

Introduction to the Virtual Issue:
Advancing Public Policy Research through the Lens of Public Administration

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This virtual issue is a complement to *Public Administration Review (PAR)* editorial titled, “Epistemic Decolonization of Public Policy Pedagogy and Scholarship” (Pandey, Cheng, and Hall 2022). The editorial makes an argument for disciplinary decolonization of public policy. Epistemic decolonization of public policy research and pedagogy requires “putting more emphasis on public administration and other disciplines such as sociology and psychology, and less on political science and economics.” (Pandey, Cheng, and Hall 2022). We hope this virtual issue serves as a bridge to channel and elevate insights from public administration scholarship for public policy research.

We select and include 16 articles published at *PAR* in the last two years (2021 and 2022) in this virtual issue, representing key insights public administration scholarship can contribute to public policy research. We group these insights into four major themes and provide a brief summary of each article. In particular, we focus on public administration scholarship’s contributions in challenging the policy/politics and administration dichotomy, developing a deep understanding of bureaucracy, accounting for the human agency across different levels of management, and embracing different methodological approaches (particularly qualitative and mixed-methods research). We hope these articles’ methodological approaches, theoretical underpinnings, and analytical focus provide insights into a deeper understanding of how public policy is formulated, implemented, and evaluated.

The policy and administration dichotomy is oversold and misleading

The first major contribution public administration scholarship makes to public policy research is the recognition that policy and administration can never be neatly separated. This idea is deeply rooted in the rich discussion of the politics-administration dichotomy in public administration scholarship (e.g., Rosenbloom, 2008; Svara 1985). It is important to recognize multiple pathways through which policy and administration complement and influence each other. Here in this

virtual issue, we highlight four recent articles that provide nuances about how policy, politics, and administration interact with each other.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally reshaped how our society is governed and managed. It has important implications for how public administration is even more entangled with politics. Busuioc (2021) points out that while the use of AI and big data has been framed as efficient and “neutral”, it shapes many high-stake processes in our life, namely hiring and education decisions, enforcement decisions (policing), and liberty-restricting decisions (bail and sentencing). The use of AI algorithms is not purely technical and should be held accountable to the public. Transparent and interpretable models in the public sector should be prioritized over black-box alternatives. AI tools have a profound impact on administrative decision-making and bureaucratic discretion.

Yu and Jennings Jr. (2021) examine the conditional effects of competence on performance as moderated politics, using data on US state budget agencies from 1986 and 2008. They find that when budget agencies are highly politicized, the competence of budget agencies influences state fiscal performance in accordance with the preferences of Democratic and Republican elected officials when one or the other party controls state governments. In other words, the level of political control and policy preferences of elected officials jointly determine the impact of agency competency on state government fiscal performance.

Brudney, Cheng, and Meijs (2022) challenge the policy and administration dichotomy by empirically assessing how practicing public managers view their local governments’ involvement of citizens in different stages of coproduction, namely co-planning, co-designing, co-delivering, and co-assessing. Using a survey of a national sample of municipalities and counties in the U.S., their empirical analysis suggests that the implementation of coproduction can be measured along a unidimensional scale and that this measurement scale is robust across different subgroups. From the perspective of public managers, local governments’ involvement of citizens in planning, designing, delivering, and assessing services is interconnected. If local governments involve citizens in one type of coproduction, they are more likely to involve citizens in other types of coproduction of the same public service or somewhere else. They also find that local governments are more likely to implement coproduction when they have a larger population, provide more services, have a more professional form of government, and are located in the western U.S.

Bridging the distributive politics, collaborative governance, and regional governance literature, An and Bostic (2022) explore how institutional rules and power shape how metropolitan planning organizations in the United States allocate public investment from different levels of government to member municipalities for transportation projects. Their findings suggest that the

power structure of regional policy boards matters for the geographical distribution of public investments. The degree of power concentration of the dominant city seems to be key to whether the power of remaining cities also matters in this process. Rule-based allocation of power and the domination of a region's central city jointly determine where public investment goes for the regional government.

Deep conceptual and practical understanding of the workings of bureaucracy

Public administration scholarship also offers a deep conceptual and practical understanding of the role of bureaucracy in the policymaking and implementation processes. Here we highlight four recent papers published in *PAR* on this topic. Three of the four articles are systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses, demonstrating the rich history of public administration scholarship on bureaucracy.

Ding, Lu, and Riccucci (2021), through a meta-analysis of 648 effect sizes from 80 quantitative studies, examine the conditions under which bureaucratic representation affects public organizational performance. Their findings suggest that representative bureaucracy does have a positive impact on public organizational performance, and this positive impact is moderated by demographics and types of representation, levels of bureaucracy, and performance measurements. Bureaucratic representation is more effective for frontline or street-level bureaucrats than managers.

Campbell, Pandey, and Arnesen (2022) conduct a meta-narrative review of the red tape and administrative burden literature. They bridge these two lines of literature to understand the origin and impact of divisive public sector rules. The findings suggest that the design and quality of public sector rules have significant implications for policymakers, public servants, and citizens. Five distinct yet inter-connected themes emerge from this literature review: administrative performance, behavior impact, rule quality, impact on citizen access to public services and benefits, and administrative system politicization.

George, Pandey, Steijn, Decramer, and Audenaert (2021) ask the questions of what the impact of red tape is on organizational performance and which conditions moderate this impact. By conducting a meta-analysis and meta-regression of the existing public administration literature, the findings suggest a robust pattern across sectors, administrative traditions, and research methods that red tape has a significant, negative, and small-to-medium impact on both organizational performance and employee outcomes. In addition, red tape's negative impact is significantly smaller when red tape is imposed by external parties as opposed to by the organization itself.

Situated in the literature of representative bureaucracy, Headley, Wright, and Meier (2021) develop a micro-theory of symbolic representation to show the interplay between the symbolic benefits of passive representation and positive treatment by bureaucrats. With qualitative interviews in two cities with a high proportion of people of color and police officers of color, they further illustrate the utility of this theory. Their findings suggest that the demographic representativeness of the bureaucracy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for improving the state-citizen relationship. Public officers' attitudes and actions towards the public are key to shaping the public's perceptions of the bureaucracy.

Accounting for the human agency across different levels of management

Public leadership, employees, and their motivation in public services matter for the effective design and implementation of public policy. We include four recent papers that provide insights into the role and impact of human agency across different levels of management in the public bureaucracy. Backhaus and Vogel (2022) conduct a meta-analysis to understand under which conditions leadership does or does not make a difference in the public sector. From a meta-regression based on 486 effect sizes from 151 studies, the findings suggest that leadership in the public sector is positively related to beneficial outcomes, such as performance, and negatively associated with detrimental outcomes, such as turnover. How public leaders lead seems to not matter as long as they do lead. The impact of public leadership is stronger for the achievement of beneficial than for the prevention of detrimental outcomes, as well as for group- and organization-related than for employee-related outcomes.

Miller-Mor-Attias and Vigoda-Gadot (2021) use a three-phase longitudinal examination of public service motivation (PSM) and work values of Israeli students who gradually enter the job market. A cohort of 2,799 students was surveyed in late 2012 and a surviving final cohort of 558 respondents took part in the third stage of data collection in early 2015. The findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of intrinsic and collectivistic values, and an academic background in core public service studies demonstrated stronger PSM over time. Person-organization fit seems to be a key factor for public sector organizations to encourage PSM over time.

Belle and Cantarelli (2021) draw on the theory of normative conduct and nudge theory to experimentally test whether descriptive social norms have a positive impact on public employees' desired behaviors, namely vaccination, and help-seeking. Through a series of randomized controlled trials with 19,984 public healthcare professionals, they find that descriptive social norms do trigger conformity. Employees are more likely to get vaccinated or seek help when knowing that the majority of their colleagues in their organizations do the same.

Using ethnographic data from frontline public managers in Punjab, Pakistan, Masood, and Nisar (2022) investigate how street-level bureaucrats serve as policy entrepreneurs to use creativity and improvisation to solve on-the-ground local policy programs in resource-scare environments. They further define policy repair as the use of “creativity and innovation in their day-to-day work to find local and contextualized solutions for their localized service limitations, to overcome scarcity, and to deal with the vulnerability of bureaucratic systems.” (p.256) They find that these policy repair efforts are collaborative, client-centered, and compassionate in nature. Involving street-level bureaucrats in formal policy decisions is key to developing context-specific solutions to frontline public management challenges.

Embracing different methodological approaches, particularly qualitative and mixed-methods research

The final set of articles examine how qualitative and mixed-method studies contribute to a more nuanced understanding of policymaking and implementation. Bell, Ter-Mkrtyan, Wehde, and Smith (2021) utilize quantitative and qualitative data to examine street-level bureaucrats (SLB) policy preferences regarding administrative burden in a means-tested college access program-Oklahoma’s Promise. They find that political ideology matters for SLB’s interpretation of administrative burden policies. In particular, Conservative SLBs express significantly more support for administrative burden policies than liberal SLBs. Via analyzing open-ended survey questions, they find that this pattern is mainly driven by the SLB’s perception of client deservingness and social equity.

Althaus and O’Faircheallaigh (2022) use a qualitative study of Indigenous public servants in Canada and Australia to understand how bureaucratic representation works and how these public servants bring about policy change in these contexts. Following the four R approach, namely respect, relationship, reciprocity, and responsibility, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 participants in Canada and 18 participants in Australia. Their findings suggest that active representation by these Indigenous public servants presents a high price with respect to working in isolation, confronting racism, facing formidable obstacles to pursue, or challenging policy processes and outcomes aligned with the interests of the communities from which they come and ultimately leading many to exit the bureaucracy or forego career opportunities. Despite these obstacles, Indigenous bureaucrats are able to create policy change and (re)build trust between the government and the Indigenous communities.

Albert Meijer, Lukas Lorenz, and Martijn Wessels (2021) use in-depth qualitative research to conduct a comparative analysis of predictive policing in Berlin, Germany, and Amsterdam, Netherlands. They particularly focus on the process in which organizations rearrange their working routines around the use of algorithms or the algorithmization of bureaucratic organizations. Two emergent patterns are identified from the study: the algorithmic cage or the

hierarchical control by the algorithms, and the algorithmic colleague, or the room for professional judgment. Dominant social norms and interpretations seem to matter more than the technological features of algorithmic systems.

Situated in the context of the persistent racial leadership gap in the nonprofit sector, LeRoux and Medina (2022) use a mixed-method sequential design to understand the organizational and community-level factors that shape nonprofit organizations' decisions in hiring Black or Latino Executive Directors. In particular, they draw on the data from a national survey of 606 nonprofit organizations and interviews with 12 nonprofit executives in the Chicago metro area. Their findings suggest that increasing the representation of these groups on the governing board of nonprofit organizations plays an important role in attracting Black or Latino Executive Directors. However, the role of government funding in diversifying nonprofit executive leadership is not consistent. The combination of various sources of data and the mixed-method approach generates a greater degree of reliability in the findings and a more nuanced understanding of representation and nonprofit executive leadership.

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