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**How Politicians See Their Relationship with Top Bureaucrats:
Revisiting Classical Images**

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Abstract

The relationship between politicians and bureaucrats is an enduring concern in political science. Central to this debate, Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (APR) (1981) developed four images to characterize political-bureaucratic relations. We argue that the one-dimensional focus on roles in their images comes with important limitations. To deal with these limitations, we collect survey responses from 3,384 local politicians from four countries on seven dimensions of the political-bureaucratic relationship. We then use cluster analysis to develop six images bottom-up. Five of our images are largely consistent with APR's image II and III. Yet, they differ in the extent to which politicians trust the bureaucracy, consider them loyal, and see them as an important source of information. A sixth image is not consistent with any of APR's images. We find that both systemic (country, municipality size) and individual factors (ideology, position, seniority) contribute to differences in images. Overall, our images suggest that political-bureaucratic relations vary more between and within political systems than suggested by APR's images.

Introduction

The relationship between politicians and bureaucrats is an enduring concern in political science. Central to this debate, Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (1981) (from now on referred to as APR) developed four images to characterize political-bureaucratic relations. In their study, APR introduced the idea that politicians and bureaucrats do not have fixed and inalterable roles and that their relationship can change over time and across political systems. To account for this diversity, they famously launched four images of political-bureaucratic relationships. The APR study laid the foundation for a large number of studies of political and bureaucratic roles at both the national (e.g., Derlien 2003; Page and Wright 1999; 2007; Rhodes 2011) and the subnational level (e.g., Mouritzen and Svava 2002; Bäck, Heinelt, and Magnier 2006; Egner, Sweeting, and Klok 2013).

However, as is also acknowledged by APR, the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats is a multi-faceted phenomenon. While APR's images emphasize one aspect of this relationship by highlighting the roles of politicians and top bureaucrats, other important dimensions concern questions such as the bureaucracy as a source of information for politicians (Jacobsen 2006; Bækgaard 2011) and the bureaucracy's loyalty to politicians (e.g. Hood and Lodge 2006). The explicit focus on roles in APR's images may thus miss out on important variation in other aspects of political-bureaucratic relations. For instance, it is perfectly possible that roles are constant over time and across systems while factors like political trust in the bureaucracy and contact intensity vary over time and place. To obtain a more complete understanding of how political-bureaucratic relations vary, a more comprehensive approach is therefore needed in which several prominent dimensions of the relationship are analyzed in conjunction.

We present a study based on such an approach. First, we introduce and discuss the APR study. We then present relevant, agreed-upon dimensions of political-bureaucratic

relationships. Next, we discuss a bottom-up approach to identifying political-administrative images and present our data, which are based on surveys of 3,384 politicians from local governments in four countries. We then turn to the construction of the images of political-bureaucratic relationships, which is based on a hierarchical cluster analysis. This analysis identifies six distinct images that differ from the images in the APR study important ways. Thus, trust in the bureaucracy, the perceived loyalty of the bureaucracy, and the frequency of contacts vary significantly across our images and contribute to unique configurations of how the relationship is perceived from the viewpoint of politicians. To add to our understanding of our images, we furthermore conduct an exploratory analysis and find that both systemic and individual factors contribute to differences in the images. We conclude by discussing the differences and similarities between our images and the images of APR, how the extra dimensions that we bring into the characterization of political-bureaucratic relationships resonate with the literature, and what the implications of our study are for future research.

The APR study

The exact nature of the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats has vexed students of bureaucracy for more than a century. Until the APR study, the literature, although diverse in many respects, agreed on several points. First, there was a consensus that politicians are dependent on bureaucrats and that this fact provides the bureaucrats with a privileged position that can be abused. Second, there was a shared understanding, though not always made explicit, that this situation was normatively wrong. The ideal relationship between politicians and bureaucrats is one in which the politicians are firmly in control, much like in the original contributions by Wilson (1887) and Weber (1970 [1922]). Third, political-bureaucratic relations were generally considered relatively stable. Finally, empirical studies were overwhelmingly limited to one-country studies, often the home country of the authors.

This situation changed with the APR study (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981). With this study the literature took an ambitious empirical turn. It spanned seven countries and drew on more than one thousand interviews and survey respondents. And for the first time a catalogue was developed of potential role divisions for politicians and bureaucrats. This consisted of four images of increasing role overlap:

- *Image I*: “Policy/administration”—politicians make policy; bureaucrats administer.
- *Image II*: “Facts/interests”—both politicians and bureaucrats make policy, but differently. Bureaucrats bring facts and knowledge; politicians bring interests and values.
- *Image III*: “Energy/equilibrium”—both politicians and bureaucrats make policy, but still differently. Politicians articulate broad diffuse interests; bureaucrats mediate narrow focused interests of organized clientele.
- *Image IV*: “The pure hybrid”—virtual disappearance of the distinction between politicians and bureaucrats.

Finally, the APR study was pioneering because it did not see political-bureaucratic relations as stable, but as progressively developing from image I to IV over time. As will be discussed in the next section, the APR study left a huge imprint on the literature. But it also left some important questions unanswered. First, the exact status of the four images has been difficult to pin down. APR take pains to clarify that the images are not theories or models, but “searchlights for illuminating empirical patterns” (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981, 20). However, this status is elusive. Do the images constitute a catalogue, or are they points on a continuous scale that goes from none to full role overlap? If not, are they an exhaustive catalogue of potential political-bureaucratic relationships? Are they mutually exclusive? Second, the images are based on hypothetical-deductive reasoning. They are constructed after a careful reading of the public administration literature. While this reading is impressive in scope, it also suffers from some limitations since it is based on literature published in English and therefore somewhat biased towards literature of a US or UK origin. This leaves a question of empirical relevance: To how many political systems are the four images

applicable? Third, the four images arguably suffer from consistency problems (Lee and Raadschelders 2008). They blend normative, juridical, empirical, and sociological dimensions, but the relative importance of these dimensions varies across images. Image I is based on normative-juridical elements, while images II–IV concern descriptive-empirical dimensions. In addition, the images contain elements of both a typology and a taxonomy. Images I and IV are elements of a typology (theoretically defined concepts), while images II and III are elements of a taxonomy (classification of different types). Finally, APR conceive of political-bureaucratic relationships in institutional terms. The four images are characteristics of power relationships between two groups of actors, i.e., politicians and bureaucrats, and not features of individual relationships. APR note in passing that the images may vary within systems,¹ but their endeavor is explicitly to uncover “generic characteristics of bureaucrats and politicians in industrial democracies” and to “illuminate consistent features” of political-bureaucratic relationships that persist across several political systems (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981, 30). This ontological starting point makes it difficult to theorize and investigate the extent to which political-bureaucratic relationships vary across types of politicians and bureaucrats within the systems. This is a limitation, not least since later research shows that factors such as the positions of both politicians and bureaucrats in the political-administrative system matter for their relationship (Bækgaard 2011; Jacobsen 2006).

As will be discussed in the next section, the APR study has had a profound influence on the literature, which has worked with the four images and applied them to new settings and developed more refined categorizations. However, we conjecture that the challenges with the APR images are also relevant for much of this subsequent literature. We therefore propose a new approach based on an empirical identification of political-bureaucratic relations. Instead

¹ APR note that the images may vary across levels within the central government (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981, 20) and realize that the contact with bureaucrats may vary across types of politicians (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981, 227), but these insights play a marginal role in their analysis.

of the hypothetical-deductive method used widely in the literature, we suggest a more inductive, or bottom-up, approach. We prefer to leave it to actors in the field to characterize the exact nature of political-bureaucratic relationships. This may sound straightforward, but it requires a measurement instrument, and some agreed upon elements that constitute the nature of the political-bureaucratic relationship, but the exact composition of which remains to be determined. The literature following the APR study has developed a consensus not only on the dimensions that go into political-bureaucratic relationships but also on how to measure them. Our approach is therefore inductive, but not agnostic. It builds on the insights of the extant literature but uses these insights to create a measurement tool that can be used for an inductive analysis of political-bureaucratic relationships.

After the APR Study: Toward Consensus on Dimensions of Political-Bureaucratic Relationships

Based on analyses of the US, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the APR study concludes that image I is found nowhere, image II is empirically relevant, but not quite as relevant as image III (especially in the US), while image IV is almost empirically non-existent.

This conclusion, based on data from 1969 to 1973, has been revisited many times. Two of the three original authors—Aberbach and Rockman—have done so themselves on several occasions. Among other things, they have found that their speculation in the 1981 book, that image IV would become more relevant over time, is wrong. If anything, things have turned slightly backward in the sense that, especially in the US, image III has become less relevant, while image II has become more relevant (Aberbach and Rockman 1988; 2000; 2006). But the central finding is still that top bureaucrats are key advisors for politicians and engage with them in constant and intense dialogue about policy formulation. Although there are nuances

across countries, other scholars have reached broadly consistent conclusions at the national level, for example in the UK (Bulmer 1988; Page and Jenkins 2005; Rhodes 2011; Wilson and Barker 2003), Germany (Derlien 1988; 2003), France (Rouban 1999), Sweden (Ehn et al. 2003; Premfors and Sundström 2007), the Netherlands ('t Hart and Wille 2006), Belgium (Dierickx 2003), and Denmark (Christensen 2004; Salomonsen and Knudsen 2011). Similarly, a number of scholars have studied the relationships between politicians and bureaucrats at the local government level and reached conclusions that are also broadly consistent with the central findings of the APR study. This holds for cross-national studies (Bäck, Heinelt, and Magnier 2006; Egner, Sweeting, and Klok 2013; Mouritzen and Svara 2002) as well as single-country studies (e.g., Demir and Reddick 2012; Grøn and Salomonsen 2018; Klausen and Magnier 1998).

It seems to be the case that relationships between politicians and bureaucrats almost everywhere can be located somewhere between APR's images II and III. This is an important finding, but it also comes with some shortcomings. Due to the elusiveness of the image concept discussed above, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact differences in political and bureaucratic roles and how they vary across political systems as well as across individual politicians and bureaucrats.

Other scholars have worked with APR's four images and developed refined categorizations. For example, Peters (1987) suggests five models ranging from a formal-legal Weberian model to an "administrative state" in which the politicians have abdicated power to the bureaucrats. Another example is Hood and Lodge (2006) who suggest the concept of public service bargains to understand the role divisions between politicians and bureaucrats. While conceptual refinements such as these have addressed some of the shortcomings of the APR images and have led to a more nuanced understanding of political-bureaucratic relationships, they are, like the APR images, based on a hypothetical-deductive reasoning and

thus to some extent vulnerable to the same challenges as were discussed above in relation to APR's images.

A more inductive approach to mapping political-bureaucratic relationships requires some agreement on what the constitutive elements of political-bureaucratic relationships are. Such a consensus has gradually developed in the literature following the APR study. In this literature, measuring the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats has not been done in a strictly cumulative fashion in the sense that later contributions have replicated APR's measurements. Although studies have been closely inspired by the APR study—and by each other—the measurements have varied across studies. However, looking across this literature, it is possible to identify seven dimensions that are broadly taken into account when mapping political-bureaucratic relations, cf. Table 1. In the next section, we explain how we use these dimensions to design a measurement tool to identify political-bureaucratic relations in an inductive way.

Table 1 about here

Methods and Data

The logic of the classical top-down approach is to subject theoretical models and ideas to empirical testing in selected cases. In the bottom-up approach, the logic is opposite: Based on a large number of observations and a measurement of several aspects of the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats, we identify groups of cases. To do this, we use cluster analysis. This is an exploratory technique, which is useful when the objective is to describe a set of multivariate data where the number of subgroups (in our case images of political-bureaucratic relationships) within the dataset is unknown (Székely and Rizzo 2005, 152). The aim is to ensure that the observations in the same subgroup (called clusters) are more similar

to each other than to those in other clusters (Berntson, Wallin, and Härenstam 2012; Everitt et al. 2011; Pedersen et al. 2019). Specifically, we use complete-linkage hierarchical cluster analysis. In this type of cluster analysis, each observation is a cluster on its own to begin with. Clusters are then combined (based on measures of similarity/dissimilarity) into larger clusters. This process continues until the researcher decides that an appropriate solution has been achieved based on diagnostics of similarity within clusters, dissimilarity between clusters, and the number of observations in each cluster.

An appropriate research design for finding clusters of observations according to the type of relationship between politicians and bureaucrats must satisfy three requirements. First, the data must contain a rich set of diverse indicators of the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats. In the spirit of the exploratory ambition, we use measures of all the seven dimensions we identified above. Each of these dimensions are measured by a set of survey questions. Hence, we rely on the breadth of existing empirical studies to get information about the nature of the relationship for each case. We return to the empirical measures and descriptive statistics below.

Second, we need a large number of cases to obtain a robust classification of cases into clusters. To do this, a reasonable number of cases for each cluster is necessary. It is also important to have a large number of cases in order to find uncommon types of relationships. We satisfy this requirement by surveying local politicians. By focusing on politicians at the local level, we can count the number of cases in 1000s rather than in handfuls.

Third, if the images are meaningful, they should reflect differences at the systemic and individual levels. The focus on local governments in different countries, allows us to explore systemic differences in the images. By surveying individual politicians, we can study the influence of their background and role. Hence, our focus on individual politicians in local

governments allows us to conduct a large-N study in different national contexts. We now turn to our selection of countries.

Country Selection

We select our case countries based on what Gerring (2006, 97–101) calls a “diverse-case design.” The objective of this design is to ensure variation in the factors of potential importance to the phenomenon of interest. We conduct studies in four different settings, Italy, Flanders (the Flemish Region of Belgium), Denmark, and the USA, selected according to three criteria. The first criterion is to ensure variation in key dimensions of political-bureaucratic relations to provide as much leverage as possible for developing images. Our case selection includes both settings that generally are considered high trust (Denmark) and low trust settings (Italy), settings where the average politician either have many (Denmark and Flanders) or few formal powers (US municipalities with a council-manager form of government), and countries where the contact intensity between elected politicians and bureaucrats are expected to be either high (Italy and the USA) or somewhat lower (Denmark and Flanders) . Second, the case selection ensures a great degree of variation in the institutional set-ups of political systems. Third, our case selection is in part pragmatic. We selected settings where contact information of local politicians was available and where we were able to obtain assistance from native speakers.

In total, we contacted 36,193 politicians and obtained answers from 5,922 (corresponding to a response rate of 16 percent) in the years 2016–2017. However, since our consecutive analysis requires meaningful responses on a large set of survey items, we exclude respondents who made a non-response or a “don’t know” response to at least one item. Thus, our final sample consists of 3,384 local politicians in total. Information about the data collection procedure and response rates from each country can be found in appendix C.

Measuring the Relationship between Politicians and Top Bureaucrats

Table 1 shows the seven dimensions of the relationship between politicians and top bureaucrats along with references to the relevant literature. In Table 2, we provide examples of the items used in our survey to measure the dimensions along with descriptive statistics for the dimensions.

Table 2 about here

The first dimension is “Contact patterns”. We measure this with five questions about contacts with the top administrative staff, members of the news media, interest organizations, political networks, and think tanks (see the question wording in Appendix A, Q1).

The second dimension is “Information”. We ask about information from seven sources (see Appendix A, Q5): Top administrative staff, interest groups, *National League of Cities* (this is the American organization; in the other countries we ask about the corresponding organization: *Kommunernes Landsforening* in Denmark, *Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden & Gemeenten* in Flanders, and *Associazione Nazionale dei Comuni Italiani* in Italy), political think tanks, universities, and the news media. The respondents are asked to rate the information sources from 0 (a very low degree) to 10 (a very high degree).

The third dimension is the influence of the top administrative staff. It is a battery of five questions (see Appendix A, Q4) measuring the influence of the top administrative staff, elected leaders, interest groups, the news media, and individual citizens, measured on a scale from 0 (low influence) to 10 (high influence). For the first three dimensions, we compute relative measures. For instance, we compute the relative influence of the top administrative staff by subtracting the average of the perceived influence of all other groups from the

perceived influence of the top administrative staff. In a similar manner, we compute measures of relative contact and relative information. The positive mean values for all three dimensions demonstrate that on average, the top administrative staff is a relatively more frequent source of contact, it is used more frequently as a source of information, and it is considered more influential than the other groups.

The fourth dimension is “Role norms” and focuses on the norms about bureaucratic impartiality. It includes four questions about whether the administrative staff should be impartial, should be the prime movers in adapting the municipality to changes in society, should speak for weaker groups of citizens, and should make an effort to learn the policy goals of the political leaders (see Appendix A, Q2).

The fifth dimension is “Role focus.” The four questions (see Appendix A, Q3) are identical to the fourth dimension, except that respondents are asked to indicate whether the administrative staff is in fact impartial, etc. In both cases, we conduct factor analyses to investigate to what extent the items load on the same factors. Since it appears that no index construction of more than one item is meaningful, we use only the items about the impartiality of bureaucracy in the remainder of the analysis. The items run from 1 to 5 with 5 denoting a high level of agreement that the top administrative staff should be/is impartial. Overall, the descriptive statistics demonstrate that the local politicians have high expectations about an impartial bureaucracy but that they experience such a behavior to a much lesser extent.

The sixth dimension is about “Trust.” We use six questions (see Appendix A, Q7–9), all about trust in the top administrative staff. We conduct an exploratory factor analysis (principal factors with orthogonal varimax rotation) of the six items, which shows that a one-factor solution is appropriate with an eigenvalue of 2.3. The six items are computed into an

index in which each item counts equally, and the index is rescaled to run from 0 (lowest level of trust) to 100 (highest level of trust). The index has an alpha value of 0.85.

Finally, the seventh dimension, “Disloyalty,” is measured with five questions (see Appendix A, Q6) about different controversial ways in which the top administrative staff can potentially influence the political agenda. The respondents are asked to indicate whether they have experienced this on a scale from “To a very high extent” to “Not at all.” We conduct an exploratory factor analysis (principal factors with orthogonal varimax rotation) of the six items. Again, a one-factor solution is appropriate (eigenvalue = 3.18). The index, which is rescaled to run from 0 to 100, is highly valid with an alpha value of 0.90. The descriptive statistics for the two indices demonstrate that while the local politicians in the four countries generally express trust in the bureaucracy, there is a considerable variation, and also the politicians express some concern about disloyal behavior on the part of bureaucracy.

In total, we use 30 survey questions, which have been used to create indices for the seven dimensions in Table 2. All the questions were included in the four country surveys and translated into the appropriate language. Questions in English appear in Appendix A along with the descriptive statistics from all four countries. Questions in Flemish, Danish, and Italian can be found in the background report (reference withheld).

Cluster-analysis: Six Images From Local Politicians

The first step in the analysis is to identify the subgroups in the dataset where the answers to the seven dimensions are similar to each other. These subgroups are the main contribution of this study: They constitute the images of the political-bureaucratic relationship obtained in a bottom-up analysis. We then characterize the subgroups based on average scores on the seven dimensions and develop six new images, name them, and discuss their rationale. In the second part of the analysis, we study how systemic and individual factors contribute to the

differences in the images. To identify the subgroups, we use the Calinski/Harabasz pseudo- F , the Duda–Hart, and the pseudo- T -squared diagnostics criteria to select the preferred solution of our cluster analysis (please see Appendix Table B1 for statistics for the three criteria). More distinct clustering is indicated by larger values on the Calinski/Harabasz pseudo- F and the Duda–Hart as well as by the pseudo- T -squared values, which are small in absolute terms compared with nearby clustering solutions (Calinski and Harabasz 1974; Duda, Hart, and Stork 2001). Across criteria, two solutions seem particularly desirable: A six-cluster solution (performs second best on the Calinski/Harabasz pseudo- F and the Duda–Hart and as number four on the pseudo- T -squared) and a 14-cluster solution (performs best on the Duda–Hart, third on the pseudo- T -squared, and sixth on the Calinski/Harabasz pseudo- F). However, a 14-cluster solution produces several very small clusters, including one with eleven politicians only. Since we are interested in clusters of more general relevance, we proceed with the six-cluster solution.

The outcome of this analysis is presented in Table 3, while Table 4 shows on which dimensions clusters are statistically significantly different from each other. The smallest of the six clusters consists of what we denominate the *Outsiders*. These politicians are characterized by having very little contact with the bureaucracy, and thus the bureaucracy is also a minor source of information compared with the other clusters. Moreover, while they consider the top bureaucrats very influential, they have very little trust in the top bureaucracy, which they feel manipulated by to a very large extent, and see this as problematic as they have high standards of impartiality (“Role norms”). The second cluster is also characterized by having high standards of impartiality. These politicians have a moderate level of contact with the top bureaucrats, yet they have little trust in and are skeptical about the impartiality of the top bureaucracy as is evidenced by the low score on “Role focus”. We name this cluster the *Skeptics*. The third cluster is more moderate in many respects than the two previous ones.

They have less expectation of impartiality, and relatively more trust in the bureaucracy. However, they think that bureaucrats in practice do manipulate information and affect the agenda (“Disloyalty”), and they think the the bureaucrats have a high degree of influence, even higher than the *Skeptics* believe that they have. We call this group the *Fatalists*. The fourth group, consisting of around 19 percent of the politicians, is remarkably close to the average value on almost all dimensions. They have moderate contact, rely on information from the bureaucracy to a moderate degree, and have moderate expectations. They are also in the moderate category regarding their perception of trustworthiness and disloyalty. However, this group is characterized by considering the top bureaucracy much less influential in relative terms than all other groups. Thus, we name this group the *Unconcerned*. The fifth group, the *Insiders*, is in many respects the counterpoint of the *Outsiders*. This group consists of politicians reporting very high levels of contact with the top bureaucrats compared with other groups, and they express that the top administrative staff is a very important source of information relative to other groups. They believe – to a higher degree than the *Unconcerned* - that top bureaucrats have some influence, but perceive to a very high degree the top administrative staff as impartial and consider the administration to be much more trustworthy than the other clusters.

Table 3 about here

Finally, the largest group by far is the *Mainstreamers*. This group is a light version of the *Insiders* in the sense that they report relatively high levels of contract, trust, and perceptions of impartiality but to a somewhat lesser extent. Notably, the *Insiders* and the *Mainstreamers* comprise around 57 percent of the sample. However, the cluster analysis also reveals considerable cleavages in how the top bureaucracy is perceived from the viewpoint of the

politicians. As demonstrated in Table 4, the clusters are statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from one another in 77 out of 105 pairwise comparisons (15 comparisons on each of the seven dimensions).

Table 4 about here

Exploring Clusters Differences

To further understand the differences between the six clusters, we conduct a multinomial logistic regression. The regression is exploratory in the sense that we did not have *a priori* expectations about cross-cluster patterns since the clusters themselves are derived from the empirical material. We look at the macro-level (municipality size and country) and the individual level explanations (committee chairman, mayor, gender, ideology, education, city council seniority) for which we have available data for all four countries. Table 5 reports the output of the multinomial logistic regression (please see Appendix Table B2 for descriptive statistics on the explanatory variables). Robustness checks show that the results of the analysis are robust to excluding one or more of the explanatory variables. The analysis adds considerable nuance to our cluster analysis. First, it suggests that the divide between the *Outsiders*, the *Skeptics*, and the *Fatalists* on the one hand, and the *Insiders* and the *Mainstreamers* on the other hand, in part depends on whether the politicians are frontbenchers (mayors, committee chairmen, and politicians with many years of experience) in close contact with top administrators or backbenchers. Second, the ideological viewpoints of the politicians matter in various ways. Notably, right-wing politicians are more likely to be in the group of *Fatalists*, politicians with more extreme ideological viewpoints are more likely to be part of the *Outsiders*, while the ideologically moderate politicians are more likely to be part of the *Mainstreamers*. Third, the *Fatalists* stand out by having a longer education.

Fourth, the analysis tentatively suggests that feelings of manipulation are more prevalent in larger municipalities. Thus, municipality size has a positive and significant correlation with the likelihood of being either one of the *Outsiders* or the *Fatalists*.

Table 5 about here

One reason for this may be that political-bureaucratic cultures differ between small and large municipalities. Another potential explanation is that the city councils are typically larger in bigger municipalities and that the distance from the average politician to the bureaucracy becomes bigger too. At a more general level, the analysis suggests that the structural characteristics of the municipalities are important to the political-bureaucratic relations as the population size is significantly correlated with the likelihood of belonging to four of the clusters. Fifth, the analysis reveals considerable cross-country differences. While we are not able to get closer to the reasons for these differences, we suggest that the differences in culture and institutional setups are likely drivers of the cross-country differences.

Discussion

We now discuss how our inductively derived images of political-bureaucratic relationships compare to APR's images and to the broader literature. We argue that, on the one hand, our images are compatible with APR's images but, on the other hand, show the limitations of APR's images which are too crude to distinguish among real-world systems. On this basis, we argue that the extra dimensions we bring into the characterization of political-bureaucratic relationships are both empirically and theoretically justified – empirically because they enable a more refined categorization of real-world political-bureaucratic relationships;

theoretically because they build on suggestions in the literature and resonate well with both classic and modern contributions to the public administration literature.

The cluster analysis shows six distinct ways in which local politicians see their relationship with top bureaucrats. These views do not correspond to APR's four images. This is hardly surprising, since the bottom-up approach we have pursued is fundamentally different from APR's methods. However, despite the lack of correspondence, the *Insiders'* view of the relationship is consistent with Image II and III. They rely on information from the bureaucrats and are in close contact (bureaucrats bring facts and knowledge as in image II), and they are likely to be front-benchers with considerable policy influence. The *Mainstreamers* are very similar, just more moderate. Both groups have a pragmatic view of the norms of bureaucrats' political impartiality, and they think that bureaucrats enjoy some influence (as in Image III) but the relationship is characterized by a high degree of trust and loyalty (bureaucrats respect political agendas, also as in Image III). It is harder to reconcile the *Insiders* and the *Mainstreamers* with Image I (*Insiders* and *Mainstreamers* believe that bureaucrats have real influence and role norms are not clear-cut), and with Image IV (they still see a clear distinction between political and bureaucratic roles).

The views of the *Insiders* and *Mainstreamers* correspond well with accounts of political-bureaucratic relationships found in much of the extant literature, e.g. the studies of the German, Dutch and Swedish central governments by Derlien (2003), 't Hart and Wille (2006) and Premfors and Sundström (2007). This may not be so surprising since *Insiders* and *Mainstreamers* are prominent local politicians, and the extant literature typically focuses on bureaucrats' relations with ministers – the functional equivalent of our local frontbenchers – and not on rank-and-file politicians.

However, our study shows that important, although smaller, groups of politicians exist in addition to *Insiders* and *Mainstreamers*. Their views are not covered well by the extant

literature. We believe this is because most studies of political-bureaucratic relationships do not focus on rank-and-file politicians. The few studies that do suggest that the distinction between prominent and rank-and-file politicians matters for political-bureaucratic relations. For example, Bækgaard (2011) and Jacobsen (2006) show that prominent politicians have more frequent contacts with bureaucrats. In line with these findings, our study shows that prominent politicians view political-bureaucratic relationships systematically differently from rank-and-file politicians. Importantly, our findings also show that rank- and-file politicians do not hold homogeneous views of political-bureaucratic relationships, but can be grouped into four distinct categories: *Outsiders*, *Unconcerned*, *Fatalists*, and *Skeptics*.

Outsiders have a very negative view of bureaucrats: They think that bureaucrats ought to respect norms of political impartiality, but that they do not. They believe that bureaucrats have very high influence, but they do not trust them and think they are disloyal. These politicians – who constitute a quite small group - tend to be more extreme ideologically and to be new to the game. Their view of the top bureaucrats is consistent with APR's Image II and III, but they do not see themselves as included in the group of politicians with influence. Far from the Weberian ideal in Image I, these politicians look at the policy-process from the outside, and what they see is close involvement of bureaucrats: But they are not involved themselves. Hence, the group of *Outsiders* shows a limitation of the APR's four images. They may describe important differences in the relationship between politicians and top bureaucrats, but not all politicians, particularly not those with relatively extreme ideologies, are part of this relationship.

The *Unconcerned* see things differently. They have some contact with bureaucrats, and a moderate view of norms, trust, and loyalty, but they believe that the bureaucrats have very low influence. It is hard to reconcile this group with APR's four images at all. The pragmatic view of norms, trust, and loyalty is inconsistent with Image I, which stresses the sharp

distinction between politics and administration. However, the view that bureaucrats have very limited influence is inconsistent with Image II, III, and IV. The existence of this distinct group of politicians also point to a limitation: They are not blind to the potential for strategic behavior of bureaucrats, but they are still not very concerned.

The *Fatalists*, who tend to have a longer education and to be right-wing, have a somewhat cynical view of the relationship between politicians and top bureaucrats. In contrast to the *Unconcerned*, they believe that the influence of bureaucrats is high. Apart from that, they share the low to moderate interaction with bureaucrats, and the moderate view of norms and trust. Their view of the relationship is a more moderate version of the *Outsiders*'s; and it is also fairly consistent with the APR image II and III, but not I and IV. Hence, the *Outsiders* constitute another distinct group with a view of the relationship which is consistent with APR's images, although they tend to see the policy-process from the outside. This also applies to the *Skeptics*. Like the *Fatalists*, the *Skeptics* have a moderate interaction with the *Fatalists*, but they share a very negative view of trust, role focus and disloyalty with the *Outsiders*.

Taken together, our six images tell a simple story about APR's images. They are consistent with Image II and III, but not with Image I and IV. On the one hand, in all groups but one, politicians acknowledge that top bureaucrats have at least some influence, that they to some degree rely on information from bureaucrats and / or that bureaucrats at least sometimes pursue other agendas than politicians. The only exception is the *Unconcerned*. The analysis does not say anything about whether this exception should be taken as an indication that Image II and III are not always relevant or whether it simply reflects a misperception in this group of politicians. On the other hand, none of the six groups subscribe to views that are consistent with image I and IV. This story confirms the findings of the post-APR empirical literature that Image I is unrealistic, and that Image IV has materialized

nowhere and probably never will. Our six images neither give an indication of a clear division of politics and administration nor of a ‘virtual disappearance of the distinction between politicians and bureaucrats’. It is perhaps reasonable to simplify the four images of APR to two, and perhaps also to realize that the involvement of bureaucrats is a matter of degree, not of dichotomy.

On the one hand, our study thus confirms the continued relevance of the APR study. With the exception of one, all our inductively derived images can be fitted into the APR mold. However, on the other hand, our study also shows the limitations of APR’s conceptualization of political-bureaucratic relationships. The APR images are crude and do not offer a categorization that can distinguish among important real-world differences. We do not learn much about differences and similarities between real-world systems by discovering that they all fall somewhere between APR’s image II and III. This state of affairs is probably caused by APR’s emphasis on the division of roles between politicians and bureaucrats. We agree that roles are important, but there is more to political-bureaucratic relationships than role divisions. Our study shows that including other dimensions of the relationship allows a more fine-grained empirical categorization that, in contrast to APR’s images, can distinguish among real-world relationships.

Conclusion

APR’s *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies* (1981) is a landmark study of political-bureaucratic relations. It provided an elegant theoretical synthesis of the extant literature and offered unprecedented empirical analysis. It famously introduced four images of political-bureaucratic relations that have guided the ensuing literature. However, APR’s four images have also created some confusion and challenges for subsequent researchers. We have accounted for four types of challenges. First, the four images blend normative, juridical,

empirical, and sociological dimensions, but the relative importance of these dimensions varies across images. Second, the images contain elements of both a typology and a taxonomy. Third, it is not clear whether the four images constitute an exhaustive and mutually exclusive list of relevant images. Finally, the images are built on the notion that while political-bureaucratic relations may change over time and vary across nations, they take on general and consistent features at a given point in time in a given nation.

These characteristics of the four images are likely a result of APR's epistemological and ontological stance. Epistemologically, they adhere to the hypothetical-deductive method. They use the existing literature and theories to develop the four images. Ontologically, their study is premised on the notion that there exists one type of political-bureaucratic relationship within the countries they study at the point in time they study them. To deal with the criticisms raised against the four images, and to bring the literature forward, it is therefore necessary to look critically at both APR's epistemology and their ontology. This has led us to part ways with APR on both accounts. We seek to identify images of political-bureaucratic relations in Western democracies without any prior assumptions about their nature. Ontologically, we are open to the possibility that relationships may vary not only across nations, political systems, and time, but also across individuals. Epistemologically, we approach the field inductively and leave it to actors in the field to determine the images.

This approach to identifying images of political-bureaucratic relations has yielded some noteworthy results. In contrast to APR's four images, we find six images, which we label the *Outsiders*, the *Skeptics*, the *Fatalists*, the *Unconcerned*, the *Insiders*, and the *Mainstreamers* respectively. Importantly, since these images are built inductively on the basis of our respondents' information, we can be reasonably sure that they constitute an exhaustive list of images, at least within the empirical field that we study. And given our method, they are also mutually exclusive. Our images vary across the dimensions, which the extant literature

concerns go into political-bureaucratic relations: “Contact patterns,” “Information sources,” “Influence,” “Role norms,” “Role focus,” “Trust,” and “Disloyalty.” Like APR’s images, they vary across nations and political systems. But unlike APR’s images, they also vary considerably across individuals. Most notably, we find that a large minority of politicians feel marginalized and manipulated by the top bureaucracy, and we find important differences in the political-bureaucratic relations, depending on whether the politicians are backbenchers or frontbenchers (mayors, committee chairmen, experienced politicians). Our findings thus imply that more attention should be directed to the differences between the individuals and how these might matter to the distribution of power within the political-bureaucratic system.

While we end up with images of political-bureaucratic relations that are empirically richer and more nuanced than APR’s four images, some limitations of our study should be noted. First, we only study the political side of the relationship. This yields some important differences compared to APR’s images. Whether this conclusion holds or is nuanced by including the administrative side of the relationship, however, remains to be seen. It would also be important to investigate the degree to which politicians and bureaucrats agree about the nature of their relationship. Second, in contrast to APR, we focused on local, not national, governments. An especially promising feature of this research design is that it allows a better disentanglement of national factors, such as political culture, history, and tradition on the one hand, and institutional characteristics of political systems on the other hand. At the national level, these two types of factors coincide. But subnational government systems often include several layers of governments (provincial, regional, local), which constitute different political systems. For researchers, it is thus often possible to include different systemic characteristics within a given national framework. We only included the lowest level of the subnational governments and were only able to include municipality size as a within-country varying systemic feature. Here is an improvement point for future studies.

Third, our regression analysis demonstrates that the composition of images vary with regard to the formal positions, seniority, political ideology, municipality size, nationality, and – to some extent – education length of politicians. While our design does not allow us to provide a detailed explanation of this variation, we encourage future research to make use of qualitative research designs to better understand why images differ across politicians.

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