

The Organizational Consequences of Politics: A Research Agenda for the Study of Bureaucratic Politics in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

The study of the bureaucracy in Latin America, within the study of politics, has long been little more than an afterthought. It is assumed to lie in the realm of public administration, distinct from other regional subfields that have increasingly gained the attention of political scientists. As a result, scholars' understanding of Latin American bureaucratic politics is limited. Here, we conduct a comprehensive survey of peer-reviewed articles to evaluate the state of this subfield. We find a thematically, analytically, and methodologically splintered discipline, but a prime one for exploitation and new avenues of research. This article summarizes salient trends in the literature, describes advances in the study of bureaucracy in Latin America, and discusses limitations in this scholarship. It suggests a roadmap for scholars by proposing a series of research questions and recommends a series of analytical and methodological approaches to address those questions.

The bureaucracy is a fundamental building block of the modern state, tasked with carrying out the essential functions of the government and turning laws and other political initiatives into policies. Knowing this network of organizations and their role in the policy implementation process is essential to understanding how the state works.

In places like Latin America, this information guides the advice and recommendations of international financial organizations, think tanks, and other donor institutions. However, despite the enormous financial resources channeled through bureaucratic institutions and the crucial role of public administration in politics and society, bureaucratic politics research is relatively scarce. Most studies focus on describing legal frameworks and administrative differences and suggesting strategies of reform while overlooking the internal dynamics and political aspects behind bureaucracy. This is a significant shortcoming, since bureaucratic resources and power condition policy outputs and drive social, political, and economic change.

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This article presents a comprehensive survey of peer-reviewed political science articles to highlight the state of the study of Latin American bureaucratic politics, which we define as the political interaction between individuals and organizations in the executive branch of government, as well as how those actors relate to actors outside the bureaucratic apparatus.¹ We find a prime field for exploitation and new avenues of research. Despite advances in the areas of legislative politics, judicial politics, and mass behavior in the region, no attendant “wave” of research into Latin American bureaucratic politics has arisen; out of 15,239 articles in the 33 top journals in the field from 2000 to 2015, only 107 deal with the topic in any meaningful way. The survey reveals a field that has progressed in starts and stops, with severe theoretical limitations. We contend that one of the main weaknesses of the study of bureaucracy in Latin America is a lack of coordination—or even dialogue—among the schools of public administration, political science, and organizational sociology. With some exceptions, each school has advanced independently of the others, with different foci, methodology, and goals.²

The accumulation of knowledge derived from different single-country case studies shows that suitable conditions exist for scholars interested in expanding comparative research and theory building around bureaucratic politics in the region. Inter-country variation and the dynamically changing character of public agencies in Latin America create an opportunity to unite the different schools and their analytic approaches to gain richer theoretical insights about bureaucratic politics. Variation in administrative capacity, the ability of different branches of power to exercise control over the bureaucracy, the alarming level of corruption in the public sector, and institutional differences make the region a good laboratory in which to develop and test theories of bureaucratic politics.

The article is structured as follows. The first section presents a systematic overview of the academic literature published during the last decade, explaining substantive trends and theoretical approaches. The following section summarizes large swaths of this literature, describing the state of the field with regard to four chief areas of research. The next section proposes a series of research questions that we consider necessary to advance the field and suggests different approaches to address those questions. The concluding section reiterates our justification for investing time and energy in this endeavor.

A SYSTEMATIC LOOK AT THE LITERATURE

To understand the limitations and possibilities of the field, we examined all articles on bureaucratic politics in 19 Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin American countries published in 33 peer-reviewed academic journals between 2000 and 2015. The review includes a sample of generalist, subdisciplinary, and region-specific journals, as well as others from sociology and economics, and those published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. We largely excluded public administration journals because we are interested in analyzing trends of scholarly literature focusing on the

political interaction within the bureaucratic apparatus—the intersection between bureaucracy and politics—although we include the journal *Governance* as a point of comparison.³ A complete list of the journals and articles is available in the online supplementary appendix.

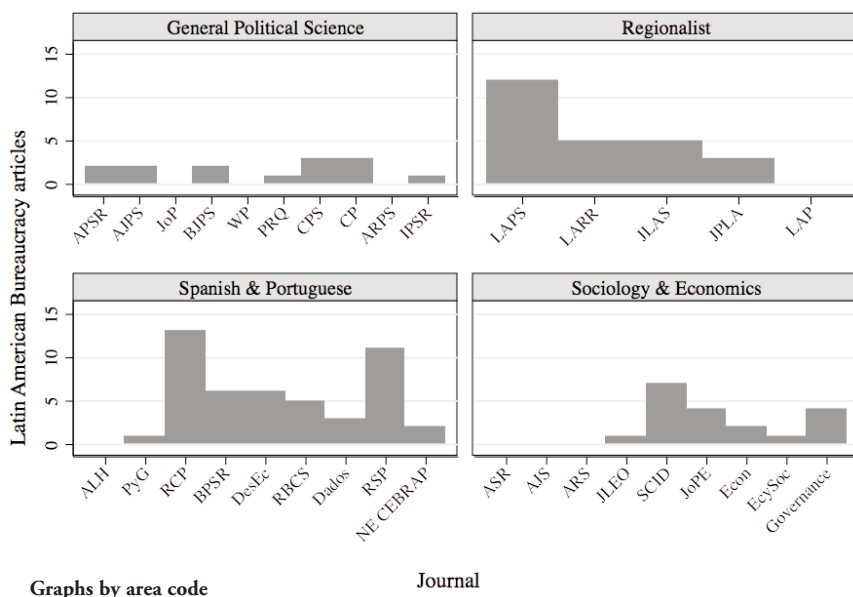
Determining what articles to include and exclude was a difficult task. Given the size and reach of public administration in modern politics, a great number of articles that explore processes with implications for the bureaucracy could be defined as bureaucratic politics—especially those in the fields of public policy and political economy. To undertake our classification, we borrow and add to Preston and Hart's (1999) conceptualization of bureaucratic politics: the political interaction between individuals and organizations within the executive branch of government, as well as their relation to actors outside the bureaucratic apparatus. This definition leaves out scholarship that has implications for the bureaucracy but that does not directly engage in the internal workings of the bureaucracy. It is not sufficient for scholarship to examine the political negotiation of the policymaking process for it to be classified as bureaucratic politics. The neoliberal processes of deregulation and privatization, for instance, inevitably affect the size and scope of the state, but we only include those works in which the role of the bureaucracy is explicitly integrated into the argument.

Publication Trends

This survey, which covers 495 journal-years and 15,239 research articles, produced a mere 107 pieces that dealt with bureaucratic politics in Latin American countries over a 16-year period or that theorized about bureaucratic politics in a developing world context. This equals a scant 6.7 total articles per year, or 0.22 articles per journal-year. There is no evidence from this survey of a wave of scholarship—that is, a multiyear monotonic increase in numbers—dedicated to Latin American bureaucratic politics, as was the case with legislative studies in the region in the 1990s and 2000s (Altman 2005; Alemán 2013) or judicial politics at the beginning of the millennium (Kapiszewski and Taylor 2008). At best, the field is in its embryonic stages, with scholars paying particular attention to the conceptualization and measurement of state capacity, bureaucratic capacity, bureaucratic autonomy and control, and civil service reform, but largely staying away from other potentially fruitful areas of scholarship.

There are no clear distinctions by journal or journal type, as figure 1 illustrates. The first plot on the upper left, restricted to the top generalist and comparative journals, shows a dearth of relevant articles, and the “big four” (AJPS, APSR, JoP, BJPS) are limited to game theoretic studies approximating the administrative conditions of Latin American countries (Bendor and Meirowitz 2004; Huber and McCarty 2004; Duvarova 2012; Gehlbach and Simpson 2015), with only two studies (Thies 2005; Gingerich 2013) explicitly examining Latin America. This is a clear indictment of the state of the field, its theoretical development, methodological sophistication, and usefulness to scholars beyond the subfield. The relative paucity of article place-

Figure 1. Articles on Bureaucratic Politics in Latin America by Journal, 2000–2015



ment in top journals—and lack of research in general—may be a result of a combination of factors: the difficulty of data collection or lack of quantifiable data with which to work, the limits of the methodological techniques, the language barrier for Latin American scholars writing and publishing in English, or the absence of a collective effort to develop new theoretical insights on bureaucracy in Latin America.

With the caveat that these journals may restrict high-end research being published by Latin American scholars in Spanish and Portuguese, the figures nonetheless show that work on Latin American bureaucratic politics tends to be restricted to regionalist journals. The bulk of articles come from region-specific journals published in English (upper right-hand plot in figure 1), and especially Spanish- and Portuguese-language journals from the region (bottom left-hand plot). Overall, 42 percent of articles (45 of 107) come from only 4 sources: *Latin American Politics and Society* (LAPS, 12), the Chilean *Revista de Ciencia Política* (13), Brazilian *Revista de Sociologia Política* (RSP, 11), and *Studies in Comparative International Development* (SCID, 9). Aside from SCID, there is also surprisingly little work on the topic in the economics and sociology journals we reviewed.

Research Topics and Countries

We further classified article content in 20 comprehensive categories according to the central topic of study, allowing up to two classifications for each (see online supplementary appendix for category definitions). Although much of the literature pertains to sector-specific areas like taxation, public utilities, or police performance, our primary classification emphasizes the common bureaucratic political terms discussed therein, like state capacity and governance. We do, however, list examples of this policy area literature below.

The taxonomic breakdown in table 1 shows that the most popular research topic was state capacity (23 articles), with bureaucratic capacity (10 articles) also among the most prevalent.⁴ Due to a lack of clarity surrounding these two terms, and their central importance to understanding the workings of the state in the developing world, a majority of these articles focus solely on conceptualization and measurement (e.g., Soifer and Hau 2008; Giraudy 2012; Kurtz and Schrank 2012; Mazzuca 2012; Soifer 2012). Although the concern with conceptualization is necessary and important, it shows that researchers have not been able to tie the ideas of bureaucratic and state capacity to other institutions, political behavior, or policy outcomes.

From a policy perspective, articles address a broad range of policy or sector-specific areas, including aviation (Monteiro 2008; Baird and Fernandes 2014), criminal justice and the police (Davis 2006; Dewey 2012; Nunes 2015), education (Soifer 2009), electoral bodies (Hartlyn et al. 2008; Gehlbach and Simpser 2015), energy (Pírez 2000), the environment (Brockett and Gottfried 2002; Orihuela 2014), industry and the private sector (Montero 2001; Schneider 2002, 2009; Duvanova 2012; Ponce and McClintock 2014), labor (Amengual 2011a), public health (Rich 2013), science (Alcañiz 2010), transportation (Palermo 2006), and water and sanitation (Regalsky 2010; López-Murcia 2013; Rocca 2014). Unfortunately, only three articles deal with the intersection of bureaucratic agencies, corruption, and politics, and research analyzing bureaucratic formation and evolution is absent, along with its intersection with party politics and democratic development in the rest of the region. The paucity of scholarship is most notable in works on Central America and the Caribbean.

In fact, most research focuses on the largest economies in the region, such as Brazil (25 percent), Argentina (11.5 percent), and Chile (10.7 percent).⁵ However, one surprising result is the underrepresentation of Mexico as a function of its size, the volume of its academic production, the high number of scholars in the country, and funds dedicated to political science research; it accounts for only 6.1 percent (8 articles) of the sample, even though the sample included Mexican-based political science and policy journals such as *Política y Gobierno* and *Economía*.

Table 1. Taxonomy of Article Topics

Topics	Percent	Total
Agency development	3.33	5
Appointments	4.67	7
Autonomy	5.33	8
Bureaucratic capacity	6.67	10
Civil service	2.67	4
Control of bureaucracy	2.67	4
Corruption	2.00	3
Delegation	6.00	9
Executive branch	4.00	6
Governance	8.00	12
Implementation	3.33	5
Networks	2.67	4
Oversight	2.00	3
Public management	3.33	5
Reform	8.00	12
Regulation	7.33	11
Private sector bureaucracy	4.00	6
State capacity	15.33	23
Street-level bureaucracy	6.00	9
Technocrats	2.67	4
Total	100	150

Note: Sum exceeds *N* of 108 due to articles with multiple content.

Analytical Approaches

There are three dominant approaches in the study of the bureaucracy: that of public administration, that of Max Weber and other organizational sociologists, and last, that of political science. Public administration research often focuses on describing policy areas, legal frameworks, and the policy implementation process of specific countries, with less attention to broader comparative analysis. Of the three approaches to bureaucratic studies, this is the dominant school, and one whose findings often drive the policy recommendations and reform suggestions of organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the Development Bank of Latin America, and the World Bank.

In the same vein, organizational theorists and sociologists in the tradition of Weber (2012 [1947]) and then the Carnegie School (e.g., Cyert and March 1963; Williamson 1985; March and Simon 1993 [1958]; Simon 1997 [1947]) are often more interested in the rules, laws, or regulations dealing with different offices with precisely defined competencies within the public and private sector, as well as understanding the rationale behind organizational dynamics (e.g., coordination among different departments of an institution, employees working at different hierarchical levels in the same organization, vacancy chains and interorganizational demography,

the origin and evolution of organizations, and the interaction between different institutions in the market). This school tends to draw broadly generalizable conclusions from detailed analysis of individual organizations in the private sector, although the theoretical applicability of such conclusions to public sector institutions has been dramatically neglected and understudied. Few scholars in the political science discipline have tried to link the powerful theoretical insights of organizational theory to public sector institutions in Latin America or other third wave democracies (Downs 1967; Smith 1979; March and Olsen 1983, 1996; DiPrete 1989).

Political scientists, for their part, have focused on the intersection of politics and public administration, with studies that are often more data-driven than theory-driven. Moreover, political scientists tend to focus on the political arrangements behind bureaucratic outputs rather than the interaction between politicians and public administration. Even beyond peer-reviewed works, many of the edited compilations of Latin American public institutions, history, and political economy are composed of single-country studies with no chapters dedicated to the bureaucracy.⁶

The review of the literature shows that articles using similar academic approaches are generally clustered by journal, even when the journals are dedicated to a region rather than a discipline (e.g., LAPS, JLAS, LARR). Most articles about Latin American bureaucracy in U.S. journals tend to approach the topic through the lens of political science, using quantification and comparison to examine the interaction of the bureaucracy and the political sphere and generally leaving aside the question of outputs (e.g., Eaton 2003; Hartlyn et al. 2008; Dargent 2011; Praça et al. 2011; Gingerich 2013; Carlin et al. 2014). Meanwhile, work published in Latin American journals nearly always comes from the field of public administration (e.g., Pérez 2000; Repetto 2000; Palermo 2006; Regalsky 2010) and often takes a more descriptive approach and focuses more on policy outputs and civil service behavior.

In addition, work that takes an organizational sociological approach to understanding the consequences of agency structure and design on performance is concentrated in just a few journals, especially SCID (e.g., Portes and Smith 2008; Mazzuca 2010; Falletti 2011) and RCP (e.g., Feldmann 2012; Mazzuca 2012; Soifer 2012). Most of these articles focus on single cases and refrain from cross-country comparison, perhaps due to the problem of measurement nonequivalence in comparative public administration (Jilke et al. 2015).

Methodological Approaches

The overarching research design favored by the authors of these studies of bureaucracy is the observational study. Setting aside the five game theoretic pieces and other theory-specific articles, all articles used observational data rather than an experimental or quasi-experimental method. The closest that any article came to experimental design is Gingerich's 2013 examination of intracountry variation in agency capacity, based on a series of surveys administered in three South American nations. In no case did scholars propose true random sampling of a given population, random assignment into treatment and control groups, and administration of

a treatment to one of those groups. Part of the reason for this is undoubtedly the focus on institutions rather than individuals, and the difficulty in administering even a quasi-experimental study, given the units of analysis. Still, this breakdown does not reflect the increased prevalence of experimental methods generally in political science during this time.

Furthermore, research was dominated by single-country case studies rather than cross-national comparisons. Sixty of the 107 articles (56.1 percent) feature case studies or single-country examinations; 15 include 5 or fewer cases; and only 12 are broadly cross-national and feature analyses based on a large number of cases. While these numbers indicate great detail in the analysis of single countries, they also reveal a tendency toward analysis in isolation from other cases and contexts, limiting the generalizability of insights and findings.

In short, the field of bureaucratic politics is underdeveloped and fragmented. Yet the systematic literature review also suggests a field grappling with theoretically and substantively interesting questions, and sometimes in very novel ways.

THE STATE OF THE FIELD

As in other subfields, many of the surveyed pieces seek to enrich existing theory by applying models developed under idealized conditions from the United States and elsewhere to a Latin American context. These analyses have yielded some understanding of political oversight of public agencies under weak legislatures (Siavelis 2000; Eaton 2003; Ferraro 2008; Arana Araya 2013), regulatory development and diffusion in places with weak states (Jordana et al. 2011; López-Murcia 2013; Baird and Fernandes 2014; Rocca 2014), and bureaucratic responses to budget shortfalls (Alcañiz 2010). Still, a large chunk of literature is not that ambitious. The peer-reviewed literature can be systematized into roughly four categories: descriptions of low organizational capacity and proposals for administrative reform; explanations of policy success in low-capacity environments; investigations of bureaucratic oversight under diverse circumstances, and analyses of regulatory behavior in weak states.

Low Organizational Capacity and Administrative Reform

High agency capacity, an organization's ability to analyze increasingly complex social problems and to carry out programs in accordance with previously specified plans, is an assumption that undergirds many of the canonical explanations of bureaucratic behavior in the United States and Western Europe (e.g., Downs 1967; March and Simon 1993 [1958]; Simon 1997 [1947]). Yet a number of scholars (e.g., Rauch and Evans 2000; Cárdenas 2010; Grindle 2012) show that this assumption rarely holds in Latin America. They agree that many public agencies in the region suffer from organizational deficits, low responsiveness to complex social problems, and low execution capacity. Often employing an organizational sociological framework, they demonstrate low "Weberianness," or few channels of meritocratic recruitment, pro-

bity, or predictable long-term careers. For example, Evans and Rauch (1999) and Zuvanic and Iacoviello (2010) find that most of the region's civil services suffer from stunted development, while the World Bank's World Governance Indicators or the Political Risk Group's International Country Risk Guide place most Latin American bureaucracies firmly in the lower or middle tiers internationally.

The response of public management scholars and policy experts has been to suggest administrative and governance reforms (e.g., Graham et al. 1999; Tulchin and Garland 2000; Schneider and Heredia 2003; Echebarría and Cortázar 2007). Since the 1990s, the dominant paradigm among these proposals has been the New Public Management (NPM), a movement advocating political and administrative decentralization and market-oriented management to achieve greater efficiency. The first generation of these reforms in Anglo-American states sought to decrease the size of the government, while the second generation looked to make structural and cultural changes (Hood 1995). In the 1990s, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay, and a host of other Latin American countries pursued varying degrees of NPM, often at the behest of right-of-center governments (Pereira and Spink 1999; Barzelay 2000, 2001; Pereira 2001; Arellano-Gault and Gil-García 2004; Panizza 2004; Ferraro 2006). Since the early 2000s, the "post-NPM" reforms that have emerged stress the need for horizontal coordination within government organizations, as well as coordination between the government and civil society (Panizza and Philip 2005; Christensen and Lægread 2007; Echebarría and Cortázar 2007).

These often controversial strategies have found mixed success, improving policy outcomes in some places (Arellano-Gault and Gil-García 2004) and generating significant problems in others (Narbondi and Ramos 1999). Yet inconsistent organizational and policy results have allowed scholars to draw at least two conclusions. First, since the administrative and political characteristics of states inevitably vary, universal standards for reform are unrealistic, and successful modifications are unlikely to follow a "one size fits all" recipe (Grindle 2007). Instead, situationally determined responses to specific problems appear more likely to improve governance and policy implementation.

Second, Weberian reforms should precede NPM, as much as possible, in less-developed democracies that tend to possess low organizational capacity. Peters, for example, argues that NPM is likely to do more harm than good in these places. "The values of efficiency and effectiveness are important, but in the short run not so crucial as creating probity and responsibility. Once a so-called Weberian administrative system is institutionalized, then it may make sense to consider how best to move from that system toward a more 'modern' system" (Peters 2001, 176). Other scholars, such as Ramió Matas (2001), share this perspective and contend that the presumed benefits of NPM tools are lost when they are implemented in countries with an administrative culture and tradition that differs from the Anglo-Saxon.

Policy Success in Low-capacity Environments

Evaluation of agency administrative capacity has led to other insights, specifically in explaining policy success. Despite overall low agency quality, political scientists have taken pains to document variation in administrative capacity within countries (Dargent 2011; Gingerich 2013; Bersch et al. forthcoming).

According to these studies, some organizations, like central banks and finance ministries, boast higher degrees of meritocratic recruitment and the ability to address complex problems regardless of the setting, while others, like education ministries, often do not. One important study by Gingerich (2013) uses extensive surveys of public employees in Bolivia, Brazil, and Chile to show that interagency differences in bureaucratic quality may actually be larger than cross-country differences. Similarly, Bersch et al. (forthcoming) refine concepts of both capacity and autonomy to show a number of high-performing Brazilian agencies amid a multitude of low-performing ones and to support the idea of Brazil's administrative "archipelago of excellence." Successful policy implementation is therefore possible in low-capacity environments for the simple reason that not all agencies are equal.

The sources of capacity go beyond budgets and civil servants' training. Organizational theorists argue that a root cause of improved agency effectiveness is a strong organizational culture; that is, a patterned way of thinking about the central tasks of human relationships in an organization (Wilson 1989, 91). Looking at posttransition Brazil, Tendler and Freedheim (1994) and Tendler (1997) contend that even in unfavorable contexts with overall poor public sector performance, managers can improve policy outcomes by promoting job dedication, a sense of mission, flexibility in response to client demands, and pride of workmanship among civil servants, as well as fostering organizational accountability from local governments and civil society. Echoing this, Grindle (1997) argues that organizational mystique, management style, performance expectations, and a degree of autonomy in personnel management contribute to positive organizational culture in better-performing agencies.

Scholars have also illustrated politicians' and bureaucrats' creative solutions to their agencies' weaknesses. Rich (2013) argues that politicians may ensure the implementation of national policies when political authority is weak or decentralized by developing allies outside the government. She shows how Brazilian bureaucrats mobilized civil society as a government watchdog and political advocate in the implementation of AIDS policy. Meanwhile, Alcañiz (2010) takes a network analytic approach to show that technology-driven bureaucratic sectors in Latin America respond strategically to budget cuts and general instability by becoming more active in transnational policy networks. According to her, domestic resource scarcity may actually foment transnational collaboration rather than stifle innovation.

In sum, the constellation of agencies and actors that make up the modern bureaucracy is more varied than what we perceive by looking solely at country-level indicators. Furthermore, politicians and civil servants may still be able to achieve implementation success from low-capacity agencies by collaborating with civil society or foreign actors.

Bureaucratic Oversight, Control, and Autonomy

Latin America has also proven to be a good place to study the persistent tug of war between politicians and bureaucrats for control over policy, a favorite avenue of research among political scientists. Although McCubbins (2014) finds most of the scholarship on political control of the bureaucracy to be shaped by U.S. and European politics, the topic of autonomy has intrigued scholars of Latin America off and on since Peter Cleaves's *Bureaucratic Politics and Administration in Chile* (1974).

Much of this work examines how elected officials are able to manipulate the bureaucracy so that it will implement their policy goals (Siavelis 2000; Ferraro 2008; Dargent 2011; Arana Araya 2013), while others analyze what conditions enable the bureaucracy to effectively achieve autonomy from political control (Eaton 2003; Orihuela 2014; Nunes 2015). This literature finds that inefficient agencies are often less responsive to politicians; that control of bureaucrats depends on both political and bureaucratic inputs; and that significant longitudinal variation exists. Furthermore, Latin America's weak legislatures make formal tools of political control often less successful than informal ones.

With few notable exceptions (Huber and McCarty 2004; Ting 2011), existing models of delegation almost uniformly assume high-capacity bureaucratic agencies (Bawn 1995; Epstein and O'Halloran 1996; Volden 2002). From the perspective of the political principal, this assumption generates a tradeoff between informational gains from agency expertise and distributive losses from bureaucratic drift—the “fundamental tension” that motivates much of the literature. Politicians can either attempt to monitor bureaucrats directly and actively through hearings—referred to as “police patrol” activities—or they can engage in “fire alarm” oversight, under which they rely on signals from third parties that have an interest in and information about bureaucratic activity (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984). Yet what happens when these parameters change and informational gains are reduced? What choices and new tradeoffs must politicians—or bureaucrats—consider as they convert laws into policies?

Latin Americanists have periodically addressed this question. Siavelis (2000) highlights four noncodified mechanisms in Chile by which constitutionally limited political actors can exercise control over the state's administrative apparatus. Similarly, Ferraro (2008) describes four informal means of congressional influence over the bureaucracy in the same country. Arana (2013) builds on both those works by explaining how Congress is able to use *protocolos*—agreements signed between the legislature and the executive during Chilean budgetary negotiations—to exercise greater influence over the bureaucracy than that granted by the constitution.

While politicians decide on an optimal level of discretion, bureaucrats seek more. Dargent (2011) exploits the appearance of “technocratic democracies”—democratic governments whose bureaucratic ranks include high numbers of technocrats, especially in central banks and finance ministries—in Colombia and Peru to show that the level of civil servant expertise is a fundamental source of bureau-

cratic autonomy. As a scarce resource in Latin America, expertise allows technocrats to advance their policy preferences against the interests of other powerful actors. Still, this principal-agent game is a back-and-forth between politicians and bureaucrats. Eaton (2003) shows that shifting partisan tides and political objectives in Argentina under the Menem presidency influenced the degree to which the country's General Tax Board sought autonomy from Congress, as well as its success at doing so. In other words, Latin America shows that politicians can still control bureaucrats in low-capacity places, even though this control is not always consistent.

The Regulatory State and the Private Sector

Scholars have made inroads into explaining how private interests may shape bureaucratic behavior in places where the state is weak. Business federations, chambers of commerce, and other organized private sector groups are active participants in Latin American politics that seek to influence public policy, budget allocation, governmental regulation, and law enforcement. One branch of this research examines the private sector's influence on policy (especially economics), while a second examines regulatory agency capture by organized interests.

The first branch examines how business interests organize and manifest themselves politically. Maxfield and Schneider's edited volume (1997) analyzes relations between bureaucrats and the business community that enhance elements of economic performance and defy conventional expectations that such relations lead ineluctably to rent seeking, corruption, and collusion. Contributors leverage variation in state capacity and statism to enrich theory and gain insight into bureaucracy-state relations across a broad range of cases. They also focus on economic change and how business interests manifest themselves in strong states versus weak states. Peer-reviewed scholarship charts a similar course, as illustrated by studies of business associations in Venezuela (Becker 1990), Chile (Silva 1996), Peru (Durand 1999), Colombia (Doner and Schneider 2000), and Mexico (Schneider 2002), to name a few.

In addition to work exploring how organized business may influence the state, other studies focus on how the state influences the private sector. Schneider (2004) uses Latin America as a laboratory to examine why the organization of business varies so greatly. He argues that most variation, such as weak versus strong, rich versus poor, or politicized versus neutral competence, can be traced back to actions of state actors and the cumulative effect of these actions over time. His main contention is that states organize or disorganize business interests. Yet recent research on these topics—both the influence of the private sector on the state and the impact of public administration on business—is more limited.

The second branch of the literature examining state-business interactions focuses on the development and function of the regulatory state. Some scholarship in this area takes a political science approach (e.g., Amengual 2011b; Batista da Silva 2011; Baird and Fernandes 2014), but most work on this subject tends to come from the fields of economics or public administration. Topics include the design of

regulation (Mueller and Pereira 2002), the diffusion of regulatory agencies (Jordana and Levi-Faur 2005; Post 2005; Levi-Faur and Jordana 2006; Jordana et al. 2011), and de facto regulatory independence in the region (Montoya and Trillas 2006, 2009; Durand 2010; Trillas and Montoya 2013). Far from simply reproducing existing analytical approaches or applying existing theories, much of this research moves theory development regarding the regulatory state away from a North American context to a broader sectoral one (e.g., central bank independence in a range of countries) or explicitly uses variation in the role of the state and its development in Latin America to produce generalizable insights.

All in all, despite the aforementioned limitations to the existing literature, scholars have still managed to gain impressive insight in a number of areas. Many have used variation in organizational and state weakness to explain such things as policy success, agency oversight and control, and regulation, especially in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

A ROADMAP FOR SCHOLARSHIP

Despite these advances, the subfield of bureaucratic politics remains underdeveloped in regard to Latin America, in comparison to legislative politics, political parties, mass behavior, and even judicial politics. An optimistic interpretation of this is that comparative bureaucratic politics in the developing world is an area ready for exploration. Although the works described above represent relevant contributions to the field, the limited number of published peer-reviewed articles on Latin American bureaucratic politics and the relative immaturity of the subfield itself indicate that more work is required to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how presidents, politicians, and bureaucrats actually exercise power in the region. Using the foregoing systematic literature review as a baseline, we lay out a series of questions we believe scholars must ask, as well as approaches that would best address those questions.

Research Topics: Filling in the Empirical and Theoretical Gaps

A first set of questions should build on gaining greater knowledge about what is actually going on in Latin America. Understanding the interaction of the bureaucracy and politicians, citizens, businesses, or interest groups is necessary to gain a more complete knowledge of Latin American politics. Complex political, social, and economic processes in the region are incomplete through a purely political interpretation. The systematic literature survey should provide a reasonable, though by no means exhaustive, guide to some of the most pressing substantive concerns. It highlights few published articles on the civil service, technocracy, agency creation and development, agency ideology, or even the size of the executive branch. Research in these areas would help to consider all sorts of pressing concerns.

First, the survey shows that scholars have only occasionally examined the behavior of the civil service and the technocracy in the region and how this behavior

is affected by, and in turn affects, politics. What political decisions, for instance, have helped make the Nicaraguan National Police so highly respected by citizens and effective at reducing violent crime in the country, especially in comparison to neighboring El Salvador and Honduras? What can these neighboring states learn from the Nicaraguan experience?

Second, the literature review turns up precious little on the development and evolution of different agencies, on which political agents undertake administrative reorganization and agency creation, or on how these processes work. How did Brazil's Public Prosecutor's Office (*Ministério Público da União*) evolve to enjoy such political autonomy and cachet that it has been able to successfully initiate and pursue the *Operação Lava Jato* money-laundering investigation? And why is there no equivalent agency in, say, Venezuela?

Third, the review reveals little research dedicated to explaining the political-institutional factors behind the size and organization of the state since the major wave of privatizations observed in the 1990s. For example, is the common wisdom correct in assuming that the leftist "pink tide" governments increased the size of their bureaucracies while governments in places like Peru and Panama decreased them? Answering questions like these is a prerequisite for understanding the region's politics and can give important clues for how to improve governance and services.

Of course, these are just three of the least-covered topics in our survey. Table 1 lists at least a dozen other thematic areas—all with important empirical implications—that merit more extensive investigation. Scholars have left other worthy topics untouched, such as measuring agencies' ideologies and seeing how these correspond to political actors' ideal points or how they change when political alternation occurs in the executive branch. Whatever the focus, a political bureaucratic approach provides a great avenue to understand many of the most pertinent issues in the political world.

A second set of questions aimed at theory building should be informed by the gap between existing theory and the Latin American reality. In particular, scholars should ask how well theories of bureaucratic politics developed elsewhere apply to Latin America. Testing existing theoretical models in a context of great empirical variation helps inform those theories, demonstrating under which conditions they do and do not work and allowing researchers to validate or further refine explanations. Some of the more rigorous articles in our review explicitly engage existing theories of the bureaucracy, while others unfortunately are largely theory-free. Applying existing suppositions, such as Niskanen's budget maximization model, the so-called Pendleton's premise, and that of representative bureaucracy to a Latin American context would allow researchers to utilize existing theoretical tools to gain a better understanding of the Latin American public apparatus, test the generalizability of commonly accepted theories, and allow the empirical particularities of the region to inform and refine those theories.

In a broader sense, scholars should ask, what assumptions hold across contexts and which ones need to be relaxed? The latter question challenges scholars to find new ways to explain bureaucratic and state behavior and also the policy implemen-

tation process. For example, U.S. legislative politics literature is predicated on the assumption that politicians are election seekers. In Latin America, some places bar re-election, while legislators in other places simply do not serve as long. This situation has encouraged theory building in that field during the 1990s and early 2000s. Outside of academia, most people believe the old truism that political appointees are generally of poorer quality than career civil servants (Pendleton's Premise). Given the variation in the percentage of political appointees compared to career bureaucrats in Latin American democracies, testing this theory would yield important information not only about how the bureaucratic state is composed in Latin America, but also how the theory is perceived and applied in other contexts.

Analytical and Methodological Approaches

The literature survey also shows that in many instances, scholarly studies of the Latin American bureaucracy fall short of the explicative rigor and methodological reliability that characterize work in other fields. Three chief debilities stand out: the research does not consistently focus on both bureaucracy and politics, but only on one or the other; little dialogue or cross-fertilization takes place among different analytical approaches; and scholars often pay scant attention to their research design and the reproducibility of their studies.

To remedy the first of these deficits, researchers must examine public agencies not as something separate from other political institutions but as one piece of a larger political puzzle. The public administration interacts with other institutions constantly, yet the amount of bureaucratic-legislative or bureaucratic-judicial relations literature, for instance, is not remotely comparable to executive-legislative relations scholarship. This raises a number of pertinent questions, such as which branch of government most influences the bureaucracy in Latin America, or how the bureaucracy affects these other branches of government. Unlike much of the organizational sociology or public administration literature, these questions seek to understand the characteristics and behavior of the bureaucracy in a political context and recognize that it is difficult to have one without the other. What's more, they consider dimensions and components of the bureaucracy as both independent and dependent variables, in conjunction with political-institutional factors.

The study of Latin American bureaucracy would undoubtedly benefit from greater dialogue between fields and approaches (including fields not discussed here, such as organizational psychology). Political scientists tend to cite political scientists, follow theoretical approaches from political science, and use a methodology particular to political science—similar to public administration scholars with their field and organizational sociologists with theirs. As a result, these three fields have tended to advance independently of one another, with different methodology and goals. Incredibly, neither the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) nor the Latin American Association of Political Science (ALACIP) has working groups dedicated to the study of bureaucracy in the region. The quality of knowledge would increase

by combining, say, the detailed knowledge of government agencies and policy responsibilities from those in public administration, the comparative framework and links to the political process studied by political scientists, and a greater understanding of the internal dynamics of agency hierarchy and organization as understood by organizational sociologists. Researchers like López-Murcia (2013), for example, have benefited by employing multiple techniques and approaches in their analyses.

Scholars should be more rigorous in constructing and executing their research designs, including data collection, measurement, and analysis. The foregoing discussion has noted that a great deal of scholarship on Latin American bureaucracy is descriptive, which limits theory building and reproducibility. Part of this—and part of the larger problems stunting the development of the discipline—is the difficulty in collecting, maintaining, and sharing data on public agencies, the civil service, and the state in Latin America. District-level electoral returns, legislative re-election rates, and high court appointments across the region are publicly available for scholars who seek to investigate these topics, but there are few commensurate databases dedicated to public contracting, civil servants' career trajectories, or the number of public agencies. Gathering and sharing quantifiable data is an important first step for the subfield.

Furthermore, greater attention to and justification of research design would help in the accumulation of knowledge. This means taking greater care to justify a qualitative versus quantitative design, weighing the advantages of a small- n approach against a large- N one, and ultimately choosing the method that best fits the particular research question. Too many of the reviewed pieces seem to assume the case study as a default when other designs would have been more appropriate, and few of them discuss the advantages or disadvantages of one research method over another.

Rigorous qualitative approaches, which focus on multiple causal pathways and interactions, are uniquely suited to explaining the dynamics of power inside organizations and between bureaucrats and other political actors seeking to exercise influence over them. These methods are best suited for testing conceptual validity, deriving new hypotheses, exploring causal mechanisms, and modeling complex causal relations. Yet they are more susceptible than large- N designs to selection bias, underdetermination, and lack of representativeness, and scholars must take care to address these issues in their work.

Scholars should explore the possibility of incorporating experimental designs as a methodological strategy.⁷ Despite difficulties in administration, this research strategy provides a clear-cut solution to problems of endogeneity endemic in a survey-oriented discipline like public administration. In doing so, an experimental research agenda can provide robust answers to old questions that are of theoretical importance, such as whether governmental performance information and transparency affect citizens' voting behaviors and trust (James 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013) or how public service motivation is linked to job performance (Bellé 2013). Just like case studies, if properly designed, experiments enrich the methodological toolbox of public administration research and help to increase usable knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of Latin American bureaucracy and bureaucratic politics is fundamental, given the considerable power and resources the executive branch wields in the region. Our comprehensive and systematic literature review illustrates that political science has paid relatively little attention to the political “black box” of the relationship between policy inputs and outputs and the link between politics and the behavior of public agencies. What we find is that scholars have dedicated much more work to understanding Congress and the judicial branch than the more powerful executive branch. Yet understanding political processes within the bureaucracy, the ability to develop and implement policies, and the consequences of this behavior are essential to explaining social, economic, and political changes in the region.

While it is simpler to study what is most clearly observable, studying where power is actually concentrated is more germane to understanding the political system and its relationship to people. If political science is the study of power, then it is crucial for scholars to have a better understanding of bureaucratic politics.

Existing scholarship on Latin American bureaucracy is often splintered, and it has tended to highlight the region’s infamous administrative inefficiency and to advocate different types of reform at the expense of a deeper understanding of the agencies in question. This article has summarized the conventional wisdom in the study of bureaucratic politics in Latin America, examined the major branches of academic research on bureaucracy, identified the key questions and conceptual disconnects in the literature, and suggested a roadmap to develop new avenues of research.

The accumulated knowledge in the academic literature and the variety of approximations of the study of bureaucracy in the region offer interesting but insufficient insights to understand the organizational dynamics of the most powerful structure in the executive branch. Scholars’ understanding of how these structures have evolved, are designed, and affect the political realm remains limited in many ways. We contend that there is a wealth of topics to explore and an urgent need to develop new avenues of research in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how power and politics work in Latin America. This survey and reflection of the state of the field should help scholars move forward in a deliberate and more coordinated manner.

NOTES

An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 2015. Andrés Herrera provided valuable research assistance. We would like to express our gratitude to Lorena Moscovich, Patrick Dumont, Matthew Kerby, Feodor Snagovsky, Bruno Hoepers, and three anonymous reviewers at LAPS for their comments and suggestions.

1. We also include a small selection of sociology and economics journals in order to incorporate fields with potentially theoretically relevant studies of bureaucratic politics.

2. Our survey of the literature focuses solely on articles related to Latin America in order to narrow the scope and to consider the region’s unique characteristics. However, we

believe that similar arguments could be extended to scholarly work focusing on bureaucratic politics in other regions of the world (i.e., Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East).

3. Although we recognize their value and contribution to the study of bureaucracy, major journals of public administration in Latin America tend to focus more on the formal aspects, legal frameworks, or case studies of public policy than on political scientific theory building. *Governance* sits at the intersection of political science and public administration, but it serves to illustrate that the incidence of relevant articles published in the public administration subdiscipline is not radically higher or lower than in others.

4. The online supplementary appendix contains definitions and distinctions between these concepts.

5. A detailed breakdown by country is available in the online supplementary appendix.

6. Notable exceptions include Centeno and Ferraro 2013; Garavaglia and Ruiz 2013.

7. One successful example of this comes from Kurtz and Schrank (2012), who propose an experimental method for capturing state strength.

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1. Online appendix