Political Failure, Citizen Feedback, and Representative Bureaucracy: The Interplay of Politics, Public Management and Governance*

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Abstract: This article proposes that two major trends – the failure of political institutions and the globalization of minority rights – present major challenges for public administration. These changes mean that public administrators must now perform roles that were previously the realm of elected officials in relation to the broader public. Specific concerns related to the public's ability to evaluate programs and the enhanced role and limits on representative bureaucracy are discussed.

Keywords: Political failure, globalization of minority rights, citizen feedback, representative bureaucracy, comparative public management

Public administration has become both intellectually and in practice an international field. Gone are the days when scholars might immerse themselves in the detail of a single country and be able to ignore the literature from elsewhere. Scholarship in Asia and Europe now rivals, and in many cases exceeds the scholarship from North America. Investments in the academic human capital produced by major universities have been matched by exceptionally valuable data particularly in

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South Korea, Denmark, and the Netherlands among others. Korean data sets on public schools, for example, now have multiyear panels with surveys of multiple stakeholders and incorporate numerous different performance indicators (Chun and Song 2017). Danish data sets have exceptional access to individual level data that allow surveys and other data gathering techniques to be matched with virtually unlimited detail on individuals (Hjortskov 2019).

The internationalization of public administration has emphasized the tradeoff in scholarship between context and generalization. We seek generalization, statements about public management and its impact that are always true everywhere, or perhaps even better always false; we would like to find universal truths. At the same time our data keep telling us that context matters, sometimes national context (O'Toole and Meier 2015; Meier et al. 2015), sometimes political context (Meier and Rutherford 2017), other times organizational context (Capers 2018; Meier and O'Toole 2009) or many times just the variation in individuals (Carroll 2017). As the result of this outpouring of findings, the need for comparative theorizing and comparative analysis has never been more essential.

Despite the extensive differences in context across nations, common trends affect us all to a greater or lesser degree. We have all weathered the new public management and the religious fervor that the private sector can solve all of government's problems. Two new trends are now challenging the status quo of public management. The first is what I term "the failure of politics," the inability of or unwillingness to resolve political disputes and essentially abdicate the political function necessary for effective governance (Meier et al. 2019). The second is the globalization of minority rights, starting among indigenous populations in Latin America thirty years ago (Yashar 2005) and now through international media world-wide with minorities within nations having ties and allies in other countries, thus creating pressures to minimize unequal policy treatments and to create more representative bureaucracies. Demands for social equity are being pressed in Myanmar, Israel, Turkey, China, Nigeria and countless other countries. What were once national issues now become international issues as illustrated by the spread of Black Lives Matter protests from the US to the United Kingdom, France and other countries.

THREE MACRO-FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

The failure of politics and the globalization of minority rights fundamentally change the relationship between public administrators and their political sover-

eigns. They generate major challenges for public administration in terms of three macro-functions of public managers – interpreting political sovereigns, that is figuring out what elected and other governing officials want, relating to clients/citizens and their feedback, and representing the interests of those citizens/clients. I see these functions as encompassing the major roles public administrators play in terms of executing the policy decisions of elected officials, responding to public needs, and filling in the existing gaps in representation.

First, public managers play a role in all steps in the policy process in terms of interpreting political sovereigns. They provide the options and support for those options when policies are formulated including potential problems that are likely to occur when policies hit the field (Rourke 1969). They engage in the traditional implementation of programs, providing the detail and the applications necessary to turn policy goals in actual programs (O'Toole 2000). And public managers play a major role in providing the policy feedback that elected officials need to determine if policy is working and what the next steps might be (Moynihan and Soss 2014).

Second, public managers need to relate to citizens/clients. This essay will not distinguish between clients and citizens since bureaucrats not only deliver programs to noncitizens but are often mandated to do so (US policy, for example, requires that public schools educate all children whether citizens, legal residents, or undocumented individuals). The interface of public managers with citizens/clients is a fundamental part of the feedback and accountability systems that are used to evaluate and recraft public policy. Some of this feedback is passed through to the political sovereigns, but much of it stays within the public management realm to improve the process of service delivery.

The manager citizen interface is complicated by the evolution of how public programs are designed and delivered. The idea of a "public program" has expanded well beyond the scope of direct implementation by government agencies. Public programs are implemented via public, private for-profit, and private nonprofit organizations often in highly complex networks of service delivery where no single person is in charge (O'Toole 1997). Governments decide what is and is not a public program, and that decision itself is a public policy whether implemented by a government agency or myriad other institutional forms or even via the creation of individual incentives. How the public responds to these various forms of service delivery and the biases of that response are part of the charge of contemporary public administrators.

Third, at times public administrators engage in representation to advocate the interests of their clients or facilitate the delivery of services. This action has become more important with the internationalization of minority rights and the

expectations that government needs to address persistent inequalities. Bureaucratic representation, far from being a challenge to democratic governance, can bring positive tangible and symbolic benefits to the delivery of public services.

INTERPRETING POLITICAL SOVEREIGNS

A recent symposium in *Administration & Society* documented some world-wide trends that indicate political sovereigns are less interested in governance and more interested in permanent electioneering (Meier, et al. 2019). Although some of this change can be viewed as the rise of populism (Peters and Pierre 2019; Rockman 2019), there are fundamental changes in the governance process as a result. We have seen the rise and persistence of political stalemates with countries such as Belgium and Israel failing to create governments and relying on caretaker arrangements. Even in cases with established governments such as the United States, we see a failure of the budget process by which I mean the failure to produce a budget or address policy issues within the budget. These stalemates and the quest for subsequent electoral advantages have led to the creation of symbolic policies with little chance of working (witness the futile effort to save the coal mining industry in the US and Poland). The stalemates have led to a rejection of science and analysis in the policy process; while the case of climate change is the most prominent example it is hardly the only one. In other cases, it has led countries to seek to be free riders (e.g., Australia's unwillingness to reduce carbon emissions despite the impact of climate change on the country; or China's rejection of intellectual property rights). In other cases, nations seek to turn collective efforts into profit making enterprises such as the Trump administration's effort to force Korea and other countries to pay for the basing of US troops (Starr 2020).

The failure of politics is often accompanied by a politicization of the administrative process. Cases in point include President Trump directly criticizing the sentencing recommendations of Department of Justice prosecutors in the Roger Stone case, and the reversal of military discipline in war crimes trials (Philipps 2020), among others.

As I have argued in the past (Meier et al. 2019), this failure of politics requires public managers to perform both political and administrative functions (Goodnow 1900), and that is not easy to do. Public managers are generally not trained to aggregate preferences, to make political deals, and to present policy issues directly to the public, but they increasingly need to do so. Political functions that used to be limited a small portion of public managers such as city managers in the United

States and at times US School Superintendents have become widely diffused to other public administrators.

The failure of politics also disconnects the democratic process, which relies on the link between citizens and elected officials to provide guidance to public managers. If government managers do not get clear signals from above about policy and priorities, then feedback directly from citizens/clients becomes not just more valuable but essential in operating programs. This increases the importance of performance management and performance appraisal systems. They now not only provide feedback on whether programs are working but also generate information on what citizens expect from government. In a sense public feedback becomes part of the process of preference aggregation.

REGISTERING CLIENT/CITIZEN FEEDBACK

Learning directly from citizens/clients on the performance of programs and what the public wants has faced much academic skepticism. Historically, the studies have found mixed results on whether the public understands and can accurately judge the performance of government and government programs (Andrews, Boyne and Walker 2006). More recent evidence, however, suggests that citizens can make these judgements and under the right conditions can do so for a variety of programs.

Much of this work has examined schools simply because schools have been the focus of major efforts in creating performance systems and seeking to establish accountability for outcomes in a policy area with multiple and often conflicting goals. In work on New York City Schools, Charbonneau and Van Ryzin (2012) and Favero and Meier (2013) show that parents' assessments of schools are positively associated with test scores, with administrative assessments of performance, with changes in performance, with student attendance, and negatively with violence in the schools. Parent assessments of the schools are also positively correlated with teachers' assessments of the same schools, and these assessments remain correlated even with controls for all the objective performance indicators. The analysis suggests that parents and teachers see something positive beyond test scores in the performance of schools, and these perceptions are reciprocally related over time.

Song and Meier (2018) extend this study with a superior data set from South Korea that contains individual data allowing one to match parents, students, and schools with each other. This data set permits them to ask whether parents are judging schools by how well their own child is doing or if they are basing their assess-

ment on all students. Although both the child's performance and the school's performance are related to perceptions of educational quality, parents are more sensitive to how the school in general is doing than how their own child is performing. This is a sophisticated distinction and has real implications for seeing education as a public good rather than a private good and poses a challenge to individualistic assessments of government performance in terms of direct self-interest (e.g., Tiebout 1956). Additional analysis shows that these assessments interact with each other; that is, the highest evaluations are those that show results for the parent's child and the school at large.

Song, An, and Meier (2020) extend these studies cross-nationally using data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 16 countries. This data set contains individual student's math, science and reading scores as well as both administrative data and survey data from parents. In general, they find a positive relationship between student performance (both individual and at the school level) and parents' assessments of the schools, but the relationship only exists in some of the countries. In general, however, the relationship is stronger at the school level (consistent with the findings from Korea) than at the individual student level.

Additional data gathered from teachers, principals and other school officials, however, allows the authors to determine if there are things that government can do to strengthen the relationship between school performance and parents' assessments of that performance. The authors focus on the variable of local autonomy in terms of setting standards for performance, allocating human resources, and the ability to raise funding. The research finds that the best correspondence between test scores and parents' assessments exist when the standards are set nationally, and local schools have autonomy in the acquisition and use of human resources. Autonomy in the ability to raise funds for education does not appear to matter. The authors suggest that this works because national standards give parents a clear criterion of comparison (see Olsen 2017) and does not let local government game the system by setting low standards (as occurs at the state level in the United States) and because it permits the schools to hire and train teachers who can best serve the needs to the students, needs that are likely to vary from location to location as the result of differences in language, economic development, and other factors.

Setting national standards and allowing local autonomy in human resources are only two things governments could do to strengthen the tie between citizen/client assessments and existing measures of government performance. Some of these changes are simple, for example, providing the information to the public in a clear and transparent manner. As a German colleague noted, German schools would

never inform parents about students' performance on standardized tests such as the PISA tests. A key public management function, as a result, is designing performance systems that allow for the public to understand and use them.

Given the focus on education in the above studies, a fair question is whether education is unique and whether these relationships would hold in other policy areas. Education after all is highly relevant to users, users and parents are easily identified and have incentives to learn about school performance, and education is generally an understandable process. To address that question, let me move to a policy area that is marked by high levels of information asymmetry that are likely to limit the public understanding of performance – hospitals (Cheon, et al. 2019).

The United States surveys hospital users 42 days after discharge on the perceived quality of care that the patients received. This is a somewhat controversial program in that hospitals are critical of patient assessments and believe that the results are driven by access to pain medicine and other factors not linked to good health care practices. These patient post-assessments can be compared to three sets of indicators of performance. The 30-day hospital readmission rates are the percentage of patients who are readmitted to a hospital with the same diagnosis within 30 days implying that the problem was not corrected on the first visit. The post-audit quality of care measures are highly specific assessments based on the problem diagnosis (e.g., with diagnosis X, was Y done in a timely manner?); these are highly technical measures of accepted medical practice. The 30-day mortality rate is the percentage of discharged patients who die with 30 days (related to the original concern that led to hospitalization). These health care measures include both process (quality of care) and outcomes (readmissions, deaths). It is important to realize that one can have a perfect process and still have a bad outcome simply because the patient's problem could not be fixed; it is also possible to have a poor process, but the patient gets better in spite of the less than optimal treatment. In addition, in this case the information asymmetry is massive; most patients have no idea if doctor is doing what he or she is supposed to be doing.

The study (Cheon, et al. 2019) showed that patient satisfaction was positively correlated with the clinical process of care measures and negatively with hospital readmission rates. These relationships also held when examining specific diagnoses such as heart failure, pneumonia, and others. The patient satisfaction measures were not associated with the 30-day mortality rates; whether this reflects the mismatching timing of the two measures (30 days versus 42 days) or something else is not clear.

But What About Citizen/Client Biases

Although evidence is starting to accumulate that citizens/clients can judge the quality of government services, there is extensive research from psychology and political science suggesting that in some cases individuals have strong biases and are likely to discount information no matter how objective. This phenomenon is termed "motivated reasoning" (Baekgaard and Serritzlew 2016; Marvel 2015b) and is linked to classical theories in psychology such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962). Essentially individuals are likely to interpret new information in light of previously held strong beliefs, accepting information that is consistent with these beliefs and rejecting information that is inconsistent. The problem of bias as it relates to public administration is concisely framed by John Marvel (2015a; 2015b) who notes that individuals in the United States (and likely other countries see Baekgaard and Serritzlew 2016; Hvidman and Andersen 2016) perceive that in the absence of any evidence that the public sector performs worse than the private sector and that information on good performance by government agencies is discounted so that government does not get credit for positive achievements.

Two studies among several will illustrate the problem. Marvel's (2015a; 2015b) experimental study of the US Postal Service finds a consistent pattern of underestimating government performance and discounting positive information about the postal service. Hvidman and Andersen (2016), in an experimental study using Danish college students, finds that the students rate private hospitals superior in effectiveness to public hospitals despite equal levels of performance. Their experiment also provides a performance cue where the hospital hires a consultant who provides a positive report on the hospital's performance, but this positive report has no impact on the students' evaluation of the public hospital (or the private hospital). Hvidman and Andersen further argue that if an anti-public sector bias such as this exists in a country like Denmark with a massive public sector and without a long tradition of bureaucrat bashing, then the bias should be much worse in cases such as the US.

Meier, Johnson and An (2019) replicate the Danish hospital experiment in the US with two additional changes; they add in the possibility that a hospital will be a nonprofit organization (the largest group in the US, see Meier and An 2020) and use an internet sample of adults rather than students (although they replicate the study with students and get similar results). The striking finding of these US studies is that there is no bias in regard to sector on any performance dimension (effectiveness, efficiency, red tape, or benevolence); and none of the hospitals get any positive benefit from hiring a consultant who subsequently provides a report that is

positive about the hospital's performance. So while the US finding of no sector bias supports the argument for including citizen/client assessments in performance appraisal systems, the lack of response to the consultant report is problematic.

One possible reason why individuals do not respond positively to the consultant report is that such a report might be open to a variety of interpretations. Because the hospital hires the consultant, individuals might be concerned about whether the consultant was credible in terms of independence and objectivity. In addition, the consultant report while positive might be too ambiguous to be convincing since it was relatively general.

Meier, Song, Davis and Amirkhanyan (2020) extend the work on sector biases to elder care with an experimental study of nursing homes in the United States. They find that without any performance information, the biases generally favor nonprofit, and at times government-run, homes; for-profit homes are perceived the most negatively (the bias was relatively modest). Although this might suggest some bias, this relative order is consistent with objective assessments of nursing home quality by government inspectors (Amirkhanyan et al. 2008). Meier et al. (2020) opted to use an unambiguous performance cue, a rating on a five star scale, arguing that this was the actual rating used by the official government rating organization (The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) and was similar to official ratings for hospitals and many school systems in the US. When individuals are given performance information in this experiment, all biases disappear; and there is no difference among the sectors. Only the rating matters. In addition, while many studies find a negativity bias where bad news is given more weight than positive news (consistent with prospect theory, Tversky and Kahneman 1981), the relative weights of positive and negative information were of the same magnitude. The credibility of who did the rating also mattered; credibility was given to the official government rating organization and to a private nonprofit rating organization, but not to consumer ratings posted on the internet.

Additional work by Davis (2020) examines other substantive policy areas. In an experimental study using universities, she finds that the only sector bias is related to the for-profit sector with individuals evaluating those universities negatively but giving relatively equal ratings to public and nonprofit universities. These ratings are again consistent with empirical reality given that US for-profit universities such as Trump University have frequently been involved in major scandals related to poor performance and high student loan defaults (Hafner 2018; Surowiecki 2015; Vasquez and Bauman 2019). Davis also examines housing programs for the poor and again finds a bias against for-profit organizations and a more favorable view of nonprofit organizations (with public organizations in the middle).

These findings suggest that while there are cases where anti-public sector bias exists that for the most part it does not interfere with the public's ability to evaluate many existing programs. This research implies that the public can evaluate programs if given the appropriate information. To enhance the capabilities of a democratic system, this means that agencies can structure performance information to facilitate the ability of the public to make judgements about programs. Providing unambiguous information that is easy to interpret and compare appears to allow the general public to successfully evaluate programs (see Olsen 2017). Research in public administration can contribute to this process by examining how one communicates both the general performance of agency programs at one level for the general public and at more detailed levels for those interested in in-depth assessments.

BUREAUCRATIC REPRESENTATION

As public managers need to incorporate political functions as well as administrative functions, the role of representative bureaucracy also becomes important. After all, representation is an essential part of the democratic process, and bureaucracies can represent either via the traditional top down linkage to democratic institutions or by a bottom up aggregation of citizen/client preferences. Representative bureaucracy has traditionally been a US-centric literature reflecting the country's decentralized political structure (see Long 1952). In a decentralized system with fragmented political power, there are incentives for bureaucracies to build independent power bases; and one aspect that can facilitate this is representation. Despite its narrow origins, representative bureaucracy has become a truly comparative literature with work by Hong (2016a; 2016b) and Andrews and Miller (2013) in the United Kingdom, Guul (2018) in Denmark, Song (2018) in South Korea, Fernandez (2019) in South Africa, Agyapong (2017) in Ghana, and Baekgaard and George (2018) in Belgium among others (see the on-line data base at https://perg-au.com/documents/2019/4/RBdatabase.html). This international focus ties into contextual theories of representative bureaucracy that seek to determine the conditions that facilitate or limit representative bureaucracy (Meier 2019).

Representative Bureaucracy as Instrumental

Representative bureaucracy has always been somewhat controversial in public administration given that organizations engage in an extensive socialization process to moderate or eliminate the values and beliefs that employees bring to the organi-

zation. The tension between bureaucratic representation and organizational socialization, in fact, is the driving force behind much of the theoretical and empirical work in representative bureaucracy (Romzek and Hendricks 1982). Organizational socialization is designed to persuade employees to subordinate their own values to those of the organization and thus to increase the productivity of the organization (Barnard 1938). The tension between socialization and representation occurs because representation is perceived as something that might encourage a bureaucrat to make a decision that would not be otherwise made and that would reduce the organization's effectiveness. Although this logic has motivated substantial research examining the assumption of conflict between socialization and representation (Carroll 2017; Dolan 2002; Gidengil and Vengroff 1997; Romzek and Hendricks 1982), it is useful to reexamine the relationship theoretically because there are reasons to believe that the two do not always lead to cross pressures. In essence the question is whether or not representation can be instrumental in the eyes of the organization – might it lead to a more effective agency and under what conditions might that be possible.

The socialization concerns (and the bias concerns see Lim 2006) focus on active representation at the individual level that results in decisions that would not normally be generated by the bureaucracy, but several other cases of active representation can be viewed as instrumental in terms of agency goals. First, there might cases where the minority bureaucrats engage in policy discussions with others in the organization and persuade the organization to change policies. As an example, minority teachers might convince a school that in-school suspensions are superior to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (see Roch, Pitts and Navarro 2010), and such ameliorative forms of discipline appear to have fewer negative consequences than punishment-oriented discipline. The result will be changes in disciplinary practices that benefit minority students and nonminority students with the end result being better school performance. Active representation that generates *policy* changes would need to be evaluated for whether or not the policy changes are instrumental; they cannot on their face be considered negative for the organization unless organization socialization has to be considered static rather than something that evolves as the organization changes.[1]

Second, the minority identity being represented might match up well with the mission of the agency. The US military has long over-represented individuals from

1. Eckhard (2014) presents an interesting case of a problematic United Nation's failure in Kosovo that he attributes in part to the lack of bureaucratic representation and thus the absence of any advocacy for minority positions in the process.

Southern states where the military is held in high regard and seen as a potential career (Kane 2006). A similar tradition involves the elite Welsh Guard units in the United Kingdom which appear to cultivate traditional Welsh identities from a historic tradition (Harnden 2011). More directly, representation of lived experiences (see Park 2020; Zamboni 2019) is often used when drug treatment programs rely on former drug addicts as counselors or when former convicts are used to operate halfway houses for transitioning prisoners (Hecksher 2007; Park 2020). These lived experiences are thought to give bureaucrats insights that contribute to more effective implementation (Park 2020).

Third, this second element of active representation implies a range of other instrumental representations that would occur if the minority bureaucrat brings skills to the organization that improve the functioning of the organization. For example, a US police officer who speaks Spanish (or another language spoken in the community) has a greater chance of effective communication with residents and thus is more likely to gain information that solves crimes. Calderon (2018), in a study of immigration enforcement in the US, demonstrated that policies designed to increase language diversity in law enforcement were associated with fewer overall stops and arrests but more arrests of individuals with serious criminal records. In short, immigration officers were better able to meet the goals of the organization. The minority bureaucrat might not bring skills per se but a better understanding of the needs of the clientele. The use of former drug addicts in treatment programs operates under this premise (Park 2020). This understanding is especially important in minority and immigrant communities where cultural norms differ from those of the rest of population.

Fourth, minority bureaucrats might also bring more valuable skills to the organization as the result of segmented labor markets. Research on education has long demonstrated that women teachers in K-12 education have higher levels of skills than male teachers as the result of long historical stereotyping of teaching as a female profession (for cross national results on this question see An, Song, and Meier 2020). A similar pattern appears in Texas where talented first generation Latinos opt for teaching careers over other professions because they see teaching as a profession that is open to them (Meier and O'Toole 2006).[2] The special skills argument is a general case of the contention in two somewhat distinct literatures. The diversity management literature contends that more diverse workforces bring a wider range of ideas and information to the organization with the result that this

2. A classical example of this in the private sector is the extensive over representation among high steel construction workers among the Mohawk (see Blanchard 1983).

should generate better quality decisions (Ashikali and Groeneveld 2015; Groeneveld and Verbeek 2012). The representative bureaucracy and distributional equity literature (Meier, Wrinkle and Polinard 1999) contends that nonrepresentative bureaucracies are likely to discriminate in the labor market and thus have lower quality employees.

Fifth, given that many public programs are implemented through networks of public, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations in nonhierarchical delivery systems (O'Toole 1997), minority bureaucrats might bring their own unique networks to the organization, networks that majority bureaucrats cannot access. For example, the outreach of US government programs in the African-American community can be greatly aided by the multifunctional nature of African-American churches, and one would expect that many African-American bureaucrats would have pre-existing ties to such organizations (McDaniel 2009).[3] These ties might be useful to the agency both in terms of program implementation but also in terms of building political support in the community.

In addition to these active representation aspects that are instrumental for the organization, there are also two cases where symbolic representation is likely to benefit the organization. First, there are several documented cases in the literature where symbolic representation appears to change the behavior of clients in such a way that it benefits the organization: greater parental involvement in schools (Vinopal 2018), willingness of women to report sexual assaults (Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006), and a greater trust of police officers among African Americans (Riccucci, Van Ryzin and Jackson 2018). Second, it is possible that contagion effects exist whereby the presence of minority bureaucrats changes the behavior of majority bureaucrats or gives them access to better understanding of client needs (Atkins and Wilkins 2013).

These instrumental aspects of representative bureaucracy either active or symbolic not only challenge the empirical and normative contentions of those opposed to representative bureaucracy, but also link into the growing literature that finds representative bureaucracies are more effective (see among others Meier, Wrinkle and Polinard 1999; Hong 2016a; 2016b; Roch, Pitts and Navarro 2010; Andrews, Ashworth and Meier 2014; Schuck and Rabe-Hemp 2016).

3. The same argument can be applied to the various minority social service fraternities and sororities.

Politics and Representation

Given that representation is a political function, it should not be surprising that bureaucratic representation is affected by political factors. In their study of the 1800 largest school districts in the United States, Meier and Rutherford (2017) find that African-American teachers have a substantially larger influence on positive outcomes for African-American children in school districts where the Democratic party has a voting majority (the overwhelming majority of African Americans vote for Democratic candidates). These influences which range from gifted class assignments to disciplinary outcomes to test scores and graduation are often three times larger in Democratic districts and at times fall to insignificance in Republican districts.

Extending this political logic using data on international test scores, An, Song, and Meier (2020) examine 44 countries around the world focusing on the relationship between female math teachers and girls' math scores. They find that a relationship between passive representation and positive results for girls appears in some countries and not in others; at times the relationship is negative. The authors examine two political variables – whether the country has policies that support gender equity and the percentage of the national legislative seats held by women. Passive representation matters more for policy outcomes when countries have adopted gender equity policies and when women have greater representation in the national legislature. The authors suggest these variables operate as symbols that encourage bureaucrats to represent and encourage female children to invest more in education given its potential payoff. Reinforcing this latter point is a draft study by Choe (2019) on Korean higher education where she shows that more women on the faculty are associated with higher college graduation rates for women, but that this does not translate into employment opportunities outside the university.

Another factor that matters in enhancing representative bureaucracy in the cross-national context is simply democracy itself. Meier, An and Song (2020) examine 65 countries again using international test scores and gender representation. They find that passive representation matters only in countries that are rated highly on international measures of democracy. In fact, their analysis shows negative relationships for passive representation of women in authoritarian countries, likely representing a conscious policy of not investing in education for girls.

Symbolic or Active Representation

Despite the growing literature on representative bureaucracy, most studies can-

not determine if the changes in bureaucratic outputs or outcomes associated with passive representation result because bureaucrats actively represent the clients or whether clients change their behavior without any action on the part of bureaucrats. With the exception of studies where any results could only be because clients change behavior (e.g., the willingness of victims to report cases of sexual assault, see Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006; Schuck and Rabe-Hemp 2016) or where there are indirect indicators of the efforts of bureaucrats and clients (Guul 2018), most studies simply do not have the ability to separate these processes. In a study of gender representation in Chinese schools, Xu and Meier (2020) use a mixed methods approach to distinguish between active and symbolic representation. Their quantitative analysis shows that girls' math scores are higher when the students are taught by a female math teacher, but interviews with teachers and administrators provide no evidence of active representation. Both female teachers and administrators, in fact, reject the notion that they do anything different to aid girl students; both often hold values that are consistent with the stereotype that boys are better at math than girls despite evidence to the contrary. Female principals, in fact, explicitly state that if they have a choice between hiring a male math teacher and a female math teacher who are equally qualified, they would hire the male math teacher. In this situation, any representation impact would be via symbolic representation where female students change behaviors. Although this is a single study in country that is not likely to be supportive of representative bureaucracy (a centralized education system in a nondemocratic country with major gender inequities), the study does provide an illustration of how other studies might distinguish between symbolic and active representation.

The Limits of Symbolic Representation

Symbolic representation holds out the promise that bureaucracies will be more effective or perceived as more effective without actually changing anything that bureaucrats do. While this seems like a boon to bureaucracies to gain the benefits of representation without expending any additional effort, probing the microtheory behind symbolic representation, however, suggests that there are clear limits to symbolic representation. Why might a client change behavior simply because the visible identity of the bureaucrat matches that of the citizen? The logic is that the client sees a bureaucrat who looks like them and assumes that they share common experiences. As a result, the client thinks that the bureaucrat is more likely to respond to the problems that the client faces and treat them fairly. Why might they have these expectations? These are expectations that come from lived experiences;

often with nonbureaucrats and often colored by experiences with racism or sexism or other forms of discrimination. All of these experiences contribute to a Bayesian prior in regard to how the client expects to be treated.

The symbolic logic, however, is based on the notion that you have no prior experience with either the individual bureaucrat or the bureaucratic agency represented by the bureaucrat. Any prior experience is likely to adjust this Bayesian prior in the direction of the experience. If an African-American parent has found that African-American teachers are more interested in their child or have been more effective in teaching their child, they are likely to increase their expectation that an African-American teacher will benefit their child and respond with greater parental coproduction (Vinopal 2018). Just as positive experiences adjust the expectation upward, negative expectations adjust the expectation downward.

Bureaucratic interactions in this logic might be considered the equivalent of a repeat game with each interaction resulting in an adjustment of priors. The client then adjusts his or her behavior (level of trust, perception of legitimacy) accordingly. This logic suggests clear limits to symbolic representation. If a black man is consistently treated poorly by black police officers or sees that behavior affect others like himself, he is likely to see the police officer as blue (or even white) not black. Wright's (2018) analysis of the Washington DC police, as an example, reveals substantial public skepticism among blacks of the DC police despite that the force actually over represents blacks. Rosenbaum et al. (2005) find that attitudes toward the police are affected by both prior encounters and encounters between the police and others that the citizen knows about. As one moves to the extremes in this behavior, the limits are clearly obvious from the historical examples of Vichy France or Quisling Norway. The use of Irish troops to suppress Irish revolts against the United Kingdom generated little symbolic representation benefits and likely further inflamed tensions (see also van Gool 2008 on caste in India).

CONCLUSION

Contemporary public management is facing the twin challenges of failing political processes and the need to better represent the public, particularly minorities and disadvantaged segments of the population. Effective governance requires a political process that resolves conflict, creates goals for public programs, and provides those programs with the resources and autonomy needed to operate. Numerous cases worldwide illustrate that political institutions no longer perform these important policy functions (see Meier et al. 2019; Peters and Pierre 2019; Rockman 2019),

with the result that public managers now must perform these political functions along with the traditional administrative side of policy. In particular, the failure of politics severs the democratic linkage that flows from the public to elected officials to appointed bureaucrats, and bureaucrats need to augment or replace this political process completely.

Two key bureaucratic functions were examined in depth – the ability to create performance appraisal systems that the public can use to register their support or opposition to existing programs and the representation of the public directly by bureaucrats. Substantial evidence now exists that under the right conditions, the public can understand and evaluate the effectiveness of government programs. Public administration scholars need to augment existing work to better understand how optimal performance information can be communicated to facilitate public engagement. Bureaucratic representation, in turn, needs to be understood in its broader context as it reflects the political system. The costs and benefits of bureaucratic representation will clearly vary across countries. Despite the tensions between bureaucracy and democracy, representative bureaucracy appears to only exist within democratic contexts that sanction or at least tolerate it.

If the conclusions of this article are correct, the role of public administrators and the role of public administration research has gotten more difficult. We need to deal with both administrative and political challenges. Our studies need to do so within the varying national contexts that shape the relation between bureaucracy and governance. Fortunately, quality public administration research is broadly distributed cross-nationally to be able to deal with these challenges.

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