The details are encapsulated in table 3.

Table 3: Analytical Methods

Method	Details
Recruitment Pattern Analysis	<p>Temporal Pattern Recognition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Time series analysis techniques were applied to identify patterns and event-based (electoral cycles) variations. Political transition periods were coded as discrete events to enable comparative analysis across different administrative regimes. <p>Recruitment Trend Visualization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Line chart visualizations were constructed to illustrate recruitment frequency over time. These visualizations incorporate political period demarcations to contextualize personnel changes within broader governmental transitions.
Turnover Analysis	<p>Cumulative frequency analysis was employed to visualize long-term turnover trends, with turnover events plotted chronologically to identify periods of stability and instability (highlighting volatility). This approach reveals acceleration patterns and correlations with political cycles. Continuation rates were calculated as percentage using tenure continuation measures across political transitions between 2007-2025: the proportion of appointees who survived a political transition versus those who did not.</p>

Source: Author's compilations.

The dataset pertains to all election cycles starting from the first caretaker setup in 2007 to the most recent elected political government in 2024 - the details are encapsulated in table 4. The total time period for the study spans between 2007 to 2025. The time of appointment and transfers on these six positions was mapped against the political tenure. This helped to analyze the timing of appointments and transfers— the relevant time period for turnover. One of the rationales was to map and analyze if the appointments made by the caretaker regimes are taken forward by the incoming political regimes, or if the caretaker regimes continue with the existing set of bureaucrats at the top administration and police positions. That is why the dataset begins with the caretaker set up in 2007 while analyzing both political and caretaker setups until 2025. The first period is reflective of the political democratization of the larger governance system in Pakistan, after the presidential era of Pervez Musharraf.

Table 4: Regimes and Their Accompanying Tenures

Regime	Tenure
Caretaker Setup 1 (CT1)	16 November 2007 - 25 March 2008
Political Government 1 (PG1)	25 March 2008 - 24 March 2013
Caretaker Setup 2 (CT2)	25 March 2013 - 4 June 2013
Political Government 2 (PG2)	5 June 2013 - 31 May 2018
Caretaker Setup 3 (CT3)	1 June 2018 - 18 August 2018
Political Government 3 (PG3)	18 August 2018 - 10 April 2022
Political Government 4 (PG4)*	11 April 2022 - 14 August 2024
Caretaker Setup 4 (CT4)	17 August 2023 - 4 March 2024
Political Government 5 (PG5)	4 March 2024 - Present

*Note: *: This political government was not preceded by a caretaker setup as political government 3 was ousted as a result of a 'vote of no-confidence' and consequently replaced (directly) by political government 4. The political instability and its repercussions (associated with turnover) will be discussed in the final paper.*

Source: Author's compilations.

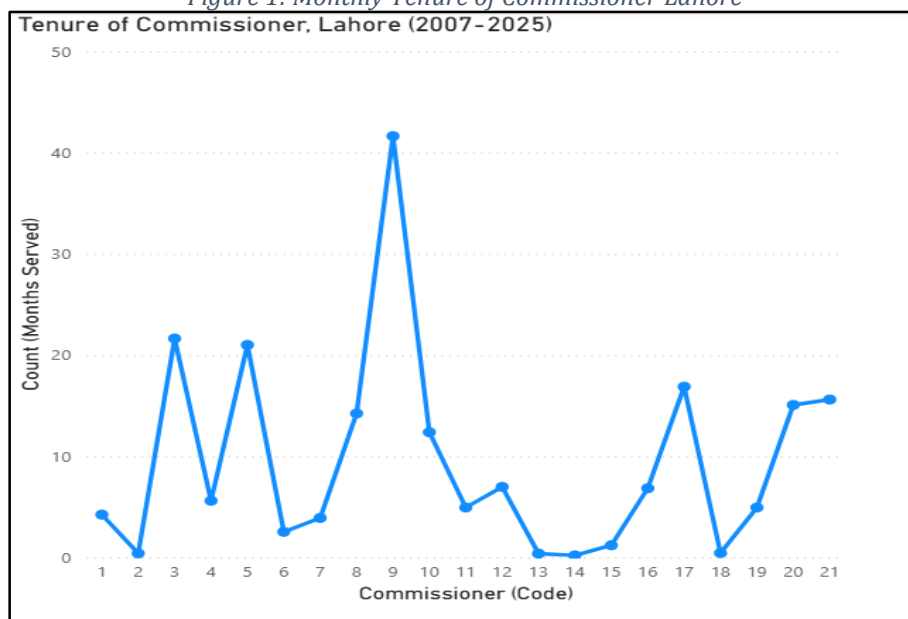
3.1.1. Quantitative Findings and Discussion

The discussion in this section pertains to the initial statistical analysis, as the research team continues to build-on and further analyse the data for deeper insights. The details of those findings will be disseminated through a quantitative policy brief, which is currently being developed. We conducted initial analysis on the most senior positions from both the cadres under discussion. This will form the foundation of the policy brief mentioned just earlier, which will encapsulate similar (and more detailed) analyses on district and assistant commissioners as well as deputy IGP (DIG) and senior superintendent of police (SSP).

3.1.1.1. Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS)

For this analysis, there were a total of 21 commissioners for Lahore and 17 for Karachi, between 2007 and 2025. For the former, only 3 appointees were able to continue their service after a government change, while there were 4 for the same for the latter. These people were replaced by new appointees within the term of the then political government - the reasons for which will be explored through qualitative analyses.

Figure 1: Monthly Tenure of Commissioner Lahore



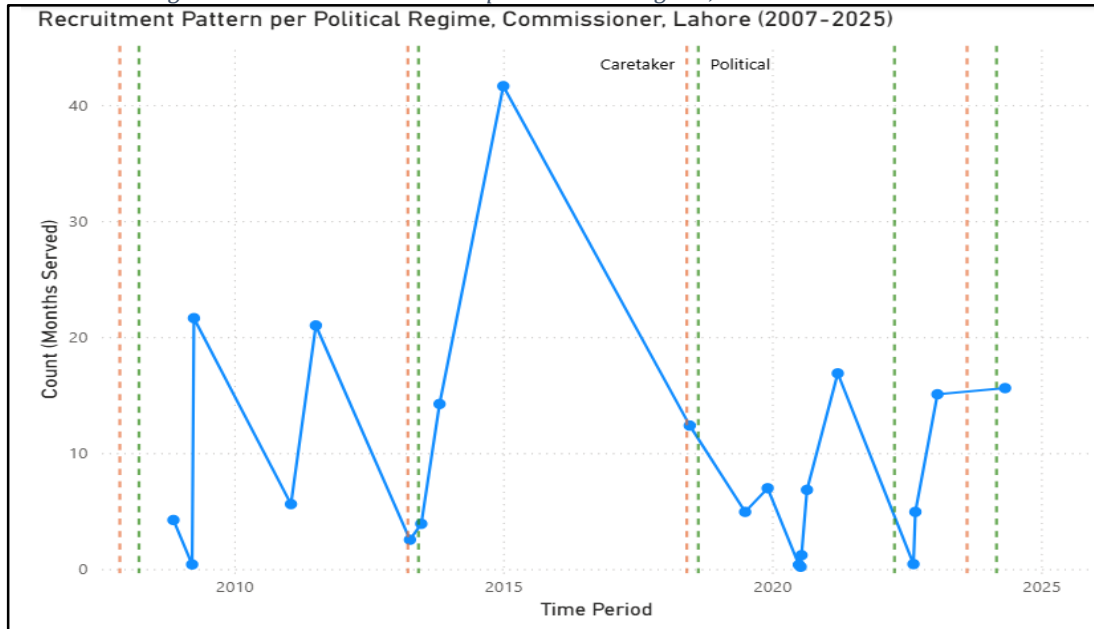
Source: Author's compilations.

The figure above shows the total term of appointment of commissioner Lahore, between 2007 and 2025. The average tenure of commissioners in the city is about 10.1 months; the median for the tenures is approximately 6-7 months, which is more representative since it adjusts for the outlier impact of commissioner number 9. Since there is no legally stipulated tenure of commissioner, Lahore, there is no threshold to gauge the status of completion of the respective term of appointment. The maximum number of months an appointee has served in this position is 41, while the minimum being a couple of days. While the earlier commissioners served longer terms, those in recent years have extremely short tenures which is indicative of extreme instability in this position.

Figure 1 is further unpacked by figure 2, which shows a time-series view of the tenures of commissioner, Lahore, mapped against political regimes. The x-axis is a continuous series which pertains to the (corresponding) dates each commissioner started their term/service. The y-axis pertains to the count measure of the maximum number of months each individual served in their respective term of appointment. Overall, this graph aims to capture whether a new individual is appointed as soon as a new government comes in, thus highlighting the relationship between political and administrative careers. The first point in the graph shows that this appointee was hired during the tenure of PG 1 and was followed by other appointees before coming of CT 2.

2013 starkly reveals the intertwining of political and bureaucratic careers. We can see that a new individual is hired by CT2, reflected by the intersection of the start dates for CT2 and the 6th commissioner for Lahore. This individual is replaced by a new appointee as soon as PG 2 takes office (the intersection of the 7th commissioner and start date of PG2). This figure captures turnover in a nuanced sense, as it shows how the person hired by CT 2 was replaced by another individual as soon as PG 2 assumed office.

Figure 2: Recruitment Pattern per Political Regime, Commissioner Lahore

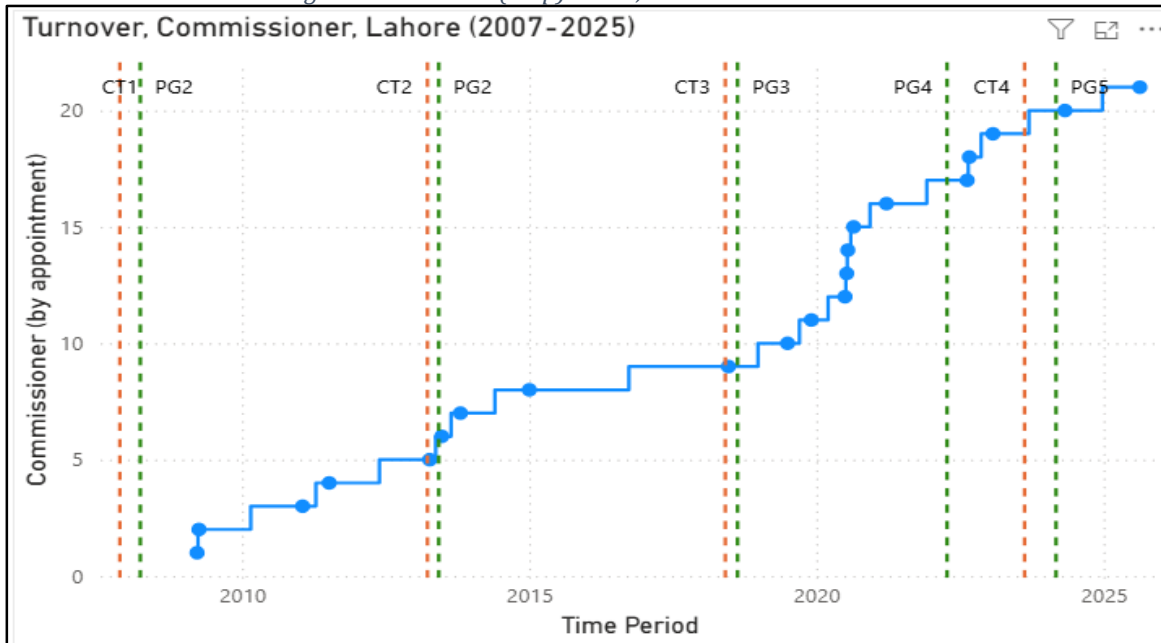


Source: Author's compilations.

Turnovers pick up pace by 2019, even though figure 2 marks the continuation of the commissioner appointed by CT 3. The turnover of commissioners in this period is obvious, as they are replaced one after the other. This goes in tandem with the political instability that marked this time. Figure 3 unpacks this even further. The most striking pattern is the dramatic acceleration in turnover frequency starting from 2020, which is marked by a steep upward trajectory, indicating that commissioner changes became more frequent in recent years in comparison to the earlier period.

We can see that 2007-2019 was a relatively stable period with a steady turnover - approximately 1-2 changes per year. However, the latter half of the curve shows a period of high instability with rapid succession of commissioners - more than ~ 4 per year. The period between PG 3 and PG 4 is prominent in this regard. The vertical lines (marking political regimes) add clarity as they bring to prominence the underlying correlation between regimes and increased instances of turnover. This has obvious implications for the governance apparatus pertaining to policy continuity, implementation challenges as well as administrative efficiency - aspects which will be further analyzed through qualitative insights.

Figure 3: Turnover (Step) Curve, Commissioner Lahore

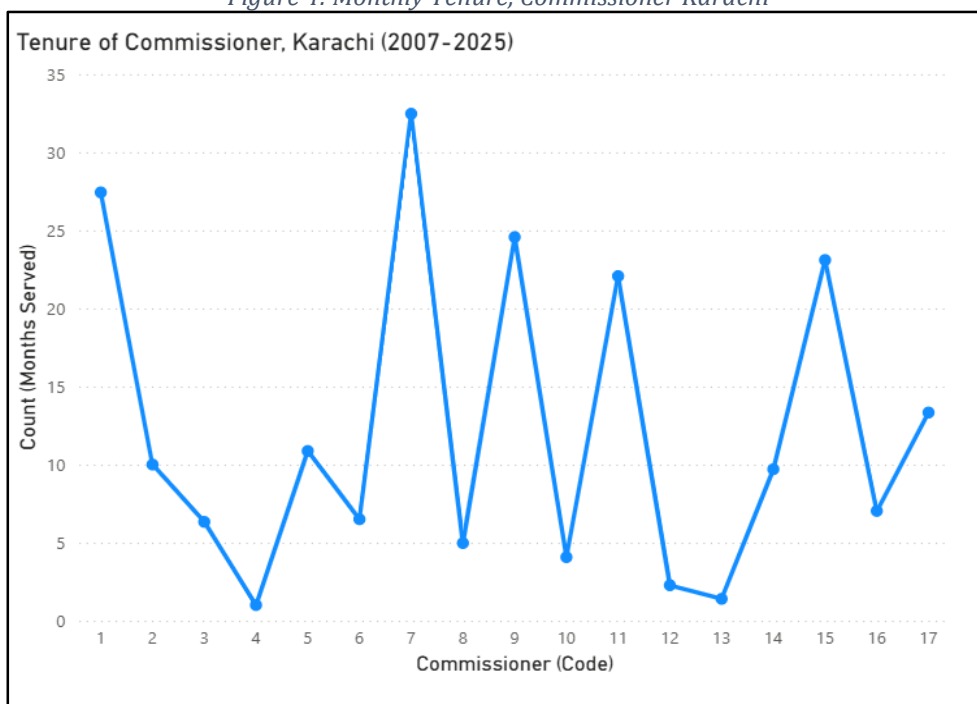


Source: Author's compilations.

The percentage of turnover for commissioner Lahore is quite high with only 14% (i.e. 3 commissioners) being able to continue their service as commissioner, as a new government took office.

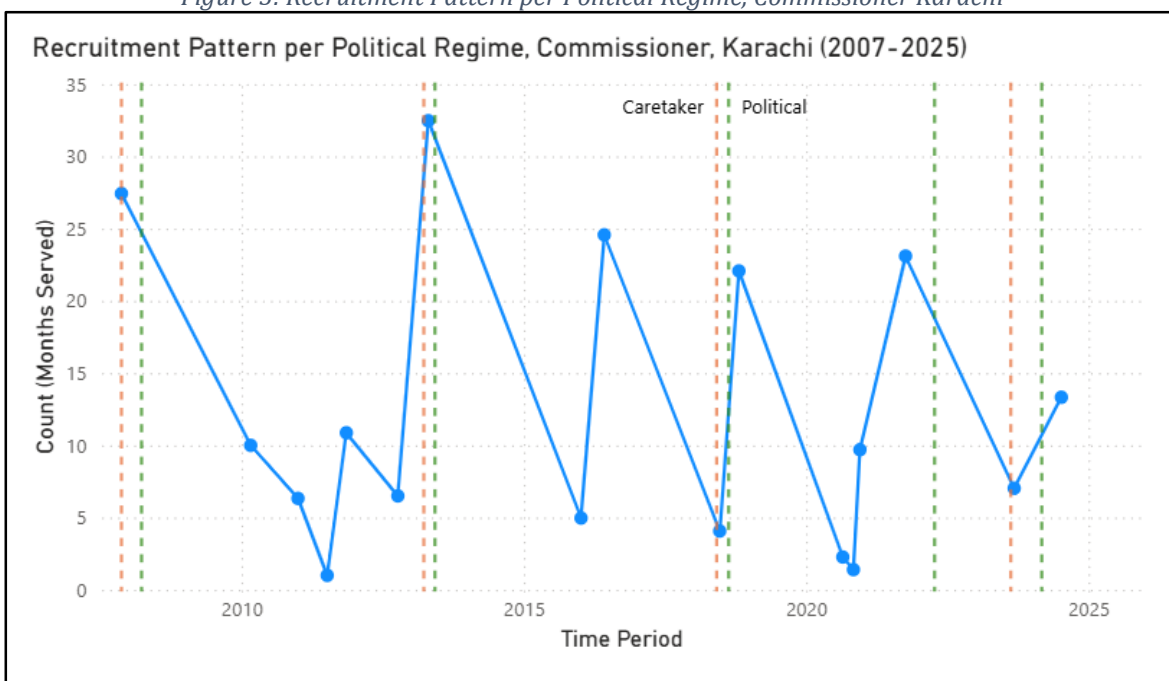
The tenure of commissioner, Karachi shows a relatively better trend, marked by more stability as compared to that in Lahore's case. As shown in figure 4, most of the appointees served more months, with the highest being 33 months and the lowest being 2 months. The average tenure equals ~12 months and median tenure being ~7-8 months.

Figure 4: Monthly Tenure, Commissioner Karachi



Source: Author's compilations.

Figure 5: Recruitment Pattern per Political Regime, Commissioner Karachi



Source: Author's compilations.

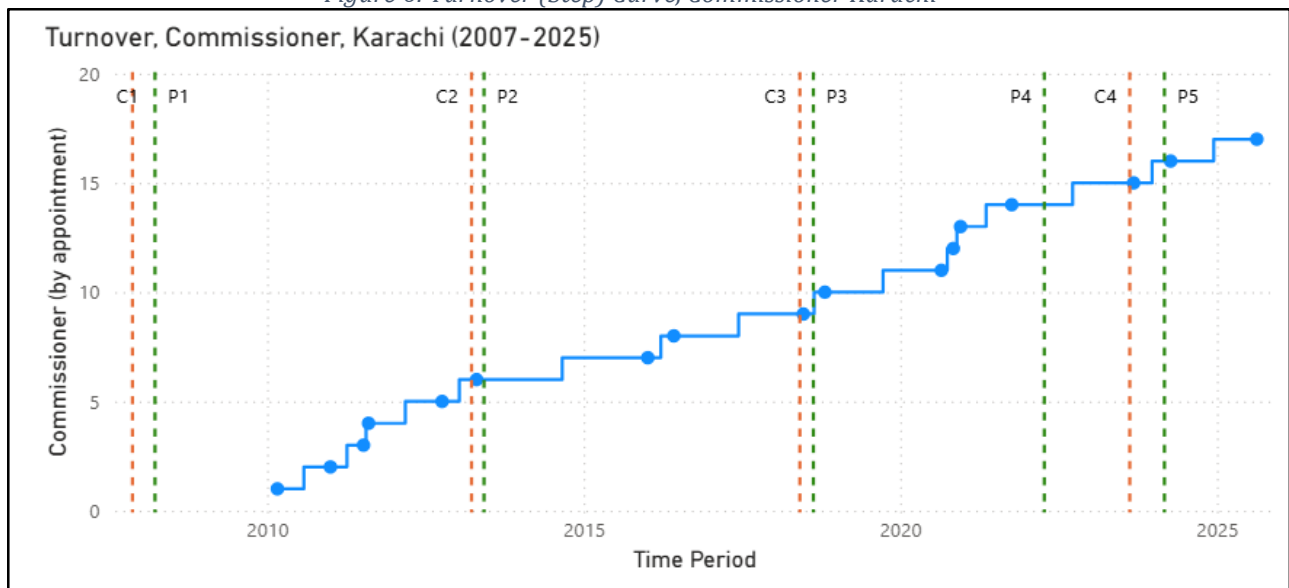
The figure above shows an interesting pattern for political and administrative careers in the case of commissioner, Karachi. While some appointees continued to serve incoming ministers as governments changed (for example, 2007 and 2013), there were others who were replaced almost

immediately, as evident in 2018 for both, caretaker and political governments. But the number of people continuing their service as commissioner, Karachi is still higher than that in Lahore.

Moreover, unlike Lahore's general decline, Karachi shows a boom-bust pattern with alternating periods of very long and very short tenures. This points to the extreme volatility than Lahore even with a higher average (for Karachi). Comparatively, the graphs above show that while Lahore had accelerating instability, Karachi demonstrated extreme volatility with no prominent pattern towards stability or instability.

Figure 6 adds further clarity in this regard. As also evident in the turnover trend for commissioner Lahore, we can see political instability being reflected through increased turnovers in Karachi as well, between P3 and P4. However, unlike in Lahore, turnovers are also high post-2010 period until 2013 (C2). Interestingly, the incidence of turnovers is lesser during government changes as most turnovers for commissioner Karachi occur within the same political regimes. Cumulatively, it shows a steady and consistent escalation of turnovers throughout 2007-2025. This means that there was a steady decline in administrative stability i.e. gradual institutional degradation, while for Lahore the decline was rather exponential, almost hinting at crisis acceleration.

Figure 6: Turnover (Step) Curve, Commissioner Karachi



Source: Author's compilations.

In addition to the findings above, turnover for Karachi was better than that for Lahore with 76% exit rate and 24% continued after the regime change, still, overall turnover is quite high.

Deputy Commissioner: For DC Lahore, analysis reveals that turnovers are higher 'within' regimes, especially post-2019, but cross-regime survival improves thereafter as appointees survive political transitions. This was observed for the PDM government (2022), Kakar's caretaker government (2023) as well as the PDM government (2024). The position of DC Karachi, on the other hand, shows largely spread out turnovers. Of these, some districts were particularly sensitive to political transition, prominent ones being Malir and Orangi

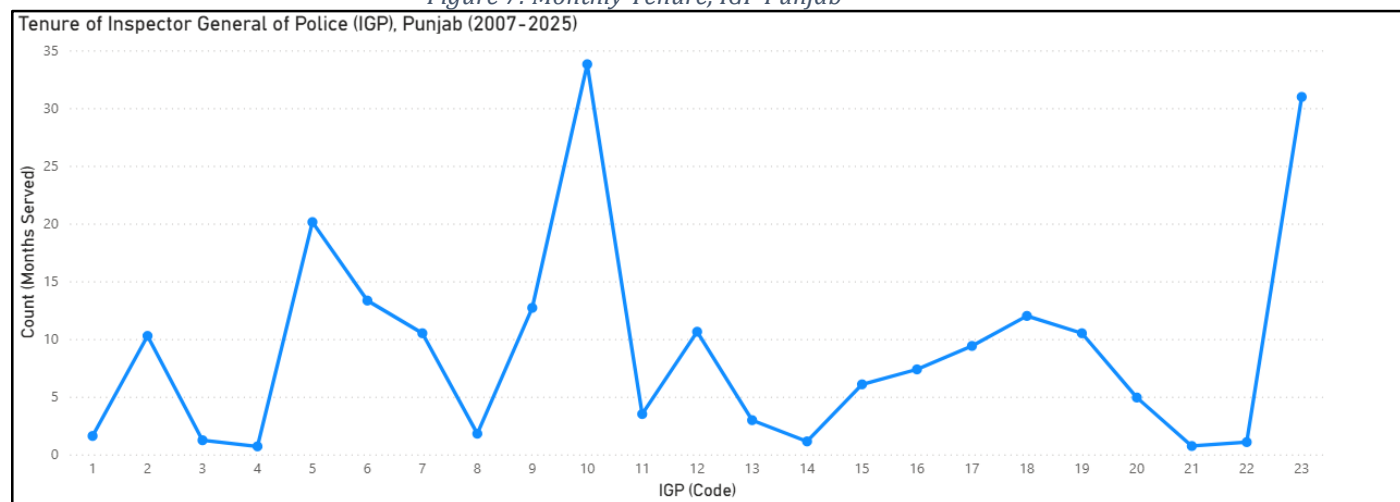
(post 2022), while others demonstrated a higher tolerance for tenure continuity across-regime, prominently, District East and Keamari.

Assistant Commissioner: The team faced significant constraints in collecting data for AC given a higher number of missing values in official records. Web scraping also proved futile due to a lack of reporting in this domain. Moreover, data was also limited for some jurisdictions as new sub-divisions were created in 2024³, therefore, making comparisons difficult. Thus, based on analysis on the information available, this position also reflects systemic instability and high volatility. Turnover remains high but cross-regime survival is better than that for commissioner and DC - ~20% for Lahore and 21% for Karachi. It is important to note that for those who survive political transitions, they do not last long in the service. This is prevalent especially for tehsils in Lahore, particularly Lahore Cantt, Lahore City, Raiwind and Shalamar between 2013 and 2024 for all governments, especially all political governments. For Karachi, this pattern holds for some sub-divisions while for others appointees survived political transitions and continued service for a comparatively longer period of time. In sum, while Karachi performed marginally better in terms of continuity, instability and volatility were still shared structural features with Lahore.

3.1.1.2. Police Service of Pakistan (PSP):

As far as the data for IGP is concerned, there were a total 23 appointees for IGP, Punjab, and 18 for the same for Sindh. Out of these, there were only 3 incumbents who were able to continue their service across a political transition for Punjab, whereas there was just 1 IGP who could survive a political transition in Sindh.

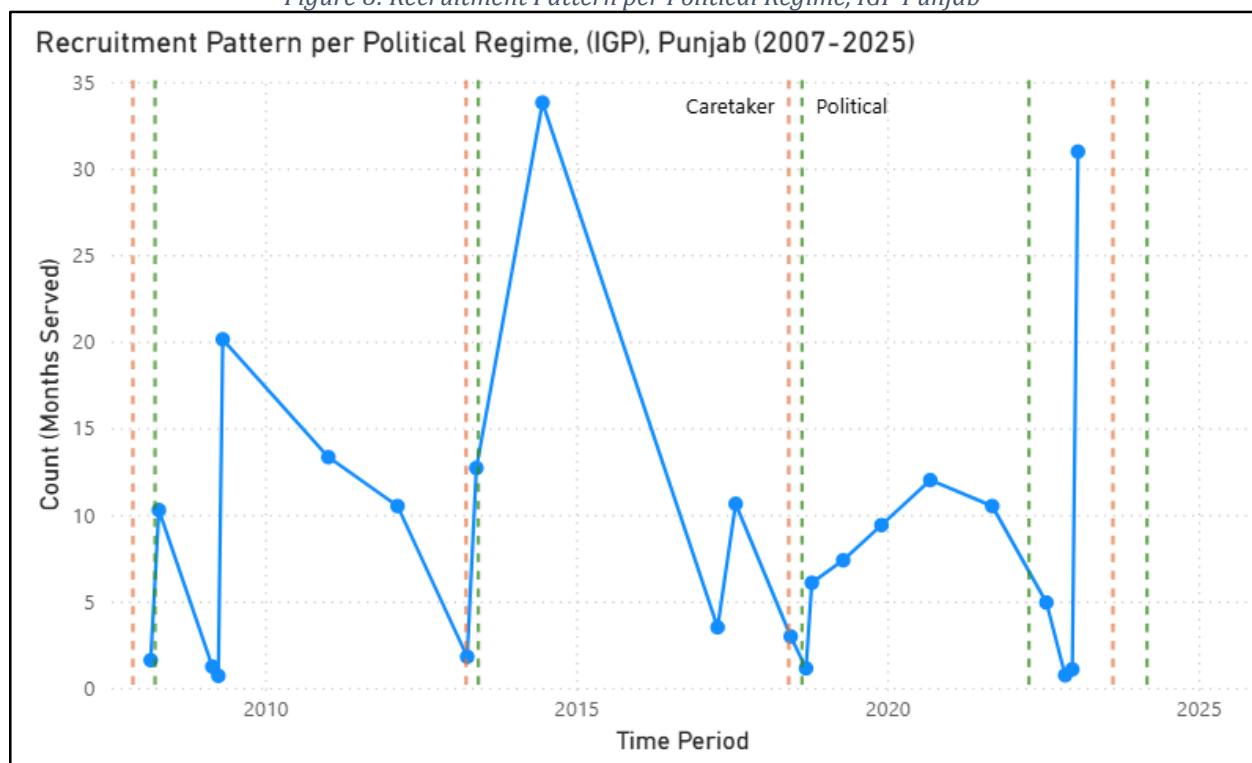
Figure 7: Monthly Tenure, IGP Punjab



Source: Author's compilations.

³ 5 new tehsils were created in Lahore, August 2024, namely Nishter, Wahga, Iqbal Town, Ravi and Saddar.

Figure 8: Recruitment Pattern per Political Regime, IGP Punjab



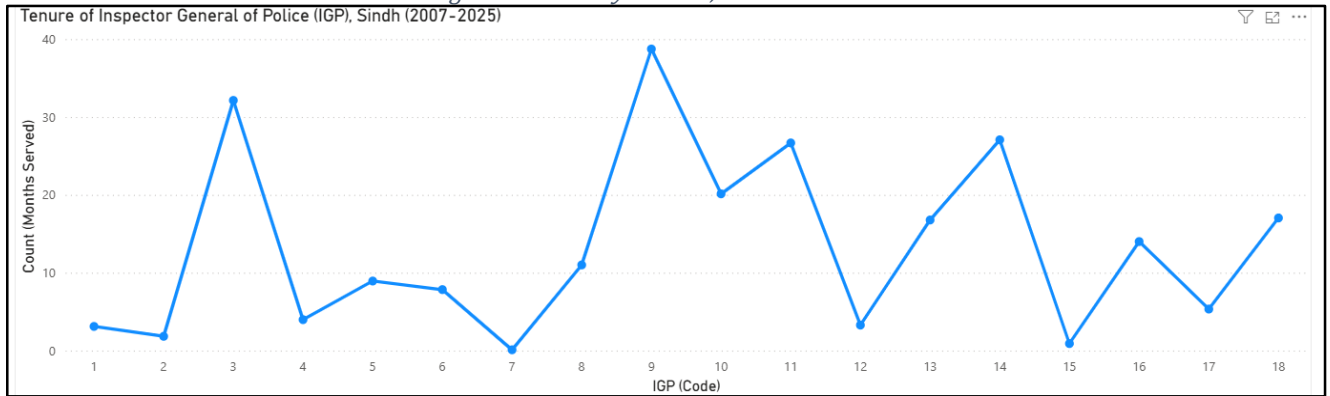
Source: Author's compilations.

Figures 7 and 8 above show the recruitment pattern and the broader pattern of tenure, for IGP Punjab, which is also marked by high instability (as commissioner Lahore). As is evident, change in appointees is very frequent and is mostly accompanied by shorter tenures with an average tenure of approximately 11 months. Although there are peaks (implying a higher term of appointment), around 2014 and 2023, the overall pattern is still largely unstable.

Moreover, there are (frequent) sharper changes in tenure around regime shifts - near election time - which hints at the significance of this position in the governance apparatus. IGP Punjab seems more prone to abrupt changes during both regimes - caretaker setups and political governments. This further emphasizes the underlying instability associated with this position, signalling towards a greater degree of politicization.

It is useful to compare the results for IGPs for both provinces given their stark differences and underlying similarities. Figure 10 reflects greater variation in tenures for IGP, Sindh. In comparison to IGP, Punjab, there are several relatively longer tenures, where peaks reach up to ~39 months (around 2013-2014). It is also evident that most IGPs in Sindh have served between 15-30 months which is indicative of slightly higher stability (in those periods).

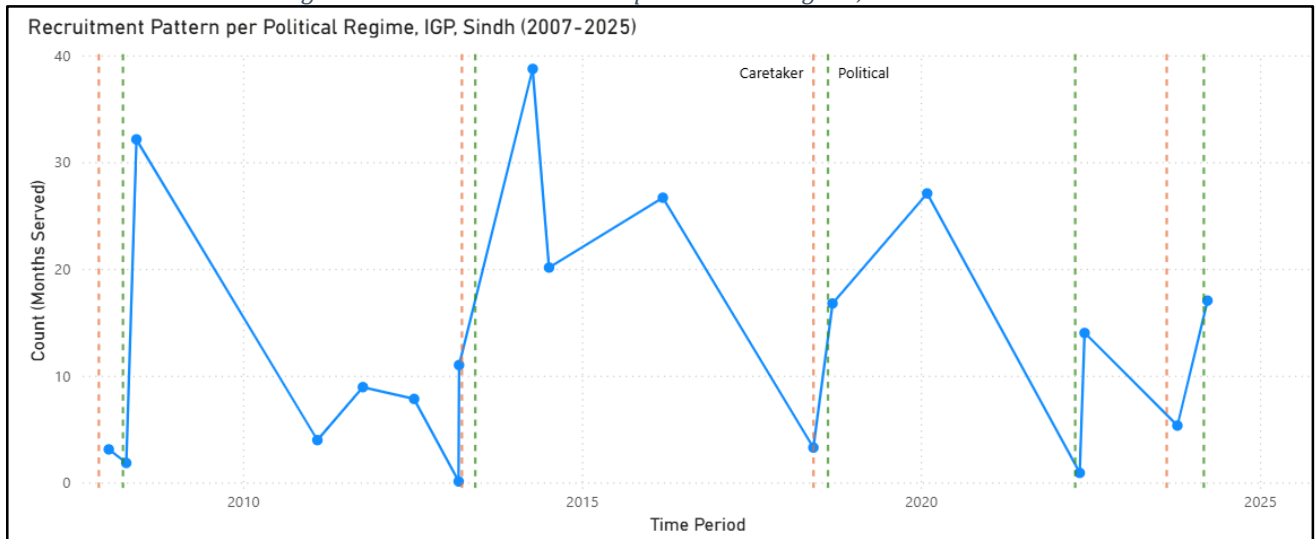
Figure 9: Monthly Tenure, IGP Sindh



Source: Author's compilations.

Furthermore, figure 10 shows that political transitions trigger administrative change. Nevertheless, there is also evidence of a few IGPs (Sindh) continuing in office across regimes. These insights highlight an interesting pattern: there is volatility around election periods but is followed by longer and largely uninterrupted periods of service, which indicates a higher degree of institutional continuity.

Figure 10: Recruitment Pattern per Political Regime, IGP Sindh



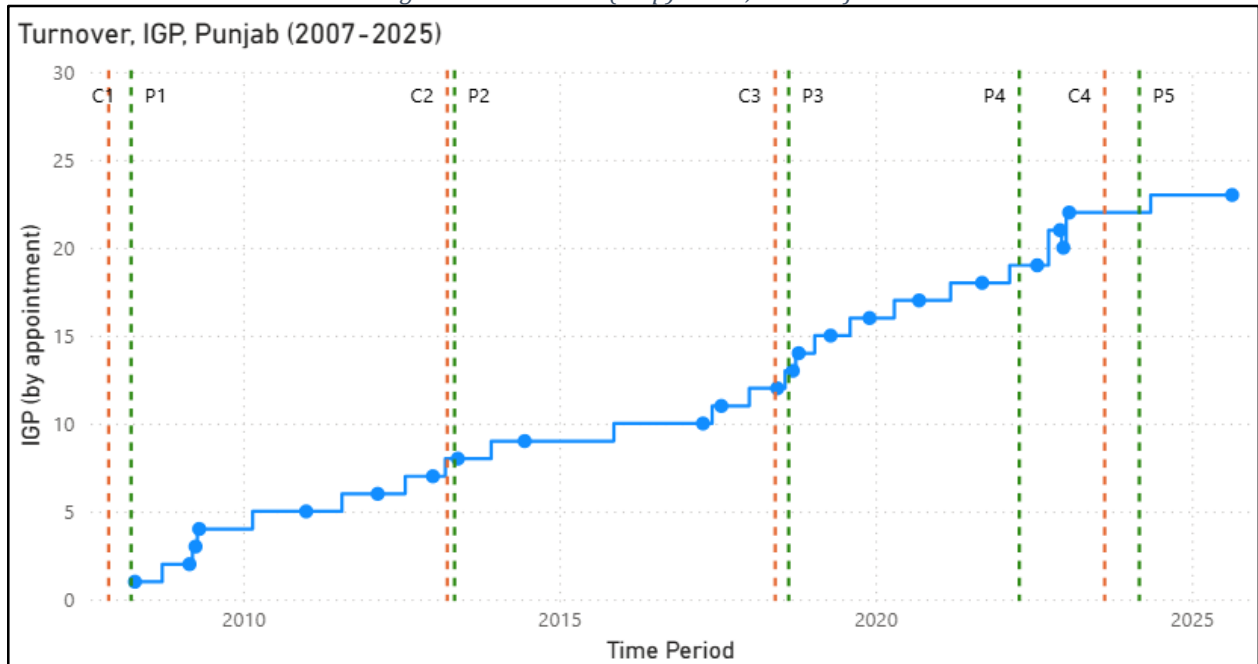
Source: Author's compilations.

Figure 11 gives a deeper perspective at turnover and its relationship with political changes. Following from the earlier discussion, it is clear how instability accelerates from 2018 onwards - especially between 2019 and 2021 (indicated by the steepness of the curve and less plateaus⁴). As we can see around C3/P3 and P4/C4 boundaries, there is a sharp increase in turnover during these

⁴ The plateaus in the turnover line chart indicate periods where the same IGP remained in position i.e. no turnover event during that timeframe - which is another way of referring to 'stability' in the position.

transition periods - which reiterates and emphasizes that Punjab Police leadership is significantly subject to political considerations.

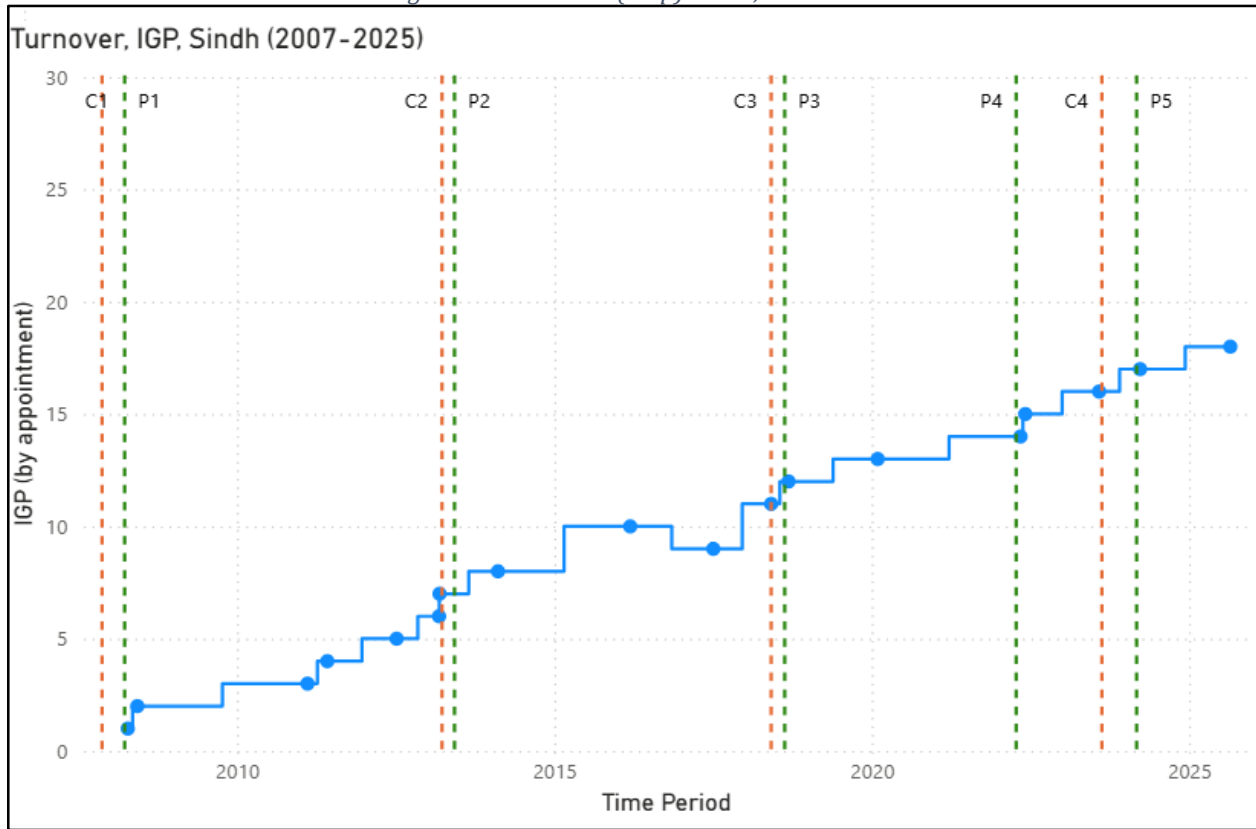
Figure 11: Turnover (Step) Curve, IGP Punjab



Source: Author's compilations.

Overall, 87% of IGPs exited during 2007-2025 while only 13% continued their tenures.. This confirms the short average tenure, and hints at the prevalent instability (in terms of frequent exits) being the recurrent recruitment trend. The minor share of contributions aligns with the observation that few IGPs serve across political or caretaker regime changes. From a policy perspective, this implies a lack of institutional continuity and a higher degree of politicization, which weakens prospects of long-term policy implementation and police reforms.

Figure 12: Turnover (Step) Curve, IGP Sindh



Source: Author's compilations.

The figure above represents the turnover pattern for IGP Sindh, which is marked by 'intermittent stability', especially as compared to its highly sensitive counterpart in Punjab (with almost 'continuous' turnover). While it is obvious that Sindh had a relatively stable police leadership, nevertheless, it is still susceptible to change/replacement during periods of political transition.

On average, Sindh's IGPs serve longer tenures, still the high variance indicates extreme swings: meaning, that many tenures are either quite short-lived or quite long but eventually are prone to removal with regime shifts. This justifies the high turnover percentage of 94%; it means that when political changes occur, removals are more decisive thus leading to fewer cross-regime continuation, which is only 6%.

In sum, the above visualizations for IGP Sindh cumulatively indicate that there is more tolerance for long tenures. However, appointees are more susceptible to removals as regimes change, thus reducing instances of (across regime) continuation. Average tenure stability in Sindh does not translate to 'regime stability' but implies that some individuals last long 'within' a regime, but very few survive 'across' regimes.

Deputy Inspector General of Police: Appointment patterns for DIG for both cities share a similar degree of instability and volatility as those for IGP. It shows sensitivity to political transitions but not as much as IGP. Changes in appointments are less frequent for DIGs in both cities, which suggests moderate predictability. Although most appointees serve for ~7 months, they are rarely replaced

instantaneously. For instance, appointment patterns for DIGs for Districts East, South and Orangi in Karachi, for mostly post-2018 political governments are prominent examples in this regard. Nevertheless, the opposite is true for DIG Lahore, where turnovers accelerate post 2018, particularly between PTI's government in 2018 and Kakar's caretaker government in 2023. Lower cross-regime survival percentages (see table 4) reiterate structural instability as political cycles dominate tenure longevity. This is, again, prominent for DIG Lahore post-PTI government (2018) till Kakar's caretaker government (2023). It is interesting to note that, while PML-N's regime has been the most stable for DIG Lahore (with only 2 turnovers during this regime), the same is not true for DIGs Karachi. Incidence of turnover is higher starting from the PPP government in 2008 till Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk's caretaker setup in 2018, with on average 5 turnovers per regime. Turnovers for Districts East, South and Orangi largely stabilize post-2018. Overall, the DIG position is unstable in both cities.

Senior Superintendent of Police: Appointments for SSP Lahore are not as volatile and unstable as those for SSP Karachi. The cross-regime survival is higher for SSP Lahore (~24%) than SSP Karachi (~17%). Total turnover is higher for Karachi (83%) than Lahore (76%). Moreover, data suggests that there were some appointees who served two successive governments as SSP Lahore. For example, one of the SSPs (administration) Lahore was appointed by the PTI regime, and they continued their service under the PDM government in 2022 as well as Kakar's caretaker government in 2023. While many appointees survived political transitions in Karachi, most of them were replaced quickly. It is also interesting to note that in Karachi mostly and some individuals in Lahore were reshuffled either into a different sub-division or were reappointed at a different time period in the same position. This highlights an interesting perspective on (such) turnovers and their likely relationship with political principals. Overall, tenure variability in both cities is high as some appointees served 25 and 32 months, in Lahore and Karachi respectively, while others barely survived for days. Appointments for the position of SSP are broadly unstable and volatile.

3.1.1.3. Comparative Analysis (PAS & PSP)

In retrospect, a cross cadre comparison reveals a more heterogeneous tenure distribution for PAS than PSP. Tenure patterns for PSP demonstrate uniformity in terms of volatility and instability. Table 4 presents a statistical overview of all positions in both cadres.

Table 5: Cadre (PAS & PSP) and Geographical Comparison (Summary Statistics)

Cadre	Position	City Province	Median Tenure (Months)	Mean Tenure (Months)	Turnover (%)
PAS	Commissioner	Lahore, Punjab	7.4	9.6	86.0
		Karachi, Sindh	7.4	12.2	76.0
	DC	Lahore, Punjab	10.8	10.9	84.0
		Karachi, Sindh	7.0	10.6	78.0
	AC	Lahore, Punjab	7.2	8.0	80.4
		Karachi, Sindh	7.2	8.4	79.6
PSP	IGP	Lahore, Punjab	10.0	9.1	87.0
		Karachi, Sindh	10.0	13.3	94.0
	DIG	Lahore, Punjab	8.2	8.9	86.0
		Karachi, Sindh	7.1	8.5	82.0
	SSP	Lahore, Punjab	6.2	8.5	76.0
		Karachi, Sindh	6.0	7.6	83.0

Source: Author's compilations.

The table 5 quantifies the institutional crisis prevalent in both cadres, especially at senior-most positions. Across the ranks, median tenures are very low, ranging between 6-10 months, which are far below the international best practice. This highlights systemic dysfunctionality and underscores the urgent need for minimum tenure legislation.

Table 6 further differentiates the cross regime survival across the six positions in the two provinces. IGP Sindh shows the worst cross regime survival rate (6%) while Commissioner Karachi and SSP Lahore represent the higher end of survival rate at 24% which is not very high either.

Table 6: Cross-regime Survival across Positions and Provinces

Position & Province	%
Sindh IGP (PSP)	6%
Punjab IGP (PSP)	13%
Lahore Commissioner (PAS)	14%
Lahore DIG (PSP)	14%
Lahore DC (PAS)	16%
Karachi SSP (PSP)	17%
Karachi DIG (PSP)	19%
Lahore AC (PAS)	20%
Karachi AC (PAS)	21%
Karachi DC (PAS)	22%
Lahore SSP (PSP)	24%
Karachi Commissioner (PAS)	24%

Source: Author's compilations.

Summarily, neither cadre shows sustained stability of tenure, especially with regards to political careers: PSP cadre faces systemic instability while PAS cadre shows 'managed' instability.

Finally, it is important to conclude the analysis with a word of caution: regime survival as a measure of resilience requires further (qualitative) contextualization as it may offer an alternative perspective on the underlying political dynamics in relation to bureaucratic careers. Stability in this context may capture political networks rather than institutional strength.

3.2. Qualitative Analysis

3.2.1. Qualitative Data

The statistical analysis under the project was supplemented by qualitative data. The qualitative analysis was broadly based on a (thematic) interview guide (attached in the annexure), which aims to delve into the nuances of the statistical findings. This aimed to bolster and provide a holistic explanation of the phenomenon of bureaucratic turnover in Pakistan. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews (around 16) with (retired) or senior bureaucrats who have served at these positions. Insights derived from qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews were combined with expert discussions (academics) as well as a policy seminar involving academics, policy practitioners and political representatives. The interviews were guided by broad themes that helped contextualize information regarding the political and bureaucratic dynamics. This qualitative information synthesizes lived experiences of civil servants and their observations on political-bureaucratic relationships, and reflections on structural and institutional reform needs. This provides a reliable cover for the analytical limitations of the statistical analysis, which presents a numerical view of bureaucratic turnover. This analysis proved to be extremely fruitful for the contextualization of our analysis, emphasizing its relevance and alignment with on-ground realities.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Following are the key findings from the qualitative analysis:

Politicization is a key determinant of bureaucratic turnover: There is consensus among the interviewees that politicization has persisted since the early years of Pakistan's history. However, they assert that it intensified especially in the aftermath of the 1973 constitutional reforms, which eliminated due-process protections for the bureaucracy and (informally) expanded discretionary authority of political principals over appointments and removals. Moreover, starting from the 1990s, intense political rivalries between Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) created stronger incentives for political parties to demand bureaucratic loyalty over competence—infact loyalty outweighed competence. PTI being new in the power game, kept searching for loyalty in their recent term and building networks which was evident in the increased intensity of transfers and postings by them.

Politicization as a phenomenon has persisted ever since, and permeates political leadership at both senior (federal) and local levels (MNA/MPA). An interesting example in this case is that of IGP Sindh, which shows high volatility (in terms of survival of political transitions) but low instability of tenure throughout 2007-2025. It is evident that turnovers are linked to political transitions, as a new IGP is appointed with every new political principal, but continues to serve for relatively longer periods. In this case, the only exception is the incumbent appointed in 2022 by the PDM government who also served in Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar's caretaker government between 2023 and 2024. The situation could complicate when ruling parties at federal and provincial level are not the same, leading to increased conflicts and higher turnover trends. Bureaucrats can do contempt of court against the transfer before legally mandated term, however, they usually do not go to the court. It is important to note that in spite of court rulings, prominently in the Anita Turab case, tenure security remains unenforced and continues to be so because bureaucrats lack the leverage to challenge executive authority.

Turnover patterns vary by political experience and geography: The quantitative findings of our data are reinforced by the qualitative analysis showing some political eras having greater stability than others, prominently in regions that are their strongholds. This is true for PML-N in Punjab and PPP in Sindh, which demonstrate lower turnovers for almost all the positions in PAS and PSP. Insights from the interviews confirm that this is because these political parties have deep institutional memory and they already know which officers fit their political and networked expectations. This implies that stability of tenures is politically engineered. The opposite is true for new political players, as evidenced by turnover patterns for Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI). PTI experienced high turnovers given its lack of established networks. Non-alignment of PMLN bureaucrats with PTI lead to inefficiencies and frequent transfers. Sindh on the other hand had continuous terms of PPP, that is translated in often comparatively stable tenures.

In terms of geography, it is essential to understand who holds the most power, in Punjab, provincial ministers are weak actors and the Chief Minister holds the most power and usually directly deals with senior bureaucrats.

Transfers and postings operate as a market: The ability to determine appointment patterns bolster the transactional nature of appointments where political principals are bargaining for loyalty or ‘obliged service’ from bureaucratic agents, who in turn seek to bargain with politicians for their own varied incentives. Interviewees remark that incentives are often driven by a lack of public-service orientation of officers and further exacerbated as training systems do not adequately instil civic sense or service norms. Interviews suggest that monetary exchanges and rent-seeking have been major currencies in this kind of bargain, which enables extraction of (financial or political) ‘surplus’ from the system. Understand it as a utility function for bureaucrats with a bargain framework. Bureaucracy has longevity and politicians get to achieve their agenda through them. Political agenda completion depends on who to post and where. Accordingly, these bargains occur continuously and vary by position, geography or ministry showing higher turnovers in high rent or donor heavy sectors such as energy or revenue. One of the interviewees mentioned that it is important to note that where are the officers going after turnover happens, what are their next steps, are they more lucrative?

There is a persistence of trust deficit between politicians and bureaucrats, often driven by misaligned incentives: Following from above, it is evident that these bargains are not only driven by rent-seeking behaviors and innate objectives, but are also bred through the continuance of a trust deficit between politicians and bureaucrats. Politicians distrust bureaucrats in aligning policy goals with political agendas and often deem officers as incompetent - an issue prominently highlighted by bureaucrats. Bureaucrats, on the other hand, distrust politicians due to (unnecessary) interference (in their day-to-day work) and lack of (constitutional) protection (or even support from senior bureaucrats). One of the interviewees shared that a politician while addressing PAS officials said that he will not hire a grade-20 bureaucrat as their peon— representing the lack of trust in the competence. Bureaucrats receive minimal recognition for good performance while any attempts towards reform are often met by political backlash. There is interesting literature on blaming bureaucracy in the west for instance (Hinterleitner, 2025) calls bureaucracy as the favourite scapegoat of the politicians. There are minimal chances that bureaucrats will respond back against the political narratives in case of policy failures. This kind of behaviour fuels the mistrust between two parties and it's easier for the politicians to remove the scapegoat and perhaps bring another through turnover.

On the other hand, politicians (a few interview respondents) mentioned that bureaucrats as soon as they get the charge, become obsessed with authority and fail to cooperate with the politicians. The interviewee from the political side also asserted that most bureaucrats prefer to do nothing, since there are no rewards for better performance. Bureaucrats also often get into trouble, with the court cases by the National Accountability Bureau—when they initiate new projects. Political respondents claim that bureaucrats are a ‘privileged ruling club’ who won’t let any major reforms take place.

Continuous re-fabrication of Political Parties in Pakistan: ‘Politics of the power holder determines transfers’. Politicians in Pakistan are continuously switching political parties, specifically translating trends for any political party is a hard nut to crack, according to one respondent. Understanding the composition of political parties during different time periods is significantly relevant. In the recent regimes of PDM and Post-PDM, the leading actor is not necessarily political.

Interviewees agreed to call the military as an agent with strong political agency while staying in the background. Stability or varying patterns in the recent regimes could not be called de-politicization. Rather, it is more to understand the composition of the agents with political agency.

Role of Stakeholders at Local Level: MNA's, MPA's, and Landlords: There is a lot of interference by MNA's and MPA's in the posting and transfer decisions. Even federal ministries are awarded for political coalitions with relevant administrative staff holding the key positions. The interviews emphasized that there is heterogeneity of interest in the political domain more so at grassroots levels. For instance, at constituency level, there are nested interests of politicians —MNA's and MPA's. They will preferentially have the officers on ground that are on the same page as them, for relatively easier day to day affairs.

Politicization is beyond 'Political Parties or Political Leaders': Role of Other Stakeholders: One of the most evident and interesting findings from interviews was to rethink politicization beyond political actors. Politicization is necessarily a phenomenon and not a specific actor. The role of local landlords and industrialists has appeared as a key variable specially for the administration and police service positions. One of the respondents from politics mentioned that all transfers and posting in PAS primarily are on the requests of industrialists and other power groups. Many political families are closely knitted in the consultant groups— they get requests of transfers and postings from the. There were times when businessmen and civil servants would not mix in Pakistan; however, in these materialistic times, business men have a lot of say in postings and transfers. They are part of a wider network with marriages and social circles. Interviews mentioned specific clubs and places where elites of the society tend to socialize actively with senior civil servants, leading to alliances that further translate into transfer trends. The role of the corporate sector and donor interest is also relevant, for instance they would want to give a lucrative position to secretary finance or a senior civil servant who holds a significant long-term institutional memory. Often leading to turnover at his/her position.

Governance outcomes are shaped by politico-bureaucratic alliances: Backed by quantitative data, qualitative analysis reiterates that the bureaucracy has now metamorphosed into a networked system where appointment, and therefore governance outcomes, are determined by alliances between political and bureaucratic actors. In this regard, local politicians play a critical role as they provide feedback loops and electoral linkages (from grassroots) to senior political principals and thus exert authority over appointments, especially at lower levels of administration. This is often justified as one reason why turnovers are relatively infrequent at lower positions (as compared to senior positions) of the bureaucracy - also evidenced by this research's quantitative analysis. For instance, politicians are more likely to reach the senior most officials for getting their tasks done, leading to frequent transfers in case of misalignment. This further underscores the argument that stability does not indicate depoliticization. It shows that stability reflects loyalty networks as discussed above - producing predictability from an HR perspective but without improving service delivery outcomes. A few respondents agreed that a smaller group of bureaucrats is politically aligned while others are still politically neutral and putting in their best efforts to perform their jobs alone.

Monetary Value of the Positions: Sometimes money is involved in postings (in the terms of PTI and PPP) which could affect the overall pace of turnover. Some positions hold great monetary value, calling for more political involvement in them and the postings. Postings in certain districts and locations could be more lucrative. Interviews asserted that there is growing tolerance for corruption with below par ethical standards. A lot of things surround self-projection, convincing junior bureaucrats to take short cuts. This leads to different forms of politics and bureaucratic alignment. Many agreed that due to increased cost of living, bureaucrats' elite social circles while their salary alone does not match with the required standards of the society. They are more inclined to form alliances with the power brokers who could facilitate their transfers and postings at more favourable places (geographical areas or departments). Interviews made it evident that bureaucracy is strongly knitted with certain networks and values connections with the power groups. This is what Scott (1972) referred to as parochial corruption, access to the favours of power holders.

Difference between PAS and PSP: The three positions in both cadres (PAS and PSP) operate at different levels in the state hierarchy, for instance IG police is very senior compared to the Commissioner of a division, although, in this data, both Lahore and Karachi are provincial capitals and the commissioners hold significant power. The interviews also highlighted the internal tensions between PAS and PSP at operational level.

Turnover- Implications for Policy Continuity: Higher turnover trends lead to instability at policy level. There are so many policies which are important for national interests but their implementation is affected by the turnover. One of the interviewees narrated that in a high flood risk area, there were frequent changes at the deputy commissioner level, the new person would take so much to understand the intricacies of the issues and climate governance. This often leads to higher risk of ineffective disaster preparedness and post-disaster management. Policy continuity matters more for the administrative positions where sufficiently long tenure could lead to policy implementation and consistent growth. Interviews asserted that PAS is more challenging in terms of policy continuity compared to PSP, since quick impact is visible at administrative level. In PSP, 13 Superintendent Police (SP) were changed in Karachi in 12 months according to one respondent, this happening in a city highly vulnerable to street crimes has implications not only for the law & order but for overall economic growth of the city. The policies usually have a wider national interest that is compromised for a short-term or personal interest at local level.

CONCLUSIONS

The need for contextualizing the political dynamics of bureaucratic turnover is crucial. Administrative structures and stability is shaped by 'politics' as a phenomenon which is beyond individual political actors or parties. Re-configuration of political parties, nested interests of other strong stake-holders, institutional memory of political and bureaucratic actors complicate the bureaucratic turnover which might not appear in the numerical data. Weak organizational systems for the bureaucracy - through lack of clear job descriptions and rules as well as fragmented authority - fosters reliance on informal networks and politico-bureaucratic bargains. However, politicization could not always be declared bad, informed decisions can sometimes lead to efficiency and effectiveness. Analysis from this research suggests that bureaucratic turnover in Pakistan is not merely an administrative issue but also a political instrument that undermines administrative performance and stability. Political dynamics of bureaucratic turnover makes us re-think politicization as a process that is not specific to political actors. This does increase the complexities in reforming the bureaucratic recruitment, transfer and appointments. Consequently, this reifies structural weaknesses and institutional ambiguity within the governance system by rewarding discretionary powers, patronage networks as well as rent-seeking behaviors. Cumulatively, these factors reduce accountability and mar service delivery thus eroding performance and undermining reform efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the discussion above, both cadres face systemic instability, marked by frequent turnovers and unpredictable tenure durations, especially at the top-most positions. While there is variation in the relative symbiosis between political and administrative careers, it is evident that political dynamics shape continuity.

Unpredictable appointment patterns add to already-existing governance challenges through loss of institutional memory and short-termism. This in turn undermines long-term planning and policy implementation - issues which are critically severe in Pakistan's case. Around the world, mainly in the West, the average time at the post is more than 3 years while in most countries of South Asia it is 2 years or less on average. OECD (2019) report on 'The innovation driven public sector', states that tenure of less than 2 years for senior bureaucrats is an evident reason for policy failures. World Bank (2021), Bureaucracy Lab research asserted that in countries with protected tenures there is less corruption and higher GDP. Therefore, based on our analysis and international best practices, the following policy reforms are recommended:

1. Tenure Policy Reforms—Minimum 3 years: There is a need to legally consolidate recruitment policies of civil servants, particularly, by introducing minimum tenure guarantees for at least key bureaucratic positions. It is critical to reduce tenure volatility, especially in relation to political considerations, as predictable tenures can incentivize strategic administrative performance instead of short-term (political) compliance.

2. Restrict Posting Powers of Caretaker setups by Statute: Each caretaker regime represented prominent bursts in our data which showed there was a spike in senior appointments in both Sindh and Punjab. This could be because of the outgoing government, incoming caretaker setup or incoming political government, but this consistent spike in short windows at senior level needs to be addressed. Restricting the postings by the caretaker government could decrease unnecessary reshuffling for short periods affecting the overall efficiency of the system.

3. Treat the IGP Sindh as a Priority Standalone Case for Reform: IGP Sindh had the lowest cross-regime survival and 94% turnover over the period under review. This is categorically different from other positions studied and the severity of the problem, calls for urgent standalone reforms to examine the position and ensure legislative protection with a fixed term.

4. Investigate the Political Government 2 (2013-2018) Stability Condition for broader administrative reforms: In comparative analysis, political government (PG 2) from 2013-2018 produced a sustained continuity. During this period, PMLN was leading the Center and Punjab while PPP was leading Sindh. Both these parties have rich institutional memory and experience of working in these provinces that could be attributed to comparatively stable patterns. We recommend that the legal, administrative and political conditions should be studied to understand if the stability was purely political or there were other factors in play to design informed reforms.

5. Automate and train systems of appointments and transfers with Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI can be leveraged to build integrated human resource (HR) data systems, and trained systems can flag any transfers made before the minimum tenure. AI can also be used for career pathing of

bureaucrats. These systems can protect against unjustified rent-seeking opportunities, which may be used as 'bargains' from political principals for promotions, transfers or removals of officers.

6. Open administrative processes to the public by standardizing data and making it available:

Citizens are the main receivers of policies and accordingly should have access to information on the agents who serve them. There should be mandatory public reporting of all senior appointments, promotions, transfers and removals. While recruitment-related announcements are made through national and provincial gazettes, annual reports should be published to present consolidated analytics on bureaucratic tenure and performance.

While the above recommendations are targeted towards administrative rules, it is important to note that reforms must also be introduced to address constraints emanating from the political sphere. These may include aspects pertaining to consensus-building, strengthening political institutions (such as the judiciary) and creating streamlined external pressures through investigative journalism as well as civil society advocacy.

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ANNEX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide is prepared to provide contextual information regarding the dynamics of bureaucratic turnover and its relationship with political changes. Given the complexity of administrative practices and their embeddedness in politico-institutional contexts, qualitative inquiry provides an opportunity to derive lessons from lived experiences, perceptions and strategies of bureaucrats in ways quantitative data cannot. It underscores the depth, credibility and relevance of our research.

The interview guide provides a systematic yet flexible framework for exploring nuanced perspectives on bureaucratic turnover. It helps us to delve deeper into how factors such as fixed terms, political transitions and transfer practices affect administrative performance and the larger governance system. The expected contribution of this analysis lies in its ability to:

- Illuminate undocumented practices and informal norms which shape bureaucratic turnover;
 - Identify the interplay between political transitions and administrative stability;
 - Highlight cadre-specific vulnerabilities;
 - Generate grounded reform insights by drawing on practitioner's experiences and perceptions.
-

Questions

Interview questions were only a guideline, in-depth interviews lead to rich data guided by the quantitative insights from the project.

Introduction and Background

- Could you briefly describe your role, career trajectory and experience with bureaucratic postings and transfers?
 - *Theme: career trajectory; exposure to transfers; length of service (insight to tenure stability)*
- How many times, or how frequently, have you experienced transfers in the past decade?
 - *Frequency of turnover; stability vs instability; career pattern*

Tenure Security and Performance

- How do you see the relevance of tenure security, for example, a fixed 3-year term for bureaucratic performance and effectiveness?
 - *Perception of tenure security; performance outcomes (continuity and efficiency); professional autonomy; political interference/patronage*
- In your view, does tenure security enhance accountability, efficiency or service delivery? Why or why not?
 - *Accountability; service delivery quality; neutral vs responsive politicization*
- Can you share examples where stable tenure enabled better policymaking or (policy) implementation?

- *Case example; policy continuity; implementation challenges*

Service, Vulnerabilities and Transitions

- Are certain cadres more vulnerable to frequent transfers? Why?
 - *Service-specific vulnerabilities; power structures; political visibility*
- What have been the most common reasons for your transfers?
 - *Causes of turnover; merit vs patronage; institutional needs*
- How do abrupt transfers affect your motivation, decision-making and relationships with stakeholders?
 - *Stakeholder relationships; politico-administrative networks; personnel management*
- How do political transitions (for example caretaker to elected setups) affect bureaucratic postings and transfers?
 - *Transition effects; patronage reshuffling*
- Do these transitions affect certain positions more than others?
 - *Scope of transitions; strategic postings*
- If the same officials continue from caretaker to elected setups, does that continuity reduce or intensify turnover pressures?
 - *Patronage resilience; stability strategies*
- To what extent do bureaucrats adapt their behavior strategically during such transitions?
 - *Strategic compliance; survival strategies; political neutrality vs alignment*

Experience of Bureaucratic Turnover

- Can you describe your own experience of bureaucratic turnover and how it has shaped your work?
 - *First-hand account; learning and adaptation; effect of politicization/political interference*
- What have been the most common reasons for your transfers?
 - *Causes of turnover; merit vs patronage; institutional needs*
- How do abrupt transfers affect your motivation, decision-making and relationships with stakeholders?
 - *Politico-administrative networks; personnel management*
 - *Role of different political parties*

Stakeholder Relationships

- In your experience, which actors (political leaders, senior bureaucrats, judiciary, civil society, lobbyists) play the most important role in bureaucratic turnover?
 - *Hierarchy; governance network; social capital and informal networks*
- Do you see differences in the influence of these actors at the federal, provincial and district levels?
 - *Federal dynamics; governance system; level-specific vulnerabilities*