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The Turnover of Palestinian Governments and its Selected Impacts on the Sustainability of Public Policy

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Abstract

The aim of this research is examining governmental turnover and its impact on the sustainability of public policy in the Palestinian context. We argue that the absence of a clear political program of governments and the absence of clear rules in professional and independent civil service allows Palestinian ministers to politicize the ministries they run, in addition to imposing their personal visions on different administrative levels, which makes the frequent turnover of governments and ministerial faces a challenge to the administrative level's capability to create and implement sustainable public policies. We examined and compared through in-depth interviews the relationship between the political dimension of government formation and its surrounding considerations with the administrative executive dimension in Palestinian conditions. We concluded that professionals from most ministries think that frequent ministerial turnover usually has a negative impact on the sustainability of public policy while only respondents from three ministries stated that turnover could have a positive impact.

Key Words:
Government Turnover, Public Policy, Sustainability, Palestinian Governments. Human Resources.

Introduction

The question of frequent government turnover and its impact on agencies' performance and public-policy sustainability is a research topic that has received comprehensive academic attention. Government turnover is operationally defined as

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change in all (complete government turnover) or some (partial turnover) of the minister positions; while the term sustainability of public policy is defined as policy that continues to have its impact not affected by the change of ministers' positions. Existing studies (see later in the text) tackle many different aspects of this issue in the conditions of developed and, in some cases but not comprehensively, also developing countries.

This study aims at examining the impact of frequent government turnover on the capacity of executives in ministries to implement sustainable public policies in Palestine. The study particularly aims at identifying the impact of government turnover on: administrative decision-making and the capability of top management to work as a team, financial decisions associated with the implementation of public policies, implementation of strategic plans, cooperation and joint work of ministries to achieve sustainable public policies. To achieve this, the following research questions are set:

(1) What is the impact of government turnover on human resources (professional and independent civil service in ministries)?

(2) What is the impact of government turnover on the fiscal priorities of ministries?

(3) What is the impact of government turnover on strategic planning in ministries?

According to chapter (3), article 72 of the Palestinian basic law (the constitution) (2003), as well as the Council of Ministers Resolution No. (144) for the year 2004, the minister is a political position that generally leads, directs and organizes his/her ministry's public policy; while the deputy minister, his/her assistants (usually two positions) and public managers are all executive positions that are supposed to formulate public policy, according to the government vision, and report to the minister to sign it. This is the most common structure of Palestinian ministries, but in some cases ministries create some important departments that report directly to the minister, such as the Unit of Ministers Council's affairs. When ministers very frequently change through complete or partial turnovers, governmental vision usually changes. This kind of politics that usually appears because of the frequent government turnovers and its impact on sustainability of public policy is the problem of this research. Due to a lack of research that addresses Palestinian public-policy questions, the subject of the study is considered one of the few topics in the Palestinian context that targets the dilemma of the sustainability of public policies. The study is expected to cover an essential research gap that explains the relationship between the political dimension of government formation and its surrounding considerations with the administrative executive dimension in Palestinian conditions. Such research can provide important lessons regarding improving government performance and the reform process of the Palestinian public policy, to contribute to the efforts of the comprehensive national plan of reforming the Pal-

estinian public sector. The study is expected to enrich the literature that addresses similar conditions.

Our study addresses the subject of government turnover since the formation of the first Palestinian government and until the current government (under the presidency of Mohammed Ishteyeh, April 2019). It also addresses variables that have never been discussed before in Palestinian conditions, namely government turnover (ministerial characters) and its impact on selected aspects of public-policy sustainability, as defined within the study terms.

1. Government turnover in Palestinian and international literature

Many international researchers (Grechyna 2016; Heald and Steel 2017, Acemoglu et al. 2008; Alesina and Tabellini 1990; Lindqvist and Östling 2010; Klein et al. 2008; Scholl 2017) address the impact of government turnover on public policy from the perspective of fiscal policy. Political turnover has come up to influence fiscal policy such as public debt that has increased because of frequent turnovers in some developed countries while political polarization was found to increase public spending. Other research has come up with the result that governments, such as the UK government, imposed austerity measures to reduce the size of the fiscal deficit and to diminish government roles in the delivery, financing and regulation of public services.

Several researchers (Molina 2001; Horowitz et al. 2008; Daalder 2015; Deng et al. 2019) examined the politico-economic impact, including the environmental performance, of government turnover in different contexts. Molina (2001) argues that government turnover and attrition in the incumbent party share of the vote is more frequent and intense in non-industrialized countries (Latin America and the Caribbean area) than in industrialized countries, and the possible reasons for this difference were explored through an analysis of 328 post-war democratic elections. The data analyzed supported this hypothesis and therefore the conclusion that the structural economic situation of a country exerts a significant effect on voting behavior. This effect was found to be independent of occasional changes in the economy and electoral participation and also of institutional factors such as re-election. However, the latter diminishes the frequency of turnover and the intensity of attrition in non-industrialized countries, and for this reason, its introduction could improve political continuity and policy stability (Molina 2001).

Shale Horowitz, Karla Hoff, and Branko Milanovic (2009) co-researched and investigated in their *Government Turnover: Concepts, Measures and Applications* the impacts and applications of government turnover in different political contexts. The authors argue that government turnover is often thought of as a cause of uncertainty and instability, as well as a cause of competition and institution-building (Horowitz

et al. 2009, 107). The study also considers the concept of turnover as a distinguishing feature of democracy by examining two main concepts of turnovers: leadership turnover and ideological turnover in many post communist countries, such as Hungary, Poland and Russia. The study provides an in-depth discussion of the possible impacts of both kinds of turnover on aspect like economic corruption, public policy, the rule of law and institutional fragmentation, among others. For example, on the economic impacts of government turnover, the authors stated that "long-lived governments will have scope and incentives to implement a broader range of corrupt policies than short-lived governments" (Horowitz et al. 2009, 108). However, they also argue that leadership change without ideological change increases the possibility of "patron client relations", and long-term corruption contracts between government bodies and businesses; while ideological turnover is expected to produce disruption of such long-term corruption contracts (Horowitz et al. 2008, 119). In the same context, Simon Otjes, and David M. Willumsen (2019) explored the effect of government changes "wholesale", in different political systems, e.g. Sweden and some central European countries, showing that "there is an interaction effect between dis-proportionality and wholesale turn-out. Wholesale decreases turn-out but only when dis-proportionality is high" (Otjes and Willumsen 2019, 49–63).

Hans Daalder conducted a historical review of European politics and state formation. He significantly illustrated some comparisons between the American Presidency system and the British system of Cabinet Government. He concluded that "comparison had usually been very much to the advantage of the latter" (Daalder 2015, 19). Daalder argues that there was strong insistence on the value of the House of Commons as a testing ground for politicians forced to climb the "slippery pole to the top", and strong emphasis on the merits of collective ministerial responsibility over the hazards of rule by a single executive. Reformists in American political science and public administration habitually held up the British model as the one to follow, e.g. in matters like civil-service reform. or the need to adopt "a responsible party model" (Daalder 2015, 20). On the other hand, contrasts between the American democracy and that other large democracy on the American continent, which had a parliamentary system of government, Canada, tended to support such views. They were also to inspire the very influential economic models of democracy, as elaborated by J. A. Schumpeter (1942) and Anthony Downs (1957). Their descriptions of political entrepreneurs seeking to win undivided mandates clearly had mainly the British system as its inspiration, with multiparty systems being an erring deviation from the preferred simplicity of the two-party norm (Daalder 2015, 19–20).

In Palestinian literature, there exist very few academic and professional studies that tackle various questions about Palestinian governments under the topic of administrative and political reform of the Palestinian Authority. This set of literature could be divided (for the purpose of simplifying their critical review) into two groups: scientific papers presented and published in Palestinian public-sector

reform conferences proceedings, and books as well as academic articles addressing specific topics about Palestinian governments.

Existing conference (both academic and professional) papers focus mainly on the administrative and political reform of Palestinian Authority agencies. For example Kasses (2011) presented a paper at the annual conference of MAS Institute under the title "Building the Appropriate and Effective Administrative Structure of the Palestinian National Authority despite the Geographic Separation." The author identified the distortions afflicting the administrative structures of the Palestinian National Authority agencies when formed after Oslo. However, the author confirmed in his conclusion that a "graceful" government composed of and driven by proven professionalism and transparency cannot be realized in governance without the support of the political leadership. Kasses's conclusion also constituted a basis for the problem of the research under preparation; that is, how can a government/governments that came into power as a result of enticements, political conflicts, internal compromises and external pressures, and most importantly knowing that none of these governments, in general, has completed a year in governance (18 governments as of the advent of the Palestinian National Authority until the present day), respond to a vision necessarily requiring stability so as to cause the desired change or reform through sustainable policies?

Aman 3rd Annual Conference report (2007)[3] addressed the subject of "The Conflict of Powers and Lack of Responsibilities within the Palestinian National Authority". Presenters, in their papers and interventions, highlighted the "Mixed – presidential parliamentary" Palestinian political system in which a single person occupies two positions, namely the National Authority President and the Chairman of Executive Committee of PLO. Not to mention that this system is dominated by the conflict of powers between the Authority and its agencies on the one hand, and PLO and its equivalent agencies on the other hand. The report did not present any practical solutions to the powers conflict problem within the Palestinian National Authority agencies as far as it described and identified the problem itself.

A report prepared by Kayed (2003) summarizes the proceedings of a workshop organized by the Buraq Center for Research and Culture under the title "The First Palestinian Premiership Government Map". Most of the papers presented in the workshop focused on the political conflict that revolved around originating the position of prime minister within the Palestinian Authority (occupied for the first time by Mr. Mahmoud Abbas). The report concluded that the Palestinian Prime Minister Position was originated due to political and security reasons aimed mainly at revoking the powers of former President Yasser Arafat, who at that time had lost the trust of Americans and Israelis as a partner for peace, and not in response of

3 See Aman Annual Conference (2007). *Powers Conflict and Lack of Responsibilities within the Palestinian National Authority: Work Papers, and Conference Recommendation on Powers Separation.* Coalition for Integrity and Accountability/Aman, Ramallah.

the internal reform requirements, as claimed by the defenders of reform despite its necessity. Although the report highly addressed the problems of the first Palestinian premiership government map, it did not discuss any other governments. The study under preparation will refer to the report as a supporting case (evidence) to the negative reflection hypothesis of politicizing the civil service on the governmental policies sustainability.

Dudin (2007) provides a detailed study concerning the performance of the tenth government (Hamas Government), formed for the first time as a result of elections dominated by competition between the two major political parties, Hamas and Fateh. Dudin presents a critical review, in which he compares the performance of the tenth government with its electoral platform and ministerial statement. While Dudin has concentrated on the tenth government only, the present study highly benefited from his study, given that the tenth government is considered the sole government formed based on election results faced with objection (from the Fateh Party), providing that the government included completely new members and attempted to impose its new governance agenda, but could not succeed.

In his book "A Reading in the Palestinian Governments since the Establishment of PNA until the Second Legislative Council Elections", Sulaiman (2006) delivers a critical review of the circumstances and grounds of governments' formation since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority until the second Legislative Council elections. Sulaiman focused on the security and political dimensions surrounding governments' formation, neglecting the political professional dimension, which is highly discussed in the present study. Furthermore, the present study addresses broader limits compared with the previous studies. It addresses governments not affiliated with the governing party, so to speak, given that the governments which came after 2006 were under the presidency of two independent characters.

2. Research methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary research. The original field research investigated the views of politicians and professionals who have practiced governance (government presidents, former ministers, deputy ministers, assistant deputies, general directors, governmental associations' chairmen, experts in Palestinian Governmental Affairs). In-depth interviews are the tool through which the main information was gathered, connected, analyzed and qualitatively compared to debrief results. The focus-group interviews were conducted with experts from the Palestinian General Personnel Council.

On the executive administrative level, the researcher interviewed officials in the Supreme Management (Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs) in each ministry, or officials occupying

supreme management positions at governmental associations subsidiary to a given ministry. To strengthen the credibility of the study, the researcher set the condition that interviewees have to have worked with three ministers at least. As for the political level, the researcher selected a deliberate sample of previous or current ministers under the condition of being a prime minister or a minister more than three times. In total five persons were interviewed and three focus groups organized.

The secondary research was significantly beneficial in completing the first part of the study, which is an exploratory chapter aimed at identifying Palestinian governments' formulation process and all politics around it, and followed up on these governments starting from the first government formed in 1994 until the present government, the National Reconciliation Government, which is still operating until the research completion date. It was also beneficial in specifying the difference between ministries in terms of being affected with the governments' frequent turnovers. That is, there are ministries in which many ministers have frequently changed; whereas in other ministries, no or few ministers have successively changed. The study addressed all Palestinian ministries in which ministers have subversively changed for eight times or more.

To present the results, the study dominantly uses a qualitative approach, supported by simple descriptive statistics.

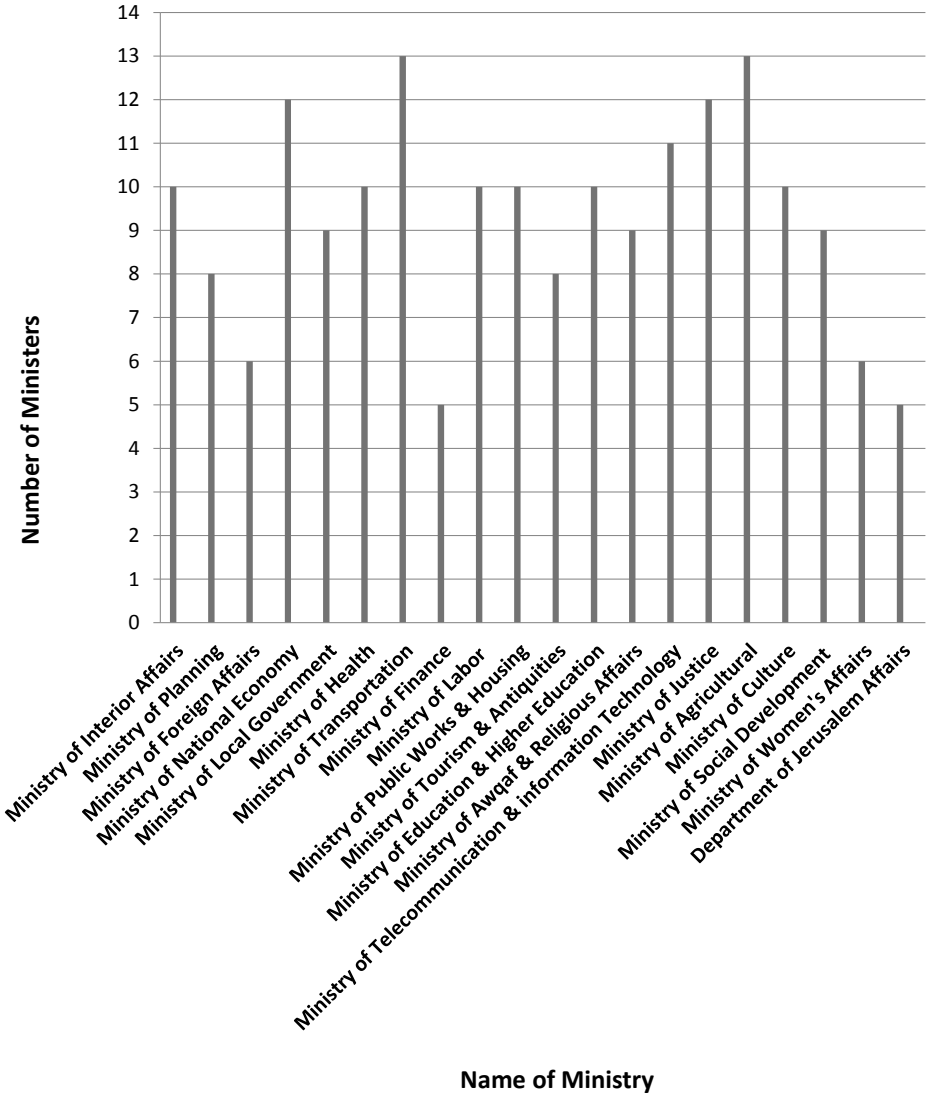
3. The frequency of turnover in Palestinian ministries

Since 1994, the time of formulating the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), until the time of writing this research, eighteen Palestinian governments have successively ruled in governance (ministries' administration) in Palestine. Some governments maintained the same ministers over years, while others were distinct with frequent change. Chart 1 below indicates the frequent turnover in Palestinian Ministries since 1994 until 2018.

3.1 Impacts of Turnover on the Ministry's Human Resources (Professional and Independent Civil Service)

Human resources in Palestinian ministries have been negatively influence by ministers' frequent turnover; this influence was based on politics. Ministers usually change the top professional level (deputies, deputy assistants and general directors) and definitely the minister's office staff to guarantee loyalty and support. Respondents indicate that the frequent turnover was highly reflected in disturbances on the professional level. A summary of responses of those interviewed is provided in Table 1 below.

Chart 1
The Frequency of Turnover in Palestinian Ministries



Source: The Authors.

Table 1
Turnovers impact on human resources

Question	Fully agree/36	Agree/36	Disagree /36	Fully disagree/36
Ministers usually change top management executives and make transfers for some positions upon the receipt of duties in the ministry, in order to ensure the presence of loyalists.	30	4	2	0
The legal framework that organizes the relationship between ministers and their top administrative staff is absent.	31	4	1	1
The absence of the details of law "gives ministers the right to manage ministries, including withdrawing and granting powers.	23	7	5	1
Ministers' subjectivity or personal way of administration has been overwhelming and controlling ministries' work.	22	11	3	0
Ministers' frequent turnover negatively disturbed fiscal priorities in public agencies.	25	5	4	2
Ministers' frequent turnover negatively disturbed strategic planning efforts in public agencies.	26	6	3	1
Ministers' frequent turnover negatively disturbed policy sustainability in public agencies	27	6	1	0

Source: The Authors.

The data indicate that frequent government turnover disturbs executives and interferes with their capability of formulating and implementing sustainable public policies. Ministers usually change top management executives and make transfers for some positions upon the receipt of their duties in the ministry, in order to ensure the presence of loyalists.

The core problem lies in the absence of the legal framework, which organizes the relationship between the minister and his/her top administrative staff. Whereas the absence of such legal framework, which emerged from the absence of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) for a long period of time due to the political division, and the absence of its auditor role, led to subjectivity or what is called "the despotism of the minister's personality". Ministers' subjectivity or personal way of

administration has been overwhelming and controlling ministries' work, which reflected negatively on the sustainability of public policies (Fayad 2016).

Most of the respondents of the professional team agree that the ministers they witnessed, during the first few months, conducted administrative transfers within the ministry staffs; described as "non-professional" transfers aimed at appointing relatives "trustworthy" in sensitive positions that the new minister desires. Most respondents also agreed that their ministries witnessed, upon appointing new ministers, the withdrawal and/or granting of powers to employees for reasons that "seem to be legal" according to the Basic Law which gives the minister the right to manage their ministry as they desire without identifying powers. According to many researchers, the absence of the details of law "gives ministers the right to manage ministries, including withdrawing and granting powers as they deem appropriate" (directors general in different ministries 2016, different deputy ministers 2016). Some researchers and also interviewees described transfers as well as withdrawing and granting powers with hard phrases such as "the minister's farm". While, the interviewees opposing the idea of transfers, withdrawing and granting powers (less than 10 %) did not deny their occurrences upon the designation of a new minister, they rather justified this with the interest of work and confirmed the large number of occurrences of the same in the era of the tenth government formed by Hamas.

In reference to this subject above, Salam Fayyad, the former prime minister, pointed to the principle of transfers, withdrawing and granting powers by the new ministers due to the availability of fertile "public employee mentality", in Fayyad's words, within the public association, which encourages ministers to withdraw or grant powers and conduct non-professional transfers, which, according to Fayyad, are limited and have significantly reduced particularly the designations. Furthermore, experts from the General Personnel Council (Khader 2016, Ziad 2016, Samhan 2016) confirmed that the Council has played a major role in reducing designations and illegal transfers. However, the subject of powers requires support and legal details, which are currently absent, not to mention that the absence of the Legislative Council constitutes an obstacle.

Given the Council of Ministers Resolution No. 144, for the year 2004, concerning the job description of senior positions in ministries, Article 2 stating the powers and duties of the minister, this resolution re-confirmed the right of the minister in authorizing some of his powers to the deputy minister within the limits of the law (the Council of Ministers Resolution No. 144, for the year 2004, Article 2). On the other hand, article 5 of the same Resolution addressed some details related to the deputy minister and the duties assigned to him as a first executive official responsible for implementing the ministry policies and leading its executive team. However, the problem remains in two matters: first, the deputy is designated by a decision from the Authority President, which leads to politicizing and suspecting the competency and professionalism of whoever occupies this position because of

a political decision. Second, the powers of the minister are still broad in terms of giving or withdrawing powers from the deputy. The researcher observed in various ministries more than three cases of withdrawing or freezing the powers of deputy ministers or directors general due to personal disputes or conflicts in perspectives. It is worth mentioning that some respondents from other ministries working on the professional level also pointed to the negative reflection of powers overlapping or conflicting, and the lack of clear law details, arising between the minister and the deputy minister regarding the ministry's public policies. The following section discusses the state of the Ministry of Education & Higher Education as an example of the lack of a clear relation between the professional level and the political level and the reflection of this unclear relation on public policies.

Most of the respondents from the professional level agreed that the new minister's decisions, as mentioned above, create conflicts among the professional-level poles (deputy, assistant deputies, directors general). Furthermore, the respondents pointed to several reasons that lead to such conflict, in addition to the political conflict between the political level and the professional levels. One example is the fact that the minister depends on the principle of trusting only the close employees in terms of receiving information about the ministry, particularly at the beginning of occupying the position. That said, the principle of trusting some close followers instead of following the administrative hierarchy defined by the law is to the disadvantage of official and professional information. This creates the impression to the minister that conflicts exist and need to be handled as a matter of fact. Among the reasons confirmed by most of the respondents of the professional level is the fact that the mentality of the public employee and his/her volunteering in providing information and non-official reports promotes the minister to only depend on his/her personal perspective rather than the law. Many of the respondents have referred to various cases in different ministries to show that the background of the minister and his interests as well as the reports given to him at the beginning of his term altogether constitute a facilitating factor to politicize the governmental work. It is worth mentioning that everything non-professional, or derived from personal desires, or opposing the law falls under the term "politicization". Among these cases is the case of a new minister who conducted transfers for 25 % of his staff within the ministry without depending on professional or legal foundations, but rather based on personal trends and malicious reports from some employees. Additionally, there is the case of a minister that took a decision described by the professional team as "personal, unstudied, and confusing to the ministry staff not to mention that it includes squandering of public funds", providing that the decision was to transfer the sample testing lab at the Ministry of Agriculture in Ramallah in the middle of West Bank to Hebron in the South, which has increased exhaustion and costs upon farmers to send the samples to Hebron. One of the respondents of the Ministry of Endowments has pointed out that successive ministers took "non-professional decisions of transferring employees in an arbitrary manner which has confused

the professional team work". Indeed, such examples among others fall under the term "politicization" which, according to most of the respondents, has significantly damaged the sustainability of ministries' policies. In this regard, Ziad Al-Rjoub, the Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Endowments, pointed out that the professional team is part of the problem since it, directly or indirectly, participates in providing an appropriate opportunity to the minister to use absolute, or sometimes temperamental powers. The professional team plays a role in corrupting or misleading new ministers, and part of the problem lies in the culture existing in ministries (Al-Rjoub 2016). Indeed, this gets worse with the frequent change of ministers.

3.2 The Impact of Turnover on Fiscal Priorities

There is no doubt that budgets and funds are considered a major element in implementing public policies, not to mention that its provision or ensured provision gives a comfortable margin to public-policy makers. Therefore, the researcher has discussed this subject with the professional team, particularly the financial and administrative affairs directors. Table 2 below summarizes the impact of ministers' frequent turnover on fiscal priorities.

Table 2
Turnovers impact on fiscal priorities

Question	Fully agree/36	Agree/36	Disagree/36	Fully disagree/36
Ministers can interfere in the financial matters related to the Ministry of Finance	0	0	2	34
Ministers can interfere in the financial matters related to projects and programs provided by donors	30	4	1	1
Successive ministers usually change their priorities about projects and programs financed by donors	29	4	3	0
Ministers' frequent turnover usually disrupted the work of the professional team in the ministry	27	6	3	0

Source: The Authors.

The respondents completely agree without exception that the ministers, whatever their backgrounds, cannot interfere in the financial matters related to the Ministry of Finance, such as salaries or exchange terms identified by the Ministry of Finance. However, the problem remains in the decisions related to projects and identifying their priorities, which are often provided to ministries from donors. Most of

the respondents agree that successive ministers have interfered in identifying the exchange priorities for projects, notwithstanding the ministries' agreement with donors on general principles concerning the projects priorities. For example, respondents from the Ministry of Local Governance, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture reported that the exchange priorities for projects have varied, even sometimes conflicted, and disrupted the professional teamwork due to the frequent change of ministers. As for the respondents reported the non-interference of ministers they witnessed, or some of them at least, change in priorities for projects, the reason was that they (the new ministers) have not stayed enough in the ministry to be familiar with the projects and did not meet with donors at all or that they met them only once. In a related context, where the researcher raised a question about identifying the priorities, all respondents reported that this regard is considered technical and is rather to be left to the professional team. The interference of successive ministers in changing the projects' priorities usually causes confusion for these projects, which accordingly negatively influences their sustainability. As one example of the interference of some ministers in the projects' priorities, the financial and administrative affairs director general in one of the ministries reported that he had to make some transfers between expenditure items to finance the travels of persons selected by the minister to work on a project they were not part of to financially cover such travels.

3.3 The Impact of Turnover on Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is one of the governmental tasks creating the most conflict between the political level (ministers) and the professional level (the ministries' executive staffs). Executives indicate that they are usually highly involved in formulating their ministries' strategies; nevertheless, strategies used to be politically influenced by new ministers who do not trust their former colleagues and usually disturb implementing strategies, most likely because of political reasons. Table 3 below summarizes the impact of ministers' frequent turnover on strategic planning.

The data indicate that most of the respondents agreed that the frequent turnover of ministers negatively impacts the stability of professional teamwork and their capability of setting out and implementing strategies. The questions of the study under this field of research have focused on the role of both the political level and the professional level in strategy formulation and implementation. Most of the respondents agreed that ministers do not set out strategic plans, but rather they place ideas and directions that fall under their responsibilities. Furthermore, most of the respondents have agreed that the role of the minister, in terms of strategic planning, is to review and approve these plans. As for setting out and implementing plans, it is a technical matter that has to be left to the professional team. Moreover, the researchers have raised questions about the interference of ministers in strategic plans in general. Most of the respondents agreed that interventions by new ministers in the strategic plans of their ministries occurred after the great efforts exert-

ed by the professional team in preparing it, and sometimes implementing some of their terms. According to many respondents, interventions included attempting to change some of the terms of strategic plans or interfering in some of their priorities or even the entire plan. Respondents from three ministries at least reported that the interference of the minister in the strategic plan is attributed to a conflict with the previous minister, while others reported that such interference are not caused by any conflicts with the previous minister, but rather occur because the new minister is not convinced by the existing plan and wishes to leave his/her own mark on it. In all cases, these interventions confused the professional teamwork and negatively reflected on the sustainability of public policies emerging from strategic plans. The following section summarizes the details of the Ministry of Education case to clarify this subject even more.

Table 3
Turnover impact on strategic planning

Question	Fully agree/36	Agree/36	Disagree/36	Fully disagree/36
Ministers usually participate in formulating strategies	2	2	2	30
Ministers usually review and approve strategies	30	4	1	1
The professional team in the ministry is responsible for formulating and implementing strategies	28	5	3	0
Interference in strategic plans by new ministers has occurred in the ministry	28	6	2	0
Interference in strategic plans by new ministers caused disruption and conflict among the professional team members	28	7	1	0

Source: The Authors.

4. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education case: Unclear power and its reflection on implementing strategic plans and policies

This case study demonstrates the importance of institutionalization and its reflection on the process of setting out and implementing public policies, particularly strategic plans. Specifically, institutionalization shall mean committing to the laws and regulations by respecting the directions and procedures asserted by Council

of Ministers Resolution No. 146, for the year 2004 on enforcing the education and professional training system, as well as the 3rd strategic plan (2015). Providing that the structure was compatible with the law, committing to the law and the strategic plan in different manners varies from one minister to another. This commitment to the law varied from centrality (complete administrative powers with the minister) in addition to authorizing the deputy minister with some of these powers without impacting his responsibilities set forth in the structure of the ministry that was approved in 2005, to flexibility in authorizing powers and committing to what is stipulated by the law and plan. In reference to the responsibilities identified by the annual operational plan of the ministry that is risk-based strategy, the deputy, his assistants, and the concerned public departments are in charge of setting and implementing public policies after being approved by the minister. However, this was not the case, and the plan implementation was subject to the successive ministers' estimations and desires.

The first strategic plan of the Ministry of Education was developed in the era of Minister Naeem Abu Al-Homos. A Moroccan expert participated in setting out the structural plan of the Ministry. He came up with a structural model and called it general directorates (general directorate of curricula, general directorate of public education, general directorate of supervision etc.). The general directorates witnessed powers overlapping, to say nothing of the fact that trespassing on others' powers became very common. There was no harmony or horizontal coordination among the general directorates, which caused confusion to the donors, not to mention that each directorate used to offer its projects solely without coordination with the other directorates.

The second strategy was developed based on the agenda, and it presented the idea of overlapping among the directorates participating in specific agendas. Further, it addressed quality education for the first time. The Ministry could not create a complete horizontal communication among the directorates; however the programmatic principle was asserted together with the "kingdoms" system – each general directorate is considered a kingdom. As for the third strategy, all of the mistakes in the second strategy were reviewed, and the Ministry hired international experts who attempted to introduce the principle of sharing and joint action. The experts asserted a new principle that included the plans and budgets shown in the agenda and their outcomes; it was called programs structure principle. The Ministry team worked with the International expert, named Martin Thompson, under the supervision and partnership of the Ministry of Finance. In general, no one at the Ministry was interested in supporting that principle; that is why it kept stumbling. At the administrative level, the Ministry witnessed a "politicized" approach in administration. Some of the successive ministers authorized powers to the deputy minister, in his capacity as the first person in charge of implementing strategies and policies according to the Council of Ministers Resolution No. (144), for the year 2014, which clarifies the powers of the deputy minister. Furthermore, some of them withdrawn

these powers according to the Basic Law that gives the minister the right to authorize or not to authorize powers to the deputy as he or she deems appropriate, and to authorize powers to the assistant deputies and directors general. Historically, the subject of powers became very personalized and subject to the convictions of the minister (Abu Zaid 2016).

In the period 2013–2015, three ministers were appointed to the Ministry of Education, which caused an imbalance in providing the continuity required to draft the 3rd strategy, and consequently implementing the operational plan emerging thereunder. This coincided with forming the "Education Reform and Development" Committee by the Council of Ministers. This Committee was formed from outside the Ministry, which confused the executive team work within the Ministry to the extent of freezing all of its activities. The Prime Minister, Rami Al-Hamdallah, assigned the Committee to review the policies of the Ministry of Education as well as to place proposals on the method of reforming the educational system. However, this Committee created parallel powers to the efforts of the Ministry to convince the Prime Minister and the current Minister of Education & Higher Education, Sabri Seidem, that reforming the Ministry shall come from outside not from inside the Ministry. The members of the Committee held meetings several times inside the Ministry with clear negligence of the deputy minister role. The minister, Seidem placed concepts of a new strategy for the electronic and digitization education and management. He attempted to implement his new ideas using a committee from outside the Ministry. He also presented new concepts consisted of 15 points that were presented by the Committee (Abu Zaid 2016).

Although the deputy minister included the points developed by the minister in the strategic plan, the minister did not take this into consideration. In other words, the story of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education is a clear example of the absence of a unified institutionalized pattern for the work management inside the ministry. Minister Ali Abu Zahri did not intervened in the executive aspects of the Ministry and authorized the deputy minister with his powers to implement the 3rd strategy. Meanwhile, the new minister, Khawla Al-Shakhshir, disagreed with the deputy minister on understanding the required change to the curricula and administrative reform, regarding the decision whether it should be a radical or a slight change. According to Abu Zaid, under the administrative reform subject, the minister envisaged to authorize powers to the assistant deputies and directors general on the expense of the deputy.

This caused negative impacts on the principle of participatory and horizontal coordination and also created internal conflicts within the Ministry. As for the curricula reform subject, the disagreement was between the minister, Al-Shakhshir, and the deputy minister, concerning the depth of change according to the strategy principles and the slight change insisted upon by the minister. From the perspective of the deputy, the strategy serves as a law that has taken enough effort, time and

money that shall not only prevent breaching such strategy but also prevent any radical change to it (Abu Zaid 2016).

As for the minister, Seidem, he introduced new concepts to the strategy and reduced the powers of the deputy by working with the Education Reform Committee to convince him that reform comes from outside the Ministry. Notwithstanding the international experiences used by the Ministry, which focused on the principle of separating the executive level (the deputy, his assistants, and the directors general) from the political level (the minister and his role), the successive ministers have disagreed and used their own convictions in authorizing or withdrawing powers. This has caused confusion to the horizontal coordination among the professional level elements for the interest of ministers' intervention in professionals' work by creating supporting centers of powers. All of this negatively influenced the public policies and did not result in a firm institutional accumulation that shall enable the ministry to build and implement sustainable public policies.

5. Discussion and conclusions

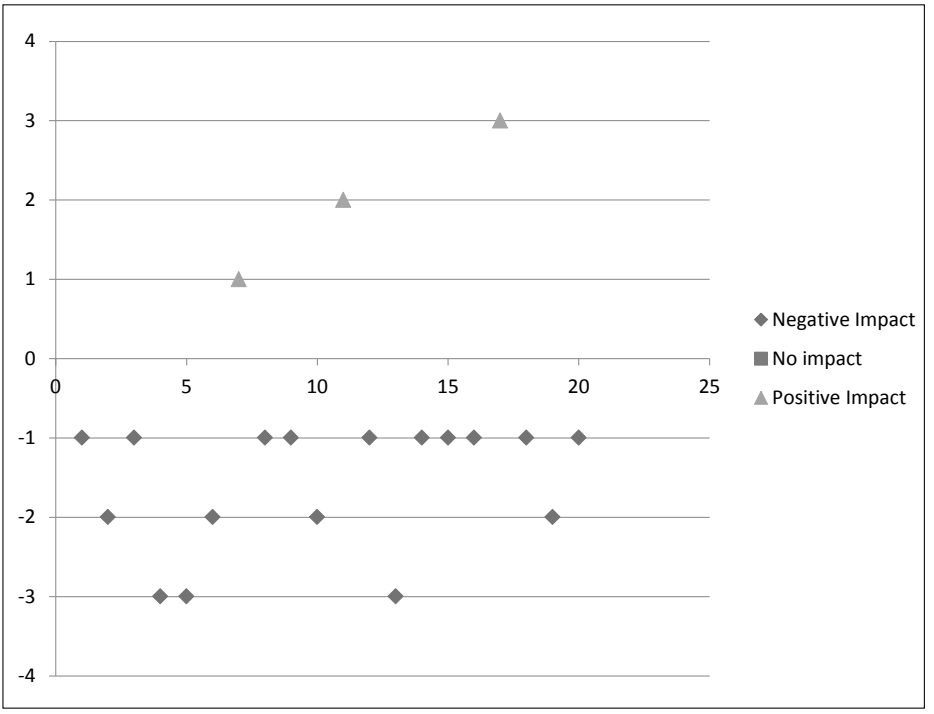
The chart below indicates that professionals from most ministries think that ministerial frequent turnover usually has a negative impact on the sustainability of public policy while only respondents from three ministries stated that a positive impact could come from turnover. The question about the impact of turnover on public policy was asked to three respondents from each ministry in the research sample; the deputy minister, the deputy assistant and the general manager of administrative and financial affairs. Values[4] (1, 2, 3) signify a positive impact while (–1, –2, –3) signify a negative impact.

Most of respondents from political and professional levels, except for three from both levels, reported that the frequent governmental turnover in the Palestinian case negatively impacts public policies' sustainability. Respondents of the political level all unanimously agreed that governmental turnover could be justified as a necessity, but in the Palestinian case (with an average of one government each year) it cannot be considered a necessity. There are some ministers who did not identify their ministries until the issuance of a ministerial change decision that requires them to leave the ministry before getting to know them. Given the absence of true institutionalization and frequent turnover, it could be said that public policies constitute a real "dilemma". In the same context, many of the respondents of the professional level argue that their problem is not with the ministers who hold a de-

4 Negative impact was charted 3 when the three respondents indicate negative impact of turnovers on public policy, impact was charted 2 when two of them indicate negative impact while the third did not indicate clear opinion; and 1 when one respondent did indicate negative impact while the other two recorded no clear opinion. The same thing is with positive level of the chart. As some respondents did not agree to mention their names, the researcher stated (m1, m2, m3,…) instead of names of ministries.

velopmental vision for the ministry and strive to achieve it, although these were not given the opportunity to achieve their visions, but rather with the ministers who are designated without having a vision and who intentionally or unintentionally work on politicizing the organization and putting obstacles before the professional team from setting out and implementing sustainable policies which shall leave an impact on the Palestinian society. Here, many respondents have reported that the Prime Minister is fully responsible for selecting ministers and forming the government, as well as the conciliatory model addressed earlier.

Chart 2
Impact of ministers' turnover on sustainability of public policy



According to many respondents, the conciliatory model assorts ministers who do not hold leadership qualities, and who are encouraged by the surrounding environment or common mentality within the governmental services and the absence of detailed law as well as the poor institutionalization of ministries' management through "temperamental" methods that negatively reflect on public policies. The frequent turnover of governments in the Palestinian case is not a globally rare feature. For example, governments frequently change in Italy and Greece without a negative reflection on the executive services of the State and without reflecting on public policies. This is attributed to the establishment of the institutional system

that separates between the fixed professional level and the changing political level (Al-Jarbawi 2016). This also aggravates the dilemma of poor law and institutionalization, the politicization of the governmental job position and the absence of the legislative council, which is supposed to observe the government performance, and perhaps even strongly contributes to assorting the trustworthy governments (by voting, in the beginning, on the trust of the government and ministers) as well as observing and holding accountable ministers during their work.

New ministers carrying out administrative transfers within their ministers, which also includes withdrawing powers from some employees and giving them to others for the purpose of ensuring loyalty and harmony of ministers' corteges – this happens because of the ambiguity of the law and the lack of its details that distinguishes the powers of different positions (the agreement of most of respondents of the professional level). Most of the respondents of the professional level agreed that most of the new ministers depend on non-professional information (reports) neglecting the deputy to receive information from his own sources – that is employees other than the deputy, which creates internal conflicts and negatively impacts the harmony of the professional team and consequently the sustainability of public policies. The minister's administrative decisions, in particular during the beginning of their term (the first 6 months) contribute in politicizing the general work and sustaining the fertile field for politicization. However, the procedures of the Personnel Council in recent years (including the Code of Conduct, formations table and appointment controls) have reduced politicization. The unanimous agreement of all deputies and most of assistant deputies as well as directors general is that the relation between the position of the minister and the position of the deputy is not clarified by law and is often governed by the mood of the minister and the absolute powers conferred to them by the Basic Law.

All respondents of the professional level agreed that the fiscal resolutions related to the Ministry of Finance are fixed and do not affect the frequent ministerial change, while there is only an impact (according to most of the professional team respondents) on the projects as priorities that vary from one minister to another, which confuses the professional team work and negatively impacts public policies' sustainability. Additionally, the strategic plans (entirely or some of its terms) are negatively influenced by priorities of the new minister (according to most of the professional team respondents). There are some ministers who cancelled the entire plan and started all over again. As for institutionalization, using personal relations between the ministry and other ministries or associations partner in implementing public policies is positively or negatively influenced by the minister's desire (their personal relation with the leaderships of partner associations), which confuses the professional team and negatively impacts the sustainability of policies. This relation shall originally be institutionalized. According to most respondents from both levels, institutionalization has made reasonable achieve-

ments, but that is not good enough. Legal reforms and political determination are the keys of institutionalization.

From a comparative perspective, ministries that have more frequent turnover (the ones that have had to reorganize themselves more than twelve times) reported worries on the sustainability of public policy in their ministries more than others. Some of them considered government turnover and the changes that occur accordingly to have prevented any development in the relevant sector. In comparison, ministries that have less turnover, according to some respondents, experienced difficulties and challenges in implementing crosscutting policies that need cooperation and partnership with ministries that have highly frequent turnover (Seder 2016, Qatami 2016).

6. Lessons and recommendations

There should be a legal reform of the regulatory relation between the political level (the minister) and the professional level (the deputy, the assistant deputy and the directors general) for the purpose of detailing, clarifying and separating powers. Moreover, a ministers' orientation process for new ministers needs to be prepare to ensure introducing them to the administrative and legal dimensions of the governmental action in general, and the ministries they will work in in particular. This process should be carried out by a neutral party, such as the General Personnel Council or the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers to avoid the minister receiving misleading information from probable various poles of the ministry. For the turnover impacts, the relative stability in the authority of Palestinian governments emphasizes that the government term shall not be less than three years or more than four years, unless necessary. However, the Palestinian National Authority President should confer broader powers (ensured by law) to the General Personnel Council to lead a comprehensive reform process to the administrative procedures, which shall ensure organizing the relation between various agencies and help in consolidating procedures and resolving disputes.

As for the challenge of the lack of institutionalization, the solution would be forming an independent and supreme national committee related to institutionalization that shall reconsider the administrative system and its relation to the political system in addition to placing its recommendations and proposals to the Council of Ministers. According to the Palestinian case, cancelling the political designation of the deputy minister position and replacing it with another designation according to the professional sequence (promotion based on competency) is part of the reform process that should be implemented to improve professionalism and decrease politicization in the public service.

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Annex:

Respondents of the Professional Level

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- Sulaiman Zahry, Deputy Minister of Communications and Information Technology. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 3 April 2016.
- Fayeq Al-Deek, Deputy Ministry General of the Public Works. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 10 April 2016.
- Nael Zeidan, Director General of Administrative Affairs, Ministry of Public Works. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 18 April 2016.
- Iyad Assi, Director General of Legal Affairs, Ministry of National Economy. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 20 April 2016.
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- Nazeeh Rajab, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ministry of National Economy. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 3 May 2016.
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- Jamal Qasem, Assistant Deputy of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ministry of Endowments. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 7 May 2016.
- Tharwa Zaid, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ministry of Education & Higher Education. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 8 May 2016.
- Mohammad Abu Zaid, Deputy Minister of Education & Higher Education. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 10 May 2016.
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- Maher Abu Raida, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ministry of Culture. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 15 May 2016.
- Mohammd Jabareen, Deputy Minister of Local Governance. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 20 May 2016.

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- Ghassan Darghmah, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ministry of Local Government. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 20 May 2016.
- Abdullah Lahlouh, Deputy Minister of Agriculture. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 22 May 2016.
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- Mohammad Abu Hmeid, Deputy Minister of Social Affairs. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 1 June 2016.
- Rola Nazzal, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ministry of social Affairs. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 2 June 2016.
- Dawoud Al-Deek, Assistant Deputy of Planning Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 5 June 2016.
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- Samer Sharqawi, Assistant Deputy and Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Ministry of Justice. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 8 June 2016.
- Nasser Qatami, Deputy Minister of Labor. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 15 June 2016.
- Buthaina Salem, Director General of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Labor. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 15 June 2016.
- Nazeeh Arman, Director of Projects and Policies Unit, Ministry of Labor. Personal interview conducted by the researcher, Ramallah, 6 June 2016.
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Respondents of the Political Level

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