Superstar Bureaucrats from the Global South*

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Abstract

Does the World Bank poach talent from developing countries for its own bureaucracy, and if so, how? International organizations strive to recruit internationally diverse staff. A primary way the World Bank becomes familiar with potential candidates is through operational work with governments of client countries. Using newly digitized data of projects-in-progress at the World Bank, we identify the individual bureaucrats in client countries who were assigned to liaise with the World Bank ("contact points"). We then collect original data on their career trajectories to learn whether they eventually became employed by the World Bank. We propose that these bureaucrats vary in quality and contribute to the success of the World Bank projects they facilitate. The World Bank learns their quality through the process of working with them and which "superstars" they would like to attract to the World Bank. If true, this has important equity implications, as World Bank projects could facilitate brain drain of bureaucratic talent away from the developing world, while promoting the representativeness of the IO bureaucracy.

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1 Introduction

It is a truth universally acknowledged that an international development organization that purports to benefit the Global South must be in want of an internationally diverse bureaucracy.

The World Bank boasts one of the largest staff sizes in global governance in order to support its project-based development work around the world. However, the bureaucrats who lead these projects have historically held fairly narrow and Western-dominated views of progress and development (Weaver 2008). Over time, the World Bank has sought to address these critiques through diversifying its staff, with some moderate success (Weaver et al. 2022). Attracting more bureaucrats with Global South perspectives could increase the representation of alternative ideas about development and reduce the vulnerability of staff to geopolitical pressures (Clark and Dolan 2021).

But how does the World Bank attract these bureaucrats? In most countries, development outcomes hinge in large part on the responsiveness and quality of the domestic bureaucracy (Grossman and Slough 2022). Citizens must be able to approach civil servants, such as health officials or benefit providers, knowing that they will respond to citizen needs and not to the opportunity for graft or corruption. But the involvement of international development actors can weaken the bureaucracy in many ways, including by incentivizing bureaucrats to dedicate their effort toward more lucrative international projects and away from their domestic policy priorities (Nagawa N.d.). We consider a related but separate way in which the World Bank may alter developing country bureaucracies: by offering permanent jobs to their highest quality individuals.

The goal of our project is to illustrate any hiring pipelines that may exist between developing country bureaucracies and the World Bank. Specifically, we introduce newly digitized data that identifies, for each World Bank project, the "contact point" in a client country's bureaucracy. We collect biographical information about these individuals to learn their career trajectories, and we test whether the highest quality bureaucrats are more likely than the lower quality bureaucrats to go on to work for an international organization.

In this paper, we report preliminary findings from a fraction of the data collection and analysis

that is possible, in order to demonstrate proof-of-concept and request feedback on next steps. Our preliminary findings do suggest that higher quality bureaucrats are pulled to international organizations, away from their home countries, but we stress the preliminary nature of this finding and temper our claims until our sample is more robust.

Nevertheless, if this finding holds, we believe it holds two important implications. First, our study highlights the contributions of client country bureaucrats in the success of World Bank projects. Previous work has featured the contributions of World Bank bureaucrats to project success (Denizer, Kaufmann and Kraay 2013; Limodio 2021). We consider the possibility that client country bureaucrats also matter, improving our understanding of the agency of developing countries in their relations with the Global North (Swedlund 2017). Second, if higher quality bureaucrats exit their home country bureaucracies for international organizations, this constitutes a unique source of "brain drain." It creates a selection pathway that leaves behind the lowest-performing bureaucrats to serve citizens in client countries. We are normatively concerned about the appropriation of human capital, originally cultivated by developing countries, to serve global goals, although we weigh this concern against the benefit of more diversity in these globally significant institutions.

2 Brain Drain and International Organizations

The migration of highly qualified and educated individuals from developing to developed countries has been a key source of inequality across countries; reducing human capital in developing countries by buying out the services of talented individuals can undermine state capacity at crucial points in a state's development (Docquier, Lohest and Marfouk 2007). At the same time, opportunities for emigration to higher salaries and improved living conditions may spark "brain gain:" individuals in developing countries may acquire additional skills given the possibility of emigration, raising the overall skill level in the country, even if they choose to remain. Migrants also often return to their countries of origin, bringing with them the expertise and experience from abroad to benefit home communities (Agrawal et al. 2011; Beine, Docquier and Rapoport 2008). Arguments

about the relative weight of brain drain and brain gain on state capacity remain unsettled; however, our primary concern is *how* brain drain operates in developing countries, specifically with regard to international organizations.

Within literature on international organizations, recipient country bureaucrats have primarily been painted as partners or implementers of international development projects. A growing body of work on aid bureaucracies focuses on hierarchies that continuously undervalue local staff (Hor 2022; von Billerbeck and Oksamytna 2023). Local counterparts are often seen as corrupt or political operatives (Kamruzzaman and Kumi 2023; Sundberg 2019) or as occupying the “savage slots” (Peters 2016; Trouillot 2003), filling donor needs to be seen as locally oriented. Even as developing country personnel are compensated at lower wages to their expat counterparts, the salaries in international organizations often exceed comparable roles in their home countries. The allure of international organization salaries and job opportunities abroad can draw government officials to move from the public sector and academia to INGOs (Ong and Combinido 2018). As employees of international organizations, these local actors may use the international networks and training provided within the small, underpaid roles as leverage for greater (international) employment moving forward, driving "career breakthroughs" for some by "[using] their professional experiences, affiliations with widely recognized global agency brands, and positionality as leaders from a developing country to attain professional mobility" (Ong and Combinido 2018, 98). Developing country citizens may pursue training and experiences that set them up as competitive candidates for local positions in international development organizations, which they can then leverage into more lucrative positions within the organizations or connections with other employment opportunities internationally.

While developing country citizens may actively seek out positions in international organizations, IOs too have preferences for working with talented individuals from both Western and non-Western countries. Historically, international organizations have insisting on working with ideologically friendly counterparts; Nelson (2017), for example, attributes the disproportionate success of neoliberal finance ministers in countries with International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans

to their economic philosophical sympathies with IMF advisors. This affinity for quality counterpart bureaucrats extends to hiring practices: the IMF preferred to recruit central bankers from postcommunist countries to aid in its technical assistance missions in the 1990s and 2000s rather than relying on career IMF bureaucrats (Johnson 2016, 12). How do international organizations learn which developing country bureaucrats fit the mission and needs of the international organization? And how do these hiring decisions then affect the state capacity and international cooperation of developing countries the bureaucrats leave behind?

3 Theory

Our theory features two actors — an international organization (IO) and a bureaucrat in a developing country. We are primarily interested in the career trajectories of these bureaucrats, which is the joint product of an IO's decision to extend them a job and a bureaucrat's decision to accept such a job.

International organizations desire high-quality bureaucrats that are internationally diverse. IOs have established recruitment pipelines in the Global North but find it more difficult to identify individuals in the Global South that are comparable in terms of talent. This is not primarily because of lack of supply (although in aggregate terms the Global South has received less investment in human capital) but because established heuristics (such as specific university trainings, see Nelson (2017)) may be noisier signals of candidate quality (fewer individuals may have access to those specific universities, leaving many qualified candidates with no way of proving their skills). IOs want high-quality bureaucrats to advance their missions; there is little need to buy off the bureaucracy through patronage, as might be the case in certain domestic contexts. But IOs also value diversity for several reasons. They are routinely pressured by peer institutions (Honig and Weaver 2019) who value diversity. Hiring more diverse staffs may also be associated with superior performance outcomes (Eckhard 2021).

While it is difficult to ascribe preferences to such a large and heterogeneous population, bureaucrats in developing countries are likely to value IO jobs for several reasons. These jobs are

often associated with good compensation, locational advantages, and status. International mobility may be especially appealing to candidates who face discrimination at home (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth 2025). Even if bureaucrats do not desire these postings, though, improved outside options from an IO may bolster their job security at home. A job offer certainly does not hurt them.

We assume that bureaucrats vary in quality. Some are good at the nuts and bolts of making things happen, while others are not. Previous studies have demonstrated that some World Bank bureaucrats are systematically associated with better performing projects, suggesting that, on the IO side, bureaucrat quality is variable and measurable (Denizer, Kaufmann and Kraay 2013; Limodio 2021). World Bank bureaucrats play a significant role in the success of projects (Heinzel and Liese 2021). We propose the same is true of the client country side. In the case of the World Bank, the World Bank's Task Team Leader must work closely with their "contact point" in order to design a project that is feasible for the government to implement. In other words, we see equal role for bureaucrats from developing countries to vary in quality and for that to be apparent in the success of the final project.

The crux of our theory is that IOs draw on project-based experience with developing country bureaucrats when making hiring decisions. Without many reliable indicators of individual talent, IOs use project-based interactions to learn about the quality of possible candidates. When interactions with an individual in a client country go well, staff representatives from the IO may recall them for a job opening, or the candidate may become more aware of how to seek a position in these IOs, or a similar pathway. All of these possibilities are encompassed in our theory, which is that the project constitutes a learning or matching process.[1]

Currently, we conceive of our theory as explaining a candidate's career trajectory toward IOs in general, since we can imagine both direct and indirect pathways through which this learning process occurs. The direct case is simplest: the World Bank chooses to hire an individual it had firsthand knowledge of. We also think an indirect case is plausible, though. For example, the

[1] An alternative mechanism would be a signaling mechanism. The idea here is that a developing country bureaucrat's involvement with a high quality project itself signals to other potential employers that they are of high quality. We think it unlikely, though, that potential IO employers are mining project performance reports to backwards infer talented bureaucrats.

African Development Bank might consult peers in its network for a recommendation when a candidate mentions their involvement with a World Bank project.

Our theory results in a testable hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *Developing country bureaucrats associated with high quality IO projects will more likely obtain IO jobs, when compared to developing country bureaucrats associated with low quality IO projects.*

We note that our hypothesis conditions on a bureaucrat's association with any IO project at all. We could conceivably examine an alternative independent variable — project association instead of project quality — but we are agnostic about how this would relate to our outcome of interest, since IOs may become more or less likely to hire this person as a result of their interaction. While it would be ideal to model selection and include this independent variable, doing so would require collecting data on bureaucrats who are not associated with any World Bank projects. There are ways of identifying a comparison set of bureaucrats, but they are not especially clean, and would require us to dedicate our research funds toward a purpose that may not ultimately serve our analytical goal. Instead, for the moment, we describe the selection processes that may be involved in how developing country bureaucrats are assigned to projects, and we request our reader's opinion about the importance of modeling these pathways empirically.

4 Selection Processes

We first consider how World Bank projects come into existence and how bureaucrats are assigned to those projects. We consider four possible pathways that may be occurring in different cases.

According to official World Bank protocol, projects are identified by borrower governments. Governments request projects, not the World Bank.[2] In practice, projects are often identified through consultation with World Bank staff or international efforts (for example, the Energy Sec-

[2] Author's interview with a World Bank Task Team Leader, January 6, 2025.

tor Management Assistance Program or ESMAP determines investment in energy projects and is jointly run by the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank) (Group 1993). Frequently, projects arise from previous research or analytical work, joint between the government and the World Bank, that illustrated a need.[3]

The first pathway we consider, therefore, is that governments propose projects, and bureaucrats are assigned to those projects simply by virtue of their positions. For instance, the government might propose an energy project because it is of interest to the country's goals, and the bureaucrat who serves as the "contact point" will be the person who occupies a specific position in the energy ministry, irrespective of their quality. In this world, bureaucrats are selected to the sectoral governing body (ministry, department, etc.) while the sector itself is selected for the project, and the two processes are fairly independent.

The second pathway we consider is that, despite protocol, the World Bank proposes projects, but again, bureaucrats are assigned only as a result of their position's relevance. The World Bank could engineer the creation of projects by using its agenda-setting power to launch analytical work, which could conclude in recommendations for improvements in certain sectors. Nevertheless, it is possible that the assignment of bureaucrats remains independent of this process; once a project is proposed, the contact point is simply the relevant individual in a given ministry.

If these first two pathways are most common, this allows for the most straightforward analysis, since a bureaucrat's quality is largely unrelated to a project's existence. It may still be the case, overall, that across a client country's bureaucracy, the bureaucrats selected to work with IOs are of higher quality than others, but this should be a constant and would not vary by project.

The third and fourth pathways we consider, however, violate the assumption that project existence and bureaucrat quality are independent.

In the third pathway, governments may propose projects that follow from a bureaucrat's high-quality effort. Here, we imagine a government bureaucrat highly skilled in working with IOs who puts together a promising project proposal that succeeds in gaining the support of the client country

[3] Author's interview with a World Bank Task Team Leader, January 6, 2025.

government and the World Bank. The bureaucrat then becomes the "contact point" for this project.

In the fourth pathway, the World Bank proposes projects based on its knowledge or prior experience with certain bureaucrats. If a developing country bureaucrat has previously worked with the World Bank, or perhaps studied at the same university as World Bank staff, the World Bank could identify them as a promising partner and lay the groundwork for a project that ultimately involves them as the main contact point. In both the third and fourth pathways, then project existence and a bureaucrat's quality are not independent, but only in the fourth pathway is the World Bank aware of the bureaucrat's quality prior to the project.

For the purpose of our study, we remain agnostic about the selection mechanism of bureaucrats to projects. However, the interpretation of our findings may differ depending on how bureaucrats are selected. The next section explores the theoretical implications of bureaucrat quality for career trajectories and the interplay between client countries and international organizations.

5 Data

Our goal is to generate a sample of bureaucrats in developing countries who have worked with the World Bank. We do so by extracting the names of "contact points" in developing countries from World Bank project updates, and then we task research assistants with identifying biographical details about those individuals. Introducing these sources of data involves a number of technical challenges that introduce selection processes to our current sample, which we conceive of as proof-of-concept. For ease of exposition, we represent these challenges in Figure 1. In what follows, we unpack this figure and identify the different avenues we might pursue in future research and request advice on.

5.1 Identifying Projects (Panel A)

To identify developing country bureaucrats, we begin with World Bank projects (panel A). Most digitized documentation names the bureaucrats on the World Bank side, but not the bureaucrats on the client country side (Clark, Dolan and Hanson N.d.; Heinzel 2022). In this project,

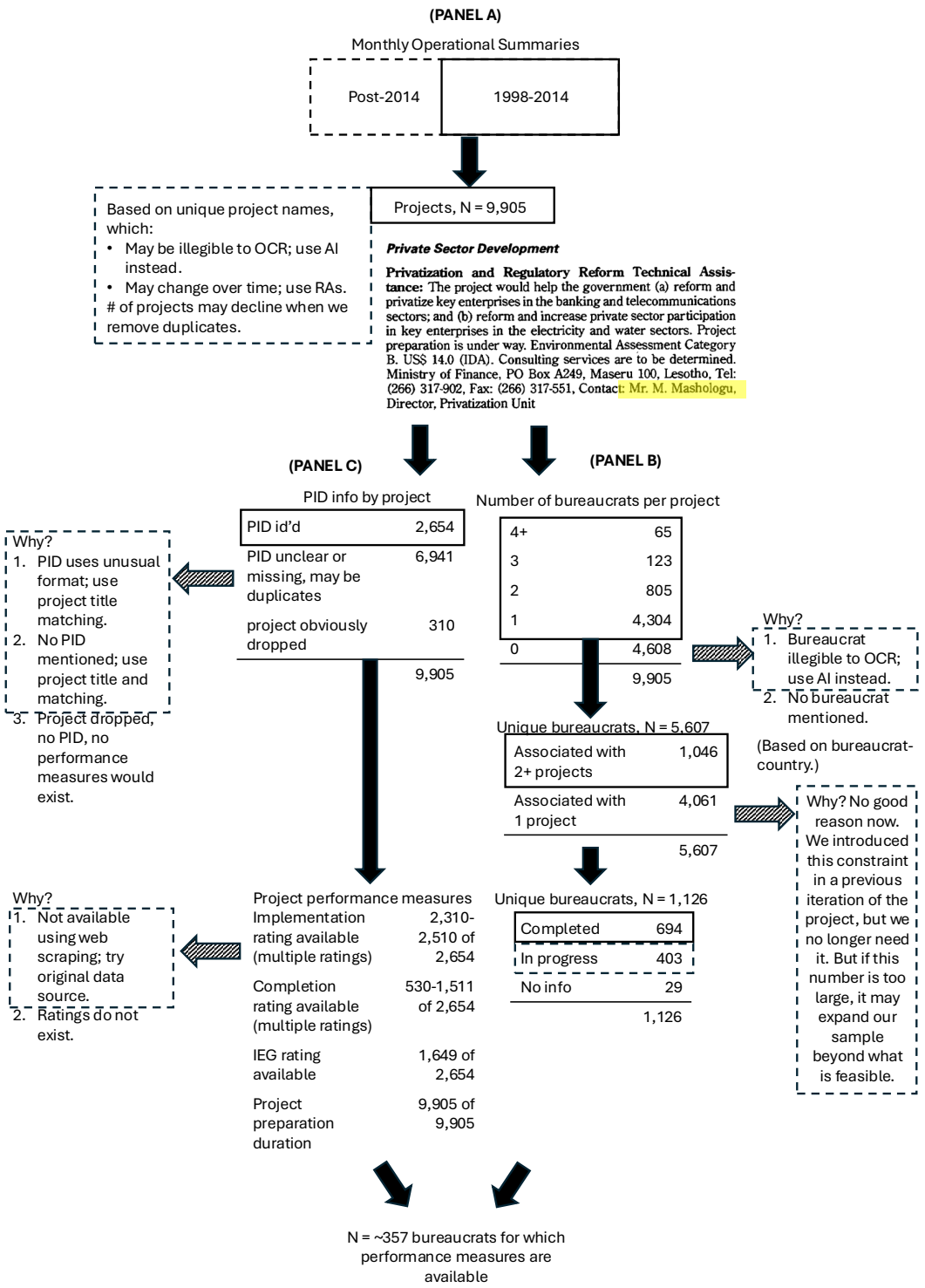

Figure 1: Data generating process

we introduce newly digitized documentation that names these bureaucrats. Specifically, we look at Monthly Operational Summaries of projects in-progress from the World Bank. These reports, released monthly, give short summaries of projects under construction at the World Bank. Our sample of consists of all summaries occurring between October of 1998 and December of 2014 (a possible avenue for expansion is to digitize the remaining post-2014 summaries). Using the digitized summaries, we connect projects across time using string matching and country-sector characteristics (we discuss the World Bank's project ID system later, as this introduces an additional source of selection were we to rely on it). This allows us to identify a total of 9,905 unique projects. Future data cleaning, assisted by AI, may cause this number to increase or decrease, as we get more precise at connecting projects based on their project names. Were we to expand the sample beyond 2014, we expect that our number of projects could roughly double.

We are only looking at projects during the pre-approval preparation phase. This is because the Monthly Operational Summaries describe project development only up until the point of approval. We would expect many of the bureaucrats in our sample to continue their involvement with the project post-approval, but in other cases, the client country may switch the main contact point — we have no way of knowing, given our data. We therefore restrict and conceive of our data as a sample of client country bureaucrats who work to plan projects with the World Bank, for comparability and tractability reasons.

5.2 Identifying Bureaucrats (Panel B)

Our next step is to use these documents to identify the client country-side bureaucrats associated with each project (panel B). Project descriptions appearing in the Monthly Operational Summaries frequently identify a "contact point," a bureaucrat on the client country side who works with the project. We are able to identify at least one bureaucrat in a total of 5,297 projects (53% of all projects). Some of the projects for which no bureaucrat is identified may be due to technical errors, if OCR missed the identification of a contact point. We are in the process of using Claude Code to improve our ability to identify contact points and increase this number, however, we expect it

to increase our sample only marginally; there will still remain about half of the sample of World Bank projects that do not name a contact point.

We are in the process of learning more about why some projects in the sample are associated with named bureaucrats and why some are not. In many cases, the project summaries identify a relevant ministry, but not a specific individual, and these would appear as missing data to us. There is also variation by country. Figure 2 shows the proportion of projects in a given country that are associated with a named bureaucrat. The country with the lowest proportion of named bureaucrats is Trinidad and Tobago, with only one project out of twelve associated with a specific bureaucrat. All projects are associated with bureaucrats in Czechia and the MENA region (with two projects each during this time period). Seven of nine projects in Turkmenistan have bureaucrats attached; 40 out of 53 projects have bureaucrats associated in Thailand.

Projects may have different bureaucrats associated with them over time. In our sample, 4,251 projects have the same bureaucrat associated with a project when the project enters the dataset and when it leaves the dataset–79% of all projects with a named bureaucrat in the first month of preparation have the same named bureaucrat at the time of the project's approval; 68% of projects with bureaucrats at the time of approval have the same bureaucrat at the start of the project. Figure 3 shows that, in the aggregate, projects are likely to have roughly the same number of named bureaucrats at the start of the project and when it is approved.

Many client country bureaucrats are associated with multiple World Bank projects. We identify 5,607 unique bureaucrats based on their names. We assume that bureaucrats with the same name in different countries are different bureaucrats, as a bureaucrat would be unlikely (although not impossible) to work for the national government of two countries.[4] Of these 5,607 bureaucrats, 4,061 of them are associated with just one project, while 1,046 of them are associated with multiple projects. In a prior version of this project, we restricted our sample to only those bureaucrats associated with multiple projects, but this constraint is no longer needed and introduces unnecessary selection concerns now. Our first priority is to expand our sample by collecting data on the

[4] If necessary, we can verify how frequently exceptions occur using RAs and random sampling.

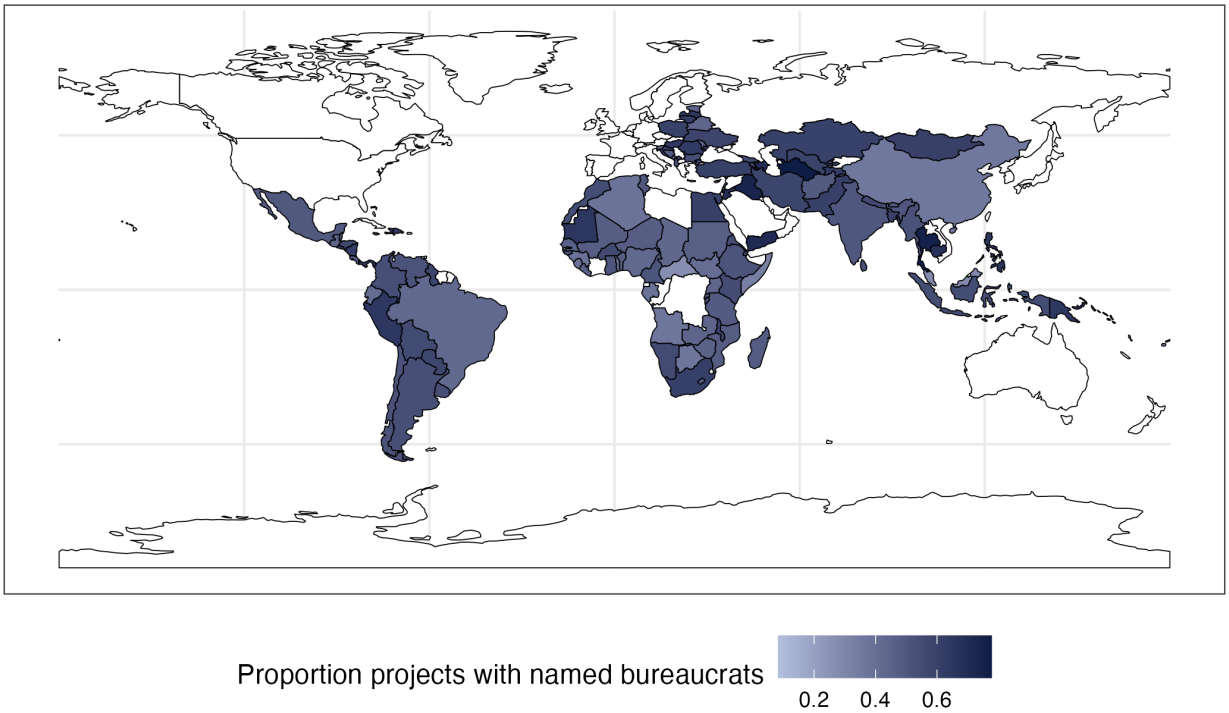

Figure 2: *Proportion of projects with named bureaucrats by country:* Proportion of a given country's World Bank projects with an associated bureaucrat. Darker hues indicate larger proportions of projects with associated bureaucrats.

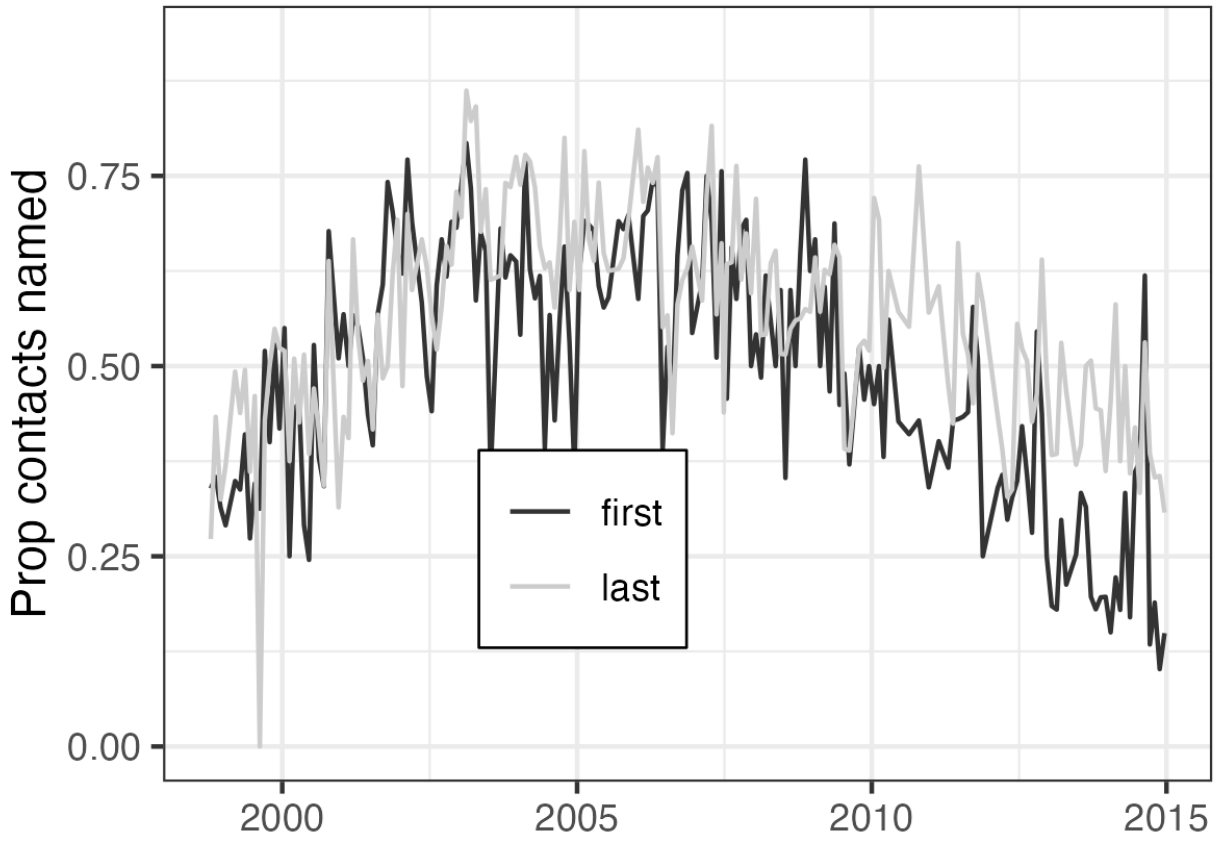

Figure 3: *Proportion of projects on a given date with named bureaucrats:* Proportion of projects from 1998 to 2014 with a named bureaucrat at the time the project was proposed (first, black line) and at the time the project was approved (last, grey line).

Position type	# bureaucrat-positions
Academic	167
Business	430
Government	1640
IO	343
NGO	119
Undefined	22

Table 1: Number of bureaucrat positions by category

bureaucrats associated with just one project. If we did this in full, it would quintuple our sample.

5.3 Collecting Career Histories

A team of undergraduate research assistants then was tasked with tracking the employment history of the associated bureaucrats using LinkedIn profiles, government web pages, and archival documents across NGOs, IOs, and private businesses. As of January 2026, the RAs have completed work histories for 694 of the 1,046 bureaucrats associated with more than one World Bank projects. The descriptives in this section pertain to those 694 bureaucrats. RAs have yet to research 403 of those bureaucrats and were unable to find any information at all for 29 bureaucrats. We describe their procedures now, and then we will return to panel C of the figure to discuss project-driven sampling concerns that may affect our analysis.

Our main bureaucrat-level outcome of interest is career history. We want to know where bureaucrats work after their interactions with the World Bank.

We categorize the positions into five main types: academic institution, business, government, international organization, and NGO. Table 1 shows the types of positions held by bureaucrats. Figure 4 shows the types of positions held over time.

Figure 5 shows the employment histories of individual bureaucrats – each bureaucrat is a row – by type of employment. Missingness in some of the start and end dates of individual employment accounts for gaps in the graph.

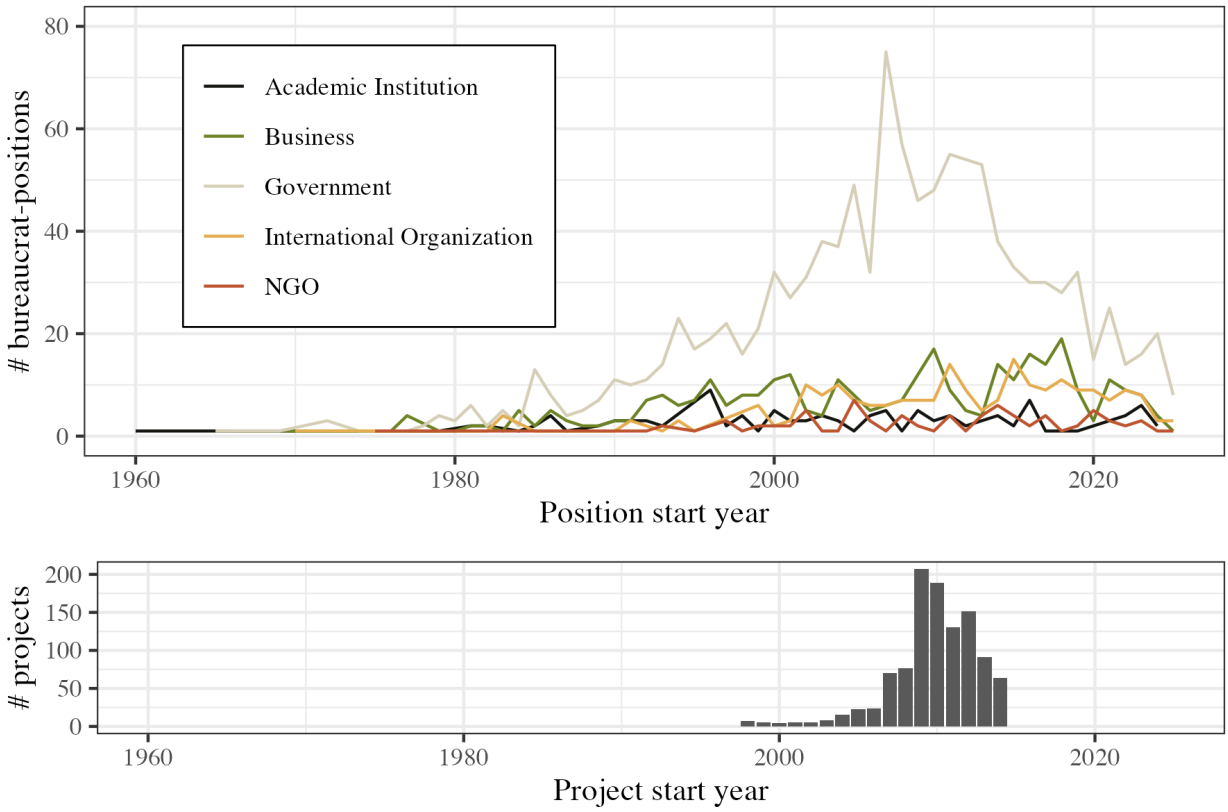

Figure 4: Positions over time. Top panel shows number of bureaucrat-positions by category over time. Bottom panel shows the number of projects in Monthly Operational Summaries from which the bureaucrat names were extracted.

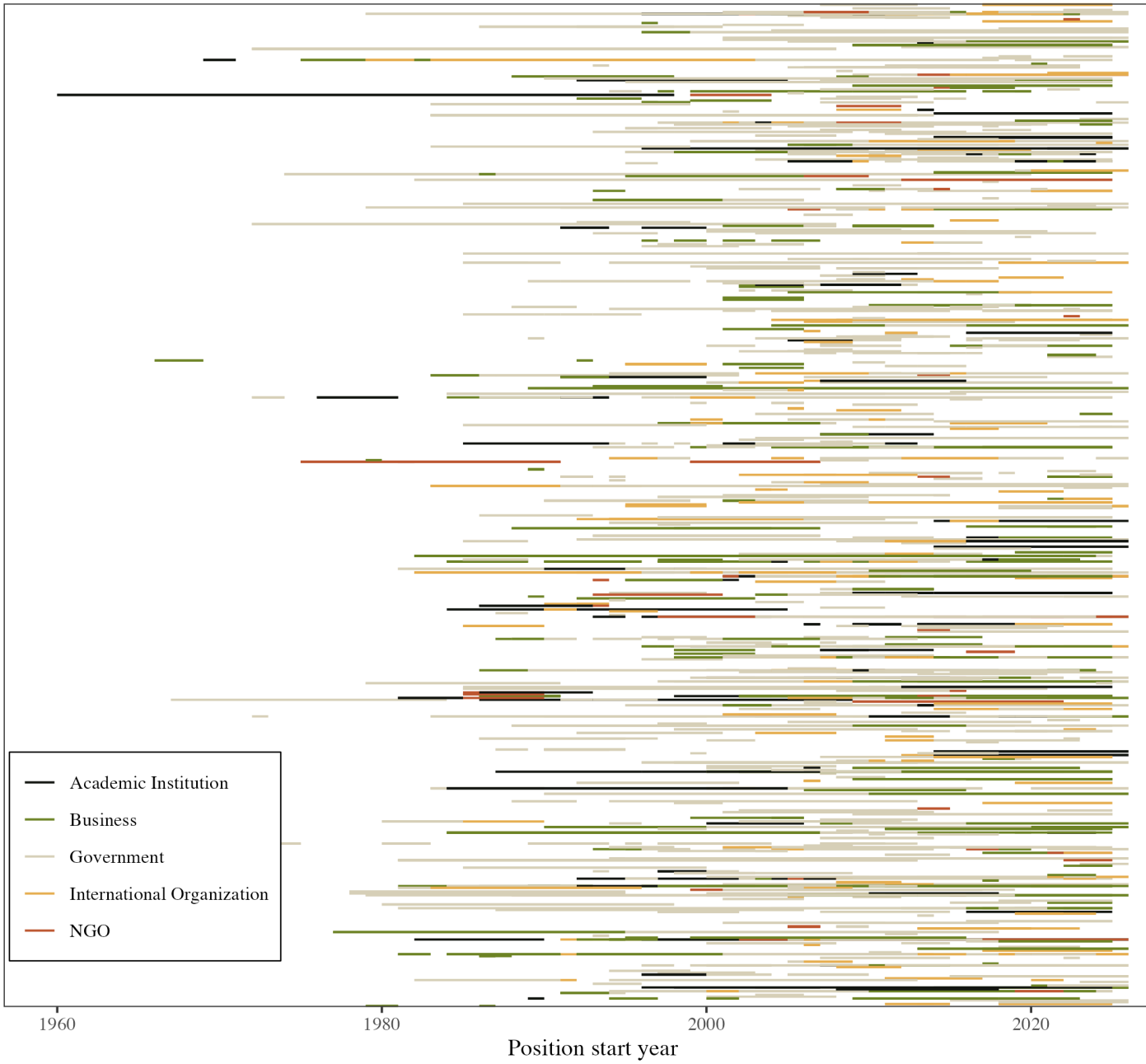

Figure 5: Bureaucrat career histories

5.4 Using Project Performance Data (Panel C)

Previous studies identify variation in the quality of bureaucrats using project performance data. Some individuals are more productive and successful than others, and this appears in the success of projects they work on. For instance, Denizer, Kaufmann and Kraay (2013) and Limodio (2021) use bureaucrat fixed effects to show that variation in specific World Bank bureaucrats explains some amount of variation in the performance of World Bank projects, suggesting that bureaucrats vary in quality and that this affects projects.

Ideally, we would like to similarly establish variation in the quality of bureaucrats on the client country side, using the same approach. Therefore, the next task is to merge the projects identified in our sample with project performance data currently used by the World Bank.

In order to do this, we must associate the projects in our sample with the project identifiers (PID numbers) used by the World Bank (panel C). For the 9,905 projects in the Monthly Operational Summaries, the description associates 2,654 with a PID (27%). PID numbers are missing from so many projects for a few reasons, and some PID numbers may be identified as we clean the data further. We suspect the 9,905 number is overly large relative to the number of projects with PID because it contains duplicates of projects that we have not yet precisely matched. There are some projects that are likely to remain without a PID because the project was dropped before approval, and we believe PIDs are typically assigned when a project is approved. We identified 310 clear cases of this, so we do not think it accounts for the majority of the sample. To the extent we want to prioritize our ability to observe a relationship between project performance data and bureaucrat career trajectories, we might collect only future data for bureaucrats associated with projects with known PIDs.

To measure project performance, we first rely on the Bank's implementation and completion ratings for this purpose (Heinzel 2022). While the Bank may have particular biases in how it considers and evaluates project success, our primary interest is in bureaucrats' relationships with international organizations; therefore the Bank's internal ratings provide an excellent proxy for how projects associated with particular bureaucrats are evaluated by international organizations.

Merging the Bank's project performance data with our archival data introduces a new source of missingness, separate from the PID issue. Of the 2,654 projects for which PIDs are available, we have variability in the availability of performance measures. Implementation ratings are fairly widely available, ranging between 2,310-2,510 (87-95%) depending on the specific measure. Completion ratings are less widely available, ranging between 530-1,511 (20-57%). IEG ratings are available for 1,649 (62%) projects. We obtained the project performance data through web scraping; it is possible that an original source of data may be more complete. However, we also believe there are many projects for which these rating simply were never assigned, particularly because our implementation ratings are actually fairly widely available.

The most widely available source of project performance data would be to use project preparation duration. Kilby (2013) argues that project performance duration is positively associated with project quality and varies for geopolitical reasons. To measure project preparation duration, we simply take as a proxy the amount of time between when a project enters and exits the Monthly Operational Summaries. Since this does not rely on project ID, this measure is available for all 9,905 of the unique projects in our full data set, although there may be ceiling effects with projects occurring later in the data set for which we do not observe the entirety of the project preparation period.

Once we have merged project performance data with bureaucrat data, we have a current sample of 357 bureaucrats, which the below analysis describes.

6 Analysis

6.1 Empirical Strategy

Does project performance correlate with associated bureaucrats' career trajectories? We examine the relationship between measures of project success (internal World Bank ratings and time to project approval) and the likelihood that a bureaucrat will subsequently work for an international organization, non-governmental organization, business, government, or academic institution.

Conditioning on bureaucrats who hold any position in any type of organization after a given project is approved, we take the average rating of all projects approved prior to the bureaucrat's position. The outcome variable of interest is the probability that the post-project position is in a given field (international organization, non-governmental organization, business, government, or academic institution).

Our standard approach uses OLS with robust standard errors. We model three different specifications to test the association between pre-position project ratings and position type likelihood: country fixed effects, country fixed-effects and standard errors clustered by country, and standard errors clustered by country. World Bank operations in a given country are likely correlated; this approach accounts for some of the variation in project quality that may be due to country-specific factors.

The first set of tests uses the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group's (IEG) ratings as a proxy for project quality. These ratings take on a value from Highly Unsatisfactory to Highly Satisfactory, recoded to numeric values of 1 to 7. Projects without IEG ratings are excluded from this set of tests. In total, 319 bureaucrats across 121 countries appear in this sample.

6.2 Preliminary Findings

For bureaucrats who held positions after participating in a World Bank project that was rated, Figure 6 shows how the average rating of pre-position projects is associated with having a role in a future type of position.

The only substantial correlation between project ratings and future bureaucrat career is in the category of international organizations. Positive IEG ratings are associated with bureaucrats taking positions in international organizations after project approval.

The second set of tests uses the length to project approval as a proxy for project and bureaucrat quality. Kilby (2013) finds that projects with longer preparation periods are rated more highly by the World Bank than projects with shorter preparation periods. We use the date that a given project first enters the Bank's Monthly Operational Summaries as an indicator for when the project

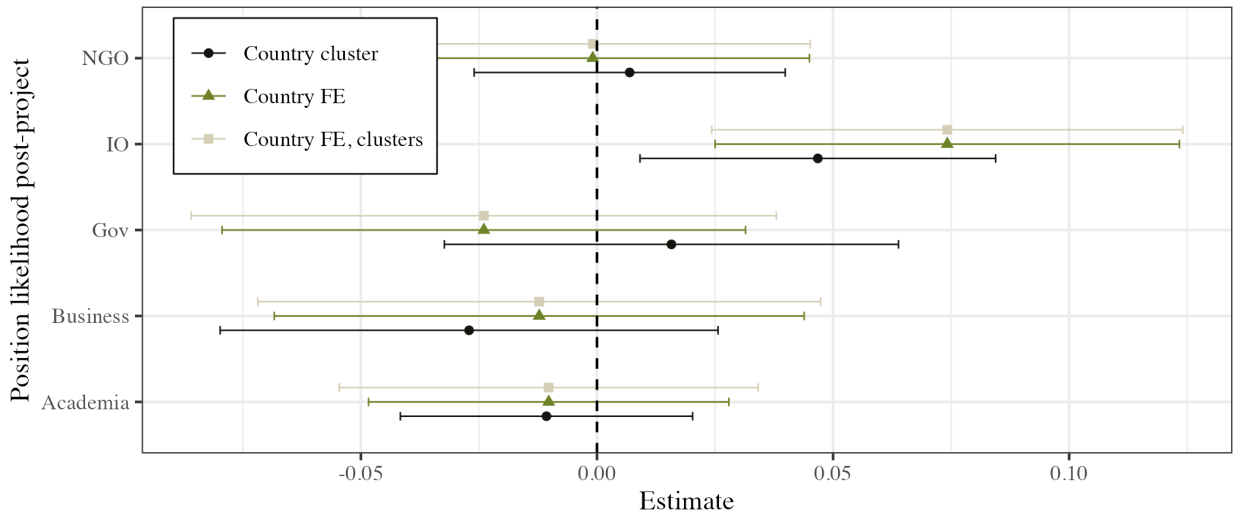

Figure 6: Average Internal Evaluation Group rating for pre-position project and subsequent position(s). Three OLS specifications displayed: country fixed-effects, country fixed-effects and standard errors clustered by country, and standard errors clustered by country.

is first conceived; the last date that the project appears in the MOS is considered the date closest to official approval. Using this measure of quality, we increase our sample size to 596 bureaucrats. Figure 7 shows the association between the average length of project preparation and the likelihood that a bureaucrat holds a given type of position post-project. Project length does not appear to be associated with future bureaucrat career trajectories.

We perform a placebo test to probe whether bureaucrats are more likely to work particular positions prior to high-quality projects. This test should ameliorate some concerns that bureaucrats select into high-quality projects based on their proclivity for work in particular types of organizations. Considering only pre-project positions, we take the average rating of projects that appear chronologically *after* a bureaucrat has held particular positions. We then evaluate whether pre-project positions belong to a given field (international organization, non-governmental organization, business, government, or academic institution). The sample contains 211 bureaucrats across 85 countries.

No clear conclusions can be drawn from these correlations; while one model is statistically significant (outcome: Government, model: country-clustered standard errors), the data are not robust to alternative specifications. Bureaucrats associated with high-performing projects are not

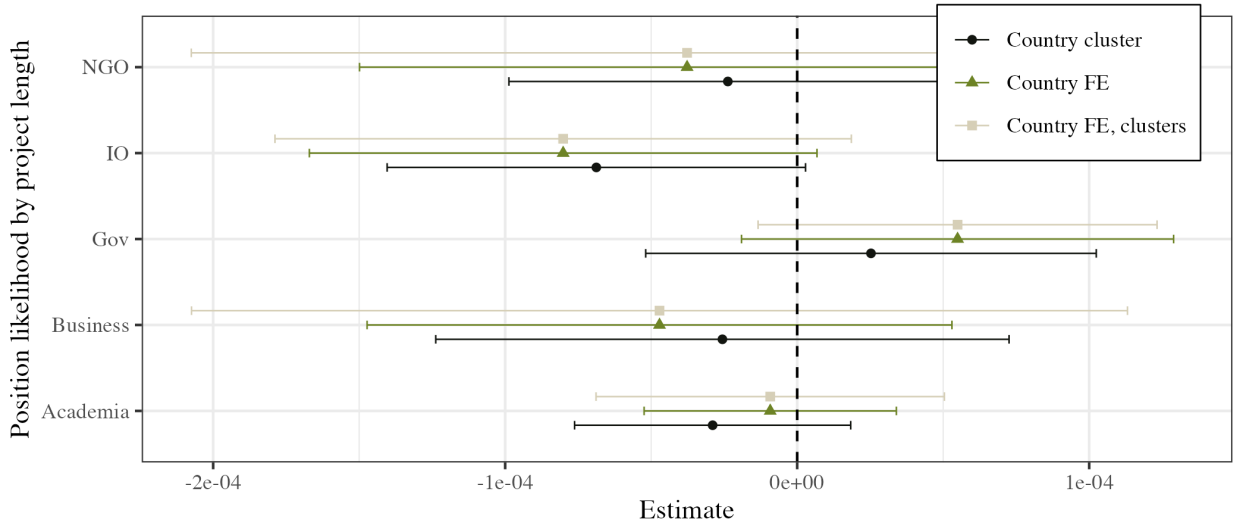

Figure 7: Average time to project approval for pre-position project and subsequent position(s). Three OLS specifications displayed: country fixed-effects, country fixed-effects and standard errors clustered by country, and standard errors clustered by country.

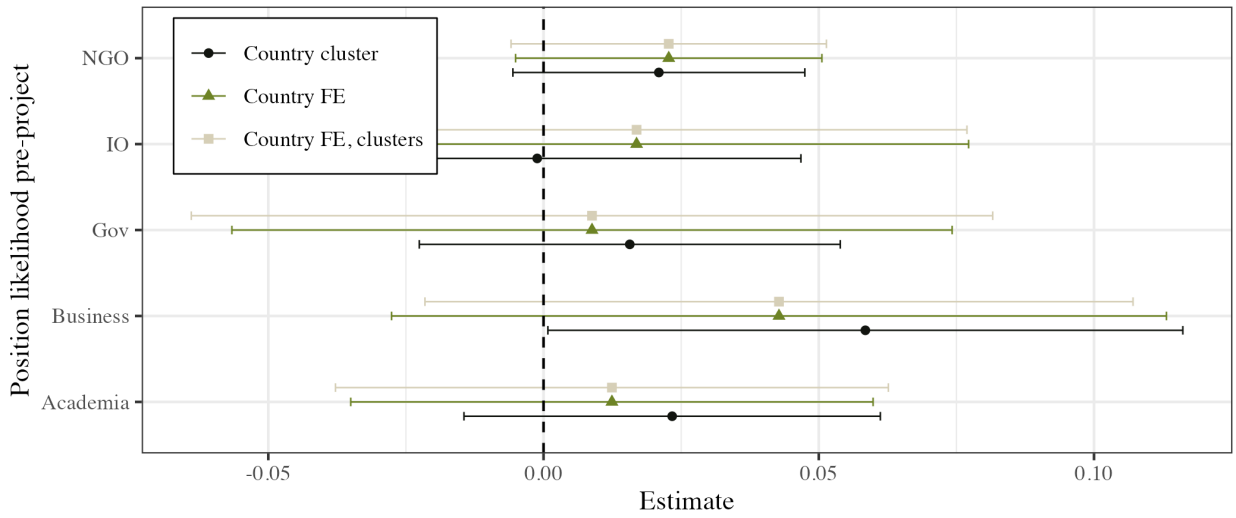

Figure 8: Placebo: Average Internal Evaluation Group rating and likelihood of holding position(s) *prior* to the project. Three OLS specifications displayed: country fixed-effects, country fixed-effects and standard errors clustered by country, and standard errors clustered by country.

more likely to hold particular positions prior to working with the World Bank.

7 Next Steps

Please note that the project is very much a work-in-progress. The project will continue along two separate, but related, dimensions. First, we are expanding the sample size. Second, we are interviewing bureaucrats.

7.1 Sample

As Figure 1 illustrates, the universe of developing country bureaucrats is quite large, and we are in the process of determining how to expand our sample.

We will assign RAs to manually collect biographical details for more developing country bureaucrats. Our instinct is to prioritize expanding the sample of bureaucrats in these ways:

1. Complete biographical details for the bureaucrats that are associated with 2+ projects. In other words, bring our sample size up from 694 (61% of bureaucrats associated with 2+ projects) to 1,126 (100% of bureaucrats associated with 2+ projects). However, bureaucrats associated with 2+ projects constitute only a fraction of the universe, as about 72% of the bureaucrats we have identified are associated with just 1 project.

2. Take a random sample of bureaucrats who are associated with just 1 project. We do not have the budget currently to support data collection for all 4,061 bureaucrats in this category. We would instead take a random sample based on what our budget will support.

    - Should we prioritize bureaucrats attached to projects for which project performance data is available? This would have the greatest impact on the sample size supporting our main analysis, but may be a non-random sample of bureaucrats.

3. We seek advice on how important it is to expand our sample temporally, post-2014. Complete digitization could roughly double the number of bureaucrat names we identify. Perhaps

we do this before randomly sampling bureaucrats above.

We will also strive to improve the precision of our digitization (using AI), which will result in our ability to link bureaucrats to a greater number of projects. This should increase the number of projects-to-bureaucrats to a size at which we will be able to use bureaucrat fixed-effects to better understand the impact of bureaucrats on project evaluations.

Separately, we are pilot testing using AI to code bureaucrats' career histories. We are using RAs to validate the work conducted by AI. Succeeding in this method will allow us to expand our sample size beyond what we can do using RAs' manual labor.

A last possibility is that we could construct a placebo sample of bureaucrats in client countries who are not associated with projects pre-approval. Our idea is to take a random sample of the bureaucrats we have coded and identify other individuals who have held those positions, potentially during different years, and then we would collect their biographical data. We would then use this group as a comparison to understand if and how working with the World Bank is related to future employment patterns. However, without a clear theoretical prediction for this sample, we are hesitant to use our budget in this way.

7.2 Qualitative Evidence

As many of the bureaucrats in our sample are still alive and active, we aim to interview a wide swath of individuals to better understand the factors that influenced career decisions. Some of the questions we intend to ask:

- How they came to work for the government and (if applicable) an IO
- Career preferences, past and present
- Experience working with the World Bank

7.3 Substantive Focus

We request feedback on the substantive focus of our project. If we are going to the trouble of collecting data on these bureaucrats and scheduling interviews with them, we would like to know whether our substantive focus is sufficiently important to justify this investment of time and money. Are there other characteristics of these bureaucrats we should be measuring, or other questions we should be posing to them?

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