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Public Administration in Democratic Governance

Few phenomena in public life are probably more misunderstood than public administration. It is customary to think of public administration, or public bureaucracies as they are often called, as rigid organizations more concerned with promoting their own interests than catering to the needs of their clients. The more extreme images of the bureaucracy tend to portray these public organizations as essentially exoskeletons of power and control, accountable to no one. Political rhetoric, fictional literature but also a surprising amount of academic work is replete with these images of public administration. These caricatures also serve political purposes. Parties and politicians on the political right advocating extensive tax cuts and cutbacks in the public service need to instill an image of an inefficient, costly and power-minded bureaucracy to sustain their claim that taxes can be cut dramatically without any noticeable difference to the rest of society. And parties of the political left have criticized public administration for being insensitive to the needs of the disadvantaged in society.

Yet these public institutions organize public transport in cities, manage service facilities for children and the elderly, provide emergency rescue services, maintain infrastructure, and help ensure safety and security to citizens. They are charged with the fundamental task of implementing public policy and upholding legal authority. To be sure, it is difficult to think of any significant public service that is not delivered by the public bureaucracy or a private contractor working for the bureaucracy. Furthermore, while it is certainly true that administrative decisions can have a major impact on the lives of clients and citizens – from issuing a driver's license to sentencing individuals to serve time in prison or having them deported – that administrative authority is conducted under supervision and accountability.

Given this centrality of the public administration in fundamental public affairs such as policy implementation and service delivery, at least in the Western democratic world, the public administration is integral to democratic governance. However, this perspective has been overlooked for a long time, with the public bureaucracy treated to a large extent as a system of organizations on its own. For instance, in the United States, public administration and political science have become different academic disciplines; an arrangement which has prevented many observers from observing the inherently political and democratic mission of the public bureaucracy. Many political scientists now do not appear to realize that most of the work of governing is done through public administrators.

It is also a mistake to think of the public bureaucracy as a rigid, self-referential system unable or unwilling to change and modernize. There are few, if any, areas of the public sector that have undergone more extensive reform over the past couple of decades than the public administration. Public organizations have to a significant extent increased their efficiency in delivering service and to operate in closer contact with their clients. New models for measuring the performance of the bureaucracy have been developed and are today an essential instrument in the management of most public organizations. Managers have been given greater autonomy, allowing them to organize their work in an efficient and professional way. Basically all major systems in the public administration, from human resource management to budgeting and accounting, have been thoroughly modernized over the past several years.

It is fair to say that public administration scholars in general tend to be closer to their object of study than are most other political scientists or economists. The linkages between academia and public administration have historically been strong. The positive aspect of this close relationship between practitioners and scholars is that research is more likely to be relevant to practice. The main downside of this arrangement is that research may become atheoretical and mainly concerned with documenting and studying practice without wider reflection or theoretical criteria for assessment (see Bogason and Brans, 2008; Peters and Pierre, 2016). There are also examples of the opposite pattern, where we can see students of public administration deliberately removing themselves from administrative practice in order to apply abstract deductive theory. Strange as it perhaps might seem, building theory means that you have to remove context and formulate more general statements about how, in this case, public administration behaves and what might account for that behavior. What is gained in terms of generalizations is lost in the lack of attention to detail.

Public administration has for long suffered from being undertheorized. Dwight Waldo once described public administration as a 'subject matter in search of a discipline' (1968: 2), an observation that remains relevant to date. There are both positive and negative aspects of this state of affairs. The positive aspect is that an explicitly multidisciplinary research area draws on theories from a multitude of academic disciplines. The main downside is that, paradoxically, this multitude of relevant theories has led many scholars in the field of public administration away from theory altogether. There is a disturbing tendency among some public administration scholars to avoid complex

theoretical or normative issues and instead rely on administrative practice as a yardstick of research quality. Instead the philosophy seems to be that as long as practitioners recognize their work in the analyses presented by scholars, this is proof of the quality of the research. Instead of deriving benchmarks and criteria for assessment from theory and investigating the degree to which practice meets those criteria, such a strategy of research runs a real risk of elevating practice to standard or even to ideals.

It is equally erroneous to think that one can gain an understanding of a public organization, or any organization, for that matter, without having at least some interaction with that organization. Although the organizations that make up a public bureaucracy operate under similar rules and management philosophies, they differ in many other respects, which means that understanding any individual organization cannot be achieved only through observations at the systemic level. We insist that public administration can and should serve both academic and practice-oriented interests and that indeed it is not possible to deliver good-quality public administration without considering both the theoretical aspects as well as the practice of public administration. Part of the reason why many scholars choose not to address conceptual and theoretical issues is that public administration is by definition a multidisciplinary area of research. Some scholars have made great efforts in separating the study of public administration from other social science disciplines. This has particularly been the case in the United States, where public administration is its own academic discipline. Meanwhile others have emphasized the close relationship to disciplines such as sociology, organization theory, economics and political science. Thus, there is no single core of defining theories in public administration.

Again, we argue that close dialogue between the study and the practice of public administration is central to the development of both. Scholars of administration cannot come up with meaningful research questions without engaging practitioners – indeed, most universities today strongly emphasize engagement as a key activity for its academic staff – and practitioners often lack the national and international overview required to design effective reform or devise models for evaluating the organization's performance. Scholars also have a role in stepping back from the object they study; in deriving yardsticks and benchmarks from conceptual and theoretical analysis; and in applying that framework to empirical cases. We need to understand public administration through a variety of analytic perspectives. This enables us to both understand the institutions involved in delivering public services and to evaluate its performance.

This book offers an advanced introduction to public administration as a field of practice and as a research field. Throughout the book we will be pursuing the argument that public administration matters a great deal, in several different ways. The institutions and people that make up the public bureaucracy are essential to policy implementation – often also policy advice – and are thus key components of democratic government and governance. Furthermore, while we as voters have an opportunity to communicate our views and opinions to the political elite only on election day, we do in fact have almost daily interactions with the public administration and may be able to influence the services we are offered by engaging the producers of that service directly instead of going via

political channels. Public administration is thus the key linkage between the state and society. The public bureaucracy channels information upward from clients into the public sector and maintains continuing contact with the public as they administer government programs.

Central to government, democracy and society as these roles of the public administration are, a noticeable development over the past 20–25 years has been the denigration of public administration in public discourse and the elevation of ‘public management’ as the preferred way to think about the public sector. The architects of administrative reform lost interest in many of the conventional roles of public administration, such as upholding due process or ensuring legality, transparency and accountability. Instead, they focused on efficiency and the creation of competition in public service delivery. There was certainly merit in focusing on cost-cutting and efficiency issues although, we suggest, the reform agenda that was pursued during the 1990s and early years of this millennium came at a price: core aspects of public administration and its role in governance were ignored (Frederickson, 2005). It is intriguing to note that important elements of so-called ‘post-NPM’ or neo-Weberianism can be seen as proof of a growing awareness of these problems (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011).

We have also had similar comments from practitioners over the years. Public management reform involves middle and senior levels of public organizations and has shifted attention across organizations towards productivity issues and measurements. Meanwhile, large numbers of public bureaucrats still find that their workday is dominated by issues related to more conventional public administration tasks. The shift in scholarly attention from public administration to public management is thus more than a fad or a modernization of an academic discipline; it has meant a redefinition of the reform and research agenda related to public sector organizations. One important mission of the present book is to reintroduce public administration both to practitioners and to our fellow scholars and students of public sector organizations. The book will discuss these and many other aspects of public administration in detail. Each of the chapters ahead will address a dichotomy or a dilemma in public administration, for instance the tension between neutrality and responsiveness; or between autonomy and integration; or between authority and democracy. These dilemmas continue to shape how public administrative systems around the world are designed and operate.

Rediscovering Public Administration

Some 200 years ago, Alexander Hamilton wrote in the *Federalist Papers* that ‘the true test of a good government is its aptitude and tendency to produce a good administration’ (1788, quoted in Pierre, 2013b). There is very little to suggest that this statement is not as relevant today as it was then. In fact, recent research efforts on good governance or the ‘quality of government’ typically emphasize the critical role of public administration in building institutional trust and legitimacy for the political system (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008) and that, indeed, the quality of public administration is more important in these respects than the degree to which that system allows for effective political representation and accountability (Gilley, 2009; Rothstein, 2009; Peters, 2010a).

A host of literature substantiates the integral role of public administration, both in developed countries and in the developing world, in producing effective and legitimate governance (Doornbos, 2004). Public administration is essential to all aspects of good government and democratic governance (Suleiman, 2003).

Let us first go through a few definitions. A baseline definition of public administration is that it refers to those organizational structures of the public sector that are charged with service delivery, law enforcement and due administrative processes. This means that we usually do not think of state-owned companies such as public service radio and television companies or public utility companies as part of the public administration; nor do we include private contractors in public administration. Public administration refers both to particular organizational structures in the public sector charged with specific tasks that we associate with the state and governing and also to formalized processes of making decisions pertaining to clients. The former category, which relates to clients at the aggregate level, typically includes policy implementation. The latter meaning of public administration applies to due process deliberations and rulings on matters related to individual clients.

We should, however, also think of public administration as a fundamental function of governing; indeed, it is difficult to think of democratic government without a professional public administration. The public bureaucracy delivers a range of tasks that are essential to governing, from tax collection and law enforcement to providing policy advice to politicians and facilitating different exchanges between clients and public officials. This means that public administration is much more than an institutional system created to deliver public service or enforce the law; as pointed out earlier, it is integral to democratic governance. Following Alexander Hamilton, we would argue that the quality of public administration tells us much about the quality of democracy in any given country. A high-performing professional public bureaucracy enhances the quality of policy implementation and increases clients' trust in the bureaucracy, thus reducing transaction costs. By the same logic, a public bureaucracy plagued by corruption and a lack of institutional integrity in relation to policymakers and society will be detrimental not just to public service delivery but to democratic governance more broadly.

To sum up so far, public administration refers to organizational structures; to processes of deliberation and decision-making; and also to an actor or an interface connecting the citizenry with their political leaders. Perhaps most importantly, while elections are essential in deciding which party or parties should govern a country and its agenda, the public bureaucracy provides citizens with daily exchanges with the state and is therefore essential in shaping citizens' perception of government (see, for instance, Nilsson, 2004).

Public administration and its intellectual neighbors

Having provided a baseline definition of public administration, we can now delineate this somewhat nebulous phenomenon in relation to close yet significantly different phenomena such as governance and public management.

We discussed the role of public administration in governance in some detail earlier. The governance role of public administration is today beyond controversy among students in the public administration field. Just a few decades ago, however, there was more emphasis on the apolitical nature of the bureaucracy and the formal–legal nature of its deliberation and service delivery (see Peters, 2009). That perspective ultimately harked back to the Weberian and Wilsonian dichotomy between politics and administration, and the importance of keeping these spheres of government separate. Today, however, there is recognition that the public administration is indeed part of the policy process and an important link between state and society.

The relationship between public administration and public management is perhaps less obvious. Indeed, despite several fundamental differences, public management became, in many ways, used synonymously to public administration during the 1990s and early 2000s, as part of the New Public Management (NPM) reform campaign that swept across the Western world and beyond. The essence of NPM was, as the name suggests, a focus on management; the objective was to cut costs in public service delivery and to empower its clients, or customers, by providing choice among competing service providers (see Kettl, 1997; Peters, 2001). We will return to these issues later in this chapter. For now, we note that public management is primarily concerned with reforming public organizations in such a way that they become more cost-efficient. With such efficiency as the key driver of reform, conventional norms in public administration such as due process, equal treatment and accountability came under attack.

The public management ‘turn’ meant a reprioritization of the goals of public administration, with all that entails in terms of changing roles, decision-making processes and command lines. That having been said, we see management issues as subordinate to the bigger issues about the role of public administration in governing. Such a perspective suggests that management reform should be assessed not just in terms of its expected effects on costs or efficiency but also, and primarily, in terms of the degree to which it contributes to the core mission of public administration. Here, as we will see later, opinions tend to differ significantly as some argue that NPM reform has made a major contribution to democratic governance since it empowers citizens as customers, whereas critics maintain that political responsiveness and accountability have been damaged by reform.

Thus, in our view, governance, public administration and public management are essentially a set of *matryoshka* dolls, with public management being a subsection of public administration, which, in turn, is a subsection of governance. Attempting to understand any level of this nesting of institutions and practices without understanding their context is likely to lead to significant errors.

Critiquing public administration

As we rearticulate public administration as a practice or as an element of governance or as a field worthy of study we need to remind ourselves that this is not an uncontroversial area. Public administration has for a long time been the target of criticism. Part of this criticism against ‘the bureaucracy’

(here used in a very pejorative sense) is its 'irritating methods and unsatisfactory performance' (Niskanen, 1971: 18). In the early 1970s, William Niskanen launched an all-out attack on the US federal bureaucracy accusing it both for its inefficiency and its self-serving bureaucrats. Consistent with public choice theory, managers were assumed to maximize their bureau's budget, which leads to a suboptimal allocation of resources within the bureaucracy. That these were all unproven hypotheses seemed to play a minor role. Niskanen and his followers shaped, or reinforced, a discourse on the ineffective, unproductive and even undemocratic nature of the public administration, which paved the way for the NPM reform campaign that would begin in the 1990s.

Others seem less concerned with the purported inefficiency and rigidity of the public administration. Instead they suggest that bureaucrats are energetic and zealous actors, but they are driven by motives other than the public interest. The criticism here is thus that bureaucrats have an agenda of their own, and that their pursuit of those objectives puts them in opposition to elected officials and the electorate: 'the very expertise that bureaucrats and other actors enjoy, along with their structural role in the policy processes, provides them with opportunities to work against the interests of politicians and their supporters' (Huber and Shipan, 2002: 2). Much of this criticism emanated from the economic disciplines. Applying economic theories based in assumptions about rationalistic behavior on the public sector, this approach became popular among neoliberal political thinkers and part of an overall critique of the state. Public choice theory – the application of economic theory to public administration – generated a 'principal-agent' model, with politicians as 'the principal' and bureaucrats as 'agents' (Mueller, 2003 [1979]). The model was also applied to the relationship between the legislature and the bureaucracy as an institution. The model departed from the assumption of 'asymmetrical information', so that the agents always had an advantage in relation to the principal. From this analysis it was assumed that bureaucrats had incentives not always to obey the principal's instructions but rather to pursue other options that would lead to a higher degree of utility maximization (see Pierre and Peters, 2016).

Leaving aside the neoliberal orientation and high-pitched tenor of some of the most ardent critics, an intriguing question is whether they in fact had a point. Subsequent reform, to a large extent related to the public choice critique, promised to increase public sector efficiency, to cut costs and to boost customer satisfaction. Did it? The first major stock-taking analysis of some three decades of public management reform answers this question in the negative. Christopher Hood and Ruth Dixon, authors of the study, arrive at the middle-of-the-road conclusion that the UK central government 'cost a bit more and worked a bit worse' over the 30 years they had studied it (2015: 183). Thus, customers are less satisfied, costs have not decreased but rather increased and productivity has not changed significantly. However, Hood and Dixon also point out that the result is better than what the most ardent NPM critics warned would be the result of reform. Equally disturbing, NPM reform, according to critics, undermined the role of the public administration in democratic governance by portraying clients as customers, thus introducing a market-like exchange between state and society, and also by reducing the role of elected officials

essentially to goal-setting and granting significant autonomy to the managers of executive institutions. In implementing NPM reforms, Suleiman argues, 'democratic societies have been following a path that leads to undermining, or even destroying, one of the central institutions on which a democratic polity depends' (2003: 18). Democratic government requires a professional and impartial executive branch, and market-based administrative reform has reduced the capabilities of public administration as well as de-professionalized and politicized the bureaucracy. Thus, a critical account of NPM would be that it has not only failed to deliver on its promise of a cheaper and more efficient public service but also that the reform significantly undermined the involvement of the public administration in democratic governance.

All is, however, not gloomy. On the positive side, there is much more attention to performance and quality of public services today compared with a few decades ago. Public administration has undergone extensive modernization in almost all defining aspects: its organizational management; budgeting and accounting; relationships both upwards with the political leadership and downwards with its clients; human resource management; information and communication technology (ICT) systems, etc. This modernization has been implemented without altering the fundamental norms and values of public administration. A recent study in the UK shows that despite decades of public management reform, the fundamental values – 'public ethos' – are still embraced by public servants (John and Johnson, 2008). A bureaucracy is a multi-functional organization, pursuing efficiency and client satisfaction at the same time as it is expected to adhere to principles of impartiality, legality, due process, equal treatment and transparency (Christensen et al., 2007). These values are deeply entrenched in the public administration and resilient to change, which also means that efficiency is not likely to become a top priority within the bureaucracy as it has to cater to a wide variety of goals.

We have already touched on the role of the public administration in democratic governance. Let us now look more closely on the types of contribution that the public bureaucracy makes to governance and governing.

Public Administration and Democratic Governance

The public bureaucracy is integral to democratic governance in several different ways. At a baseline level, we should note that the public bureaucracy ensures that core functions of the state such as law enforcement, defense and tax collection are upheld. Beyond these rudimentary functions, there are two particularly important types of democratic role that we will highlight in this introductory chapter.

The first role is related to the relationship between politicians and the public service, and the role of the bureaucracy in governing more broadly. The public service is a key source of policy advice and the chief structure in society to implement public policy, yet as we will discuss later in this chapter, they are basically a different species than elected officials. The public service can, and

should, provide expert advice with relatively little concern for the political consequences of the policies that they advocate. This raises the question of how politicians and bureaucrats relate to each other. The literature offers many different versions of this relationship. Sometime ago now, Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981) described it as ‘uneasy’. Later, one of the present authors developed a typology of different types of relationship, ranging from consensual to adversarial (Peters, 1987). Still later accounts have provided even more polarized views about this relationship, ranging from studies that emphasize bureaucratic loyalty toward the government of the day and mutual respect between politicians and civil servants (Page, 2012) to the public choice-based instrumental view that bureaucrats follow politicians’ instructions only when it is in their own interest to do so (Hood and Lodge, 2006; see also Brehm and Gates, 1997; Pierre and Peters, 2016). This diversity in how the exchanges between politicians and bureaucrats reflect different theoretical and normative approaches also points to some fundamental differences between the two groups and the interdependence that exists between them. In some instances, the administrators and politicians may be different players on the same team (Rose, 1980) while in others they may be in conflict with one another over policy and over power within the public sector.

The other main role that the public administration plays in democratic governance is to function as the chief interface between state and society. The bureaucracy daily delivers extensive service such as education, healthcare, and public daycare for children and the elderly. It also delivers less visible services such as environmental protection, national security, defense and legal services. Certainly for most people in the developed world, hardly a day goes by without some form of interaction with the state and its administration. These interactions are instrumental in forming our opinions about the public sector and the state. In welfare states such as the Scandinavian countries, studies suggest that the wide range of public services enjoys strong support among the citizens, despite the high tax pressure this entails (Nilsson, 2004; Svallfors, 2015). There is also a pattern that the more frequent the exchanges with the public sector an individual has, the more likely it is that they will support a big public sector. Furthermore, trust in public institutions is also shaped by citizens’ perception of impartiality, legality and due process (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008; Rothstein, 2009). This institutional trust, in turn, helps sustain the legitimacy of the state. Thus, there are several essential linkages between the quality of public service, our interactions with the public sector and how we as citizens value government.

An important aspect of the democratic role of the public administration, as already mentioned, is that unlike participation in general elections, citizens engage with the public administration on a daily basis. Election campaigns are essential to democracy as they allow for debate among different ideas about how to develop society, but the daily services shape our views of the state in more concrete ways. Our evaluation of the services we receive influence both our choice of which party we should vote for in a coming election – a party advocating an expansion of public services or one which argues for tax cuts and a reduction in such services – as well as our perception of government in a wider perspective. Elections, as Schmitter and Karl (1991) argue, certainly have their

place in democracy but so do other forms of engagement between elections, whether in associational, collective forms or through individual political action and reflection.

The obvious counterargument here is that as recipients of services we are just that: recipients, with little or no means of actually shaping decisions or services in the public sector. Conventional public service delivery offered clients limited opportunities to voice their opinions about the quality of those services. This is, however, no longer the case. Along with market-based reform in the public sector, clients (or 'customers') can – and to a large extent do (Dowding and John, 2012; Pierre and Röiseland, 2016) – use either 'voice' to let service providers know when they are dissatisfied with the services they receive, or use 'exit' to switch to a different provider. Thus, notwithstanding our previous tentative position on the idea of thinking of clients as customers, once markets are introduced into public service delivery we should expect the public to use the new instrument of empowerment that such reform offers.

These opportunities to communicate criticism to service providers also include talking directly with service managers. While it is fair to assume that such contacts are not new, the new models of public management are more open to direct customer–manager communication than was the conventional model of public administration. And the content of the discourse between the actors may also be different, emphasizing service and efficiency perhaps more than the law. This development has helped drive a debate about the degree to which the conventional, input-based legitimacy is now either replaced or supplemented by a legitimacy of the public sector which is the result of exchanges on the output side of the political system where service delivery takes place.

This debate has been going on for some time, dating back (at least) to the 1990s and the continuing integration of the European Union (EU) (Scharpf, 1999). The argument here was that the EU would have problems in being seen as a legitimate representative system and that instead its legitimacy would primarily be output-based, that is, the result of services delivered by the EU. Interestingly, this argument dovetailed with Bruce Gilley's (2009) research on the sources of legitimacy of advanced democratic states. He studied 72 countries across the globe, and his overall result was that the quality of democratic representation is less important than the quality of government and public administration in generating legitimacy for the political system. Again, this result fueled the debate on whether input-related factors, primarily democratic representation, or output-related factors, such as service or quality of administration, were most instrumental in fostering support and legitimacy for government. Importantly, studies on these issues in the EU context suggest that the distinction between input- and output-based legitimacy, while empirically relevant, is to some extent a false dichotomy as the strongest predictor of output-based legitimacy is a high level of input legitimacy (Lindgren and Persson, 2010). Further research will hopefully tell us more about the relationship between these two different sources of legitimacy. For now, we conclude by noting that the output side of the political system – the quality of administration and public service – is an important source of such legitimacy and that this role has been accentuated by public management reform. This pattern speaks directly to the role of public administration in democratic governance.

Against this backdrop, we now need to briefly go back to the discussion about the values of public administration and institutional trust and look more broadly at the various roles public administration plays in contemporary governing. These factors about public administration may be in a reciprocal relationship. That is, greater trust will facilitate service delivery and effective service delivery will build trust among the citizens.

The Role of Public Administration in Governing

Arguably, the key role of public administration in governing is that in relationship to policymakers. The public service is a critical component in the policy-making process; indeed, apart from setting policy goals and attempting to control public spending, the public bureaucracy is perhaps the central institutional actor in governance. And it is also the institution within the public sector that actually delivers goods and services to citizens, and which has daily contacts with them.

Relationship to policymakers

Politicians typically enter government with an agenda of projects they want to see realized. Their agenda defines key goals in different policy sectors and specific projects they want to see carried out – in recent years not just what should be done but also with what instruments it should be done have become more important to politicians – but the finer details of those projects are rarely worked out. The public service is expected to be loyal to the government of the day and offer ‘free and frank’ advice on policy matters. Usually, bureaucrats are charged with the task of working out specific details of policies and programs and to issue decrees on policy application and implementation without challenging the policy goals set by politicians (Page, 2012). Thus, while politicians define goals and objectives, they rely on public servants to apply their expertise to the policy within the normative framework in which it is embedded.

We mentioned earlier that politicians and public servants are different species. The two groups of officials differ in many significant aspects. First, politicians are elected representatives for a political party. They are rarely specialized in any particular policy sector; rather, they are generalists, which means that they have baseline knowledge of most policy sectors. Public servants, by contrast, may have longstanding specialized expertise in designing and implementing public policy in a given policy sector. Second, politicians tend to focus on the election cycle and therefore favor political projects that can present results prior to the next election. Public servants, by comparison, are mainly concerned with designing sustainable problem-solving arrangements, and therefore often have a more long-term perspective. Third, politicians and public servants are subject to quite different forms of accountability. Politicians are first and foremost accountable to their voters while bureaucrats are accountable to politicians (Page, 2010).

These are the preconditions for politicians and public servants' working together in the policy process. We mentioned earlier the different perspectives which the scholarly community has offered on this relationship. We would like to emphasize not just the factors that help make this an efficient partnership, such as loyalty and mutual respect, but also the seemingly inherent disagreements that come with different roles and agendas.

Relationship to citizens

If the relationship with the political level is one of the chief concerns of the senior levels of the public service, most exchanges with citizens and clients is handled by public sector employees in local government. It is here that core public services such as education, social welfare and (in most countries) health-care are delivered, and these are the sectors where direct contact with public employees – teachers, nurses, social workers, etc. – takes place. This face-to-face interaction with public officials facilitates client input on the service he or she is receiving. The consequences of such immediate contact with clients on the 'street-level bureaucrat' have been the topic of some scholarly debate (Lipsky, 1980; Hupe, Hill and Buffat, 2015).

The public bureaucracy in several countries has introduced new channels for citizen involvement not only in public service but also in public discourse at the pre-policy or implementation stage. These increasingly popular models of citizen involvement are often referred to as 'citizen panels', which is an umbrella concept for a variety of what M. B. Brown (2006: 203) defines as 'temporary advisory bodies that involve lay people in cooperative deliberation informed by expert advice'. This would include discursive venues such as consensus conferences, citizen juries and deliberative polls (M. B. Brown, 2006: 203). Citizen panels emerged in Europe, North America, Asia and the Antipodes during the 1970s but seem to have lost some momentum recently, at least in their conventional design (see Mann et al., 2014). Instead, new forms of facilitating citizen engagement in public affairs using social media or smartphones have emerged, often on an experimental basis. In some local governments in Victoria (Australia), for instance, a website (Yoursay) is used to enable citizens to become involved in the budgetary process.

Participatory budgeting is somewhat of a classic in bringing citizens into the policy process. First introduced in Brazil in 1989 it has since then been used in more than 1,500 cities across all continents.¹ In Porto Alegre in Brazil, to give an example, citizen panels were authorized to deliberate and decide on how to allocate 20 percent of the city's budget. Indeed, the public can engage the public administration in any number of ways. In Indonesia, for instance, anyone with a smartphone can download an app and use that to point out flaws in public services directly and instantaneously to the public bureaucracy. Coming back to a point mentioned briefly earlier, these forms of direct engagement in public service delivery are often assumed to help increase citizens' trust in the

¹See www.participatorybudgeting.org

public sector and the legitimacy of public institutions. More specifically, they would be assumed to boost output legitimacy of government, as well as providing more opportunities for citizens to shape those outputs through direct inputs.

The intriguing question is to what extent citizen panels and participatory budgeting affect the legitimacy of input democracy channels such as political parties or individual candidates. Do these alternative channels of citizen input on political decisions undermine their position, or is there the opposite effect so that the political system as a whole benefits from these new forms of participation and the strengthened legitimacy they are assumed to entail? We do not know much about those potential consequences of direct citizen involvement, nor do we know a great deal about the democratic quality and sustainability of these arrangements. While it appears extremely likely that direct contact with a nurse or a social worker contributes to better public service than would otherwise have been the case, citizen panels offer a more complicated analysis. One of the strengths of the conventional model of representative democracy is that it makes accountability reasonably clear, blame games and other manipulations notwithstanding. In that conventional perspective, allowing citizens to have input on budgets or policy without being able to hold them to account poses a serious problem from a democratic point of view.

Relationship to strategic societal actors

One of the more profound developments over the past couple of decades is the intensified collaboration between the public administration and strategic actors in society. This collaboration serves in part to broaden the cast of actors involved in the governance of an increasingly complex society (see Rhodes, 1997; Pierre and Peters, 2000, 2016; Torfing et al., 2011) and in part to forge partnerships with specialized organizations and networks to assist in public service delivery. These two aspects of collaboration can be related so that partnerships over time may morph into governance instruments (Donahue and Zeckhauser, 2011).

Collaboration serves several purposes. One is obviously cost-sharing, but equally important is that working with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other associations gives the public bureaucracy better access to the targets of the service. For instance, public officials may find it difficult to reach groups such as immigrant communities, people with disabilities or HIV-AIDS positive, but working with organizations and networks representing these groups will help the public service design and deliver programs more efficiently and effectively than had they tried to do it on their own.

We will delve into these issues in detail later in this book. For now, we note that together with the modernization of the public bureaucracy, the growing importance of collaborating with societal actors is perhaps the most important development in public administration. Some years ago Hjern and Porter (1981) wrote that the single lonely organization was dead, and that implementation would be conducted through collections of organizations, public and private. While true then, this perspective on public administration has become even more central as a series of reforms within the public sector, and changes in the private sector, bring the actors together around particular public problems.

Understanding Administrative Reform

As important as public administration is for governance, it is not surprising that several attempts have been made to reform its structure and its processes. Public administration may be a particularly apt target for reform because it is delivering public services and therefore should be managed for efficiency and effectiveness – along with other important values such as probity (see Chapter 2). In addition, because it is generally without direct political power, public administration can be made the scapegoat for other more fundamental failings in the public sector.

Some features of public administration also help to make it a frequent target for reform initiatives. The public image of the bureaucracy is often divided between two negative conceptions of what these organizations are like. The first view is that the bureaucracy is a Leviathan attempting to take over the rest of government and to subvert democratic rule. The second view is that the bureaucracy is inept and almost inherently inefficient and therefore requires the injection of good management from the private sector. The large-scale reforms associated with NPM were very much in this vein of addressing inefficiencies and perceived incompetence.

Although administrative reform has been ubiquitous, it has been manifested in a number of different ways in different countries (see Peters, 2001). Less developed countries, for example, are often engaged in very basic types of reform attempting to establish an effective administrative system. More developed countries have been engaged in somewhat different styles of reform, but often with the same general purposes of creating more effective and legitimate governments. And the diffusion of the ideas of NPM through organizations such as the World Bank has meant that some very similar ideas may be implemented, regardless of the nature of the administrative system. Finally, administrative reform has not been confined to any particular policy area or level of government. That said, the reforms have often been more successful at lower levels of government, in part because of their smaller size makes implementation and monitoring easier. Likewise, some central policy areas such as healthcare have been targets of reform more often than have many other sectors that are less expensive and less visible to the public. But regardless of the policy area or level of government, administrative reform continues to be a major activity in the public sector.

Summary

This chapter has pointed to a number of important roles for public administration in governance. The remainder of this book will address these underlying issues in governance, using a series of dichotomies that produce tensions within the public sector. These dichotomies each expose fundamental questions about governing, and also present the designers and reformers of the public sector with difficult choices. Each side of a dichotomy not only has some virtues but also presents potential difficulties in administration and governance.