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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Bringing political science back into public administration research

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Abstract

The paper critically reviews the consequences of a bifurcation of Political Science and Public Administration. This divorce of two closely related academic fields has removed political explanations to key developments in the public service from Public Administration research and thus it tends to provide a partial view of the reality that it seeks to capture. There are several developments underway in the public sector, which underscore the political nature of public administration. These developments include the rise of administration politics; a growing emphasis on strategic management; governance-driven democratization and administrative micro-politics; the increasing significance of interactive and collaborative forms of governance; the rise of multilevel governance; and the development toward a more active citizenship. We find that in all of these areas, public administration research would benefit from incorporating a political science understanding of power, democracy, governance and citizenship.

1 | INTRODUCTION

While in reality, political and administrative logics are intertwined and almost inseparable, there is an unfortunate bifurcation between political science (PS) and public administration

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(PA) research and teaching that hampers the quality and relevance of much PA research that frequently fails to address questions about the political foundation of administrative practices, the power struggles within and around public administration, and the administrative efforts to protect democracy and democratize public governance. Arguing that politics, power and democracy are critical foci points in PA analysis, this paper aims to show how and why PS can, and should, be brought back into PA research.

We also need to bring PA insights back into PS. Political Science now largely ignores the largest part of government, and the very political actions taken during administration, but this is something we shall return to discuss in a subsequent paper. We believe however, that the need for bringing politics back into PA is particularly urgent in the face of the accumulation of new empirical developments and research insights that reveal the key role of politics, power and democracy in public administration and governance.

We suggest that much of public administration and public management provides only a partial view of the complex political and administrative reality that these studies seek to capture. We are not arguing that all public administration research is devoid of politics. Sub-fields such as accountability (Bovens et al., 2014) and political/administrative relations (Peters, 2018) are very much concerned with political questions. There is, however, a general trend toward management, even after the interest in New Public Management has crested, that leads us to make these arguments. Likewise, we are not suggesting that all areas of PA research should bring in a PS perspective, only that it is brought in where politics-related variables are expected to offer theoretical relevance and empirical explanatory capacity. Again, this would include areas such as the role of the public bureaucracy in agenda-setting, policy making, accountability, and state-client relationships, as well as studies of collaborative governance and democratic innovation.

Political factors play a significant if not critical role in setting the administrative agenda, shaping the modus operandi of administrative institutions and determining administrative decisions and outcomes. The purpose of the article is to identify and describe the current compartmentalization of politics and administration research and to outline ways toward more encompassing analyses of public governance and administration.

There have been repeated attempts to subject the standard depoliticized PA theory to a reality check. PA scholars have challenged the politics-administration dichotomy (Svara, 2001), infused administrative organizations with a more realistic understanding of politics and power (Peters, 2018), and emphasized the democratic norms on which public administration and governance are founded (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; O'Leary, 2011; Wamsley et al., 1985). Despite these valuable attempts to tear down the walls separating the study of politics from PA, public administration is more often than not viewed as a neutral mechanism for executing the political will of the government (see Overeem, 2014). The *Handbook of Public Administration* defines PA as a "field of inquiry with a diverse scope" whose fundamental goal is to "advance management and policies so that government can function" (Rabin et al., 1989: iii). From the reverse angle, we observe that the *Handbook of Political Leadership* (Rhodes & 't Hart, 2014) hardly mentions administration, although the editors themselves have been very much attuned to administrative issues in other publications. Similarly, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science* (Goodin, 2009) does not carry a single chapter on the role of public administration.

Public administration tends to be regarded as an inferior, legal-rational supplement to the political conflicts, power struggles and democratic processes that unfold in governing, defined as the authoritative allocation of values for a society (Easton, 1965). Public servants, it is assumed, only make small administrative decisions, leaving the big political decisions based on ideology, interests, and visions to elected politicians, special advisors and lobbyists. Hence, while public

administration may have a decisive impact on policy, for example, through street-level bureaucracy (Hupe & Hill, 2015), it is seen to lack the strictly political elements that are only found in the political actors in government. This is true even though scholars such as Edward Page (2012) have demonstrated the impact of public administrators on public policy.

At times, PS and PA examine the same phenomena but do so in different ways, and with different conclusions. For example, both disciplines have concerns with corruption, but have done so in very different ways. Political science tends to focus on large scale corruption and the effects on political trust, and other political variables. Public administration, on the other hand, tends to focus on petty corruption, and its effects on the effectiveness of the bureaucracy. Likewise, political science and public administration both deal with clientelism and patronage, but again in very different ways (Panizza et al., 2022).

It is difficult to say exactly how political PA is and should be, given the multi-disciplinary nature of the enterprise (Raadschelders, 2011), especially in Europe (Kickert, 2005). Although economics, sociology, law, and other disciplines are involved in PA studies, we will argue for a more central role for politics—and especially issues of power and democracy—than we can now find in much of contemporary writing in this discipline. Ultimately, public administration is about governance, defined as the process through which collective goals are formulated and achieved, and thus involves advising on, and implementing, fundamentally political choices.

2 | EXPLAINING THE SPLIT

The bifurcation of PS and PA research goes back to the attempts of Woodrow Wilson and Max Weber to eliminate corruption and safeguard administrative objectivity from political influence by formally separating the legal-rational realm of administration from the realm of politics, power and democracy (Overeem, 2005). Although working in different intellectual traditions, these two scholars argued for a practical separation of the two fields, and that seems to have led to a more clear-cut separation in research than in the reality of governing.

Although the technocratic tradition of Wilson in particular was institutionalized in classical public administration, and its "scientific" principles of good management so roundly criticized by Simon (1947), the political was not totally lost. Public administration continued to be taught in political science departments, at least in Anglo-American and Scandinavian institutions. The integration of political science and public administration endured longer in the Westminster systems, in part because of the slower and delayed adoption of behavioralism and rational choice approaches. In the continental countries and Latin America public administration was, and often still is, taught as law. Also, major books on the role of politics and democracy (Waldo, 1948) continued to be published.

During the period of classical public administration, PA research was closely linked to practice, for example, in the Brownlow Committee in the United States that aimed to improve public administration and its accountability vis-à-vis executive political power. This link to practice can be seen as the beginning of the managerialism that later contributed to the separation between political science and public administration. This increasing interest in management also can be seen in the influence of management scholars such as Mary Parker Follett and Chester Barnard on public administration.

A second episode of splitting developed as PS, first with behavioralism and later with rational choice, adopted a stance of methodological individualism and became less interested in the institutional aspects of government that are so important for public administration (March and

Olsen, 1989). In addition to this methodological stance, PS became more interested in issues such as voting behavior and public opinion, with an associated loss of interest in institutions including the public bureaucracy. Rational choice theorists did retain an interest in institutions, but primarily as structures within which individuals pursued their own interests (see Niskanen, 1971; Ostrom, 2011; Tsebelis, 2000) rather than as actors in governance in their own right. Meanwhile, much of PA scholarship remained qualitative in methodology and institutional in focus, as evidenced by the highly influential theories of implementation (Lipsky, 1980; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

In addition to changes within PS, there have also been trends and developments in PA that have driven the wedge between the two disciplines. One of the more important of these changes has been the development of public policy as a separate field of research. Because it deals with Lasswell's fundamental question of "who gets what", public policy tends to be more obviously political than does PA, and it has therefore attracted scholars more interested in the politics of governing, while public administration has become managerial, asking questions of how the policies are made to work rather than questions about the nature of the policies. In addition, both disciplines have de-emphasized public budgeting, and that basic allocation event each year tended to link public organizations in the bureaucracy with politics, as exemplified by the work of Aaron Wildavsky. As new schools of public policy began to be founded, public administration was increasingly left with scholars concerned primarily with the internal operations of public organizations and the role of management.

More recently, this separation has been reasserted and strengthened by New Public Management's (NPM) attempt to distinguish political "steering" from administrative "rowing" (Funck & Karlsson, 2020; see also Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) and efforts to enhance the instrumental efficiency of public administration through market mechanisms, performance management, and the search for and diffusion of evidence-based "best practices" (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). At the same time, the expansion of concerns with issues such as identity politics in political science widened the gap further, despite studies of representative bureaucracy (Meier et al., 1999).

Also, the contemporary turn from government to governance associated with New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006, 2010) unwillingly contributes to the de-politicization of public administration by arguing that the rise of networked forms of governance is a smart and efficient way of ensuring coordination and governability of our increasingly complex, fragmented and multilayered societies (Stoker, 2019). This approach to governance then leaves conventional politics aside, and assumes that questions of democracy are answered by the existence of networks that enhance participation and spur deliberation. Likewise, public bureaucracies are left aside because of their presumed formality and rigidity as contrasted to the nimbleness of networks.

Moreover, in many parts of the world, the disciplinary split between PS and PA has become consolidated and amplified by an institutional separation as PA is often taught outside PS departments and in special professional or management schools. The divorce between PA and PS that we see in the United States has not happened in the Scandinavian countries, at least not to the same extent. PA remains part of the core PS curriculum in this region. However, the internationalization of Scandinavian research have pushed it in the same direction as US and UK as researchers face the choice of going for the international conferences and journals that specialize in PA or those with a PS focus.

We should not, however, be too quick to say that public administration has become devoid of interest in political questions. Some areas of inquiry such as representative bureaucracy (public administration's long-standing concern with identity politics) do relate directly to fundamental political questions such as representation and the roles of ethnicity and gender in politics (Kennedy, 2012). In addition, the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians (Bertelli &

Busuioc, 2021), patronage appointments in bureaucracies (Panizza et al., 2022) and more recently the impact of democratic backsliding on public administration (Bauer et al., 2021), remain active within public administration. But we would argue that these are found more often on the periphery of a field of inquiry currently dominated by an interest in management.

The institutional and disciplinary separation of PA from PS is problematic as it hampers a much needed inquiry into the political dynamics embedded in and gradually transforming public administrations. We risk losing sight of how political ideas and forces motivate administrative reforms; the continuous interaction between different forms of political and administrative power in formulating, implementing and evaluating public policy; and the role of public administration in democratizing governance. We also lose sight of the political role played by street-level bureaucrats who make policy as they implement it. By treating public administration as merely preoccupied with "the administration of things" rather than "the government of men" (Saint-Simon, 1975), we are deprived of crucial insights into how politics, power and democracy drive the development and shape the impact of public administration.

In order to map the extent to which political considerations have been divorced from PA research, we searched the *Web of Science* database for concepts such as politics, power and democracy[1] in abstracts of articles in five leading public administration journals from 2005 to 2019 (see Table 1). There are marked differences among the journals, but in general those concepts associated with politics appear in less than half (44%) of all articles published in those journals. It appears that the technical and managerial elements of public administration have come to dominate the political, especially in *Public Management Review.* In *Governance* and *Public Administration*, on the other hand, there are more articles that do have some connection with politics.

We are not claiming that the separation of these disciplines is complete or irrevocable. However, the table does contain information on the principal journals in public administration and it shows that political concerns are not as central as they might have been thought to be, given that public administration is a key aspect of governing, and therefore is concerned with an inherently political activity. Samples taken from other journals and books might show more concern with politics, but we believe that these data constitute a fair "test" of our proposition.

In order to stimulate the integration of PS and PA, this article will first consider recent developments and insights that call for a *rapprochement* between the two disciplines. It will then seek to draw out and reflect upon the possible implications of an increased appreciation of politics, power and democracy in PA research. This discussion is followed by the presentation of some key examples of the important insights that can be reaped from bringing politics back into PA research.

While there are good reasons for re-connecting the two neighboring fields, there are some important disciplinary and institutional barriers that must be overcome in order to create a more integrated approach. These barriers are discussed at the end of the paper. The conclusion summarizes the argument and sets out the agenda for further research based on the recognition of the interdependence, interconnection and overlap between political and administrative processes.

3 | BRINGING POLITICS, POWER AND DEMOCRACY BACK INTO PA

The introduction of NPM reforms from the 1980s onwards triggered scholarly discussions about the relation between politics and administration. Some argued that NPM resulted in a de-politicization of public administration by reducing it to a matter of getting things done in the most efficient way by quasi-autonomous public and private agencies operating at arm's length from

TABLE 1 Articles with keywords in major public administration journals

Year	Articles with keywords[a]	All articles	Percentage w/ keywords	Percentage of articles with keywords				
				PA[b]	PAR[c]	GOV[d]	J-PART[e]	PMR[f]
2005	62	140	45	55	35	78	33	36
2006	58	163	36	39	33	46	36	45
2007	75	187	40	64	38	64	50	19
2008	82	193	42	45	41	67	40	32
2009	93	229	41	38	40	61	35	38
2010	105	271	39	49	30	65	43	24
2011	121	270	43	49	39	59	44	22
2012	98	211	46	47	44	63	43	27
2013	108	210	51	54	42	79	46	28
2014	87	194	44	40	47	77	34	13
2015	101	214	48	42	46	85	43	22
2016	100	224	44	48	38	77	40	18
2017	101	216	46	55	31	73	49	26
2018	95	212	44	48	31	74	49	16
2019	130	290	45	63	28	70	61	22

[a]Politics, Power, Democracy.

[b]*Public Administration*.

[c]*Public Administration Review*.

[d]*Governance*.

[e]*Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.

[f]*Public Management Review*.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the *Web of Science*.

political and democratic control (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007; Egeberg & Trondal, 2009). In addition, a new drive for cost-efficiency created a managerial necessity that marginalized political concerns, values and judgments (Fawcett et al., 2017); indeed, in public value theory, political leadership was reduced to "the authorizing environment" for entrepreneurial public managers aiming to expand public value creation (Moore, 1995).

Conversely, others argued that NPM politicized public administration by enhancing executive control over implementation through performance management, increased use and empowerment of politically appointed staff, introduction of bonus wages and temporary contracts for top-level public servants, and generally expecting public servants to be promiscuously partisan (Aucoin, 1990, 2012). NPM also politicized public organizations below the peak level as performance management was used to enforce political agendas throughout the career civil service (Peters, 2004). However, both arguments maintain the old boundaries between politics and administration and merely complain that one is growing at the expense of the other. By contrast, we claim that *all the links in the chain of governance connecting elected politicians with public managers, frontline staff, service users and societal stakeholders are infused with both political and administrative logics and therefore must recognize both political questions and administrative concerns.*

The preference for treating politics and administration as separate realms and fields of study prevents development of an integrated view of politics and administration. Fortunately, a number of empirical developments and research insights create a fertile ground for reconnecting PS and PA research. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we point to six developments and insights that prompt us to bring politics back into PA research.

3.1 | The rise of administration politics

Administration politics aiming to reform public administration including its organization, mode of governance and forms of leadership has gradually established itself as a new policy area in line with social policy, environmental policy, etc. (Torfing et al., 2020). As Kettl (2002) has demonstrated, US presidents have always played a role in shaping core ideas about public administration. The division and balance between political and administrative powers, the internal administrative divisions and structures, the degrees of devolution, and the forms of participation have been subject to political decisions by presidents. After the formative years with intense constitutional struggles, most Western industrial societies formed a broad-based consensus about the salience of liberal democracy and public bureaucracy (see Kickert, 2005). Discussions about administrative reforms have, therefore, for the most part been internal to public bureaucracy and seldom stimulated political debate, at least not in Continental Europe.

The US President Ronald Reagan and the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher both campaigned on administrative reform (see Savoie, 1994). They attacked the postwar consensus about the virtues of public bureaucracy and recommended drastic administrative reforms to abolish waste and cut back the public sector, partly inspired by the emergent neoliberal market orthodoxy and the new managerialism. The ensuing public administration reforms, which Hood (1991) dubbed NPM—the US variant was named National Performance Review—later inspired several center-left governments in Europe that sought to trim the welfare state in the face of globalization and economic recession. Special government units driving public sector reform have also become more frequent, reflecting the politicization of administrative reform.

NPM seems to have waned, and the criticisms of its shortcomings and failures and its unintended negative effects are mounting (Hood & Dixon, 2015; Hood & Peters, 2004). This has stimulated the search for new governance paradigms such as the Neo-Weberian State (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004), New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006) and Digital Era Governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006), thus fueling the political debates about the future of public administration. Also, in some countries, the period beginning around 2010 has seen a resurgence of political involvement with the bureaucracy, albeit mostly in populist rejections of "the deep state" that is assumed to block government policies (Bauer et al., 2021).

In sum, the last 4 decades have revealed that the functioning of public administration is not only a result of scientifically guided administrative engineering in the search for best practice. It is also, for a large part, shaped by political projects and ideologies and subject to intensified political debate (Peters, 2018). There is no "one best way" of organizing, steering and managing public administration, but rather competing ideas and strategies with different political advocates. Since these issues have significant impact both on the politics-administration interface and the relationship between the bureaucracy and its clients, these are inherently political choices.

3.2 | The new emphasis on strategic management

One of the unintended consequences of NPM has been to make the executive public managers more closely linked with the political level, thus becoming more concerned with political steering than administrative rowing. The rise of populist political leaders who are unwilling to take advice from administrative advisors may mitigate this effect, although policy areas outside the limited field of view of populist leaders tend to be controlled by executive public managers.

NPM has emphasized the strategic management of public organizations. Senior-level bureaucrats are expected to be responsible for developing strategic plans, organizational visions and public value propositions, seeking political authorization of their new ideas for public value creation, and finally aligning their organization to facilitate implementation (Moore, 1995). This argument is echoed by Goodsell (2011) who also emphasizes the role of public managers in formulating visions and missions that mobilize the employees and breeds excellence in the exercise of this new form of strategic management and leadership. Thus, to the idea that street-level bureaucrats are the real policy makers (Hupe, 2019; Lipsky, 1980), we can add that senior-level strategic managers are also involved in policy making that is only partly controlled by their political principals who have acquired the role of a distant executive board endorsing the corporate strategy and budget.

3.3 | Governance driven democratization and the rise of administrative micro-politics

It is not only the line of demarcation between politics and administration that is becoming increasingly blurred, but also the boundary between the public and private sector. Public administrators are spearheading attempts to democratize public governance by encouraging for-profit or non-profit stakeholders as well as affected users and citizens to engage in collaborative endeavors to solve complex problems that the public sector cannot solve on its own (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Thus, democratization now implies involving groups and individual citizens in the delivery of services as well as the actions of political movements, parties and leaders seeking to represent the interests of different segments of the population (Warren, 2009).

The emerging mode of democratic participation at the output side of the political system differs in some important aspects from the participation that occurs through conventional channels at the input side (Pierre & Røiseland, 2016). It tends to be highly disaggregated and generally only applies to issues that matter to particular individuals or user groups. This failing is in part because the administrative agency targeted by critical users and citizens engaged in output-based participation cannot address political issues, and in part because such participation is mainly related to subjective assessments of specific public service (Rosanvallon, 2011). In this rather atomistic form of participation issues such as justice, redistribution or public interests are likely to be ignored. The disaggregated service decisions are, however, still political because they do affect the distribution of goods and services.

3.4 | The surge in interactive and collaborative governance

The mushrooming of interactive and collaborative forms of governance further blurs the boundaries between politics and administration (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Torfing

et al., 2012). In the last 30 years, governments across the Western world have invited for-profit and non-profit stakeholders into the governance process in an effort to improve the effectiveness, democratic legitimacy and innovativeness of public governance (Kickert et al., 1997; Salamon, 2002). As a result, public leadership and management has been redefined from hierarchical, bureaucratic control to "metagovernance" that seeks to influence, in subtle and indirect ways, the performance of networks, partnerships and other types of collaborative governance (Jessop, 2002; Peters, 2010; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009).

If previously public managers were mainly concerned with motivating their own employees through combinations of transactional and transformative leadership, they were now prompted to use institutional design, discursive framing, boundary spanning and process management to convene relevant actors and facilitate sustained collaboration, compromise formation and joint implementation of new and bold solutions (Crosby & Bryson, 2010).

Collaborative governance and metagovernance were initially seen as a task for public administrators (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Warren, 2009). More recently, however, government officials as well as researchers have begun to focus on the political and democratic implications of involving citizens into processes of public governance, which tends to enhance the number of political actors aiming to influence the authoritative allocation of values in society (Torfing & Triantafillou, 2013). This new focus has stimulated interest in "political metagovernance" that involves elected politicians making politically charged metagovernance decisions, for example, about the overall goalsetting, the financial framework, or exclusion of particular actors (Sørensen & Torfing, 2016). Political metagovernance thus tends to re-politicize collaborative governance and this enhances the need for PS theories to study the implications.

3.5 | The rise of multilevel governance

The formation of elaborate systems of multilevel governance tends to redefine the conventional role of elected politicians and their administrative aides. Politicians and public servants participate in the uploading and downloading of policies across local, regional, national and supranational governance levels, blurring the division of labor between politics and administration (Bache & Flinders, 2004). Political and administrative actors at each level in the nested governance systems become as much "policy takers" adopting, adapting and implementing decisions from above as they are "policy makers" developing new policies. As a consequence, both politicians and civil servants must deal with political as well as administrative issues in order to maneuver in the complex system of multilevel governance.

Multilevel governance requires that political and administrative resources are employed by groups of politicians, bureaucrats, experts and policy professionals seeking to promote the interests of a city, region, country, or industrial sector (Pierre, 2017). Politicians and civil servants tend to work closely together—as well as with other relevant actors—in order to cope with political and regulatory demands from above and requests for the development of new solutions from below. However, they also collaborate in order to influence policy making at both higher and lower levels of governance based on the interests articulated within their particular jurisdiction. Such close collaboration between politicians and bureaucrats is perhaps most common in local and regional government, but it is also found at the national and supranational level and sometimes even diagonally between politicians at one level and public servants at another (Piattoni, 2010). Faced with strategic challenges of governing within a multilevel governance system in which each level is both a policy taker and a policy maker, politicians and civil servants develop

a joint interest in maintaining autonomy while working with other actors in other jurisdictions to design new and better policy solutions.

3.6 | The development of an active citizenship

A recurrent theme in the developments described above is that citizens are no longer merely seen as passive clients or users governed by public authorities with no other role to perform than to elect their rulers, or to act as customers in quasi-markets for welfare services. They are increasingly recast as active and competent citizens with resources enabling them to participate in co-production of public services (Alford, 2009; Ostrom, 1996; Pestoff, 2012), or in the design of solutions for the local community (Arnstein, 1969).

Governments tend to welcome this participation as they need to mobilize the knowledge, resources and active support of the population in order to enhance input and output legitimacy (Hendriks & Lees-Marshment, 2019; Warren, 2009). The strategic effort of governments to cultivate an "active citizenship" is not only visible in areas such as public health, employment, social policy, environmental regulation and public safety. It is also a key element in the current embrace of co-creation that encourages, and indeed presupposes, the active participation of citizens and civil society actors in re-designing public service systems, planning urban futures and developing solutions to complex societal problems (Alford, 2014, 2016; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Stivers, 1990; Torfing et al., 2019). A study by Dalton and Welzel (2014) indicates that the efforts to recast citizens from being passive clients to, first, critical customers and, subsequently, active citizens have changed the political culture in Western liberal democracies.

From a democratic perspective, the rise of active, competent and critical citizens is positive as it may stimulate participation in times when election turnout and party membership is declining and thus help provide valuable inputs such as knowledge, ideas and support to political leaders (Nye, 2008). However, there is a risk that increasingly assertive citizens are merely given influence through participation in online consultations, public hearings, user boards and free service choice that only enable them to oppose, criticize and reject public solutions. In a worst case scenario, this could lead to the development of a 'counter democracy' in which active citizens veto public governance initiatives without taking responsibility for the need to solve pressing policy problems (Rosanvallon, 2008).

Alternatively, the involvement of assertive citizens in co-creation of public value outcomes and political debate about what works for the larger society may involve the creation of a new interactive democracy (Rosanvallon, 2011). Either way, participation of active citizens tends to politicize public administration by treating both elected politicians and civil servants as representatives of government and thus as key partners in interactive governance that involves empowered citizens in political debates about issues affecting their life quality (Torfing et al., 2012).

However, it has not only been the public sector encouraging more active citizenship since many citizens are demanding more control over the political elite. This demand is reflected in the rise of populism in many Western and post-communist countries. When in government, populist leaders have demonstrated a disturbing lack of respect for democratic institutions, procedures and values. In such situations, public administrators may emerge as guardians of democratic values, providing a bulwark against democratic backsliding (Bauer et al., 2021; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Civil servants may use their power to engage in "guerilla government" (Olsson, 2016; O'Leary, 2006) in order to delay and obstruct policies they consider illegal, anti-democratic or working against the public interest (Guedes-Neto & Peters, 2021).

Certainly, in the US, Brazil and elsewhere, civil servants have been sticking up for the rule of law more than have elected politicians, as indicated by a growing number of whistleblower incidents. This is clearly a juncture at which the public bureaucracy must be considered a political actor in terms as a protector of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

3.7 | Summary

These trends demonstrate that public administration is a seat of politics, power and democracy in much the same way as the political institutions of government, although differences in emphasis remain. Still, we lack real attempts to connect and integrate PS and PA research in ways that improve our ability to understand public administration as an integral part of the political system. Endeavors to explore the politics of public administration and its political and democratic implications are few and far between. PS research tends to focus on politics, power and democracy in the formal institutions of government, particularly the executive branch. Meanwhile, most PA scholars have perpetuated the de-politicization of public administration by focusing on managerial issues and how to implementing public policy and programs effectively and efficiently. The unfortunate outcome has been that we produce research that lacks relevance because the omnipresent political logics are left out.

4 | ASSERTIONS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EMBRACING POLITICS, POWER AND DEMOCRACY IN PA

The starting point for more fully integrating PS and PA is to foster research that recognizes the real-world intertwinement of politics and administration and that therefore aims to bring PS back into PA research. After years of de-politicized PA research, there is a need to emphasize again the idea that politics, power and democracy not only have relevance for, but play a key role in public administration. Those crucial political aspects define the institutional hierarchy, patterns of loyalty and organizational objectives. In terms of research design, this means that variables related to political leadership, power struggles and democratic norms can explain administrative phenomena. Disregarding these key features of public administration will preclude scholars from a more complete understanding of public administration. To that effect, we advance three basic assertions.

The *first assertion* is that not only the overall goals, budgets and structures of public administration, but also the mission statements of public organizations, the choice of policy instruments, the production and delivery of services, and the interface between the public sector and its external environment reflect political values and choices. Administrative discourses, organizations and processes are shaped by political decisions that involve both public and private actors in political debates and struggles. Indeed, we would argue that public administrators are generally in closer contact with private stakeholders on a day-to-day basis than are politicians.

The public service is an inherently political organization, pursuing and facilitating political objectives under political leadership. Ignoring these fundamental features of the bureaucracy and portraying it largely as a service-producing system is, simply put, missing the point. Moreover, public administration is perhaps the key linkage between the government and society. Administrative structures and processes have evolved significantly over the past two decades as there has been a growing emphasis on collaboration both within the public sector and with societal actors.

This collaboration is in addition to the 'public encounters' between public administrators and citizens (Bartels, 2013).

The room for political decision making is narrowed by institutional lock-in mechanisms in public administration that support the preservation of the status quo (Pierson, 2000), although actors may exploit critical junctures of disruptive turbulence to make structural changes. Alternatively, they may aim to make incremental changes by gradually modifying rules, procedures and ideas, or adding a new layer of institutional designs on top of existing layers, or reinterpreting ambiguous rules in order to facilitate strategic realignment (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

The focus on the political foundation and structuring of public administration means that we must consider the role of different voices and interests, coalition building, multidimensional conflicts and compromise formation in the shaping of public administration. It also means that we cannot evaluate public administration with a single yardstick, as the political, administrative and societal actors will invoke a number of competing goals. The traditional measure of effectiveness, efficiency and equity is challenged by other and equally valid goals such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which raise important questions about the course of societal development.

The *second assertion* is related to the power aspects of the public administration, and the public service as a battleground for groups competing for control. The interaction between executive politicians, public managers, professional frontline personnel, service users, citizens and stakeholders is replete with *power strategies*. While these power strategies often operate at the macro-level, seeking to affect regions, countries, sectors and organizations, individual actors become vehicles for their promulgation at the micro-level. Social and political actors both collaborate and clash with each other when aiming to set the political and administrative agenda, reframe governance processes, improve service and redefine those who are governing and those who are governed (Clegg et al., 2006).

The power strategies that shape and reshape the public sector and thus create a complex grid of power relationships can be analyzed in terms of competing public governance paradigms (Torfing et al., 2020). To legitimize themselves, public governance paradigms appeal to cherished values such as stability, efficiency and trust and seek to demonstrate their capacity to deal with unsolved or emerging problems. They aim to present themselves as all-purpose solutions and exploit conceptual ambiguity and vagueness to become the new fashion (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983) or gain the status of a "magic concept" (Pollitt & Hupe, 2011).

At the micro-level, public managers and employees face competing and co-existing power strategies that define logics of appropriate action defined by different governance paradigms. This predicament calls for context-sensitive reflection and choice that aim to match competing prescriptions to specific situations (March & Olsen, 1995). A similar argument can be made about shifting policy regimes (Jochim & May, 2010). At the extreme, bureaucratic politics represents the conflicts of public organizations over the allocation of resources, driven in part by their self-interest and in part by commitment to their clients.

The *third assertion* is that the public administration can be seen as a vehicle for *democratizing* public governance, partly through its protection of the public interest through a high level of transparency, and the effort to maintain accountability, and partly through its orchestration of participation and deliberation at both the input and output side of the public sector. Public administration is integral to democratic governance in implementing political decisions and as an interface between the elected elite and the public. NPM reform advocates downplayed the democratic role of the public service and focused on its role as a service provider that served "customers", not "citizens."

While we are used to see the institutions of government as an exclusive source of democratic governance, the appreciation of the democratizing role of public administration allows us to understand its independent impact on democracy. Public administration is not only subject to democratic control from its political principals and public auditors; it may stand up against autocratic governments and play a role in safeguarding democratic values and procedures (Bauer & Becker, 2020; Bauer et al., 2021; Peters & Pierre, 2019). Indeed, it is often elected governments rather than public administrators who try to limit access to information about public affairs as well as to administrative and legal recourse that limits their capacity for political maneuvering.

Public administrators may also spur the development of new forms of democracy, either by establishing elected user boards and other representative bodies or by inviting relevant actors and stakeholders to participate in deliberative processes concerning budgets, service delivery, public planning or societal problem solving. When promoting these forms of participatory and deliberative democracy, public administrators can play a crucial role as political intermediaries connecting elected politicians with private stakeholders and citizens, thus linking active and direct forms of participation with representative democracy to create new types of hybrid democracy (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019).

These three assertions reflect different aspects of the same basic issue. We suggest that the community of PA scholars have been very sensitive, perhaps even too sensitive, to fluctuations in the public administration and public management reform agenda. While it is certainly commendable that the research community engages the practice of public administration, there is also a danger of lost integrity in relationship to the current fad and fashion in such a strategy (Peters & Pierre, 2016). Understanding the basic political and democratic role of public administration must remain a commitment of PA scholars.

5 | WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

While it is difficult to deny the pivotal role that politics, power and democracy play in explaining public administration phenomena, it is less evident what difference it makes whether one takes a PS view of PA or sticks to the idea that public administration is an efficiency-enhancing implementation machine focused on management. To further clarify this, let us look at some examples of where a PS focus on politics, power and democracy matters.

First, there is a growing reliance on evidence-based policy making (Howlett, 2009; Sanderson, 2002). Ideally, policy problems are carefully documented through scientific studies and the impact of policy solutions are tested based on random control trials in order to create solid evidence of their effectiveness. Evidence is created through application of scientific methods and supposed to be untainted by politics. In reality, however, we often have policy-based evidence making rather than evidence-based policymaking, with interpretation of evidence shaped by the political preferences of the policy makers (Marmot, 2004). Evidence is diverse and contested and tends to be constructed through an interplay between facts, norms and political preferences (Head, 2008). Failing to understand the political and cultural nature of evidence in public policy is a source of serious misjudgment in PA analysis, and PA researchers should work from the assumption that evidence is always partly shaped by political preferences (Strassheim & Kettunen, 2014).

Secondly, the failure of interagency policy coordination resulting in service gaps, redundancies, conflicts and lack of synergy is a well-known problem (Bouckaert et al., 2010). However, if the solution to this pertinent problem is discussed merely in terms of organization reform,

clear responsibilities, improved communication and the provision of digital information sharing (Brattberg, 2012; Kaiser, 2011; Kapucu, 2006), there is a risk that the analysis overlooks the political conflicts and power games that often prevent efficient and effective coordination between public agencies with different jurisdictions but shared responsibilities (Grumbine, 1991). Hence, we need to study the politics of coordination assuming that the lack of coordination owes to the fact that public organizations are steeped in different regulatory traditions, have different core beliefs, are headed by equally ambitious political and administrative leaders, and want to protect or expand their prestige and resource through turf wars (Bardach, 1998). Hierarchical imposition may not be enough to put a lid on interagency conflicts that can only be tackled by means of political bargaining, political incentives, agency-based brokerage and the exercise of public leadership based on reframing and construction of joint storylines (Peters, 2018).

Third, NPM advocates tend to explain implementation failure as a result of the lack of top-down communication of goals, plans and procedures and bottom-up information about the results that are achieved. According to Barber (2008), implementation problems can be solved if executive leaders clearly set out the policy goals and communicate the program theory and the carefully plan the implementation process and create a clear "line of sight" based on regular performance reporting. Without denying the usefulness of intensified communication up and down the implementation chain, this solution to implementation problems appears a bit naïve in the face of the power struggles between the executive level and the frontline staff that might disagree with the new policies for professional or political reasons and therefore might engage in shirking or outright sabotage (Brehm & Gates, 1999). Opposition to policy implementation may also come from recalcitrant user groups or stakeholders (Mayntz, 1993, 2016). Failing to address the political conflicts and power struggles that undermine implementation will eventually produce studies that overlook an essential part of the picture (Sager, 2007).

Fourth, there has recently been a growing interest in how service users can co-produce services and relevant and affected stakeholders can co-create public solutions (Brandsen et al., 2018; Needham, 2008). The transformation of citizens from clients to co-producers, or even co-creating partners, is generally discussed in terms of an efficiency-improving and innovation-enhancing mobilization of societal resources into the public sector and thus fails to appreciate the democratic implications of this development. Inviting citizens to co-produce services and co-create public value outcomes provides a new channel for participation and democratic influence on the output side of the political-administrative system and calls for new research on selective participation bias, democratic ownership and interactive democracy (Ansell & Torfing, 2021).

Fifth, a PS approach to PA issues will also help uncover the political ramifications of seemingly routine administrative matters. A growing number of studies on how administrative procedures and rules, by default or design, have far-reaching consequences for clients of social programs highlight the inherently political nature of policy implementation (see for instance Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Michener, 2018; Soss et al., 2011). Much work remains to be done in this field of study.

A final example of the value added from taking a political science approach to PA research concerns the use of digital Information and communication technology in the public sector. So far the focus has been primarily on how digitalization can enhance administrative efficiency and effectiveness. Analysis of big data combined with machine learning may also help to enhance effective governance and build smart cities (Townsend, 2013), although it begs the pertinent political question of who is in charge. Digitalization is also a powerful tool for democratization, offering new forms of online participation; driving co-creation of public value outcomes; enhancing the transparency of public governance; and facilitating sustained interaction among

citizens, administrators and elected politicians (Greve, 2015). The downside, however, is that the digital tools deployed by public administration are developed by big hard-to-control tech firms and based on algorithms that may prevent free and open communication.

There are many more examples of how PS matters to PA that provide further evidence to the need for bridging the disciplinary divide. Providing such a bridge will change the focus of PA research from its current preoccupation with "managing" to a concern with "governing." We shall now turn to consider the prospect for reconnecting public administration with political science.

6 | THE PROSPECT FOR BRINGING PS BACK INTO PA?

Despite the considerable gains from a rapprochement between PS and PA, there are several obstacles preventing such a development. Long-time separation of the two neighboring research areas means that researchers have become accustomed to a particular set of research problems and tend to dismiss cross-disciplinary research as unfamiliar and outlandish. Deviations from the well-worn path appear as unwelcome digressions and may find limited support from peers and reviewers. Thus, there is a good deal of resistance to crossing the disciplinary boundaries and connecting PA and PS.

The ideational and cognitive split between PS and PA research is exacerbated by the institutional separation between the two activities. In many research institutions, PS and PA researchers belong to different schools and departments, attend different conferences, publish in different journals etc. and the scope for mutual inspiration and learning and the development of joint agendas and vocabularies is limited. Both in Europe and in the USA there are separate professional organizations for PS and PA scholars and the decreasing overlap in membership means that there are few connectors and little basis for cross-boundary interaction.

Furthermore, research collaboration is obstructed by the different methodological research strategies that are typically applied by PS and PA researchers. Political scientists tend to have a preference for quantitative large N studies typically found in studies of mass voting, whereas PA researchers traditionally have had a preference for qualitative small *n* comparative or single case studies of public organizations, policy processes and service delivery. Therefore, agreeing on a joint research design might prove to be difficult.

The gulf separating the two research disciplines has been deepened by mutual prejudices that deem PA research as unscientific due to its constant oscillation between facts and norms and its inclination to work closely with the practice it studies. PS, on the other hand, is often portrayed as a deductive and positivist research discipline ready to sacrifice its societal relevance for analytical rigor and precision (Stoker et al., 2015). While these stereotypes contain some truth, they also overstate differences as the methodologies and research strategies used in PA studies become more similar to those utilized in the other social sciences disciplines (sometimes with the unintended result that PA is accused of losing practical relevance) Theoretical developments such as behavioral public administration may accelerate that extension of methodologies.

Fortunately, these obstacles are matched by several potential drivers for rapprochement. As shown above, there are numerous trends and insights that prompt integration and cross-fertilization between PS and PA research. The lines separating politics and administration are becoming increasingly blurred in reality and researchers are responding to this development by beginning to explore the interface between administrative, political and democratic logics (see Edelenbos et al., 2009; Moynihan & Soss, 2014; Stoker, 2019). Although this movement

is slow and uncoordinated, it points in the right direction and might snowball if we pay more attention to the value added from integrating PS and PA.

Another potential driver for rapprochement is that PS and PA research share a basic interest in uncovering the conditions for building a good society and a peaceful world. They also have a similar focus on the role of leadership and institutions as tools for effective governance, although they have different foci. Hence, despite the methodological differences, there is common ground that may facilitate collaboration and joint research.

An even bigger promise for future integration is the turn toward problem-driven research of policy, governance and administration. While some political scientists tend to give priority to theory-or method-driven research and public administration researchers frequently do research-based policy or program evaluations, problem-driven research focusing on big societal challenges such as climate change, enhancing social cohesion, and finding robust solutions in the face of increasing turbulence will eventually draw upon and merge insights from PS and PA. To illustrate, studies of government response to the COVID-19 pandemic tends to draw on both PS and PA research (Petridou, 2020).

Piggy-backing on problem-driven research is the growth of interdisciplinary research projects, research centers and university departments that may pave the way for a greater appreciation of the intrinsic link between PS and PA. Interaction between PS and PA researchers in research teams may stimulate conversations about how common interests can spur the production of both precise and relevant insights. The Sustainable Development Goals play an increasing role for local, national and international organizations, and encourage joint action to realize one or more goals. The study of these processes provides a converging lens that brings together insights from natural science, human geography, sociology, politics and public administration.

Researchers who want to help move the infusion of PS into PA and vice versa forward may do so by starting debates about how to infuse PA with insights about politics, power and democracy, and PS with critical insights about organizational logics, implementation problems and new tolls of government. University deans, research leaders, professional organizations and international research associations may be persuaded to help bring together what is too often separated. Political factors may also help create some convergence between political science and public administration. The most important of these is the spread of populist politics and its attacks on government, particularly the public service (Bauer at al., 2021). In these populist regimes the public bureaucracy may have to adopt a more political role to defend the constitution and liberal political values.

7 | CONCLUSION

This article addresses the persistent and unfortunate separation between the study of politics and administration due to the institutional and disciplinary divide between PS and PA research. This divide deprives both PS and PA of important insights and limits their relevance. The repeated, but somewhat scattered attempts to break down the lines of demarcation separating PS and PA research have not yet persuaded scholars to weaken the disciplinary and institutional separation of the two neighboring fields. We have listed no less than six recent developments and insights that emphasize the need for bringing PS back into PA research. We have also provided a number of illustrative examples of the positive implications of embracing a PS focus on politics, power and democracy for PA research. Finally, we have discussed the barriers and potential drivers for crossing the divide to the benefit of both political science and PA.

We conclude by setting out a research agenda supporting the integration of PS and PA. More work is needed to document the need for and implications of integrating PS and PA research. Since we have here focused on the implications of bringing PS back into PA research, we need exemplary studies of the implications of bringing PA insights back into PS. Differences in mission, methodologies and methods seem to separate mainstream PS from mainstream PA research, so we need both to mitigate these differences through exploration of both similarities and fruitful complementarities.

A systematic strengthening of the PS perspective on PA prompts us to rethink the key concepts of politics, power and democracy in order to further unpack them and bring them into play in PA research. In the field of PA, politics is not merely present in big ideological battles and formal decisions through which government bills are passed and executive orders issued. Rather, politics is found in a myriad of small conflicts, contestations and decisions that are driven by a mixture of organizational interests, public values, professional norms, stakeholder demands and user needs (Sørensen, 2007).

Power is not only about sovereign decision making and political agenda setting, but to a large extent also about "the mobilization of bias" (Schattschneider, 1961; see also; Long, 1949), that is, a selective activation of cultural norms, institutional rules, and organizational interpretations that affect policy learning and eventually political and administrative decision making (see Hendriks, 2000).

Finally, democracy should not be equated with grand models of democracy, but rather with a set of functions such as participation, will formation, authorization, governance capacity and accountability that in various ways support the self-governance of the people (Jäske & Setälä, 2019; Warren, 2017). Further discussion of the different faces of politics, power and democracy in PA research is necessary to guide future research and to bring the two fields closer together, to the benefit of both.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data will be made available on request.

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ENDNOTE

[1] We used the search terms POLIT*, POWER and DEMOC* to capture all variants of these terms. Thanks to Professors Mads Jensen and Guillaume Fontaine for their help in this search.

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