

A Reply to “Political Turnover Negatively Affects the Quality of Public Services: A Replication”

By Diana Moreira

This article provides a summary of the key findings of Gallegos (2023) and their replication assessment of Akhtari, Moreira, and Trucco (2021). Gallegos (2023) successfully replicated AMT (2021) using independent coding and offered additional sensitivity analysis that mostly confirms the main findings of AMT (2021). In this response, I discuss one robustness test proposed in the replication, which showed that the main findings of AMT are slightly sensitive. To put the robustness in perspective, I offer the rationale behind the choices we made and a potential explanation for the observed change in results. Additionally, I conclude by discussing the extension of the work conducted in Chile, relating it to the broader literature on political turnovers that emerged after AMT (2021) on political turnovers.

It is essential to provide the thought process and rationale behind including lagged test scores in the main regressions. Gallegos (2023) found that this specific decision significantly impacted our findings. Specifically, they demonstrated that if we were to remove the lagged test score covariate from Table 3 in AMT (2021), the political turnover coefficient would have been estimated with more noise and at a smaller magnitude (although still indicating a negative overall effect). It is crucial to note that the two coefficients do not appear to be statistically different from each other, and drawing additional implications from just the levels difference would be premature. That said, the justification of the choice made are can still add value to the narrative. The decision to include these variables follows standard practices in the literature. We empirically verified that baseline lagged test scores had a smooth distribution around political turnover. In a second step, we included this covariate in the regressions that used test scores as an outcome to reduce noise, considering that individual-level test scores are inherently noisier than other school-level outcomes of interest (e.g., share of new teachers and headmaster replacement rate).¹ Moreover, the conceptual reason for always including baseline test scores harks back to how the value-added literature has tackled this issue, typically studying how teachers and individual characteristics have influenced the *growth* from the baseline test score as a starting point. Additionally, the inclusion of baseline test scores may help address any pre-existing imbalances that existed prior to the election, making the results more robust to this potential critiques.

The finding by Gallegos (2023) that Chile's educational system does not experience significant disruption with political turnover carries significant implications. The Chilean case possesses specific characteristics that directly relate to the extent to which patronage may have been employed in public schools. Firstly, public schools represent a small share of the market and compete directly for funding and enrollment with private schools. This may place bounds on the extent to which bureaucracy can be exploited for political gains, considering the potential impact on public education. Secondly, the educational system underwent a successful civil service reform on school leadership in 2011 (Muñoz and Prem, 2023). I was curious to understand whether there were any anticipated legislative changes that could explain the limited effect even before the full reform. However, Gallegos (2023) does not present results on personnel outcomes. It would be interesting to explore if there is a limited effect not only on test scores but also on personnel

¹ Note that we saw lagged test score as an outcome-specific type of covariate. We kept it separate from the set of school-level and individual level covariates, which were identical throughout for consistency across specifications.

outcomes. Furthermore, Gallegos' (2023) finding of a limited effect of political turnover aligns with subsequent work. We know cross-country evidence on the benefits of turnover for various socio-economic outcomes (Marx, Pons, and Rollet, 2022), also there is a much more limited negative consequence of turnover on locally provided health services in Brazil (Arruda and Rocha, 2023). The collection of these papers raises intriguing questions about the underlying conditions and institutions that limit political capture of public jobs

Muñoz and Prem, 2023. Management Productivity and Recruitment in the Public Sector.

Marx, Pons and Rollet, 2022. Electoral Turnovers.

Arruda and Rocha. 2023. Political Turnover and Health