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Demystifying Non-Western Administrative Traditions: An Empirical Comparison of Administrative Systems in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes public administration systems in 29 non-Western countries. Country-level data is presented for 10 core aspects of administrative systems: managerialism versus legalism, politicization, personnel system, civil society participation, accountability, service orientation, public expenditure share, decentralization, legal system, and central government fragmentation. Results show some clear groupings of countries for some variables, but overlap for others. Aggregated into two dimensions, Citizen orientation and Structural concentration, the data suggests the existence of distinct clusters of administrative systems: a Central European and an Eastern European cluster with gradual distinction in degrees of Citizen orientation, two separate clusters in Latin America with differences especially in Citizen orientation and some in Structural concentration, and an East Asian cluster distinct from a South Asian cluster with marked differences on both dimensions. Findings challenge simplistic labels such as a “Latin American” or “post-communist” administrative tradition, and contribute to more inclusive and evidence-based comparative public administration.

1 | Introduction

Administrative systems vary considerably across countries and regions, reflecting diverse historical trajectories. Considering this variation is important for scholars to contextualize their research and reflect on its generalizability, for practitioners to critically assess whether lessons, for example on an administrative reform or a development program, can be transferred from one context to another, and more generally, to acknowledge diverse logics and approaches to organizing states and communities. To pursue these goals, we need comparative data and classifications of administrative systems, as tools for comparison and building blocks of theory.

One promising approach are Administrative Traditions, widely used to describe and classify public administration systems across countries (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019; Painter and Guy Peters 2010; Peters 2021). Administrative Traditions are,

arguably, the most comprehensive approach because it combines several comparative aspects to provide a comprehensive overview of administrative systems, while other comparative classifications of administrative systems tend to focus on one comparative dimension (or a few): for example, Dahlström and Lapuente (2017) focus on aspects of civil service systems and the relationship between politics and administration, whereas Ladner et al. (2019) provide a typology of local government systems.

However, the Administrative Traditions approach has several limitations. First, as the concept was developed with a focus on Western (European) traditions, namely the Anglo-American, Napoleonic, Germanic, and Scandinavian ones (Peters 2008; Painter and Guy Peters 2010), Non-Western countries are often summarized under broad labels, such as post-communist or postcolonial, and non-Western traditions receive much less attention in academic publications. For example, the influential

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book by Painter and Guy Peters (2010), chapter 2) distinguishes four traditions within Europe but divides the rest of the world into five “families” or groups of countries with distinct traditions: Latin American, Postcolonial South Asian and African, East Asian, Soviet and Islamic. While some other publications have indeed given more attention to non-Western traditions or paradigms, these tend to focus on specific (sub-) regions (e.g., Cheung 2005) or on broad theoretical paradigms (Drechsler 2015), and thus do not attempt a broad *and* empirically-based classification of countries that would serve the goals stated above. The second shortcoming is that the description of specific traditions, Western as well as non-Western, is often dominated by paradigmatic cases: Hungary for Central Eastern European, India for Postcolonial, China and Japan for East Asian and UK and US for Anglo-American, France for Napoleonic, and Sweden for Scandinavian (see various chapters in Painter and Guy Peters 2010; Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019). These paradigmatic cases typically represent the largest and most powerful states in the specific region or group of countries and their description is often implicitly assumed, rather than empirically demonstrated, to apply to the entire country group. What I am criticizing here is not a classification of traditions or a paradigm approach per se, but the use of single paradigmatic cases and the unsystematic and mostly implicit generalization from them. Heterogeneity within traditions is often theoretically acknowledged but rarely considered empirically. Third, while publications on Administrative Traditions emphasize a range of different comparative dimensions, or conceptual attributes, ranging, for instance, from centralization versus decentralization, to citizen participation, and questions of bureaucratic recruitment, they often (though not always) lack an explicit definition of which dimensions and attributes are included. Fourth, the literature on Administrative Traditions mixes two goals, often without a clear analytical distinction: to describe features of contemporary administrative systems and to link these features to historical paths and legacies (see Hamerschmid et al. 2007; Mikkelsen 2018). Taken together, this approach allows for an encompassing understanding of (Western) paradigmatic cases and their historical trajectories, but makes a systematic comparison of diverse countries and their contemporary administrative systems, especially extending into the Global Souths, difficult.

In this article, I present an empirical overview of non-Western administrative systems in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The term “non-Western” is used here as a heuristic to refer to countries typically not included in the literature’s Anglo-American, Napoleonic, Germanic, and Scandinavian traditions, which cover the “Western” countries (sometimes referred to as WEIRD—Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) in Western Europe (west of the former Iron Curtain) and industrialized English-speaking countries in North America and the Antipodes. The non-Western countries analyzed here include highly developed as well as middle and lower-middle income countries across various continents, and the goal is not to say that they are similar to each other, but rather and precisely to explore differences and nuances within this vast set of countries and administrative systems. To do so, I provide detailed comparative data on several important comparative aspects as well as a condensed classification of these administrative systems. Rather

than classifying countries based on shared historical trajectories, I explicitly start from recent empirical data to map contemporary administrative systems. This does not mean that historical trajectories and legacies are not important for understanding administrative institutions and behavior, but here my goal is more modest: to provide systematic, evidence-based description as a tool for comparative research. In a recent article (Jugl 2025), I have identified and operationalized 10 important aspects of administrative systems (traditions) and summarized them in two dimensions: Citizen orientation and Structural concentration of the administrative system. Here I reexamine the data with a focus on non-Western countries and discuss variation within and between continental groups. The data show considerable variation within regions, sometimes even more than between regions, for example for politicization or the institutional fragmentation of central-level administration, which questions the paradigmatic-case approach. The findings suggest a nuanced classification, distinguishing an East Asian from a South Asian subgroup, an Eastern European from a Central European subgroup, and two different country clusters in Latin America, thus challenging broad labels such as “post-communist” or “Latin American”, and the often implicit assumption of homogeneity underlying them.

This article makes several contributions to comparative public administration research. The first contribution is the detailed description of public administration in 29 non-Western countries through a variety of (quantitative) data across 10 variables, constituting a particularly systematic and transparent overview of non-Western administrative systems. Based on this, I propose a two-dimensional classification of these administrative systems that can be used as a building block for theories on the causes and consequences of administrative systems or as a tool for researchers to explain their case selection or describe the country context of their study. Importantly, the goal here is not to unbundle or reject the idea of traditions entirely, nor to present 29 new paradigms, but rather (a) to evaluate empirically how much administrative systems with a shared tradition are similar or different from another and (b) to refine country groupings based on a systematic and transparent empirical analysis. This should complement existing work on administrative tradition and balance a focus on country-specific data with researchers’ need for clear groupings of administrative systems characterized by a set of common features. Last but not least, this article aims to advance the global debate on national administrative systems, and, in doing so, I hope to contribute to more inclusive and more evidence-based comparative public administration.

2 | Core Attributes of Administrative Systems and Operationalization

The following descriptive analysis is based on 10 variables that capture 10 core attributes of administrative systems. In a recent article (Jugl 2025), I have reconceptualized AT as a concept to describe administrative systems and “ways of doing” public administration. Based on a broad and systematic review of the international literature, I identified 10 important AT attributes, elements of AT used as comparative lenses in the literature

(summarized in Table 1). These include formal structures as well as practices and norms.

These attributes align to a good degree with the variety of public administration characteristics discussed in non-Western contexts, as illustrated by the following examples: In the literature on Asian countries, administrative traditions are frequently discussed in relation to the role of the state vis-à-vis society, emphasizing state-centric and hierarchical administrative arrangements, executive dominance, as well as colonial, domestic, or developmental traditions of bureaucratic rule and legalism (Cheung 2005; Haque 2013). A second common focus concerns civil service systems, including merit-based recruitment, professionalism, and varying degrees of politicization (Dwivedi and Mishra 2010; Im et al. 2013; Park et al. 2022). Questions of decentralization and central-local relationships are particularly prominent among publications on South and South East Asia (Dwivedi and Mishra 2010; Guess 2005). The literature on Central and Eastern Europe, has remarkably similar themes but with slightly different manifestations: a central emphasis is on the strong administrative law tradition and enduring patterns

of political subordination or patronage in the civil service, shaped in part by communist and imperial legacies (Fink-Hafner 2014; Sloboda et al. 2022; Zankina 2020). Another common theme is about the (growing) divergence among countries in the region (Randma-Liiv and Drechsler 2017), for example in terms of the different degrees of decentralization (Brusis 2002) or intra- and inter-organizational hierarchy and coordination (Fink-Hafner 2007; Zubek and Staroňová 2012). Last but not least, the literature on Latin American bureaucracies discusses a common set of features, which Peci et al. (2023, 72) summarize succinctly as:

[an] administrative tradition (...), usually characterized by (i) extensive and detailed legal norms combined with a large discretionary room in the implementation ... ; (ii) strong presidential powers; (iii) unconsolidated civil services ... ; (iv) complex national-local relations; and (v) large levels of corruption, clientelism, and mistrust among citizens, and between them and their governments

TABLE 1 | AT concept attributes and operationalization.

| AT attribute | Explanation | Variable and data source |
|--|---|--|
| Dimension: Citizen orientation | | |
| Managerialism versus legalism | Is the expected role of public administration and administrators primarily about managing programs efficiently and achieving results or about following and implementing the law? | Ratio “Public sector employees strive to be efficient.”/“Public sector employees strive to follow rules.”, quality of government (QoG) expert survey wave II |
| Politicization | How much do politicians influence administrative recruitment and decision making? | Additive index of: Professionalism index (formal politicization) + political interference (administrative politicization), scales adjusted, QoG expert survey wave III |
| Public personnel system | How much does a public service career differ from employment in the private sector? | Closedness index, QoG expert survey wave III |
| Interests & expertise | How much are citizens and societal actors involved in policy making and implementation? | Civil society consultation: “Are major civil society organizations routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members?”, varieties of democracy |
| Accountability | How much and by whom is public administration held accountable? | Horizontal accountability index: Government accountability to legislature, judiciary, and oversight bodies, varieties of democracy |
| Administration versus service | Is the expected role of public administrators to serve the public or those in power? | Public service orientation: “Public sector employees strive to help citizens.”, QoG expert survey wave II |
| Dimension: Structural concentration | | |
| State tradition & role | How important is the state vis-à-vis the society and economy? | Total public expenditure as % GDP, world bank |
| Decentralization | Is public administration uniform or dispersed at subnational level? | Self-rule sub-index: Subnational autonomy, regional authority index RAI |
| Legal tradition | What is the dominant logic of the legal system? | Civil law system indicator: 0 no civil law, 0.5 mixed system with civil law, 1 pure civil law system, based on Juriglobe |
| Fragmentation & coordination | How fragmented or coordinated is the central government? | Number of government ministers, WhoGov |

Note: Based on Jugl (2025).

Others also emphasize challenges related to legalism paired with strong political interference in administrative matters, patrimonialism and clientelism (Peeters et al. 2018; Salazar-Morales 2023). Beyond these illustrative examples, all 10 attributes were identified in publications on non-Western bureaucracies, suggesting that they are relevant (though not to the same degree) and comprehensive (though not exhaustive) for describing and mapping administrative systems in these diverse regions.

Through factor analysis, I found that these 10 variables can be grouped into two coherent dimensions: Citizen orientation and Structural concentration. Citizen orientation captures whether public administration is guided by the needs and preferences of citizens or by those of politicians and bureaucrats. Structural concentration refers to how much public administration and governance are concentrated (centralized, uniform) or dispersed in a country's public administration. Table 1 presents the 10 core attributes under these two dimensions, along with a brief explanation of each and the data used for operationalization. The data sources were selected to balance the goals of maximum country coverage with a faithful operationalization of the AT attribute. Data sources vary from official statistical data (World Bank) to expert surveys (Quality of Government expert surveys), coding by country experts (Varieties of Democracy) and archival data (WhoGov). The limitations and potential Western biases of these sources are addressed in the discussion section below.

Data sources vary in their coverage of countries and years. While I aimed to use the most recent available data on each variable, I wanted to exclude the years of the Covid-19 pandemic (starting in 2020). To avoid overly long time distance between data on different variables, I selected the most recently available data from *before* the pandemic, resulting in data from varying years between 2015 and 2019. In this article I present the data for various countries in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America. While the focus on these regions is intentional in this article¹, country coverage *within* these regions is limited purely by data availability. Only countries for which all 10 variables were available are included to allow for the calculation of the indices for Citizen orientation and Structural concentration. These additive indices summarize the underlying variables: To construct them, I standardized the underlying variables, adjusted signs where necessary (e.g., politicization is negatively correlated with most other variables under Citizen orientation), and took the average of all 6 variables for Citizen orientation and the average of all 4 variables for Structural concentration (for details see Jugl 2025). A descriptive analysis of the 10 variables allows for a detailed look at raw data capturing important features of contemporary administrative systems, while the two indices present a more aggregated picture of the two core dimensions of administrative traditions. A side-by-side comparison between countries within and across world regions offers a novel and nuanced comparative view at global variation in public administration. As a point for comparison (not as a benchmark), the tables also list data for four paradigmatic Western cases: the US and the UK (for the Anglo-American tradition), France (for the Napoleonic tradition), and Germany (for the Germanic tradition).

3 | Results

Table 2 presents country data for all six variables associated with Citizen orientation. For *managerialism* versus *legalism*, the Asian countries vary from strong managerialist orientation in Singapore and the Philippines and a modest managerialist orientation in South Korea and Japan to a more legalist orientation in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and India. In Central and Eastern Europe, the variation is less pronounced but managerialist orientation is strongest in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania, while legalism prevails most clearly in Czechia, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia. Latin America also shows a large range from a very strong managerialist focus on efficiency in Argentina (stronger than in the UK, the US, and Singapore) to very legalistic rule-orientation in Colombia and Peru.

In terms of *politicization*, which captures the political interference in administrative recruitment and administrative decision-making, we see again variation in Asia ranging from very low politicization in Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, to medium-high levels in Bangladesh, India, and Philippines. While Central and Eastern Europe also shows some variation and some low levels of politicization (Czechia, Estonia, and Slovenia), on average the region has a strongly politicized bureaucracy with the most extreme cases being Albania, Poland, Turkey, and Ukraine. Latin America is largely on par with South Asian countries such as India or Bangladesh, with Chile having the lowest degree of politicization and Mexico standing out as exceptionally politicized at levels similar to Turkey or Ukraine.

Just as *public personnel systems* differ between more open position-based ones in the US and UK and more closed career systems in France and Germany, there is variation among our regions of interest. Asia shows remarkable uniformity in terms of closed personnel systems with the notable exception of Singapore. Latin America, on the other hand, has rather open personnel system with the exception of Brazil. Central and Eastern Europe shows more variation with the most open systems in Czechia, Estonia and Ukraine and the most closed personnel systems in Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Turkey.

Civil society consultation, as a measure of citizen participation and openness of bureaucracies to interests and expertise, varies considerably within regions but no clear regional patterns emerge. The lowest levels of civil society consultations across the regions are observed in Mexico and Russia, followed by Turkey, Brazil, and Hungary. The highest levels, though far below those in the US and Germany, are observed in Costa Rica and Estonia, followed by Slovenia, Chile, Philippines and South Korea, which are around the level in the UK.

Horizontal accountability, or how far governments are held accountable by parliaments, courts, and other institutions, is strongest on average in Latin America with highest values in Chile and Costa Rica and the main exception with lowest values in Mexico. Central and Eastern Europe shows again strong diversity, with particularly low levels of accountability in Russia and Turkey, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, with many countries reaching medium levels, and highest levels of accountability in Estonia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Horizontal

TABLE 2 | Country data on six variables related to citizen orientation.

| Group/country | Managerialism (vs. legalism) | Politicization | Closed personnel system | Civil society consultation | Horizontal accountability | Public service orientation |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Asia | | | | | | |
| Bangladesh | 0.72 | 0.21 | 2.15 | 0.44 | 0.20 | 1.93 |
| Indonesia | 0.60 | -0.56 | 1.30 | 1.22 | 0.73 | 3.88 |
| India | 0.75 | -0.02 | 1.92 | 0.31 | 0.75 | 3.20 |
| Japan | 0.87 | -1.31 | 2.15 | 1.19 | 0.95 | 5.75 |
| Philippines | 0.96 | -0.08 | 0.43 | 1.78 | 0.61 | 4.91 |
| Singapore | 1.05 | -1.82 | -1.44 | 0.24 | 0.69 | 6.33 |
| South Korea | 0.87 | -1.26 | 1.60 | 1.69 | 0.96 | 4.74 |
| Central and Eastern Europe | | | | | | |
| Albania | 0.91 | 1.20 | 0.86 | 0.48 | 0.82 | 3.17 |
| Bulgaria | 0.74 | 0.72 | 1.36 | 1.31 | 0.86 | 3.77 |
| Bosnia Herzegovina | 0.83 | 0.97 | 0.71 | 0.21 | 0.57 | 2.80 |
| Czechia | 0.59 | -0.66 | -0.60 | 1.36 | 0.89 | 4.00 |
| Estonia | 0.81 | -0.85 | -1.40 | 2.22 | 0.97 | 4.63 |
| Croatia | 0.80 | 0.32 | 1.87 | 0.51 | 0.89 | 3.89 |
| Hungary | 0.66 | 0.88 | -0.22 | -0.20 | 0.68 | 3.73 |
| Poland | 0.79 | 1.03 | -0.41 | 0.32 | 0.79 | 5.33 |
| Romania | 0.85 | 0.58 | 1.14 | 0.37 | 0.67 | 3.78 |
| Russia | 0.76 | 0.55 | -0.87 | -0.73 | 0.21 | 3.71 |
| Serbia | 0.59 | 0.70 | 0.63 | 0.04 | 0.63 | 2.88 |
| Slovakia | 0.59 | 0.41 | 0.07 | 1.42 | 0.93 | 3.89 |
| Slovenia | 0.75 | -0.61 | -0.57 | 1.87 | 0.95 | 4.75 |
| Turkiye | 0.77 | 1.10 | 1.14 | -0.31 | 0.22 | 3.92 |
| Ukraine | 0.78 | 1.02 | -0.93 | 1.06 | 0.57 | 2.80 |
| Latin America | | | | | | |
| Argentina | 1.22 | 0.32 | -0.50 | 0.90 | 0.79 | 3.27 |
| Brazil | 0.76 | -0.30 | 1.24 | -0.26 | 0.72 | 3.54 |
| Chile | 0.75 | -0.64 | -0.78 | 1.86 | 0.98 | 5.40 |
| Colombia | 0.63 | 0.59 | -0.05 | 0.91 | 0.85 | 3.50 |
| Costa Rica | 0.84 | 0.04 | 0.39 | 2.30 | 0.96 | 4.11 |
| Mexico | 0.86 | 1.09 | -0.84 | -0.78 | 0.52 | 2.32 |
| Peru | 0.62 | 0.43 | -1.50 | 1.47 | 0.94 | 2.56 |
| Paradigmatic Western countries for comparison | | | | | | |
| UK | 0.93 | -1.13 | -1.67 | 1.76 | 0.97 | 5.18 |
| US | 0.88 | -0.57 | -0.29 | 3.48 | 0.92 | 5.25 |
| Germany | 0.75 | -1.47 | 0.81 | 3.58 | 0.98 | 5.03 |
| France | 0.87 | -1.19 | 1.18 | 1.52 | 0.91 | 5.09 |

Note: Data for varying years 2015–2019.

accountability is also very uneven in Asia, with particularly low values in Bangladesh and very high levels in Japan and South Korea.

With regards to bureaucrat's *public service orientation*, there is one of the strongest differences between the four Western cases and the countries under study here: compared to the four

Western countries, public service orientation is higher in Singapore, Japan, Chile, and Poland, and on roughly comparable levels in Philippines, South Korea, and Slovenia. In all other countries public sector employees are considerably less likely to “strive to help citizens”, the least so in Bangladesh, Mexico, and Peru. While there is again substantial within-region variation, Asia or more specifically East Asia and parts of Southeast Asia stand out as the region with highest public service orientation.

Table 3 presents country data for the remaining four variables associated with Structural concentration. *Public expenditures as share of GDP*, capturing the overall size and role of the state vis-à-vis the economy, vary considerably across the three macro regions: it is lowest on average in Asia driven by very low values, considerably below US levels, in countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Japan, Philippines, and Singapore. Latin America follows with some variation at moderate levels. Central and Eastern Europe has a higher share of public expenditure on average closer to the values of the Western European paradigmatic cases, with highest shares in Hungary, Croatia, and Slovakia, all (Eastern) EU member states.

In terms of *Decentralization* of the administrative system, operationalized by the self-rule index that captures subnational policy and financial autonomy, the countries in our three macro regions show largely medium to low levels. In some cases, such as Costa Rica, Estonia, and Singapore, the virtual absence of subnational autonomy can be explained by very small size. In contrast, very high degrees of decentralization, higher than in the federal Western countries US and Germany, are found in India, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The *legal system*, captured here as a categorical variable, appears most directly linked to the colonial past of the three regions. While Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America have, uniformly, Civil law systems, Asia is more diverse with Common law in Bangladesh, India, and Singapore, and mixed legal systems in Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, and South Korea. The legal system matters for public administration because civil law systems are often considered to be more rigid, restricting public administrators' room for maneuver through detailed administrative law and a system of administrative courts and judicial review of administrative action.

Fragmentation of the central government is proxied by the number of government ministers (understood to represent ministries or departments). There are no clear differences between regions and considerable variation within the three regions as well as among the four paradigmatic Western cases. The only countries that stand out are Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with particularly high fragmentation with 33 or more ministers, and Argentina and Hungary with particularly low numbers of 10 and 11, respectively. The number of government ministers is only a rough proxy for institutional fragmentation, because first it may include ministers without portfolio, ministers heading several portfolios, or several ministers co-heading one ministry, and secondly, the same number of ministries may mask strong variation in other forms of central-level fragmentation, for example into agencies and other bodies.

Figure 1 presents the values on the Citizen orientation index and Structural concentration index. Each index has been standardized, so the units represent standard deviations and the value “0” represents the mean of the full sample, which comprises 49 countries including several Western countries (besides the UK, US, Germany, and France) not discussed here. The non-Western countries of interest are shown in black and Western countries are shown in gray for comparison and completeness. As the indices are based on the original 10 variables, they do not present inherently new information but aggregate the variables discussed before. The figure shows the two indices side-by-side, allowing for visual comparison. On the horizontal axis *Citizen orientation*, the highest values are found in Western countries, while the highest values among non-Western countries are held by Singapore, Estonia, and Chile. Lowest values, reflecting an orientation of public administration toward the preferences of bureaucrats and politicians rather than citizens, are found in Bangladesh, Turkey, and Serbia. On the vertical axis, the highest values of *Structural concentration*, reflecting a centralized and dominant state, are observed in Iceland (Western), Estonia, and Hungary, while lowest values reflecting deconcentration and fragmentation of governance are found in India and Bangladesh, followed by Canada (Western).

4 | Discussion

Combining these various empirical puzzle pieces leads to a broad comparative picture that offers fresh insights into different administrative systems and traditions. While no two administrative systems are alike on the 10 variables discussed above, some meaningful groupings emerge when we abstract from the 10 variables to the two dimensions. In the Asian region there are two distinct country clusters, representing East Asia and South Asia, distinct from each other on both dimensions. Southeast Asian countries are split between these two clusters. Administrative systems in East Asia, including Japan and South Korea, as well as Philippines and Singapore are located in the lower-right quadrant of Figure 1, representing above-the-global (49)-average values in Citizen orientation and somewhat below-average Structural concentration. The strong Citizen orientation scores are driven in particular by strong managerialism and low degrees of politicization, which questions Peters' (2021, 162) recent summary of the East Asian tradition. The East Asian countries are located close to Germany and the United Kingdom, challenging a simplistic contrasting between Anglo-American, Germanic, and East Asian tradition, and rather affording plausibility to some shared historical legacies, for example through Japan's deliberate borrowing of administrative practices from Germany, or Singapore's import of an Anglo-American civil service model (Aoki 2015; Cheung 2013; Park et al. 2022; Peters 2021, 159). In contrast, the South Asian countries Bangladesh and India, plus Indonesia in Southeast Asia, have even lower levels of Structural concentration, reflecting the strongest deconcentration among all country groups—but closely followed by the Anglo-American countries with whom they share a common law system and strong ministerial fragmentation. The South Asian countries also have rather low levels of Citizen orientation, reflecting a strong

TABLE 3 | Country data on four variables related to structural concentration.

| Group/country | Public expenditure share | Decentralization: Subnational autonomy | Legal system | Fragmentation: N government ministers |
|--|---------------------------------|---|---------------------|--|
| Asia | | | | |
| Bangladesh | 8.27 | 18.94 | Common law (0) | 36 |
| Indonesia | 14.49 | 19.70 | Mixed (0.5) | 33 |
| India | 15.66 | 27.97 | Common law (0) | 34 |
| Japan | 16.42 | 18.14 | Mixed (0.5) | 19 |
| Philippines | 14.84 | 11.18 | Mixed (0.5) | 22 |
| Singapore | 14.15 | 0.00 | Common law (0) | 18 |
| South Korea | 27.51 | 11.00 | Mixed (0.5) | 18 |
| Central and Eastern Europe | | | | |
| Albania | 23.15 | 2.00 | Civil law (1) | 14 |
| Bulgaria | 33.06 | 2.00 | Civil law (1) | 17 |
| Bosnia Herzegovina | 34.05 | 26.34 | Civil law (1) | 40 |
| Czechia | 32.58 | 12.32 | Civil law (1) | 14 |
| Estonia | 36.12 | 0.00 | Civil law (1) | 14 |
| Croatia | 38.19 | 9.55 | Civil law (1) | 19 |
| Hungary | 39.54 | 8.13 | Civil law (1) | 11 |
| Poland | 34.19 | 11.32 | Civil law (1) | 21 |
| Romania | 33.47 | 10.09 | Civil law (1) | 25 |
| Russia | 29.61 | 13.86 | Civil law (1) | 22 |
| Serbia | 37.37 | 6.23 | Civil law (1) | 21 |
| Slovakia | 38.15 | 8.84 | Civil law (1) | 13 |
| Slovenia | 37.42 | 3.23 | Civil law (1) | 16 |
| Turkiye | 35.57 | 8.76 | Civil law (1) | 16 |
| Ukraine | 33.06 | 7.06 | Civil law (1) | 18 |
| Latin America | | | | |
| Argentina | 22.04 | 14.00 | Civil law (1) | 10 |
| Brazil | 34.79 | 16.28 | Civil law (1) | 18 |
| Chile | 23.29 | 6.00 | Civil law (1) | 24 |
| Colombia | 31.30 | 14.91 | Civil law (1) | 17 |
| Costa Rica | 29.64 | 0.08 | Civil law (1) | 24 |
| Mexico | 19.79 | 16.07 | Civil law (1) | 19 |
| Peru | 20.66 | 20.06 | Civil law (1) | 18 |
| Paradigmatic Western countries for comparison | | | | |
| UK | 36.68 | 8.48 | Common law (0) | 24 |
| United States | 22.68 | 22.18 | Common law (0) | 14 |
| Germany | 28.38 | 25.67 | Civil law (1) | 15 |
| France | 46.30 | 21.84 | Civil law (1) | 20 |

Note: Data for varying years 2015–2019.

influence of bureaucratic elites and politicians. The difference between slight deconcentration in East Asia and strong deconcentration in South Asia may reflect, respectively, the focus on uniformity in the centralized Confucian or developmental-

state tradition versus more decentralized traditions in both the Mogul empire and the British colonial administration in India, or different degrees of ethno-linguistic diversity in East and South Asia. The two empirical country clusters mirror earlier

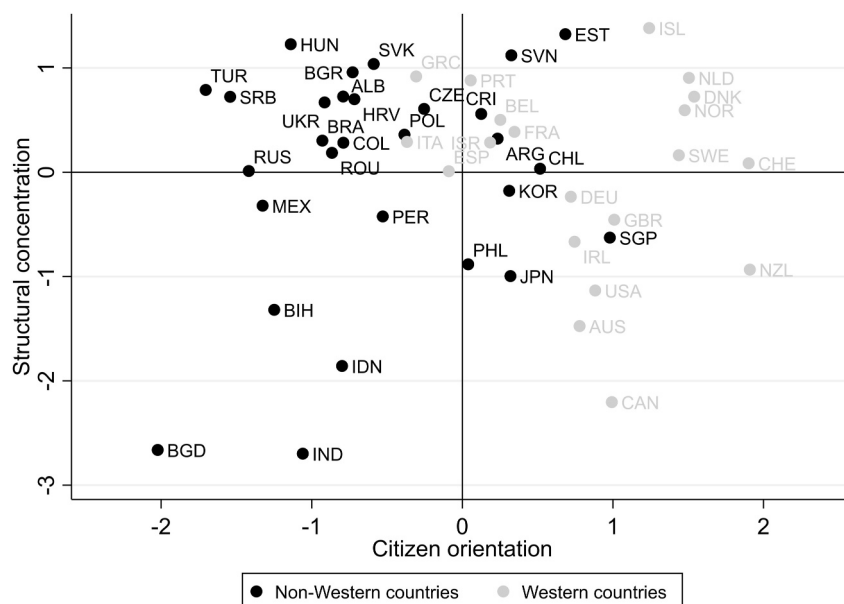


FIGURE 1 | Non-Western countries on the two-dimensional map of administrative traditions.

distinctions between an East Asian (including Singapore) and South Asian administrative tradition (Cheung 2005, 2013; Haque 2013). However, as countries in Southeast Asia are spread across these two clusters, no generalization for Southeast Asia is drawn and the empirical relevance of a common Southeast Asian cluster (Cheung 2005) is questioned.

In Central and Eastern Europe, often summarized as countries with a “post-communist” tradition, there are no clearly distinct groups of countries but there is no homogenous grouping either. Rather, the countries are stretched out, especially on the Citizen orientation dimension. On this dimension, medium or above-average values are reached by those countries, particularly in Central Europe and the Baltics, that have joined the EU in the first big Eastern enlargement in 2004, dubbed as “the return to Europe” (see Goetz 2001; Meyer-Sahling 2009). Indeed, these countries, have Citizen orientation scores comparable to those of Germany, France, and other Western European countries. On the other extreme, Russia, representing in some way the paradigmatic (and largest) case of a post-communist and post-Soviet administrative system, as well as Turkey, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina show the lowest Citizen orientation at levels similar to South Asian countries. The strong variation in Citizen orientation, at times more than two standard deviations, challenges a uniform label, post-communist or other, for the administrative systems of Central and Eastern Europe (in line with authors from the region, see Randma-Liiv and Drechsler 2017). What all countries in the region have in common (with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina), however, is above-average Structural concentration, at levels comparable to France or Scandinavian countries, reflecting rather centralized states with considerable public expenditure and rigid civil law systems. The (gradual rather than sharp) distinction between these two subgroups reflects Kuhlmann and Wollmann’s (2019, 22) distinction between a Central Eastern European subgroup and a South Eastern European subgroup. They can also be linked to different pre-communist legacies (in contrast with earlier more skeptical views Meyer-Sahling 2009): large parts of

Central Europe were part of the Habsburg empire, while the Russian and Ottoman empires were dominant powers in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. The overlap of Central European countries with countries in Southern Europe and some Latin American countries supports Goetz’ (2001) argument that public administrations in Central Europe are not so much post-communist cases but rather typical cases of transitioning, democratizing countries. However, while Hungary has often been presented as one of the frontrunners in post-communist administrative reform and in reintroducing a Continental European administration based on pre-communist legacies (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019; Meyer-Sahling 2009), the data analyzed here show a strong discrepancy between Hungary and other states in (Western) Central Europe such as Germany, reflecting perhaps more recent changes in Hungary toward recentralization and political influence. Since only one country, Estonia, represents the Baltics in the analysis, no generalization is drawn for this group. Estonia has the strongest Citizen orientation among countries with a communist legacy and is located in Figure 1 between the other Central and Eastern European states on the one hand and Scandinavian countries on the other, reflecting most likely a gradual move toward the Nordic tradition (Randma-Liiv and Drechsler 2017). Furthermore, the analysis shows that Turkey, sometimes grouped as a representative of a distinct “Islamic” tradition (Drechsler and Chafik 2022; Painter and Guy Peters 2010) is in fact quite similar to other Eastern European countries on the 10 variables and two dimensions analyzed here.

The Latin American countries are also somewhat spread out on the two-dimensional map, forming two distinct subgroups. One subgroup with Argentina, Chile, and Costa Rica, combines above-average Citizen orientation with slightly above-average Structural concentration, fairly similar to France and Belgium. The second Latin American subgroup with Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru is located around the average for Structural concentration and clearly below average for Citizen orientation, close to Russia and Romania. This summary of Latin American

public administration is broadly in line with recent descriptions of the systems as legalistic and centralized, dominated by presidents and politicians more generally, and with some noticeable variations in terms of managerialism or clientelism (Salazar-Morales et al. 2021; Peters 2021, 168–70). In particular, characteristics such as strong politicization and clientelism, strong hierarchy, and “superficial legalism” (Peeters et al. 2018, 72), which are interpreted as problematic or as contrasting with Western European traditions, have been highlighted before for countries including Peru (Salazar-Morales 2023), Mexico (Peeters et al. 2018), Brazil and Colombia (Peci et al. 2023), which all belong to the second cluster identified here. Interestingly, Spain, the former dominant colonial power in Latin America, is located in Figure 1 right between these two Latin American sub-groups.

The insights are summarized in Table 4, which classifies each (sub-)region along the two dimensions with each dimension divided into three levels (low, medium, high). Of course, such classification inevitably loses some nuances and variation within groups, so readers are advised to refer to country-specific data as reported in Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 1 whenever possible. Moreover, generalizations are drawn only from the limited country sample represented here, which misses important cases, most notably China for East Asia. With these caveats, the table still presents a novel empirically-based overview of non-Western administrative systems. While the (sub-)regions discussed in this article cover many cells of this 3 × 3 table, it is notable that one entire column remains empty: among the non-Western administrative systems analyzed here, none has strong Citizen orientation, at least not in a global comparison which includes Western countries. Still, there is considerable variation on this dimension between and within regions, namely between East and South Asia, between Central Europe and Eastern Europe, and within Latin America.

At this point, it is important for me to reflect on my own positionality: I have started this research project with the aim to expand the empirical depth and accuracy as well as empirical breadth and country coverage of comparative public administration. However, my perspective as a Western European scholar inevitably biases my views on the world. While the data sources and analytical steps used to reach my conclusions are transparently reported here and in Jugl (2025), there are at least three potential biases to mention: First, in order to identify the core attributes of administrative traditions as an approach to describe administrative systems, I relied on literature published in academic journals and books in English, which limits the included perspectives to scholars who refer to the term “administrative traditions” and who publish in such English-speaking academic outlets, disregarding discussions and conceptualizations of administrative systems in other languages and publications. As I

show in my earlier article, the reviewed literature is heavily biased toward analyses and discussions of Western, in particular European, cases (see also Haque 2022). Second, to operationalize the 10 attributes of administrative systems, I selected data sources accessible to me (i.e., primarily in English) and with the largest country coverage. The data are published by various, but primarily Western or Western-dominated institutions, ranging from academic institutions in Canada (Juriglobe) and Sweden (Quality of Government, Varieties of Democracy) to the World Bank. While their data collection process is largely transparent, their positions and motivations may potentially introduce further (Western) biases to the coverage of countries or construction of variables, for example the distinction between managerialism and legalism (see Cheung 2013 on this “Western” distinction). Third, my own subjective assessment comes into play not just in the discussion of the results here, but also earlier in the naming and interpretation of the two (empirically derived) dimensions: While I believe the denomination of the Structural concentration dimension is fairly straightforward and uncontroversial, I am aware that the term “Citizen orientation” used to summarize six underlying variables may be contested, not the least because it has a normative connotation. It was my choice to conceptualize orientation toward citizens as the opposite of orientation toward politicians and bureaucrats, while ignoring, for example, the idea of community. I spent considerable time reflecting on this and considering alternative terms, which were suggested by generous colleagues (all Western/European, though). Aware of (some) limitations of my perspective, I thus invite scholars, especially from the countries covered here and from non-English intellectual traditions, to critically engage with my proposal for classification. Combining different intellectual perspectives and comparative data may allow us to move toward a truly global discussion of public administration.

Some more limitations relate to the data, which are limited in terms of conceptual breadth, time period, and country coverage. First, the used variables simplify (sometimes painfully) the underlying conceptual attributes and provide at best a broad-brushed overview. For example, scholars and practitioners interested in politicization may wish to distinguish between degrees of formal-legal politicization on the one hand and phenomena such as corruption and patronage on the other, but the data used here do not allow for this distinction. However, the present contribution based on systematic comparison of quantitative indicators can complement the mostly qualitative case-specific, and sometimes vague or anecdotal, literature on AT. Second, as mentioned before, the data cover years between 2015 and 2019 and are, therefore, in part 10 years old. They do not cover more recent changes to public administration, especially under populist and authoritarian political leaders such as Orbán in Hungary and Milei in Argentina. Also structural

TABLE 4 | Summary of non-Western administrative systems based on selected countries.

| | | Public administration serves whom? | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|
| | | Bureaucrats/politicians | Mixed | Citizens |
| Public administration structure | Concentrated | Eastern Europe | Central Europe, Latin America A | |
| | Somewhat deconcentrated | Latin America B | East Asia | |
| | Very deconcentrated | South Asia | | |

changes induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the “return of the state”, may have had profound effects on public administration systems that are not captured here. Third, even with this comparatively broad country coverage, the description of non-Western administrative systems remains patchy. Blind spots remain especially with regards to three country groups and regions: Africa, countries with authoritarian regimes especially in the Middle East, and small states. While the latter are scattered across various world regions, they are particularly concentrated in the Pacific area and Caribbean, which are not covered here, and have received only limited attention (Jugl et al. 2026). The exclusion of these countries is purely based on data availability. Future analyses could leverage regional data sources such as the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) or data by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) that allow for more intra-regional comprehensiveness (in terms of country coverage) and in-depth analysis (in terms of different aspects, e.g. of civil service systems) of variation within regions that could complement this inter-regional study.

Last but not least, I acknowledge the limitations of the country-level perspective taken here: This perspective reflects methodological nationalism, widely considered a Western-centric bias to treat the nation-state as the natural unit of analysis for studying social and political phenomena. In doing so, the article largely ignores transnational forces as well as local and non-Western forms of governance. For example, several contemporary manifestations of the consultative Islamic AT are located at the municipal level, reflecting a “parallel system of PA” (Drechsler and Chafik 2022, 64) with a modern formal system at the national level and a traditional, indigenous system operating at the local level. By focusing on the central level, which can be useful for some research aims, the present study may vastly underestimate the distinctness of non-Western administrations and the continued influence of domestic traditions.

5 | Conclusions

This article provided new insights on non-Western administrative systems by presenting, analyzing, and comparing detailed descriptive data across countries in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Results show that public administrations in non-Western countries differ clearly, in some regards but not in others, from each other and from Western countries, constituting more or less distinct groups. The empirical picture of contemporary administrative systems is thus more complicated and blurred than the simplified “traditions” used in the literature to describe them (Painter and Guy Peters 2010; Peters 2021; Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019). For instance, public administrations in Central Europe, parts of Latin America, and in the “Napoleonic tradition” countries in Southern Europe share similar values in Citizen orientation and Structural concentration (see Figure 1 and Table 4). This challenges some stylized (but not undisputed) descriptions in the literature²—that there is *one* Latin American and *one* post-communist administrative tradition—while supporting others—such as the distinction between East and South Asian administrations. While Table 4 also presents a simplified, broad-brush picture, it is based on a systematic and transparent comparison and empirical data.

How can the data and findings be used in future research? The general conclusion is to move beyond “labels”: on the one hand, this means to move beyond broad but contested concepts such as “administrative tradition” and specify the attributes or dimensions of administrative systems that are relevant for a specific study. On the other hand, it means to move beyond country families as labels especially when countries differ empirically from others in their geographic region. The data presented in this article can serve as a starting point for empirical descriptions of administrative systems.

The finding that administrative systems of some Western and Non-Western traditions overlap in practice may reflect continued Western influence during and after the colonial era. The role of precolonial domestic traditions and how far they influence post-colonial administrative systems or interact with colonial traditions deserves more attention in future research (Haque 2013). While we know *that* precolonial traditions continue in some contemporary practices in some Non-Western administrative systems (e.g., Drechsler and Chafik 2022), we know less about *how much* of an imprint they leave on the overall administrative system. Another important insight, especially but not only for practitioners is this: Although sluggish and difficult to change, administrative traditions are not set in stone, as illustrated by the case of Estonia. Aoki (2015) demonstrates with a rich qualitative analysis of Japan and Singapore that traditions, as referring to contemporary administrative systems, are the outcome of reform sequence and policy makers’ choices. Taken together, the findings suggest that moving toward a more global and empirically grounded comparative public administration requires both sensitivity to historical legacies and attention to present-day variation. By offering a transparent, data-based mapping of non-Western administrative systems, this article provides a foundation for such future work.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Practice Impact Statement

Administrative traditions, if clearly defined and based on comparative data, are a useful perspective to compare administrative systems and assess whether lessons on administrative reforms or development

programs can be transferred from one context to another. This comparison of 29 non-Western administrative systems identifies several (sub-)regional clusters: Central European and Eastern European, East Asian and South Asian, and two separate clusters in Latin America, but also uncovers variation within clusters. Shared historical legacies do not necessarily translate into similar administrative systems today.

Data Availability Statement

All data derived from public sources and shown in the main article.

Endnotes

¹ Africa is excluded only because there is no African country with all 10 variables available.

² While there is more nuanced empirical research on various aspects of public administration in these traditions, there is no consensus on more fine-grained labels of traditions. Thus, the broad tradition labels mentioned here are still dominant in the literature, representing stylized but not undisputed descriptions.

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