

# Frontline Bureaucratic Attitude toward Administrative Integration: Does Organizational Configuration Matter?

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## Abstract

The attitudes of frontline bureaucrats play a crucial role in the implementation of administrative restructuring. Administrative integration is a type of administrative reform that can fundamentally change the structure of a local administrative system and may face opposition from local public bureaucracies. Successful administrative integration requires reformers to comprehensively grasp the factors that influence frontline bureaucrats' attitudes toward this unique form of administrative restructuring. This study empirically examines how organizational configurations shape bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. The findings have both theoretical and practical implications for research on bureaucratic attitudes, organizational configurations, and administrative integration.

## Keywords

administrative integration, bureaucratic attitude, organizational configuration

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## **Introduction**

Organizational outcomes have gained increasing attention from public sectors worldwide since the emergence of the “New Public Management.” Various methods of administrative restructuring have been devised to enhance the quality and efficiency of public service delivery (e.g., Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Hood, 1995; McLaughlin et al., 2002). One major approach to administrative reform, known as “administrative integration” or “coordination,” has been widely adopted by numerous countries aiming to establish an effective administrative system. While policy integration emphasizes the policy process and aims to achieve integrated policy objectives, administrative integration concentrates on organizational structure and interagency coordination (Bouckaert et al., 2010; Trein & Maggetti, 2020). As public organizations tend to resist change, administrative integration may proceed more slowly than policy integration. However, it can result in significant and profound impacts by altering the structure of the public sector (Buchanan & Badham, 2008; Pierson, 1996). Therefore, administrative integration can be more influential than other types of administrative reform on frontline bureaucrats, who are the main stakeholders of local agencies. The acceptance of administrative integration by bureaucrats determines the success of this systemic restructuring effort. Nevertheless, only a limited number of studies have examined the factors that contribute to bureaucratic attitudes or behaviors toward this specific administrative changes.

Extensive research has been conducted on the role of bureaucratic attitudes in administrative reforms. As local implementers of policy proposals, frontline bureaucrats’ attitudes have been found to significantly impact the success of administrative changes in the public sector. Their attitudes toward what is highlighted in administrative reforms can affect their motivation to comply with the reforms (e.g., Tummers et al., 2012). Conversely, adverse bureaucratic attitudes, such as shirking, free-riding, and power misuse, have been shown to negatively impact service delivery quality during the implementation phase (e.g., Brehm & Gates, 1999). Moreover, the attitudes of individual bureaucrats, when aggregated, can be internalized and influence the organizational culture, resulting in collective actions oriented toward administrative reform (e.g., May & Winter, 2007). Despite the well-documented significance of bureaucratic attitudes toward the outcomes of administrative reform, few studies have systematically explored the antecedents of such attitudes, particularly in public organizational settings.

Numerous public administration studies have emphasized the impact of organizational configurations on bureaucratic behaviors and attitudes. Micro-level theories such as street-level bureaucracy and principal-agent

relationships have highlighted the crucial role of discretion in shaping the power of frontline bureaucrats during policy implementation. Bureaucrats' attitudes toward ongoing or impending administrative changes depend on the level of discretion that is allowable and how much it will be affected by the changes (e.g., Wilson 2019; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Wood & Waterman, 1991). On a meso-level, organizational structures, including formalization, centralization, and professionalization levels, indirectly affect bureaucratic behaviors by conditioning their working environments (Glisson & Martin, 1980; Rainey, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2006). Frontline bureaucrats develop an image of an ideal workplace arrangement, which can serve as a reference for their sentiments about structural changes imposed on their departments. However, empirical studies on how organizational configurations at micro- and meso-levels determine frontline bureaucratic attitudes toward major macro-scale changes, such as administrative integration, remain scarce (e.g., Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Tummers et al., 2012).

This study aims to address the gaps in the literature by investigating the linkages between bureaucratic attitudes, organizational configurations, and administrative integration. It empirically examines the association between different organizational configurations and the attitudes of frontline bureaucrats toward administrative integration within the context of a prolonged administrative reform in China. The study surveyed around 700 officials from two municipalities in Hubei Province and found that discretion, supervision, and professionalization in the organizational structure significantly influenced the attitudes of local bureaucrats toward administrative integration, and those who had prior experience with such a change were more likely to support it. This study contributes to the literature on bureaucratic attitudes and administrative changes by enriching the theoretical and practical perspectives. Firstly, it extends the theory of organizational behavior in the public sector by exploring the relationship between structural factors and individual behaviors from an attitudinal perspective to identify the primary organizational factors that shape bureaucratic sentiments toward administrative changes. Secondly, it provides insights into the use of organizational structural designs to gain support from bureaucrats, which is critical to establishing successful long-term strategies for the reconstruction of local governmental systems.

## **Discretion, Administrative Integration, and Bureaucratic Attitudes**

From a micro perspective, scholars of street-level bureaucracy theory contend that perceived discretion as an explicit and behavioral aspect of organizational configuration plays a crucial role in shaping bureaucratic attitudes

and behaviors toward policy and reform (Lipsky, 1980; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014; Thomann et al., 2018). Bureaucratic discretion is commonly understood as the latitude that bureaucrats have to shape their tasks in terms of quantity and quality, within the limits of their power (Davis, 1969; Evans, 2010; Evans & Hupe, 2019; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). In the context of local government, discretion permits frontline bureaucrats to make decisions on local policy-making and implementation independently of higher-level management and supervisory directives (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Riccucci, 2005). For example, discretion has been found to be an essential prerequisite of representative bureaucracy, as it enables individual frontline bureaucrats to provide substantive benefits to their constituents (Meier & Bohte, 2001; Meier & Stewart, 1992). Similarly, studies have shown that frontline bureaucrats frequently need discretion to ensure the success of local policy implementation (Brodkin, 1997; Durant & Resh, 2009; Glanz, 1991; Mohammed, 2021).

The concept of discretion is highly valued in street-level bureaucracy as it enables frontline bureaucrats to exert influence on local decision-making and implementation. This relationship suggests a correlation between discretion and individual bureaucratic policy attitudes. When given discretion, bureaucrats may demonstrate more favorable attitudes toward a policy or reform, as it allows them to have greater input in shaping local policy. The extant research supports this assertion, with several studies indicating that when frontline officials perceive or anticipate an increase in discretion, they are more willing to implement policies (Meier & O'Toole, 2002; Tummers et al., 2012). However, supervision from upper levels has the opposite effect on discretion-prone street-level bureaucrats. While upper-level supervision regulates and legitimizes frontline bureaucratic values and behaviors, bureaucrats may still hold conservative attitudes toward local policy practices, especially in highly discretionary situations (e.g., Herzog & Zacka, 2019; Keiser, 2010; Oberfield, 2012; Sandfort et al., 2018; Vinzant et al., 1998). As implied in rational choice theory, frontline bureaucrats (as rational individuals) will perceive that such supervision reduces their opportunity to influence hands-on policy implementation and decision-making at the local level (Bertelli & Palma, 2021; Goodin & Klingemann, 1996).

Such relationships between discretion (or supervision) and bureaucratic attitudes can be anticipated when administrative integration is imminent. The prospect of merging local public agencies has traditionally been viewed by frontline bureaucrats as an opportunity to enhance their influence on local governance. The introduction of New Public Management (NPM) and the accompanying multilevel administrative integrations, which aim to promote public organizational performance in a decentralized and downward manner,

have provided platforms for frontline bureaucrats to exert greater influence in the local policy process. This is because these approaches prioritize output measurement over control mechanisms through law or administrative processes (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Kornai et al., 2001; Osborne et al., 1992; Pollitt, 1995). In theory, this wave of administrative reform should have elicited widely positive feedback from frontline bureaucrats. However, akin to the discussion on the relationship between discretion and bureaucratic attitudes in other contexts, the effects are often implicitly asserted and require empirical examination (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Pires, 2011; Tummers et al., 2012).

Our assumption is that bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative changes are mainly influenced by the expectations of bureaucrats, rather than their perceptions of the structural designs of their departments. This is because the impact of expectations on attitudes is different from that of perceptions. Cognitive theories suggest that expectations have a more direct effect on individual attitudes than perceptions, as the former are based on facts themselves, while the latter involve personal interpretations of those facts (Hjortskov, 2018; James, 2007; Sawin, 1989). Therefore, exploring how bureaucrats' expectations of organizational configurations affect their attitudes toward administrative integration can help to eliminate the effects of personal interpretations on the relationship, which is consistent with our aim of examining the direct impacts of organizational configurations on frontline bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. As discretion is granted in conjunction with top-down imposed supervision, officials may have different expectations for these two micro-level organizational configurations. Therefore, we hypothesize that frontline bureaucrats who anticipate less supervision and more discretion will exhibit greater satisfaction with administrative integration. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

*H1a: Local officials who expect less supervision from superiors are more satisfied with administrative integration.*

*H1b: Local officials who expect higher levels of discretion are more satisfied with administrative integration.*

## **Organizational Structure, Administrative Integration, and Bureaucratic Attitudes**

From a meso-level perspective, organizational structures shape bureaucratic behaviors and mentalities in a gradual and groupwise manner, thus representing the implicit dimension of organizational configuration. Rainey's (2009) definition highlights the multidimensionality of organizational structures,

which include multilevel hierarchies, professionalized units and positions, and governing rules. Formalization, centralization, and professionalization are commonly used dimensions for conceptualizing organizational structure constructs (Indik, 1963; Pugh et al., 1968; Sells, 1963).

**Formalization** is a key dimension used to conceptualize organizational structure constructs. It is defined as the use of rules, explicit policies, and procedures that set standards for a general organizational structure (Pugh et al., 1968). While formalization offers stability and order for local organizations, it also erodes discretion and the impact of individuals on decision-making (Borriy et al., 2018). When administrative integration is imminent, frontline bureaucrats who anticipate formalized organizational structures for their agencies may welcome highly bureaucratic and rule-bound arrangements to the organizational design. However, administrative integration is intended to address problems that cannot be solved by single agencies alone and requires collaboration with external parties, leading to the formation of larger entities with looser and more flexible structures and increased goal ambiguity (Agranoff, 2012; Gray & Trist, 1989). Consequently, administrative integration may not receive positive feedback from frontline bureaucrats who expect more formalized agencies. Therefore, the relevant hypothesis can be:

*H2a: Officials who expect agency formalization are less satisfied with administrative integration.*

The dimension of **centralization** in organizational structures highlights the decision-making power structure within the hierarchy. Although centralized decision-making allows frontline bureaucrats to concentrate on delivering their tasks, it limits their participation in local policymaking (Glisson & Martin, 1980; Hage & Aiken, 1967). Previous research has shown that centralized decision-making, accompanied by formalized rules, may have adverse effects on organizational innovation and performance when addressing complex issues (e.g., Chebat et al., 2002; Jantan et al., 2008). Administrative integration, on the other hand, tends to decentralize decision-making, reduce departmentalization of knowledge, and establish a polycentric coordination mechanism to enable distinct and interdependent components to work together effectively (e.g., Barki & Pinsonneault, 2005; Egeberg & Trondal, 2018; Willem & Buelens, 2007). Nevertheless, frontline bureaucrats may still anticipate agency centralization due to the differences in their power status within the local bureaucracy, with highly empowered individuals advocating for a more centralized structure to secure their control over decision-making.

Therefore, we posit a negative relationship between bureaucratic expectation of centralization and satisfaction with administrative integration.

*H2b: Officials who expect agency centralization are less satisfied with administrative integration.*

**Professionalization** serves as a fundamental aspect of organizational structure that pertains to the division of labor and task specification within human resources. This functional dimension comprises elements such as goal clarification, task simplification, and line and staff hierarchies (e.g., Pugh et al., 1968). When applied to local public agencies, professionalization can foster individual accountability by ensuring that frontline bureaucrats are fully cognizant of their job scope and performance metrics. However, it can also restrict their ability to innovate and address complex issues that require coordination across agencies, thereby limiting their impact on the local policy process (Glisson & Martin, 1980). Although public agencies are often confronted with multifaceted challenges and competing policy agendas, administrative integration is launched to navigate these difficulties by managing turbulence and accepting ambiguity as a governing process (Olsen, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2006). Unfortunately, organizational structures designed for professionalization may hinder this approach (Skowronek & Orren, 2020). As a result, there may exist a negative correlation between frontline bureaucratic expectations of professionalization and attitudes toward administrative integration.

*H2c: Officials who expect professionalization are less satisfied with administrative integration.*

## **Moderators of the Relationship Between Organizational Configurations and Bureaucratic Attitudes Toward Administrative Integration**

It has been frequently argued that the attractiveness of an organization largely rests on the extent to which employees comprehend, value, and internalize its identities and missions, organizing logics, as well as underlying norms and values (Converse, 2006; March & Olsen, 1983; Rohrschneider et al., 1994; Wildavsky, 1987). These factors similarly influence how local bureaucrats react to administrative changes that frequently entail significant modifications to their work environment and job responsibilities (Gains & John, 2010). In other words, the ability of public officials to recognize the suitability of

administrative reform and adapt to resultant structural changes is an indicator of their attitudes toward its implementation (De Dreu et al., 2008). Thus, contextual factors such as prior experience and ideological consistency may moderate the association between organizational configurations and bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration.

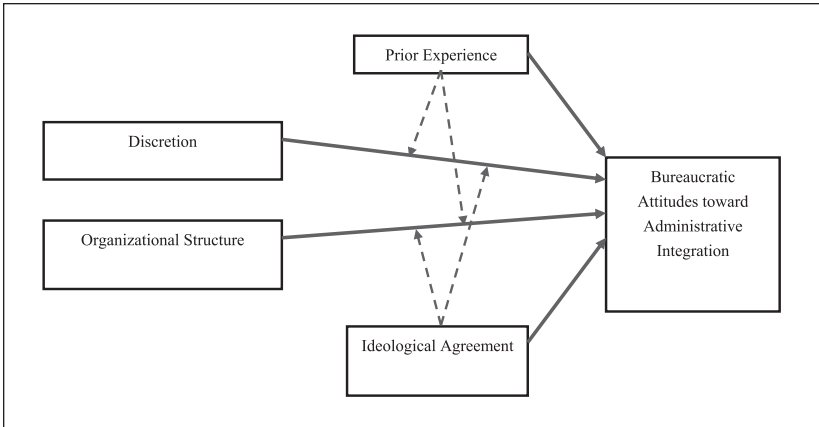
**Prior Experience:** Egeberg & Trondal (2018) emphasize the significance of “former experience” as a crucial yet often disregarded factor in bureaucratic attitudes and behavior. Bauer (2012) posits that individuals who have undergone a bureaucratic reshuffle are less likely to oppose subsequent ones. Previous experience provides bureaucrats with an opportunity to promote new administrative reforms (Huber et al., 2002). Bureaucrats who have participated in prior administrative reforms may be more receptive to future ones. Moreover, in keeping with rational choice theory, civil servants tend to view reforms that enhance their managerial privileges more favorably (Lynn & Vaden, 1979). The greater the extent of employees’ involvement in previous administrative changes, the more probable they are to assume that the next restructuring will consolidate their positions within the bureaucracy. In the context of the interplay between bureaucrats’ expectations of organizational configurations and their attitudes toward administrative integration, we can assume that prior experience of administrative integration heightens the likelihood that bureaucrats will perceive ongoing or future administrative integration as offering greater discretion and fewer constraints from organizational structures.

*H3a: Local officials with prior experience of administrative integration are more satisfied with subsequent administrative integration than are those without such prior experience.*

*H3b: Prior experience of administrative integration positively moderates the relationship between bureaucrats’ expectations of organizational configurations and their satisfaction with administrative integration.*

**Ideological Consistency:** Among the constellation of factors that influence bureaucratic responsiveness or resistance, individual ideology has emerged as the most significant element (Jacobsen, 2005). Several scholars have provided evidence that (1) variations in personal values and ideologies account for differences in the attitudes held by frontline bureaucrats toward policies or reforms (Kelly, 1994; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003) and (2) how people interpret information is influenced by political ideology, particularly in public bureaucracies with multiple or vague missions (Keiser, 2010, p. 249). Therefore, we anticipate that local officials will embrace administrative reform if they perceive that the reform’s objective align with their values and expectations. Although local officials expecting greater discretion generally





**Figure 1.** Analytical framework.

have favorable impressions of administrative integration, they may be more satisfied attitudinally if they share ideological congruence with the initiators of the administrative integrations. Similarly, bureaucrats who anticipate standardized organizational structures may become less resistant to administrative integration if they and the proposers of the integration match ideologically. Thus, we assume a positive moderating mechanism in ideological consistency regarding the bureaucratic attitude toward administrative integration. (The overarching analytical framework is shown in Figure 1.)

*H4a: Local officials whose personal ideology matches the goals proposed by the administrative integration are more satisfied with it than are their counterparts without such ideological consistency.*

*H4b: Ideological concordance positively moderates the relationship between bureaucrats' expectations of organizational configurations and their satisfaction with administrative integration.*

## **China's Integrated Administrative Executive System Reform: The Empirical Case for Hypothesis Testing**

The phenomenon of administrative integration is not limited to Western countries. China, in particular, has experienced tremendous economic growth over the last few decades due to its open-door policies (Wong, 2009). With an eye toward improving the well-being and happiness of its citizens in the new

millennium, the Chinese central leadership has launched service-oriented reforms aimed at enhancing the quality of domestic public services. One such reform is the Integrated Administrative Executive System (IAES), which seeks to address the inefficiencies of China's local administrative system by integrating the powers and responsibilities of law enforcement across multiple fragmented local agencies responsible for different service areas. The ultimate goal of this integration is to improve the effectiveness of local public service delivery (Gao & Shen, 2012).

Since its proposal in 1987, the IAES has received legislative backing from the Chinese Central State. *The Law of Administrative Punishment* enacted in 1997 gave the IAES a supreme legal status, with provincial-level governments authorized to establish an independent agency responsible for enforcing administrative punishments across local administrative departments. With the ascent of Xi Jinping in 2012, the IAES has become a key component of central legislation, extending beyond the enforcement of administrative punishments to include all law enforcement-related decisions (Wudazhiku, 2015). At the fourth plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2015, a consensus was reached to incorporate the IAES into a special domain of law enforcement in city governance, with a fraction of non-disciplinary officials appointed to enforce local zoning regulations and police urban space, that is, "*Chengguan*" ("*urban management*" in *English*). In response, the National Bureau of Chengguan was established. As of today, the IAES has been implemented nationwide, covering over 130 cities across a range of public service sectors including cultural exchange and tourism, food and drug safety, environment protection, and transportation.

The IAES reform aims to enhance local government operations in two main ways. First, it seeks to increase the efficiency of governmental functions by establishing an IAES. Traditionally, Chinese local government agencies undertake the dual roles of public service providers and sector law enforcers. However, while the former is efficiently executed, the latter is plagued by coordination challenges as the enforcement of certain sector laws and regulations necessitates the collaborative efforts of various functional departments and agencies, resulting in overlapping and inconsistent law enforcement activities across different departments (e.g., Xia, 2016). By coordinating law enforcement activities through IAES outside the regular administrative framework, the fundamental issue of a fragmented enforcement regime is addressed. Consequently, the law enforcement authorities of all functional departments are integrated into one department specializing in law enforcement. Independent law enforcement units have been established at different levels of governments, with lower-level agencies directly subordinated to their higher-level counterparts (Ding & Pan, 2016).

In addition, the IAES reform is designed to enhance local bureaucratic discretion to cope with uncertainties and contingencies during the course of law enforcement. Unlike straightforward market-based transactions, effective law enforcement requires establishing favorable relationships among functional departments, nongovernmental organizations, and policy entrepreneurs of various kinds (Osborne, 2010). Given the highly complex and collaborative nature of law enforcement activities, the subjectivity in measuring the quality of public service provision calls for establishing a flexible body of law enforcement to regulate service supply and distribution, deter noncompliance, and ensure accountability (Grönroos, 2001). As a newly developed system, IAES carries fewer historical burdens and can adapt better to different local circumstances, offering customized solutions to various issues with direct bearing on the wellbeing of local communities.

However, the initial phase of the IAES has been plagued by uncertainty and ambiguity at the operational level, leading to variations in bureaucratic support. The independent executive units, which include law enforcement authorities from all functional departments, have not yet gained de-facto legitimacy among all local officials. Moreover, since law enforcement activities in the newly integrated administrative bodies are inherently all-encompassing and physically demanding, a significant number of temporary workers with questionable work ethics and capabilities are employed to support permanent employees. Furthermore, since the IAES is not part of the regular government system on paper, its administrative ranking and entitlements are somewhat unclear. Consequently, there are discrepancies in the treatment of IAES officials and regular government employees. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the factors that influence frontline bureaucratic attitudes toward the IAES to promote the success of future administrative integrations.

The literature on local governments in China frequently explores the impact of organizational configurations at both micro and meso levels on frontline bureaucratic behaviors during administrative reform. Firstly, discretion, when accompanied by supervision, has been found to have a significant effect on frontline bureaucratic behaviors in China. Despite the modernization of China's post-Mao era, the top-down mechanism inherited from the imperial period still shapes policy processes under the authoritarian state, which restricts the capacity of frontline bureaucrats to effect change in the implementation phase (Lieberthal & Lampton, 2018). Consequently, Chinese local bureaucrats seeking opportunities to increase their influence during implementation tend to anticipate greater discretion when administrative changes are imminent (Huang, 1999; Wedeman, 1999, 2001). Additionally, China's complex Tiao-Kuai administrative structure, where the "vertical bureaucratic relationships linking central to local

organizations are commonly referred to as Tiao, whereas the horizontal bodies coordinating actions within given geographic areas are known as Kuai” (Van Rooij & Lo, 2010, pp. 3–4), further curtails frontline bureaucratic powers in the local implementation of centrally made policies. Therefore, local bureaucrats tend to desire increased discretion and reduced monitoring when administrative reforms approach, intending to balance the conflicting interests between “Tiao” and “Kuai” in the local administrative system (Lam & Chan, 1996).

Moreover, the literature has identified the close relationship between organizational structures and local government implementation in China. Chinese local bureaucrats who work in highly formalized and centralized agency structures tend to lose their motivation to seek changes in their positions within the local administrative system gradually (Y. Fan, 2015; Lam & Chan, 1996). As a result, frontline bureaucrats may display indifference toward administrative integration due to the stability and inertia created by the high level of formalization and centralization of their agencies (Gao & Shen, 2012). Additionally, the rigid structure of the Chinese local administrative system incubates the bureaucratic “liability of newness” (Stinchcombe, 2000). For example, in the IAES, employees from various functional agencies are allocated to newly established departments through agency mergers, which introduces considerable uncertainty regarding professionalism levels. Thus, conflicts between agency veterans and newcomers from other agencies, whose professionalism and work ethics are regarded as questionable, are often observed in newly integrated agencies during local reforms (see, e.g., L. Fan, 2014; Foster, 2006).

Finally, previous experience and ideological consistency have also been identified as moderators that affect the implementation outcomes of administrative reforms. In the context of environmental governance in China, prior research has found that previous experience has a positive impact on local bureaucrats’ willingness to implement policies (see, e.g., Duan et al., 2011; Eaton & Kostka, 2014). Furthermore, most administrative reforms in the 21st century align with the Chinese central government’s call for service-oriented local governance, which emphasizes a shift from “control and coercion to empowerment and negotiation and from a closed black box to openness and transparency” (Wu et al., 2013, p. 349). Local bureaucrats who possess a better understanding of and greater appreciation for this central goal are more likely to display positive attitudes toward administrative reforms. Consequently, given the close relationships among discretion, organizational structures, and bureaucratic behaviors in Chinese bureaucratic reality, the IAES reform serves as an appropriate case to empirically test our hypotheses regarding the direct

and moderating impacts of different organizational configurations on bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration.

## Empirical Strategy

### *Data Collection*

This study aims to examine the factors that affect the attitudes of Chinese local bureaucrats toward the IAES. We conducted an empirical investigation by surveying officials from *Chengguan* departments in Huanggang and Xiangyang, two municipalities in Hubei Province where the IAES was piloted. *Chengguan* officials were chosen as our respondents due to the full implementation of the IAES within their sector by 2015. As the IAES is an administrative integration reform initiated by the central government, the practices in different localities are similar to each other, and the respondents' answers to the survey prompts may not vary significantly across local contexts. The duties of *Chengguan* officials, which are to police vendors and regulate streets, are also similar across different localities. A total of 760 officials were sampled in which 676 respondents (307 and 369 from Huanggang and Xiangyang, respectively) completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 88.9%. These officials held various posts, ranging from temporary to civil service, and from section-chief to vice-ministerial levels. By focusing on *Chengguan* officials, we aimed to minimize the potential drawbacks of utilizing a single survey and provide a comprehensive understanding of the attitudes of Chinese local bureaucrats toward the IAES.

To ensure the representativeness of our survey, a convenience sampling approach with stratified logic was applied to disseminate the questionnaire among government officials in the nine administrative districts of Huanggang and Xiangyang. A representative from each district department was responsible for distributing the questionnaires to their colleagues, but they had no discretion in selecting participants. The representatives' tasks included ensuring that every official in their department completed the questionnaire and collecting the completed surveys. To minimize social desirability bias, the representatives informed potential participants that the study was solely for academic purposes, participation was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and individual responses would not be disclosed to third parties under any circumstances.

### *Empirical Model and Variables*

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used for the empirical analysis to test the hypotheses, given that the sample was hierarchically structured across

three levels of individual officials, nine administrative districts, and two jurisdictions. The dependent variable in the empirical model, (*Satisfaction*<sub>ijk</sub>), reflects the level of bureaucratic satisfaction with the implementation of the IAES for individual official *i* at level 1, within level-2 unit *j*, and level-3 unit *k*. The level-1 model can be expressed as follows:

$$Satisfaction_{ijk} = \pi_{0jk} + \sum_{i=1}^I (\pi_{ijk} X_{ijk}) + \varepsilon_{ijk}$$

where  $\pi_{ijk}$  are the level-1 coefficients of individual official *i* at administrative district *j* in jurisdiction *k*, with the corresponding explanatory variables  $X_{ijk}$ 's predictors.  $\varepsilon_{ijk}$  is the level-1 random effect. At level 2, the  $\pi$  coefficients at level 1 are treated as outcomes to be predicted. To measure the level-2 coefficients, level 2 is defined as

$$\pi_{ijk} = \beta_{i0k} + \sum_{q=1}^Q (\beta_{iqk} X_{qjk}) + \gamma_{ijk}$$

where  $\beta_{iqk}$  are level-2 coefficients for administrative districts,  $X_{qjk}$  are level-2 predictors, and  $\gamma_{ijk}$  is the level-2 random effect. Finally, level 3 is defined as

$$\beta_{ijk} = \beta_{ij0} + \sum_{s=1}^{S_{qs}} (\rho_{iqs} W_{sk}) + \mu_{iqk}$$

where  $\rho_{iqs}$  are level-3 coefficients,  $W_{sk}$  are level-2 predictors, and  $\mu_{iqk}$  is the level-3 random effect. This study employed hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to account for the clustering of observations by district and government and to examine the direct effects of level-1 officials and indirect effects of level-2 and level-3 governments. A random intercepts HLM was utilized to obtain a means-as-outcomes model, which provides a distinct intercept for districts and governments while eliminating unobserved heterogeneity across levels 2 and 3.

Multiple hierarchical regression models were constructed to determine levels of bureaucratic satisfaction. A base model was utilized, which included four independent variables and seven control variables represented by  $X_{ijk}$ . Further details on these variables will be explained in subsequent sections.

**Dependent Variable:** The operationalization of the dependent variable, bureaucratic attitude, was achieved by assessing the overall levels of satisfaction with the local IAES among survey respondents. The primary objective of IAES is to assist local administrations in enforcing public service-related rules and regulations in a more just, transparent, and efficient manner (Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party, 2013). To measure bureaucratic

attitude, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements:

- (1) *“The IAES works efficiently.”*
- (2) *“The local IAES has a working style which indeed benefits the IAES operation.”*
- (3) *“The IAES operates with honesty.”*
- (4) *“The IAES is capable of exercising its authority through administrative enforcement.”*
- (5) *“The IAES operates with integrity and justice.”*

The study employs a five-point Likert scale (ranging from “very unsatisfied”= 1 to “very satisfied”= 5) to measure each statement. To derive the factor scores for the bureaucratic satisfaction measures, the principal component analysis (PCA) technique is employed. PCA combines various attitudinal questions into a single indicator of an index variable, reflecting the overall satisfaction level, through the calculation of a mean value.

**Independent Variables:** The present study employs an empirical model that incorporates four independent variables, including two variables of primary interest and two moderators. The first two independent variables, discretion (DI) and organizational structures (OS), are assessed through two and three substantive survey questions, respectively, to explore the hypothesized antecedents of bureaucratic attitudes from the perspective of discretion and organizational structures.<sup>1</sup> Due to the dichotomous measurement of the five items, the standard factor analysis, which assumes continuous variables with multivariate normal distribution, is not applicable. Therefore, we employ a factor analysis method based on the polychoric correlation matrix, which calculates the appropriate heterogeneous correlation for each pair of variables in a data frame based on the type of variables involved (Starkweather, 2014). This results in the generation of two indicators representing the effects of discretion and organizational structure. Table 1 shows the corresponding factor loadings and Cronbach’s alphas.

**Moderating Variables:** In addition, we investigate the moderating effects on bureaucratic attitude through interaction terms between the predictors and outcomes at both high (one standard deviation above the mean) and low (one standard deviation below the mean) values of the moderator (Aiken et al., 1991; Preacher et al., 2006). Specifically, we consider two moderators: (1) whether the individual is a service-oriented official (SOO) or a conventional developmentalist bureaucrat, and (2) whether the participant had prior working experience in IAES-type departments before the full adoption of the IAES (PE). As such, four two-by-two interaction terms, namely  $DI \times SOO$ ,

**Table 1.** Factor Analysis for the Dependent Variable and Independent Variables.

Item	Factor loading	Cronbach $\alpha$
Dependent variable: Bureaucratic satisfaction		
Efficiency	.881	.688
Working style	.917	.686
Honesty	.900	.682
Competence	.895	.684
Justice	.867	.692
Independent variable: Discretion		
Supervision	.735	.717
Discretion	.735	.719
Independent variable: Organizational structures		
Centralization	.895	.725
Professionalization	.852	.729
Formalization	.852	.721

DI  $\times$  PE, OS  $\times$  SOO, and OS  $\times$  PE, are incorporated into the empirical models to examine the moderating effects of ideological alignment and prior experience on bureaucratic satisfaction. These interaction terms are included in the sixth model, allowing for the comparison of their moderating effects.

**Control Variables:** In addition to the aforementioned four independent variables, the model includes several control variables, including three demographic factors (gender, age, and education level), established post (*Bianzhi*), length of government service, and the administrative rank of each employee's IAES affiliation. As the surveyed individuals work in different districts/counties within the two municipalities, the second model incorporates a set of dummy variables to represent the municipalities and districts where the respondents work, enabling the specification of fixed effects across organizations. A detailed inventory of the survey items and their respective measurements is provided in Table 2.

To evaluate the validity of the primary factors hypothesized to influence bureaucratic attitudes, we conduct a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA results, presented in the Appendix Figure A1, are assessed using the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which are advocated by Hu and Bentler (1999) as appropriate measures for evaluating model fit to the corresponding data pattern. Our model shows an acceptable fit for the data, as indicated by the major fit indices falling within the accepted range of values, according to



**Table 2.** Survey Items on Bureaucratic Attitudes Toward IAES Reform.

Dimension	Question	Measurement
Bureaucratic attitude	Are you satisfied with the following aspects of current IAES operation?	1 = very unsatisfied 2 = unsatisfied 3 = neutral 4 = satisfied 5 = very satisfied
	<i>“The IAE is efficient.”</i>	
	<i>“The local IAE has working style which indeed benefits the IAES operation.”</i>	
	<i>“The IAES operates with honesty.”</i>	
	<i>“The IAES is capable of exercising its authority in administrative enforcement.”</i>	
	<i>“The IAES operates with integrity and justice.”</i>	
Discretion (DI)	“Do you expect more discretion in IAES?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
	“Do you expect less supervision over your daily job duties in IAES?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
Organizational structure (OS)	“Do you expect your department to be more professionalized in IAES?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
	“Do you expect more centralized decision-making for your department in IAES?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
	“Do you expect your department to be more formalized in IAES?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
IAES identity <sup>a</sup>	“Did you work in any IAE-type bureaus before IAES?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
	“Were you familiar with the idea of IAE before IAES?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
Political ideology (SOO)	“Are you familiar with the idea of ‘constructing a service-oriented government?’”	0 = No; 1 = Yes
Individual utility	“What is the administrative ranking of the locality you work in?” 1 = section; 2 = deputy division; 3 = division; 4 = deputy department; 5 = department	
Seniority	“Do you have an established post?” “How long have you been a civil servant?”	0 = No; 1 = Yes 1 ≤ 10 years; 2 = 11–20; 3 = 21–30; 4 = 31–40; 5 ≥ 40
Socio-demographics	Gender	0 = female; 1 = male
	Education Level: 1 = High school graduate; 2 = Associate degree; 3 = Bachelor’s degree; 4 = Master’s degree; 5 = Doctorate degree	
	Age: 1 = no more than 25; 2 = 26–35; 3 = 36–45; 4 = 46–55; 5 = over 55	

<sup>a</sup>Prior working experiences (PE) are coded as 1 when both the questions of IAES Identity are equal to 1; otherwise, 0.

**Table 3.** Fit Statistics of the Proposed Model.

Statistics	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
Value	2.37	0.045	0.015	0.986	0.991

the criteria set forth by Hu and Bentler (1999). Details of the major fit indices are presented in Table 3. Thus, our variable operationalization strategy is deemed valid, as all scaled survey items have statistically significant factor loadings (at an alpha level of .01) on their respective latent constructs, as evidenced by the CFA results.

## Empirical Results

### *Descriptive Statistics*

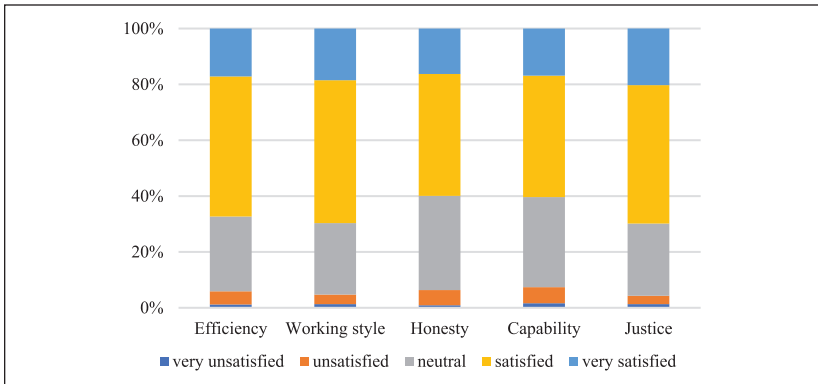
Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics and attitudinal distributions of the satisfaction of local officials with the IAES. Figure 2 disaggregates these items into distinct categories, revealing that the surveyed officials generally hold optimistic views about the IAES, as they were positively inclined toward all five statements gauging the efficacy of IAE bodies in attaining justice, honesty, and efficiency. The overall mean score of 3.76 suggests a slightly favorable attitude rather than one that is neutral or indifferent. Despite the ostensibly positive assessment, it is worth noting that only a small number of respondents were “very satisfied” with the IAES’s operation, while several survey takers conveyed dissatisfaction or extreme dissatisfaction with it. While we have not yet uncovered the factors that account for this variation, the descriptive finding implies that Chinese local bureaucrats working in a one-party state may not invariably and unconditionally endorse proposals or legislation passed by the central authorities, as argued in prior research (e.g., Aufrecht & Bun, 1995; Chan & Wong, 1994; Y. Fan, 2015).

### *Regression Results*

Table 5 displays the results of a hierarchical linear regression analysis, with six different specifications. Model 1 only includes control variables, while Model 2 incorporates both independent and control variables. The indexed variable DI is treated as a dummy variable in two separate survey items (DI1 and DI2) in Model 2. Models 3 to 6 contain interaction terms in various ways, such as the DI  $\times$  SOO interaction term in Model 4, DI  $\times$  PE interaction term in Model 5, and both DI  $\times$  SOO and DI  $\times$  PE interaction terms in Model 6.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics (n = 676).

Variable/Statement	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Unit
Satisfaction	0	0.996	-3.7	1.654	Factor score
Discretion expectation	0.536	0.364	0	.889	Factor score
Organizational-structure expectation	0	1	-2.125	.684	Factor score
Service-oriented official	0.698	0.459	0	1	Dummy
Prior working experience	0.135	0.342	0	1	Dummy
Working unit type	0.141	0.348	0	1	Dummy
Administrative ranking	2.565	1.196	1	5	Ordinal
Established post	0.848	0.36	0	1	Dummy
Gender	0.716	0.451	0	1	Dummy
Age	2.552	0.87	1	4	Ordinal
Seniority	2.959	1.506	1	5	Ordinal
Education level	3.373	0.815	1	5	Ordinal



**Figure 2.** Officials' overall satisfaction with the IAES.

Prior to analyzing the regression results, the intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) are examined to determine the appropriateness of the HLM approach and identify any clustering effects. The ICC values for all models are highly significant, indicating the nested nature of our data. Our results demonstrate that discretionary antecedents yield different outcomes than

**Table 5.** HLM Regression Results.

	Model 1 (CON)	Model 2 (BASE)	Model 3 (DI)	Model 4 (DI-SOO)	Model 5 (DI-PE)	Model 6 (DI2INT)
DII-Discretion		0.331*** (0.103)				
DI2-Supervision		0.362*** (0.083)				
Discretion (DI)			0.786*** (0.133)	1.082*** (0.234)	0.681*** (0.137)	1.007*** (0.234)
Professionalization		-0.203** (0.084)	-0.203** (0.084)	-0.190** (0.084)	-0.218*** (0.084)	-0.204** (0.084)
Centralization		-0.020 (0.111)	-0.022 (0.110)	-0.032 (0.110)	-0.051 (0.110)	-0.063 (0.110)
Formalization		0.075 (0.112)	0.071 (0.110)	0.059 (0.110)	0.078 (0.110)	0.065 (0.110)
Service-oriented Official (SOO)		0.218** (0.101)	0.216** (0.101)	0.363*** (0.139)	0.220** (0.100)	0.384*** (0.138)
Prior working experience (PE)		0.238 (0.473)	0.237 (0.473)	0.263 (0.472)	-0.214 (0.495)	-0.201 (0.494)
DI × SOO				-0.403 (0.262)		-0.449* (0.261)
DI × PE					0.836*** (0.286)	0.865*** (0.286)
Administrative ranking	0.027 (0.034)	0.050 (0.032)	0.050 (0.032)	0.048 (0.032)	0.051 (0.032)	0.049 (0.031)
Established post	-0.124 (0.111)	-0.076 (0.103)	-0.075 (0.103)	-0.076 (0.103)	-0.112 (0.103)	-0.114 (0.103)
Working unit type	0.044 (0.111)	-0.204 (0.466)	-0.205 (0.466)	-0.229 (0.465)	-0.201 (0.463)	-0.228 (0.462)
Gender	-0.107 (0.087)	-0.106 (0.081)	-0.108 (0.081)	-0.116 (0.081)	-0.104 (0.080)	-0.113 (0.080)
Seniority	0.009 (0.027)	0.019 (0.025)	0.019 (0.025)	0.021 (0.025)	0.021 (0.025)	0.024 (0.025)
Age	-0.108** (0.052)	-0.111** (0.048)	-0.111** (0.048)	-0.110** (0.048)	-0.097** (0.048)	-0.096** (0.048)
Education level	-0.071 (0.050)	-0.080* (0.047)	-0.081* (0.047)	-0.081* (0.046)	-0.066 (0.047)	-0.066 (0.046)
Constant	0.669*** (0.227)	-0.020 (0.222)	-0.017 (0.221)	-0.068 (0.223)	-0.004 (0.220)	-0.060 (0.222)
Observations	676	676	676	676	676	676
Log-likelihood	-944.628	-888.267	-888.299	-887.212	-884.154	-884.817
Wald-Chi2	23.52*	150.46***	150.38***	153.04***	155.29***	158.93***
ICC (level-2)	0.001***	0.001***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
ICC (level-3)	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

those originating from organizational structure. The positive relationship between bureaucratic expectations of discretion and satisfaction with administrative integration (H1a and H1b) is verified through significant, positive coefficients for both items ( $\beta_{DI1} = .331$ ,  $\beta_{DI2} = .362$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as well as the index variable ( $\beta_{DI} = .786$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, organizational structural dimensions, including formalization and centralization (H2a and H2b), do not explicitly impact respondents' satisfaction with the IAES, with only the influence of professionalization (H2c) on bureaucratic satisfaction being statistically significant ( $\beta = -.203$ ,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>2</sup>

We find a connection between previous reform experience, ideological concordance, and reform satisfaction. The results reveal that the coefficients of the variable PE do not demonstrate a significant difference in satisfaction ratings between officials who had worked in the IAES-type *Chengguan* department and those who did not have such experience. This finding fails to support the hypothesis that frontline bureaucrats are more receptive to administrative integration if they have already undergone such an experience (H3a). In contrast, officials who exhibited faith in service-oriented governance tended to display more positive attitudes toward the reform than those who did not ( $\beta_{SOO} = .218$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This finding confirms the hypothesis that bureaucrats exhibit more favorable attitudes toward administrative integration if their personal goals align with those promoted in the reform (H4a).

We also analyze the moderating effects of prior experience and ideological consistency on the relationship between discretion and bureaucratic attitudes. To this end, we include the interaction terms of  $DI \times PE$  and  $DI \times SOO$  in our hierarchical linear regression models, as shown in Table 5. Our findings indicate that the coefficients of  $DI-SOO$  remain significant, thereby supporting hypotheses H1 and H4a. Moreover, the coefficient of the interaction term of  $DI \times PE$  is significantly positive, regardless of whether the interaction variable pertaining to service-oriented officials ( $DI \times SOO$ ) is included or not ( $\beta = .836$ ,  $p < .01$ , and  $\beta = .865$ ,  $p < .01$ , respectively).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the graphical representations displayed in Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate that the anticipation of discretion amplified the contentment of staff members who possessed previous involvement with IAES reforms (simple slope = 1.872,  $p < .01$ ) compared to those without such familiarity (simple slope = 1.007,  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that having relevant experience strengthens the function played by expectations of decreased supervision and amplified autonomy in influencing bureaucratic attitudes regarding administrative integration (H3b). Nevertheless, none of the models indicate any moderating effect of service-oriented officials on the association between discretion and bureaucratic attitudes. This indicates that the  $DI \times SOO$  interaction is negligible, even if the  $DI \times PE$  interaction is

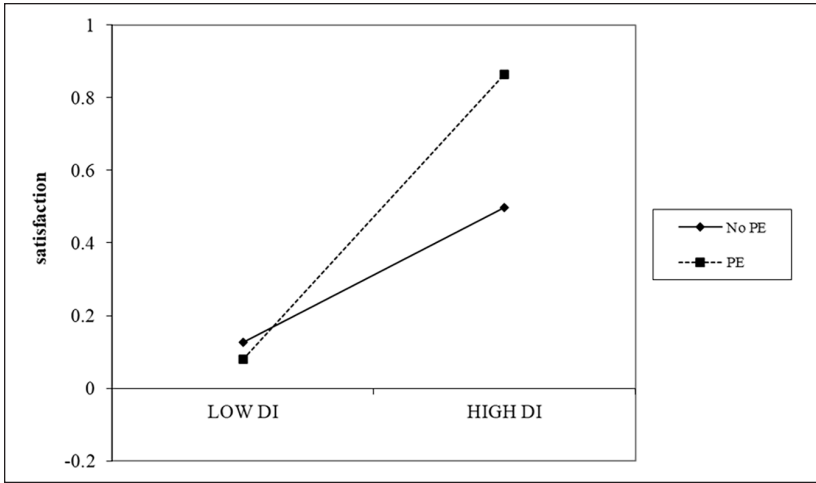


Figure 3. Moderating effect of prior experience of the IAES (PE) I.

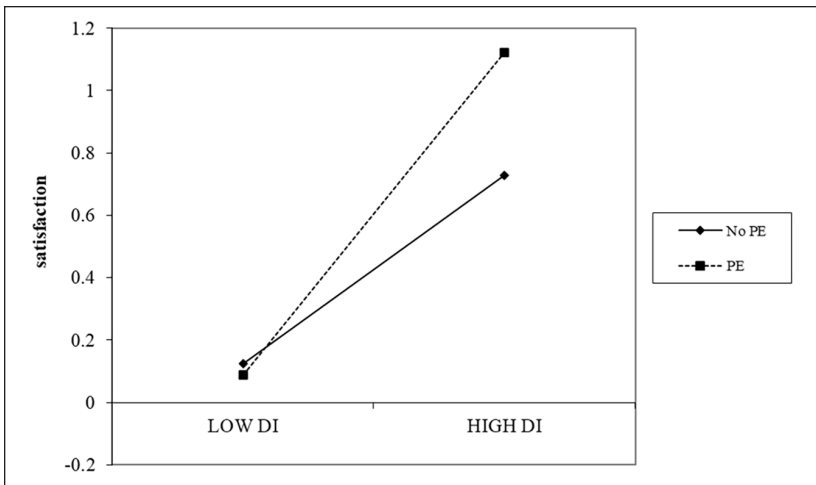


Figure 4. Moderating effect of prior experience of the IAES (PE) II.

incorporated. Consequently, we deduce that both previous involvement with IAES reform and service orientation (i.e., ideological compatibility) can directly augment bureaucratic satisfaction with the IAES. However, only the

former is substantial enough to act as a catalyst that facilitates the favorable impact of the expectation of discretion on the impressions of administrative integration among local officials.

Finally, our findings indicate that the anticipation of reduced supervision and increased discretion among frontline bureaucrats had a greater impact on their attitudes toward the Integrated Administration and Enforcement System (IAES) than their prior working experience or ideological congruence with reform objectives. This suggests that granting discretion to frontline bureaucrats is more effective in eliciting positive bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration than relying on their prior experience or ideological alignment with the goals of the reform.

Overall, our findings suggest that discretion, prior experience, and ideological alignment between personal and reform goals in terms of bureaucratic expectations have significant impacts on bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. Meanwhile, an expectation for professionalization within the organizational structure has mildly negative effects on bureaucratic perceptions of administrative reform. Specifically, our results indicate that (1) frontline officials who expect less supervision and more discretion had higher levels of satisfaction with the IAES compared to those without such expectations, thereby confirming the positive association between discretion and bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. (2) Furthermore, we observe that two out of the three organizational structure dimensions have insignificant effects on satisfaction with the IAES, suggesting that organizational structures per se have little influence on bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. (3) Our study also reveals that a desire for more effective public service delivery, as expressed in the IAES reform blueprint, has a positive effect on bureaucratic satisfaction, indicating that an ideological match between employees and the reform promotes positive bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. Finally, (4) our analysis demonstrates that prior working experience in similar departments significantly strengthens the positive effect of discretion on bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. Hence, we conclude that a frontline bureaucrat's prior experience of administrative integration can both directly and indirectly influence his or her attitudes toward subsequent integration.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The New Public Management Movement has kicked off rounds of administrative reforms in the public sector, with administrative integration being one of the most contested forms of restructuring due to its impact on

administrative structures and the potential for resistance from local agencies (Buchanan & Badham, 2008; Pierson, 1996). Given the importance of frontline bureaucratic attitudes in the successful implementation of administrative integration, it is necessary to identify the factors that shape these attitudes. Despite the significance of this issue, empirical assessments of how organizational constructs at micro and meso levels influence bureaucratic attitudes toward massive bureaucratic reconstructions are limited (Bouckaert et al., 2010). To fill this gap, this study employs theoretical models of discretion and organizational structure to explore the relationship between public organizational configurations and frontline bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. Our study makes a pioneering contribution to extending the theories of bureaucratic attitudes and administrative integration, laying a robust theoretical foundation for addressing conflicts between local bureaucrats and administrative restructuring.

Based on the regression results of our survey, we observed that discretion has a significant impact on bureaucratic attitudes toward the IAES, whereas organizational structure has a negligible effect. Our findings suggest that local officials who anticipate greater discretion and lesser supervision are more inclined to exhibit positive attitudes toward the reform. To further explore the impact of two critical moderators, namely, prior experience and ideological congruence, we conducted additional analyses to investigate their interaction with discretion. Our results indicate that past experience had a nuanced moderating effect on this relationship in the context of individual bureaucrats' attitudes. Specifically, bureaucrats who had prior experience with reform exhibited the most favorable attitudes toward administrative integration when they perceived an opportunity for greater discretion and lesser supervision in their work.

The finding of this study has several implications. First, exploring the preconditions for the successful implementation of administrative integration holds significant practical importance. Local public organizations have historically exhibited resistance to structural changes due to their bureaucratic structures and personnel's lack of flexibility, leading to hesitant bureaucratic attitudes among frontline officials. The success of administrative integration is largely contingent on the organizational configurations of individual public agencies. As discretion and organizational structures at micro- and meso-levels are critical to frontline agencies' bureaucrats, they are assumed to impact bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. Our empirical findings suggest that discretion and professionalization are significant predictors of frontline bureaucrats' attitudes toward administrative integration, and these



positive impacts can be further enhanced by prior experience with similar reforms. This indicates that policymakers must evaluate the conditions of discretion and professionalization within local government agencies before undertaking administrative integration to ensure that the local administrative system's atmosphere is highly supportive.

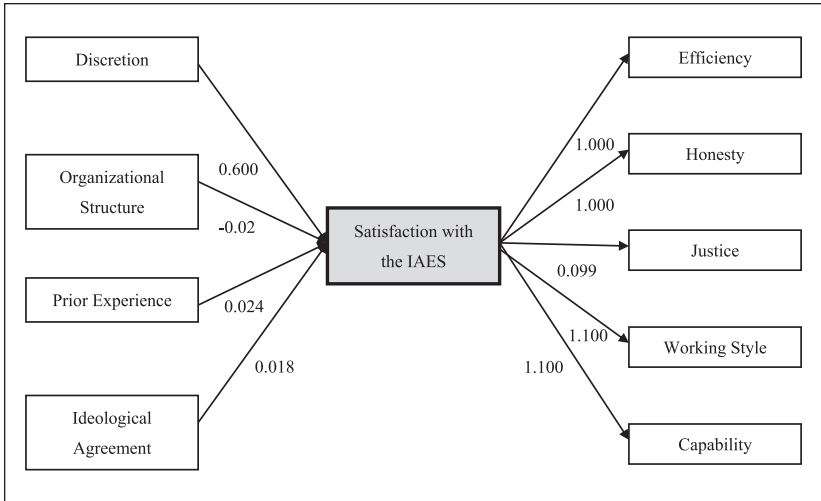
The lack of empirical evidence for the assumed negative effects of formalization and centralization in the IAES can be explained in two ways. Firstly, the IAES is a novel organization that has not yet fully integrated the characteristics and functions of regular government departments, which renders the efforts of formalization ineffective in improving the quality of law enforcement activities. Additionally, the presence of temporary workers may diminish the impact of formalization in the operations of IAES agencies. Secondly, due to its status as an organization outside of the regular government system, the IAES lacks perceived legitimacy among frontline bureaucrats who may view their counterparts in regular departments more favorably. Therefore, the null findings suggest that the organizational configurations resulting from administrative integration may affect the interests of different frontline bureaucrats in different ways, shaping their attitudes toward administrative changes. Unlike discretion and professionalization, which have a direct influence on the work routines of frontline bureaucrats, formalization and centralization resulting from administrative integration may be less immediately perceived by individual bureaucrats (e.g., Demirci, 2013). Thus, administrative reformers should consider the organizational configurations that frontline bureaucrats value the most in order to ensure the success of administrative reform.

The present study contributes to theories of organizational change across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. While discretion is typically considered a mechanism of control in organizational research, our study demonstrates a significant association between discretion and bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration, indicating that discretion can be used to predict the behaviors and attitudes of bureaucrats during administrative changes (e.g., Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Pires, 2011; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). Besides, even though negative effects of organizational structures such as formalization, centralization, and professionalization are often theorized (e.g., Johari & Yahya, 2019; Meilich, 2005; Nasurdin et al., 2006), empirical evidence supporting those claims is lacking. Our research addresses this gap by demonstrating the attitudinal effects of organizational structures on public employees during administrative changes. Finally, research on administrative integration has predominantly focused on organizational outcomes, with limited attention given to agenda-setting and

stakeholder perspectives (e.g., Bouckaert et al., 2010; Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). Our study underscores the importance of examining how internal designs and stakeholders shape administrative restructuring, and highlights the need for future research in this area. Overall, this study adds to the literature on administrative integration by emphasizing the role of organizational characteristics at micro- and meso-levels in shaping bureaucratic attitudes and behaviors.

Notwithstanding the important implications of this study, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, our investigation focused on local bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration within a non-Western context. While our analytical framework provides a broader reference point for understanding employee psychology with regard to administrative integration from a comparative perspective, future studies could explore the applicability of our behavioral model to different scenarios by comparing the magnitude of impacts that bureaucratic attitudes exert on various administrative integration practices. Moreover, we acknowledge several technical limitations that should be addressed in future research. Our survey was conducted in only two municipalities in China's Hubei province, which may not fully represent the attitudinal variations across all Chinese public employees. Although we controlled for variations between districts and municipalities in our empirical models, information on socioeconomic and demographic differences across the regions under study was unavailable, limiting our ability to comprehensively assess the effects of other organization-level factors on local bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration. Additionally, our empirical analysis was based on a single-year survey, which prevented us from exploring the details and dynamics in bureaucratic attitudes over time. Future studies could formulate more holistic and sophisticated survey instruments, collect responses from bureaucrats working outside the urban management field and in different jurisdictions with disparate socioeconomic levels, and triangulate their quantitative findings with qualitative data to address these limitations. Finally, we acknowledge that while the selection of the *Chengguan* sector is sufficiently representative to reduce the context-based overestimation of the impacts of organizational configurations on bureaucratic attitudes toward administrative integration, the use of a single survey design cannot eliminate the bias of common method variance. Therefore, future research could more robustly test our hypotheses by utilizing focal variables from different data sources in different empirical settings.

## Appendix



**Figure A1.** Structural equation modeling for confirmatory factor analysis.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## Notes

1. The questions measuring discretion include “Do you expect more discretion in IAES?” and “Do you expect less supervision over your daily job duties in IAES?” The questions measuring organizational structures include “Do you expect your department to be more professionalized in IAES?” “Do you expect more centralized decision-making for your department in IAES?” and “Do you expect your department to be more formalized in IAES?”
2. We also considered an index variable of these three survey items for organization structure (OS) as explained above; however, the indexed variable was not statistically significant either. Thus, we treated these three survey items separately and the result can be provided upon any request.
3. We found that prior working experience in IAE-type departments was not statistically significant on bureaucratic satisfaction, which assuages concerns about the positivity bias stemming from previous experiences. It is also worth noting that the statistically significant coefficients of the interaction terms in different models support the hypothesized positive moderating effects of prior working experience, which keeps the validity of our empirical findings from the possible positivity bias.

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