The Global Survey of Public Servants

A Foundation for Research on Public Servants around the World

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Abstract

How do civil service management practices differ within and across governments? How do core attitudes of public servants—such as their motivation or satisfaction—differ within and across governments? Understanding how public administrations around the world function and differ is crucial for strengthening their effectiveness. Most comparative measures of bureaucracy rely on surveys of experts, households, or firms, rather than directly questioning bureaucrats. Direct surveys of public officials enable governments to benchmark themselves and scholars to study comparative public administration and the state differently, based on micro-data from actors who experience government first-hand. This paper introduces the Global Survey of Public Servants, a global initiative to collect and harmonize large-scale, comparable survey data on public servants. The Global Survey of Public Servants can help scholars compare public administrations around the world and understand the internal dynamics of governments, with the published Global Survey of Public Servants data freely available online.

The Global Survey of Public Servants: A Foundation for Research on Public Servants around the World[1]

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Introduction: Measurement of Public Administration and the Global Survey of Public Servants

How governments are administered is a critical determinant of socio-economic outcomes (Evans and Rauch 1999; Finan, Olken and Pande 2015; Pepinsky, Pierskalla and Sacks 2017; Besley, Burgess, Khan and Xu 2022). Understanding how public administrations function and differ around the world is crucial for identifying the drivers of successful administrations. Recent research in economics, political science and public administration has capitalized on the benefits of direct surveys of public servants to investigate the functioning of the state (for example, Rasul and Rogger 2018; Rasul, Rogger and Williams 2020; Bertrand et al. 2020; Raffler 2022; Harris et al., Forthcoming). This paper presents an initiative – the Global Survey of Public Servants - to collect and harmonize large-scale, comparable survey data on public servants.

Questions around how to strengthen the functioning of state administrations pose an immediate measurement challenge: how can differences between public administrations be effectively measured? A valuable response to this has been to generate quantitative indicators based on surveying experts, households and firms, and constructing country-level governance indicators based on their responses (Transparency International 2021; World Bank 2022). These indicators have made important contributions to our understanding of comparative public administration by quantifying perceptions of experts and of those interacting with government (such as citizens and firms) around the world.

However, limitations of these indicators exist (Arndt and Oman 2006). For example, country-level governance indicators suffer from the fact that differences within countries across organizations are often larger than cross-country differences (Meyer-Sahling, Schuster, and Mikkelsen 2018), and country-level scores are often not informative to

understand cross-country differences in functionally equivalent organizations (Gingerich 2013).

As a complement to existing measures of comparative bureaucracy, direct survey measures of the experiences and perceptions of bureaucrats themselves provide an analogous source of data to household and enterprise surveys, but for the public service. This paper introduces the Global Survey of Public Servants (GSPS), a global initiative to harmonize large-scale comparable micro survey data from public servants around the world (accessible at: https://www.globalsurveyofpublicservants.org/). The GSPS was founded by the authors of this paper – researchers at or affiliated with the World Bank Bureaucracy Lab, the Stanford University Governance Project, University College London, and Nottingham University. The intention of the GSPS is first simply to encourage further surveying of public officials around the world. However, publishing data at a more granular level than has been available to date allows for research on questions of the state that are complementary to what has been undertaken to date.

To contextualize the GSPS, this paper introduces a conceptual framework of the survey, which reflects the dual academic-practitioner aims of the initiative. Such a conceptual framework is required given how limited the conceptual consensus is in any literature on the drivers of state capacity and administrative quality. The GSPS's objective is to improve scholarly understanding of how public administrations and states around the world work and to help governments manage public servants better. As such, we require a theoretical lens that allows us to make choices on what measures to include in our effort.

The paper then details the methodological approach of the GSPS and current state of play of the GSPS dataset (accessible at: https://www.globalsurveyofpublicservants.org/indicators/). We provide illustrations of how scholars can use the GSPS data to study core topics in comparative public administration

differently. We conclude the empirical section by showing how GSPS indicators correlate at the country-level with one of the most widely used sets of governance indicators, the Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2010).

Literature Review and a Conceptual Framework of the Global Survey of Public Servants

Early surveys of public servants by the World Bank were undertaken around 2001 under the umbrella of the 'Governance and Anti-Corruption Surveys' initiative (Recanatini et al., 2010). These surveys, as the name suggests, focused on the determinants of corruption and potential policy impacts. In academia, many US-based public administration academics have used the Federal Government's staff survey, the Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (OPM FEVS), or complements to it (see for example the body of work of Sanjay K. Pandey). There are a small number of exceptions of research based on surveys from elsewhere in the world, with Grødeland et al. (2001) an early example, but the overall scale of surveying has been far more limited than that of citizens, households or firms (Rogger 2017). Though some governments have undertaken surveys of their officials, regular and consistent surveying within government is a recent phenomenon in most governments (Khurshid and Schuster, forthcoming).

Each of these initiatives has, understandably, taken a rather partial view of the determinants of government functioning. In contrast to surveys of private enterprise, for which the economic theory of the firm presents a clear benchmark model, there exists no consensus on the underlying production function of public administration that would guide measurement selection. This is true both theoretically as well as empirically, where the very fact that there has been so little analysis of granular data on public officials has limited the capacity to create stylized facts of public service. As such, this section lays out a conceptual

framework for a survey of public servants that we then use to guide our measurement choices.

This requirement is particularly important given the comparative nature of the data we are harmonizing. By making public much of the survey data we – and governments – have collected, we have faced the challenges of integrating surveys that were not always implemented with integration in mind. By including a core module of questions consistent across settings and enumerating it to a similar set of central administrators in our own surveys, the scope of integration is increased. Towards this end, we have developed a conceptual framework to define the topics and questions we include in this core module.

The conceptual framework of the Global Survey reflects its dual aims: to better understand how public administrations work, and to provide actionable evidence to governments to improve management of public servants. To this end, the core questionnaire of the Global Survey contains measures which reflect core scholarly interests in comparative public administration on the one hand, and government interests on the other.

As further detailed in Mikkelsen, Schuster, and Meyer-Sahling (2021), from a scholarly perspective our core questionnaire follows public administration literature in focusing on assessing 'ideal types' of modes of governing - "the actual operating modes and administrative arrangements by which rulers govern" (Roth 1968, 156). We distinguish and measure in the GSPS indicators related to three 'ideal types': patrimonialism, Weberian bureaucracy, and (new) public management.[1]

Weber (1978) coined the term 'patrimonialism' for an administrative system in which rulers treat the state as private property and govern it as 'patrons' through informal connections with – and loyalty and reciprocity of – public employees (their 'clients'). Patterns of (neo)patrimonial rule persist in many countries in the global south in particular (cf. Fukuyama 2004), underscoring the conceptual importance of patrimonialism for a global

survey of public servants. What then are the key concepts for measurement in a survey of public servants that derive from patrimonial rule? In terms of management practices, politicization and 'personalization' (nepotism) are central: personnel decisions – such as recruitment or promotions – are decided on political and personal (family and friends) criteria. In terms of employee attitudes and behaviors, corruption (the abuse of public office for private gain) and clientelism (the exchange of state resources for electoral support) stand out – so much so that patrimonialism (or patronage) is often equated with both (Rothstein and Varraich 2017).

Weber's (1978) bureaucratic ideal-type was designed as an antidote to neopatrimonialism: bureaucrats were to become autonomous from political (or other particularistic) influences through merit examinations, job stability, seniority-based promotions, and sufficient pay to reduce corruption to supplement incomes. This was complemented by hierarchy and detailed rules, in line with a Rechtsstaat ideal (cf. Olsen 2006). This set of administrative characteristics was intended to foster key (Weberian) employee attitudes: an *esprit de corps*, impartiality, political neutrality, integrity, rule following, and expertise. Our core questionnaire thus includes their measurement.

While Weberian bureaucracy was an antidote to patrimonialism, it created problems of its own; in particular, a lack of incentives to perform and innovate (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). New Public Management (NPM) sought to address these (Hood 1991). While the term has competing conceptualizations (Dunleavy et al. 2006), at its core it is a "doctrine that the public sector can be improved [through] business concepts, techniques and values" (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2012). For personnel management, this implied a shift to performance: the setting of targets, the measurement of their achievement, and the incentivization of public servants to achieve those targets, for instance through performance pay, temporary job contracts and autonomy to innovate (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). These management

practices were to foment a series of favorable employee attitudes and behaviors – such as work motivation, innovation and performance orientation. Again, our core questionnaire therefore includes their measurement.

Our core survey thus includes measures that capture key characteristics of patrimonialism, Weberian bureaucracy and New Public Management. They enable scholars to understand to what extent governments and different institutions inside government blend different elements of these 'ideal-types'.

At the same time, to further ensure that our results are actionable, the GSPS module also contains measures that are core to governmental interests when governments themselves undertake surveys of public servants. To identify these measures, we reviewed the topics covered by six governments that regularly conduct government-wide employee surveys: the U.S., Canada, Australia, the UK, Colombia, and Ireland (see Mikkelsen, Schuster, and Meyer-Sahling 2021, for details of this review). Our review finds that governments measure an overlapping set of management practices and employee attitudes. For instance, in terms of employee attitudes, all governments measure employee engagement and organizational commitment, and all but one measure job satisfaction and turnover intention. In terms of management practices, all governments measure employee perceptions of pay, leadership, and performance management. To ensure we measure indicators of practitioner interest, we thus include in the Global Survey core module those measures which at least five out of six reviewed governments include in their surveys.

Comparing measures included in government employee surveys and measures of core scholarly interest in academic models of governance, there is some overlap – for instance around performance management or career commitment of public servants. There is also divergence, however, with government employee surveys giving greater pride of place to concepts that are core to organizational psychology – such as job satisfaction or engagement

– but seldom referenced in academic 'ideal types' of public sector governance; and academic 'ideal types' giving greater place to management practices – such as merit recruitment – which are less consistently covered in government employee surveys.

To ensure our core module is of interest to both scholars and practitioners, our conceptual framework (and the GSPS core module) thus cover both (see Figure 1). This leads to a questionnaire with 46 questions and a running time of 10 (online) and 15 (in-person) minutes respectively.

Figure 1. Core Concepts Measured in the Global Survey of Public Servants

Topic	Academic Models	Employee Surveys
Management practices (and other inputs)		
Job autonomy / Level of supervision	x	
Job stability	x	
Meritocracy / Politicization / Nepotism	x	
Pay sufficiency and structure	x	x
Performance management	x	x
Promotions and career development	x	x
Communication and information		x
Leadership		x
Resources (e.g. materials, equipment)		x
Teamwork practices		x
Training and skill development		x
Work-life balance policies		x
Bureaucratic attitudes and behaviors		
Expertise / Competence	x	
Performance orientation / Rule following	x	
Political clientelism / impartiality / autonomy / neutrality	x	
Public service identification / motivation	x	
Work motivation	x	
Corruption / Integrity	x	x
Innovation / Rule following	x	x
Turnover / Career intentions	x	x
Job engagement		x
Job satisfaction		x
Organizational commitment		x

Methodological Approach of the Global Survey of Public Servants

Surveying public servants around the world poses an immediate comparability challenge: how to ensure that survey responses can be compared across countries? We take several duties of care, while also being explicit about the limitations of our data. Our intention is also that over time, the initiative will improve the core comparability of the measures as well as learn more about the validity of comparing measures over time, space, and setting.

First, in terms of duties of care, our surveys are conducted with comparable survey population frames. All surveys included in the Global Survey of Public Servants target public servants in a broad range of central government institutions – or, in short, central government bureaucrats. Our data does not contain responses from frontline officials such as teachers or doctors, in part as other efforts – such as the OECD Talis survey (OECD 2018) – focus on them.

Second, we invite a census or representative sample of bureaucrats in all or a subset of central government institutions in each country to respond to the survey (rather than, e.g., a convenience sample). In a number of cases where comparable sub-national surveys of public administrators were conducted, we include this data in the initiative's data release. However, the core rationale for inclusion is that the survey has a central government component.

Third, we conducted over 150 cognitive interviews with public servants across countries in which we fielded surveys to develop our measures and safeguard a comparable understanding of measures across countries.

Fourth, we combine in our questionnaire established measures in the literature where available (e.g., for job satisfaction) with measures developed by ourselves where needed (e.g., to measure whether respondents were hired based on merit). We drew on the aforementioned cognitive interviews and a measurement validation framework (Mikkelsen et al., forthcoming) to develop these measures, and continue to undertake methodological work for further questionnaire improvement (cf. Rogger and Schuster, forthcoming).

Our current dataset brings together responses from over 1,300,000 public servants in over 1,300 government institutions in 23 countries in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia (Table 1). The dataset comprises surveys conducted by the authors in 18 countries, as well as published data from 5 countries that conduct their own surveys (UK, US, Australia, Canada, and Colombia). As a result – and as some of our surveys were conducted by GSPS members before our core module was finalized – the country coverage of different indicators varies. Figures 2 to 11 in this paper thus have varying country coverage (we always show the full set of countries available for an indicator).

Our online dashboard on https://www.globalsurveyofpublicservants.org/indicators/ enables scholars to compare countries and to assess within-country variation in each indicator – for instance across institutions or demographic groups (e.g., by gender or age group). The data can also be downloaded (at the country, organizational and demographic group level) with confidence intervals (see https://www.globalsurveyofpublicservants.org/datadownloads/).

Table 1. Current Country Coverage of the Global Survey of Public Servants

Country	Mode	Year	# of institutions	# of respondents	Response rate	Conducted by
Australia	Online	2019	102	104,471	77%	National government
Canada	Online	2019	86	182,306	62.30%	National government
Chile	Online	2019	66	26,106	43.70%	GSPS
Colombia	Online	2019	202	25,082	95.20%	National government
Ethiopia	In-person	2016	78	2,195	99.50%	GSPS
Ghana	In-person	2018	51	3,343	95%	GSPS
Albania	Online	2017	17	3,690	47%	GSPS
Brazil	Online	2017	18	3,992	11%	GSPS
Estonia	Online	2017	49	3,555	25%	GSPS
Kosovo	Online	2017	62	2,465	14%	GSPS
Croatia	Online	2017	64	6,711	18%	GSPS
Slovak Republic	Online	2017	100	10,817	33%	GSPS
Guatemala	In-person	2019	18	3,670	96%	GSPS
Indonesia	In-person	2012	15	3,903	83%	GSPS
Liberia	In-person	2016	32	2,790	92%	GSPS
Lithuania	In-person (via video)	2021	11	956	83%	GSPS
Nigeria	In-person	2010	94	5,630	100%	GSPS
Philippines	In-person	2014	7	2,573	100%	GSPS
Romania	In-person + online	2019	81	6,037	92% (In-person), 24% online	GSPS
United Kingdom	Online	2019	106	308,556	67%	National government
Ukraine	Online	2018	15	1,802	43%	GSPS
United States	Online	2019	45	615,395	42.60%	National government
Uruguay	Online	2021	20	10,232	29%	GSPS
Total			1,339	1,336,227	63%	

Before providing illustrative insights based on the indicators to motivate future

scholarly work, several caveats about cross-country comparisons using the data are due.

First, survey modes across countries differed, ranging from in-person to online to phone. Our evidence suggests that cross-country comparisons are nonetheless possible. Several of us conducted a field experiment in Romania, in which we randomly assigned respondents to complete our survey online or in-person. We found only small mode effects for national averages (Han et al., forthcoming).

Second, response rates across countries differed, from 11% to 95%. Our evidence suggests that cross-country comparisons are nonetheless possible. In a field experiment in Romania, we found that varying response rates to an online survey across organizations did not have substantive effects on means (relative to an in-person survey with consistently high response rates across organizations) (Han et al., forthcoming).

Third, while our survey populations were consistently central government bureaucrats, practical constraints in collaborating with different governments on the survey imply that the precise set of institutions included in central government varies across countries, as does the coverage of central government institutions. Differences in country means might thus reflect differences in organizational coverage inside governments, though – as a criterion for inclusion in the dataset – we surveyed a broad range of central government institutions.

Fourth, for some of the measures, there are differences in precise wording or scales of survey measures – in particular for measures for which our cross-country coverage extends to governments implementing their own surveys. The dashboard and dataset make these differences explicit, for instance by showing the exact question text (translated into English) when hovering over indicators. Wording differences – where applicable – should be kept in mind when comparing country means.

Lastly, despite a large set of cognitive interviews, we cannot rule out that cross-country differences stem from differences in language, social desirability biases or meaning

across countries (cf. Jilke, Meuleman, and Van de Walle 2015). Particularly culturally sensitive concepts – such as public service motivation – may suffer from scalar non-invariance (Mikkelsen, Schuster, and Meyer-Sahling 2021). They thus require more care when interpreting cross-country differences than factual questions in our questionnaire (such as whether respondents had a performance evaluation in the last two years).

While these are important limitations to keep in mind, they of course equally affect many other approaches to constructing cross-country governance indicators. In an expert survey, for instance, experts cannot be randomly sampled, respond to questions in different languages and might exhibit different social desirability biases, among others. We thus believe that our approach nonetheless adds to the available landscape of cross-country governance indicators, and with more granularity than most existing indicators. Moreover, as the initiative develops and the core module is included in a wider range of surveys, some of the abovementioned concerns will be reduced.

## Uses of the Global Survey of Public Servants

How can the Global Survey of Public Servants enrich the study of comparative public administration? To illustrate their utility, this section sketches out six possible uses of the indicators.

First, the indicators can be used to nuance popular global stereotypes – at times reflected in the literature – about bureaucracies. One such stereotype is that bureaucrats around the world lack performance incentives: their work effort is not rewarded with, for instance, better pay or greater promotion prospects (see, classically, Osborne and Gaebler 1992). The data from the Global Survey of Public Servants suggest important nuances to this stereotype. In line with conventional wisdom, only a minority of public servants – 31% on

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average across countries in our sample – believes that work performance matters for pay rises (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Performance Pay, by Country

(% of public servants indicating that work performance is important for pay rises)
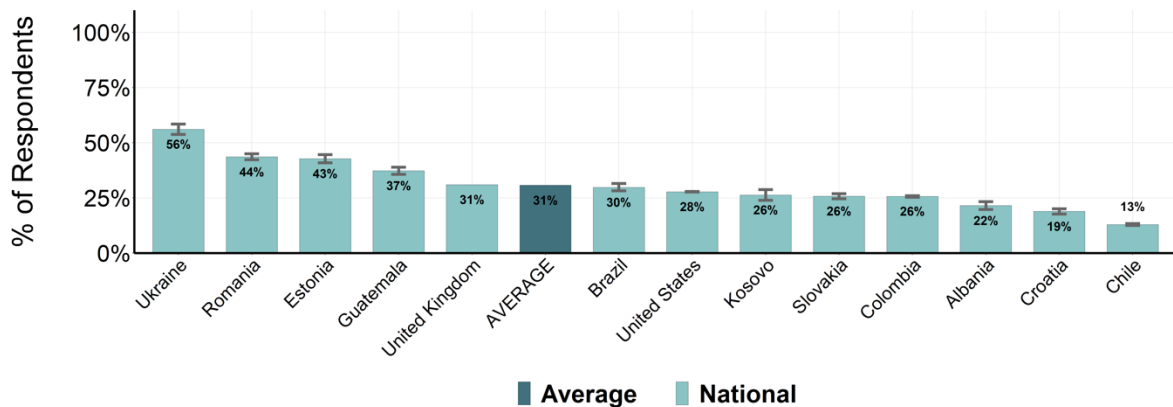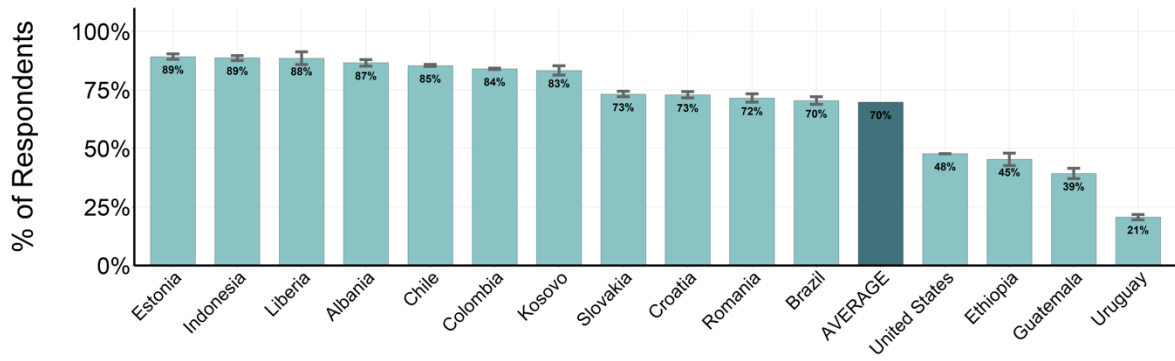

Source: Fukuyama et al. (2022)

However, contrary to stereotypes about bureaucracies, a majority – 70% on average in our sample – believes that their work performance has at least some importance for their promotion prospects (Figure 3). Public servants may not be as deprived of performance incentives as stereotypes presume, at least in the countries that we analyze.

Figure 3. Performance-Based Promotions, by Country

(% of public servants indicating that work performance is important for promotion prospects)

Second, the GSPS can – with the appropriate caveats noted above including those related to variation in exact question wording and scale – help understand sharp differences in employee attitudes and management practices across countries. For instance, as illustrated in Figure 4, the share of respondents indicating that it would be difficult to dismiss them or public servants generally varies between 21% (Slovak Republic) to 70% (Brazil). These results suggest sharp differences in the perceived job stability of bureaucrats across countries.

Figure 4. Job Stability by Country

(% of public servants agreeing that it would be difficult to dismiss them/public servants)
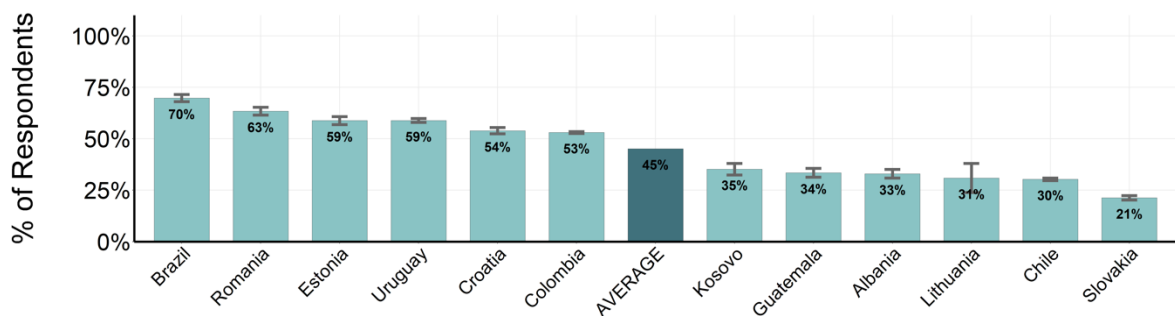
Third, the GSPS indicators can enable scholars to understand change over time in recruitment practices in governments, by assessing how recruitment practices interact with years of service of public servants.[2] To illustrate, Figure 5 plots the share of public servants indicating that they found out about their public sector job through a public advertisement in several countries (Chile, Croatia, Romania, Estonia), by years of service of public servants. It shows that in a range of countries, the share of public servants finding out about their first public sector job through an advertisement (e.g., newspaper, government website) has increased sharply. For instance, in Chile, only 18% of public servants recruited more than 20 years ago learned about their first public sector job through an advertisement, relative to 44% of public servants recruited in the last decade. With jobs being publicly advertised rather than only disseminated through word of mouth, transparency in public sector recruitment has arguably increased in these countries, at least in terms of vacancy dissemination. Our data can thus also help assess changes in civil service management and reforms where applicable.

Figure 5. Recruitment through Job Advertisements in Select Countries, by Years of Service of Public Servants

(% of public servants indicating they found out about their first public sector job vacancy through an advertisement)
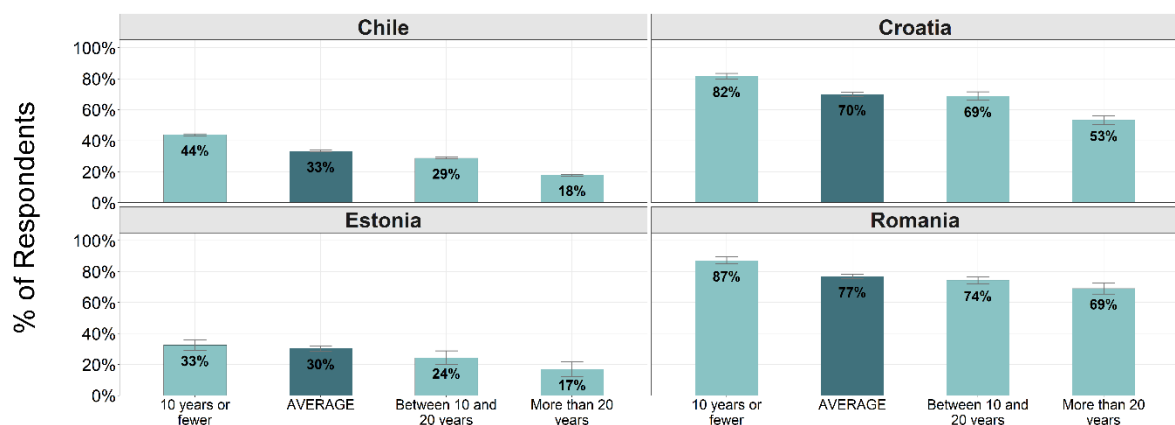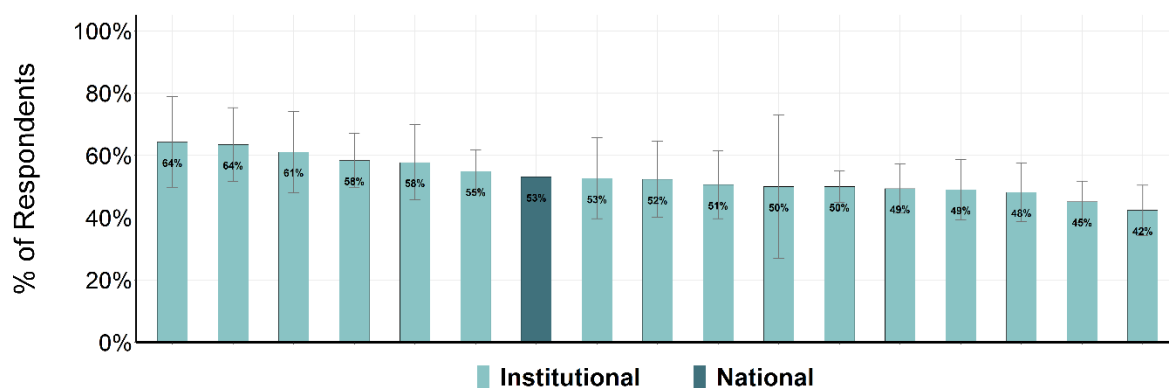

Source: Fukuyama et al. (2022)

Fourth, the GSPS indicators can shed light on variation across countries in the nature and internal organization of the state, for instance in how centralized or decentralized civil services are. To illustrate, Figures 6 and 7 compare variation across organizations inside the governments of Albania and Croatia in pay competitiveness (measured by whether respondents agree that it would be easy for them to find a private sector job that pays better). In Albania, variation in pay competitiveness with the private sector across organizations is relatively limited, with the share of respondents indicating that it would be easy for them to find a better-paid private sector job ranging from 42% to 64% (Figure 6).

Figure 6. (Lack of) Pay Competitiveness in Albania, by Organization

(% of public servants indicating it would be easy for them to find a private sector job that pays better)
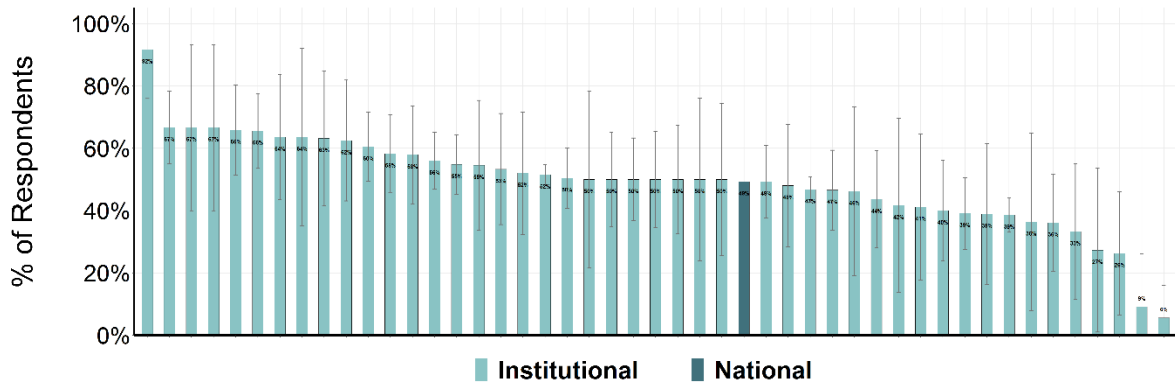

Source: Fukuyama et al. (2022)

By contrast, in Croatia, this share varies much more sharply across organizations, between 6% and 92% (Figure 7). It reflects much greater decentralization of pay setting in Croatia than in Albania, with different government organizations in Croatia in some cases counting on separate pay regulations.

Figure 7. (Lack of) Pay Competitiveness in Croatia, by Organization

(% of public servants indicating it would be easy for them to find a private sector job that pays better)
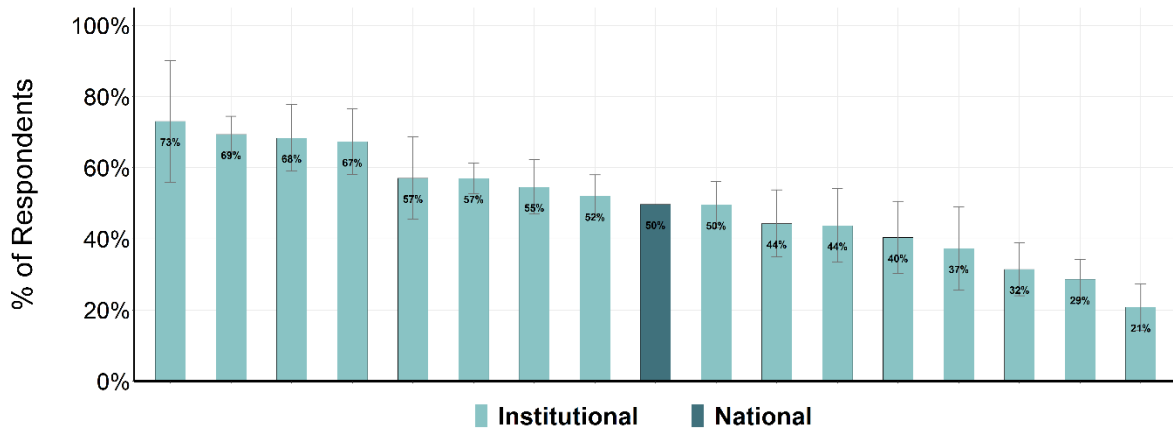

Source: Fukuyama et al. (2022)

The granular nature of our data thereby allows further nuance in understanding the (de)centralized nature of the state. For instance, within Albania, pay setting is relatively homogenous across institutions, while, in practice, recruitment practices vary sharply. To illustrate, the share of public servants indicating that they were assessed by a written exam in their initial recruitment to the public sector varies across organizations in Albania between 21% and 73% (Figure 8), reflecting the requirement for civil servants to pass a centrally administered exam but not for employees of institutions regulated by the labor code. In other words, within countries, some civil service management practices are more centralized while others vary sharply across institutions. The GSPS indicators provide granular data across countries to help scholars study and understand these nuances.

Figure 8. Merit Recruitment in Albania, by Organization

(% of public servants indicating being assessed through a written exam in their public sector recruitment)

The perspective of the GSPS is that cross-country analysis and a deeper dive into the variation exhibited across institutions within a single country are complementary lenses by which researchers and public sector managers can understand a specific public administration. Figure 9 showcases how national averages (darker blue bars) compare for the satisfaction with salary across countries. These differences are partly driven by features of the labor markets in those countries. These national averages can be compared to the distribution of satisfaction rates across organizations (lighter blue bars). As such, benchmarking across countries can be an input to an improved understanding of the variation observed within a single government.

Figure 9. Salary Satisfaction in the United Kingdom, by Country and Organization

(% of public servants indicating that they are satisfied with their salary)

Salary (satisfaction)

I am satisfied with my salary. (1-5 Likert scale; % agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement)
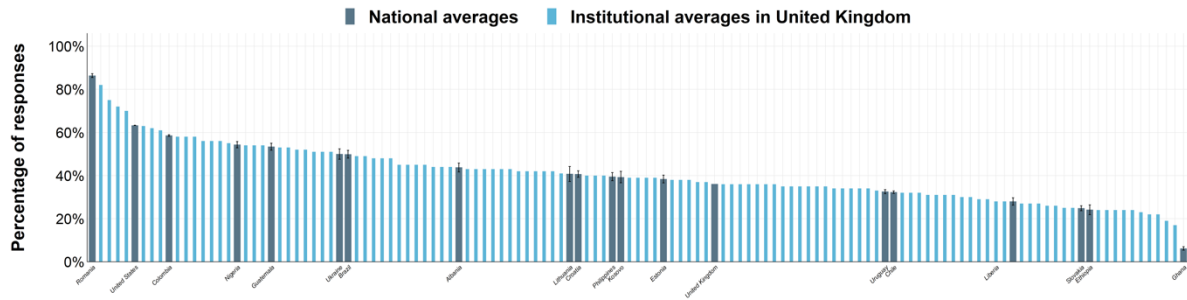
Beyond helping scholars understand heterogeneity inside government across institutions, the GSPS indicators also enable scholars to study how the experience of different demographic groups of public servants varies across countries – for instance in terms of generational differences, rank differences, differences by contract type of employees or gender differences. To illustrate, Figure 10 splits pay satisfaction of public servants by gender within each country. The graph shows that gender differences in pay satisfaction are relatively small in many countries. Yet the figure also shows that in some governments – such as Ethiopia – significantly more female employees are satisfied with their pay, whereas in others – such as the Slovak Republic – significantly more men are satisfied with their pay.

Figure 10. Pay Satisfaction, by Country and Gender

(% of public servants agreeing they are satisfied with their pay and/or total benefits)
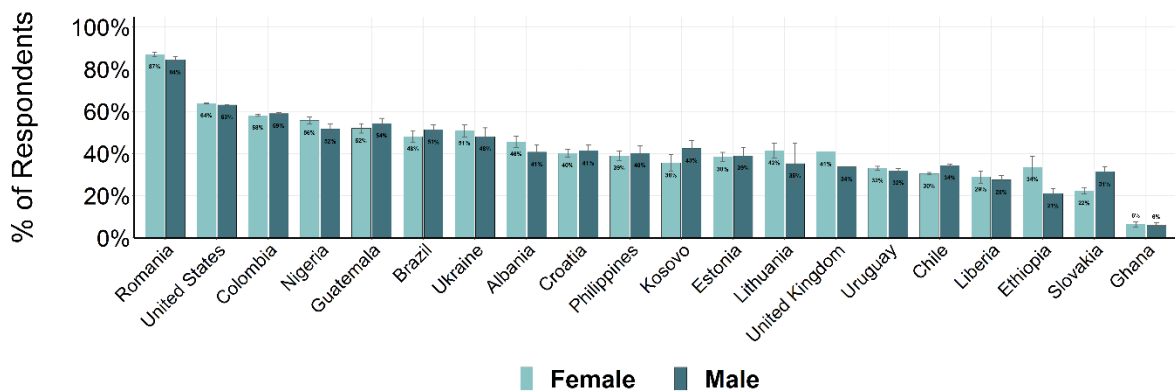
The data thus enable scholars to understand systematically how sociodemographic factors like gender differences vary systematically across countries – from employee attitudes such as motivation or job satisfaction, to perceptions of male and female employees of management practices such as leadership. Observing these differences, scholars may seek explanations for why, in some countries, men or women respond more favorably than in others. To our knowledge, this research endeavor – exploring variation across countries in the experience of different demographic groups of public servants – was previously not feasible for scholars at scale.

Finally – and perhaps most straightforwardly – our indicators may also help scholars implementing surveys of public servants in specific countries understand how their case countries are similar or different from others in the world in employee attitudes or management practices. We hope the indicators can thus lead to more empirically grounded case selection and generalizability discussions in country-specific research.

Relating the Global Survey of Public Servants to Other Governance Indicators

How do existing composite governance indicators relate to the GSPS indicators? To illustrate, consider, first, the relation between GSPS indicators and the widely used Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank 2022). We do not intend the comparison to be a `validation' exercise, but rather an exploration of the linkages between the GSPS data and the existing literature. Figure 11 provides scatterplots showing the relationship at the country-level between three GSPS indicators – work motivation, pay satisfaction and perceived job stability of public servants – and the two indicators from the Worldwide

Governance Indicators that arguably most closely relate to public administration:

Government Effectiveness and Control of Corruption.

Figure 11. Global Survey of Public Servants Country Indicators vs. Worldwide Governance Indicators
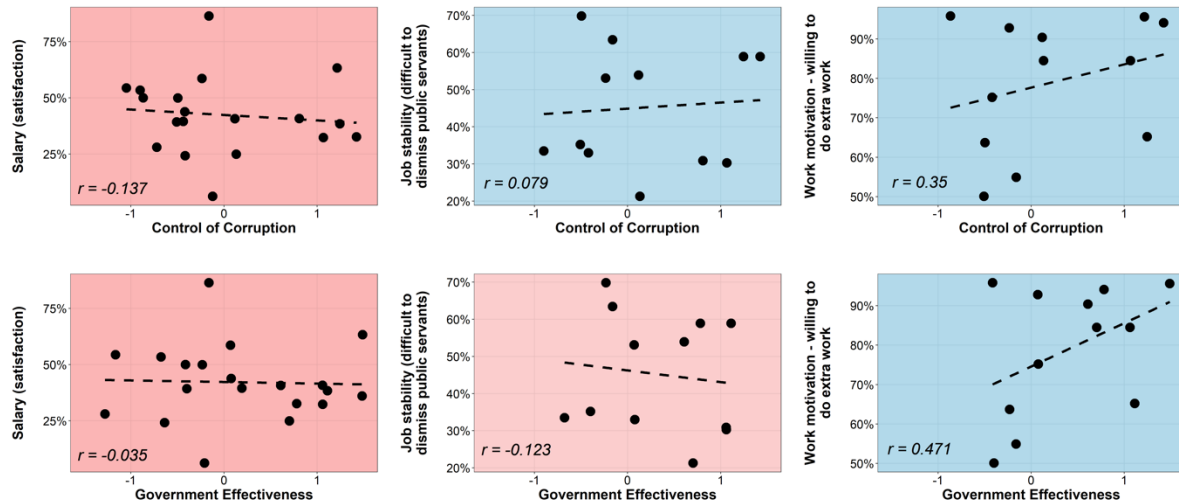
The graphs show that different GSPS indicators correlate differently with Government Effectiveness and Control of Corruption. Greater work motivation of public servants is positively correlated with both greater government effectiveness (r=0.47) and better control of corruption (r=0.35) (greater work motivation is measured by whether public servants agree that they are willing to go the extra mile or perform tasks that are not really required from them, among others). By contrast, pay satisfaction of public servants is negatively – albeit weakly so – correlated with both governance indicators, whereas perceived job stability is (weakly) positively related with corruption control, but negatively related to government effectiveness.

While these are merely suggestive correlations (which might additionally be affected by differences in wording across countries), they do underscore that the Global Survey can uncover differences in nuanced characteristics of public administration across countries and enable scholars to explore their relevance for governance outcomes in a way that composite governance indicators cannot and do not predict (as different employee attitudes and management practices in the GSPS indicators are differentially correlated with composite governance scores[3]).

Conclusions and Outlook

How do civil service management practices differ within and across governments? How do core attitudes of public servants – such as their motivation or satisfaction – differ within and across governments? This paper introduces the Global Survey of Public Servants, which enables scholars to draw on micro-data from public servants around the world to understand these key questions in comparative public administration.

The GSPS can help scholars explore stereotypes about public administrations, assess changes in civil service recruitment, and understand the internal dynamics of governments. For instance, in terms of heterogeneity across institutions, across indicators of public service management, and across demographic groups. They also enable scholars to compare public administrations around the world (with due limitations about measurement invariance and differences in languages and question wording, among others, kept in mind).

Existing composite governance scores are less resource intensive to collect and will continue to have advantages in terms of cross-country and intertemporal coverage. At the same time, where the GSPS is implemented, it arguably brings greater nuance and actionability than composite governance scores by enabling more disaggregated assessments of specific management practices in specific organizations or for specific groups of public

servants inside government. We are thus confident that the GSPS contributes to the growing set of micro datasets available to study governments around the world (cf. Baig et al. 2021; Charron, Lapuente, and Bauhr 2021; Fazekas and Czibik 2021), and offers a sea change in micro data availability to study comparative civil service management and organizational behavior in particular.

While this paper presented the current state of play of the GSPS, the GSPS co-founders (the co-authors of this piece) will continue to conduct surveys of public servants with governments around the world and work with governments which already implement surveys to align their measures with the GSPS core questionnaire module. As such, we hope that the GSPS dataset – and its utility to scholars – will further grow over time in coverage and comparability. We hope other scholars may join the effort, and we are keen to collaborate with colleagues seeking to conduct government-wide surveys of public servants in countries not currently covered by the GSPS. We also highlight the need for undertaking further methodological validation work on the GSPS indicators and on the measurement of public administration more generally (cf. Rogger and Schuster, forthcoming).

Understanding the functioning of public administration is complicated by the lack of objective benchmarks in much government activity. Micro-data on the experience of public servants of their work contributes to a more granular approach to understanding the state despite this, and coherence in that data across organizations and countries facilitates more precise comparative work. Our hope is that the Global Survey of Public Servants is a step towards each of these aims, and towards a stronger study of the public service.

Endnotes

1. These are, of course, not the only ideal-types advanced by scholars. Since the 1990s, a number of others – such as network governance or 'digital era governance' – have been posited (Dunleavy et al. 2006). None of them have been as 'dominant' a model as the three we measure, however (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2012).

2. This is suggestive only, as it is based on responses from public servants who were recruited in the past but remain in public service at the time of the survey. Given the low rate of turnover in many public services, however, this may be more credible an exercise than in a comparable private sector setting.

3. Composite governance scores draw, of course, from underlying indicators. Yet, these are themselves typically aggregated. 'Government Effectiveness', for instance, aggregates indicators such as 'Quality of public administration' or 'Institutional effectiveness' (World Bank 2022).

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