APOLITICAL, PROFESSIONAL, OR INSTITUTIONAL: RECONCEPTUALIZING EXPERTISE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

The work of public administration is important, from attending to the everyday needs of citizens to addressing complex social problems. Across organizations, a wide variety of workers design, plan, implement, manage, and evaluate the actions that make governments function. Yet, while central to governing capacity, the study of expertise in public administration has been limited and fragmented. Efforts to understand it adopt narrow definitions of expertise as professional or scientific knowledge and are driven by concerns over workers' politization, interference with political authority, and democratic will. In this essay, I map out classical and contemporary understandings of expertise in the context of public administration and propose a research agenda. I identify in the literature notions of expertise as apolitical, professional, or institutional and argue in favor of the last one. Institutional expertise refers to workers' ability to perform tasks and fulfill organizational mandates by navigating the formal and informal structures, relationships, norms, and practices that facilitate and constrain action within public administration. It explains how workers reconcile the technical, administrative, and political dimensions of government work and "keep the lights on" across

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changes and crises. I argue that looking into the political dimension of expertise, at workers below the top and behind the frontline, and at more diverse and challenging contexts, can improve our understanding of expertise in the context of public administration.

Keywords: Expertise; public administration; government work; politics; institutional expertise

INTRODUCTION

Public administration encompasses a wide variety of workers that translate laws and decisions into the policies, rules, and actions that govern the lives of people. Within their organizations, these workers address problems and oversee functions as varied and important as clean water; climate change; gender violence; regulating small and large businesses; public education; or public health. Workers across the hierarchy collectively inform, translate, plan, implement, or evaluate laws created by the legislature and the decisions of democratically elected leaders and their political appointees. While we know increasingly more about the work of those at the top (Page & Wright, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2007), in the frontline (Chang & Brewer, 2023; Lipsky, 2010), or at the periphery (Lavertu & Weimer, 2011; Marciano, 2023) of public administration, workers "in the middle" – their efforts and expertise – have received less attention (Page & Jenkins, 2005).

Expertise in the context of public administration involves the knowledge, tools, and techniques that workers employ to address the functions and challenges of government. It is key to the rise of the modern state (Heidelberg, 2024), the ability of political leaders to make decisions and navigate crises (Rutledge, 2020), and state capacity (Hanson & Sigman, 2021). Yet, efforts to understand how workers develop, share, use, and accumulate expertise within and across public organizations are limited and fragmented. Across the study of public administration, expertise refers predominantly to the use of professional or scientific knowledge (Jasanoff, 1998; Lambright & Teich, 1978; Smith, 2010) and research focuses on outside or peripheral workers like consultants (Laage-Thomsen, 2022; Lepont, 2021; Marciano, 2023; Walker, 2014), advisors, or committees (Grömping & Halpin, 2021; Jasanoff, 1998; Lavertu & Weimer, 2011) that best embody this type of expertise. Emphasis on scientific and technical knowledge excludes other types of work and support concerns over the incompatibility between expertise and political issues – like the decisions of leaders (Centeno & Silva, 2016; Fischer, 1990) and the will of the electorate (Bertsou & Caramani, 2020). While there have been recent efforts to understand the work and expertise of workers within the bureaucracy, these have focused overwhelmingly on the street-level (Arnold, 2014; Campos & Peeters, 2022; Chang & Brewer, 2023; Lipsky, 2010; Masood & Nisar, 2022; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2009; Zacka, 2017) rather than the office-level. Thus, the expertise of workers "in the

middle" – the less visible work that can account for the performance of government and for "keeping its lights on" across changes in leadership, policies, and ideologies – remains underexplored.

In this essay, I shed light on the expertise of the people employed below the top and behind the frontline of public administration. I argue that the study of these workers – "capable of imagining, planning, and directing large scale and long term programs for social and economic change" (Grindle, 1977, p. 400) – needs more attention. Recent research on the crisis of expertise looks at citizens' and politician's distrust in experts (Clarke & Newman, 2017; Collins & Evans, 2019; Eyal, 2019; Eyal & Medvetz, 2023; Reed & Reed, 2022). Part of this crisis is explained by a general lack of knowledge and appreciation of the conditions in which workers inside the bureaucracy perform tasks and how they come to produce information, advice, or policies. Related to this crisis, are also concerns about states' declining administrative capacities brought on by populism and democratic backsliding (Bauer, 2023; Bauer et al., 2021; Bauer & Becker, 2020; Koga et al., 2023). While some research has looked into how organizations can adapt to resist and overcome threats to their work (Bersch & Lotta, 2024; Bozeman et al., 2024), research into a wider variety of workers and contexts is necessary to understand the resilience and adaptability of public administration. Indeed, understanding and adapting one's work to the political context might be key to workers' expertise in public administration (O'Leary, 2017, 2019). Last, but not least, continuous calls to address grand challenges and wicked problems have in part supported an increased attention into the role that expert workers can play in policymaking (Christensen, 2021; Daviter, 2019; Fjørtoft, 2022; Head & Alford, 2015). Yet, these studies tend to focus on the expertise of external advisors (Christensen, 2021), ignoring the various forms of "inside" expertise that account for organizational performance and states' governing capacities (Hanson & Sigman, 2021; Williams, 2021).

To bring more attention to the knowledge, tools, and techniques that workers employ to address the functions and challenges of public administration, I review the literature and propose a research agenda. I first identify and describe foundational ideas on the form and function of expertise, in classical texts of public administration, and argue that they shape how we understand expertise to this day. Then, I discuss studies of expertise and expert work from the last five decades, classifying them in three categories: research that defines and studies expertise as apolitical, as professional, and as institutional. I argue that while apolitical and professional expertise restricts its study to a few types of workers, functions, and spaces, institutional expertise points to the variety of middle-level workers that inhabit public organizations and fulfill their functions. It offers the potential to explain how these workers conduct their work and navigate the formal and informal structures, relationships, norms, and practices that facilitate and constrain action within public administration. Based on this review, I propose a research agenda focused on comprehending the political dimension of expertise, looking at workers below the top and behind the frontline, and in contexts outside the Global North.

This essay contributes to the study of expertise in and around organizations and of public administration work. Expertise in the context of government has been primarily studied by disciplines like public administration and political science and marginally by sociology, management, and organization studies – where the systematic study of expertise has been thriving for some decades (Abbott, 2014; Collins & Evans, 2008; Eyal, 2013; Heimstädt et al., 2024; Pakarinen & Huising, 2023). Expanding the study of expert work to this context has the potential to enlighten the ways in which political values, ideologies, and interests shape and challenge expertise. This essay also contributes to the study of work in public administration by challenging dominant notions of expertise as instrumental or problematic. It draws attention to a greater variety of workers capable of reconciling the political, social, administrative, and technical dimensions of government work. These workers' expertise can offer clues on how to address contemporary challenges like populism, democratic backsliding, or distrust in experts. Beyond looking at how top officials make decisions or how frontline workers negotiate policy implementation, I show that we need to pay attention to the more invisible office workers that understand how government works and manage to "keep the lights on" across changes and crises.

THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF EXPERTISE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Before discussing contemporary research on expert work, it is useful to go back to early notions of expertise, in the context of public administration, that shape how we think about it today and around the world. Two ideas on the form and function of expertise appear in foundational texts from Western Europe and the United States. One, that public organizations – in their ideal bureaucratic form – concentrate the expertise needed to govern and this concentration can threaten political leaders. Two, that expertise should be strictly technical, neutral, and apolitical to guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of public organizations. Together, these two ideas characterize expertise in the context of public administration as important yet problematic because of its interaction with political actors and processes. They support a narrow understanding of expertise as technical knowledge that can threaten or be threatened by political power (i.e., actors, leaders, and processes). I explain each idea briefly before showing, in the following sections, how they have influenced the study of expertise for decades.

The first idea comes from the conceptualization of bureaucracy as the ideal or dominant form of organizing public administration because it allows organizations to accumulate, develop, and mobilize expertise (Farmer, 1995; Olsen, 2006; Weber, 1978; Wilson, 1887). According to Weber (1978), "bureaucracy is the means of transforming social action into rationally organized action" through its "technical superiority" (p. 987). This technical superiority comes from expertise – the result of "expert training, a functional specialization of work, and an attitude set on habitual virtuosity in the mastery of single yet methodologically integrated functions" (Weber, 1978, p. 988). Expert workers in the bureaucracy "have

specialized training and by constant practice increase their expertise" (Weber, 1978, p. 975). That is, bureaucratic workers bring with them professional training but also cultivate and develop expertise with time. This accumulation of expertise allows bureaucracies and their workers to play a central role in the administration of the state. A role that supports yet threatens political power and leadership.

In his discussion of the power position of the bureaucracy, Weber identified as a source of constant tensions the "ruler's dependence on the bureaucracy"; because of its expertise, "the political 'master' always finds himself, vis-à-vis the trained official, in the position of a dilettante facing the expert" (Weber, 1978, pp. 991–993). Weber asserted that for either an absolute monarch or a democratically elected leader, "the superior knowledge of the bureaucratic expert" is a necessity and a challenge in the exercise of government (Weber, 1978, p. 993). Public bureaucracies control the information, resources, knowledge, and tools needed to govern and rulers are unwillingly reliant on these organizations and their experts to exercise their power. To cement and protect their role, bureaucracies keep their expertise a secret, protecting it from public scrutiny, competitors, foreign hostile actors, and even elected officials (Weber, 1978). Thus, bureaucracy's ability to accumulate expertise makes public administration a necessity and a problem. Rulers need it to be formidable yet strive to contain and control its power.

The second idea that shapes understandings of expertise in public administration refers to how this work should take place in relation to politics (i.e., political parties, institutions, and actors and their partisan interests, agendas, and efforts to direct government). In *The Study of Administration*, Wilson (1887) writes on the need to improve how public organizations and workers operate, to increase their efficiency and effectiveness, and to answer to the will of society. Wilson writes that "the field of administration is a field of business" and it is only related to political life "as machinery is part of the manufactured product" (Wilson, 1887, p. 210). Through strict appointment procedures for civil servants and forms of organization and action that protect "the sanctity of public office," administrative questions can be kept separate from political questions (Wilson, 1887, p. 210).

According to Wilson:

> although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices … politics is the special province of the statesman, administration of the technical official … policy does nothing without the aid of administration; but administration is not therefore politics (Wilson, 1887, p. 210).

While Weber is preoccupied with the politician's dependency on the bureaucracy, Wilson is preoccupied with maintaining the bureaucracy pure and immune to political dynamics. Both agree on the function of expertise – to make public organizations effective and efficient in performing government tasks – yet see it as either unavoidably linked to (Weber) or necessarily separate from (Wilson) political power (i.e., actors, leaders, and processes).

Wilson envisioned a model of work and organization that is based on perfecting methods and procedures for administrating government and implementing policy decisions that, although political in origin, are treated by the bureaucracy

as apolitical – that is, as instructions to be executed in the most effective and efficient way. Regardless of whether it is possible to separate the work of public administration from political actors and issues, this second idea defines expertise as the antithesis of politics: neutral, apolitical, and business-like, possessed by the technical official dealing exclusively with administrative questions.

These two central ideas in the study of public administration shape how we think about the form and function of expertise today and around the world. Expertise is developed, accumulated, and stored within public bureaucracies. This accumulation of expertise sustains leaders' capacity to govern. Yet, it also creates tensions. It makes leaders dependent on the bureaucracy, anxious about the need to control it. It raises social and scholarly concerns on how expert work should take place: responding to official decisions but isolated from the political relationships and processes that produce them. The two ideas assert the importance of expertise for the functioning of the modern state yet perceive its interaction with political actors as problematic. Next, I show how these ideas on the form and function of expertise have influenced decades of studies on the work of public administration.

REVIEW METHODS

I examine how expertise is conceptualized and studied by drawing on a synthesis of the literature that, although not exhaustive, aims to be representative of what we know about expertise and expert work in public administration. I used the Web of Science Core Collection database – one of the most comprehensive in the world – to find research articles and book papers in the past five decades (1974–2024) that refer to expertise or the work of experts in the context of public administration.[1] I restricted my search to articles from the main journals for public administration, management, sociology, and political science.[2] I manually reviewed the title and abstract of 123 records that resulted from this search. To focus on the expertise of workers inside – and "in the middle" – of public administration, I excluded articles that focus on outside or peripheral experts working with government (like scientific advisors, committees, expert groups, expert activists, think thanks, civil society, and task forces); organizations that provide public services but do not perform central government functions (like public hospitals and schools); articles that mention government and expertise but are not about expertise in government organizations (e.g., studies that draw on surveys of experts to discuss policy issues); and studies of expertise that do not take place in government organizations or involve government experts. In this last category, I discarded the few studies from sociology and management journals that were picked up by the search.

I reviewed all records to identify the different meanings and role of expertise in public administration and forms of expert work. In particular, I reviewed each text in light of the following questions: What role does expertise play in public administration? What does the article mean by expertise? Who are the expert workers in this study – what do they do and what do they know? And what are the challenges to expert work identified in each case? In general, I found that most discussions come

from public administration and policy journals and to a lesser extent political science journals. I also found – perhaps unsurprisingly given the search was conducted in English and using an international journal ranking – that most studies in these top journals look at the United States, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe. After reading and thinking through these texts, I decided to organize them in the way in which they conceptualize expertise: as apolitical, professional, or institutional. In the next sections, I explain what I mean by each of these labels, discuss studies, and use this review to propose a future research agenda.

EXPERTISE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Across studies on the work and organization of public administration, expertise is understood and studied in three main ways: as apolitical, professional, or institutional. Expertise, in the first two categories, is conceptualized as technical or scientific knowledge and practices contained in selected workers, functions, or spaces. The first category asserts the politics-administration dichotomy by focusing on fears of bureaucratic power or concerns over technical neutrality. It argues that there are certain workers, functions, or spaces that must not influence or be influenced by political actors, their interests, and decisions. The second category of studies examines the compatibility between professional and public administration values and practices and the effects of employing members of professions in public organizations. Expertise is developed externally, in the professions, or as an internal yet separate product of public administration work – with its own body of knowledge, methods, and practices. Last, the third category groups efforts to understand how organizations operate and how key government functions take place, by looking at workers' expertise developed within public administration. These studies offer a richer conceptualization of expertise as encompassing technical knowledge, tools, and methods yet also the competence to navigate the complex social, administrative, and political dimensions of public organizations. I discuss the three categories of studies and use the third one as inspiration for proposing a research agenda.

Expertise as Apolitical

A large collection of studies is concerned with the (in)compatibility between politics and expertise and seek to understand how the two can coexist without compromising each other. The normative notion that politics and administration should remain separate (Wilson, 1887) has been progressively countered by many who recognize that in practice the two spheres – their processes, functions, actors, and work – interact (Demir, 2009; Svara, 2001). Yet even as this interaction is acknowledged, it is problematized. In this category, we find studies looking critically at the politization of expertise –that is, whenever political interests or pressures influence functions or work that are technical and scientific – or studies that problematize the various ways in which expert workers influence the political processes of decision-making. Through these concerns over technical neutrality

or bureaucratic power, the dichotomy between politics and administration stays alive. These studies reinforce the notion that there are certain functions – the workers that conduct them and the spaces in which they take place – that are incompatible with political interests, actors, and decisions. The key point about expertise in public administration is that it is (or should be) apolitical.

On the one hand, studies of political interference or the politization of expertise[3] understand expertise as technical knowledge and tools developed through scientific methods that are possessed by trained workers and can be objectively applied to a problem or sets of problems to uncover the best solution. These studies document the ways in which political actors – most recently in the context of populism and democratic backsliding (Bauer et al., 2021) – interfere with and obstruct expert work. Attacks on expert work can involve weakening its regulatory or legal framework, budget cuts, and political appointments (Bersch & Lotta, 2024). They can also involve using political discourse to delegitimize the role of expertise in policy and decision making (Peci et al., 2023), dismantling civil service (Moynihan, 2022), or coopting expertise to mask political interests with technical criteria (Nelkin, 1979). The problem these studies identify is the threat to or reduction of spaces within public administration that are dedicated to producing scientific knowledge and evidence to inform and assist policy design and the decisions of democratically elected leaders. Without sufficient protection for these spaces from political interests and influences, the harmonious complementarity between scientific knowledge and democratic will is lost. Expertise loses its value and becomes an unreliable function of public administration.

On the other hand, looking also at the problematic relationship between politics and expertise, but from a different angle, are the literatures on technocracy (Bertsou & Caramani, 2020; Centeno, 1993; Fischer, 1990); the politics of expertise (Bovens et al., 2008; Brint, 1996; Centeno & Silva, 2016; Turner, 2013; Whitehead, 2006); bureaucratic power (Bertelli & Busuioc, 2021; Mangset & Asdal, 2019); bureaucratic politics (Allison & Halperin, 1972; Bendor & Moe, 1985); and discussions on the bureaucratic threats to democracy (Boushey & McGrath, 2017; Cook, 2018; Etzioni-Halevy, 2009; Fischer, 2009; Steven, 1994). As the labels suggest, these literatures are concerned with Weber's original observation that political leaders, parliaments, citizens, and society at large are dependent and thus subordinate to "the superior knowledge of the bureaucratic expert" (Weber, 1978, p. 993). Bureaucrats' – or technocrats' – monopoly over expertise makes them a potential threat to political leadership and democracy and the object of continuous administrative efforts to control, supervise, and make their work more transparent.

These studies also understand expertise as technical skills, specialized knowledge, and sophisticated methods yet problematize the fact that this expertise is either protected from, obscured, or not accessible to people outside the organization. Research on bureaucratic power has looked mainly at the context of policymaking (Boushey & McGrath, 2017; Centeno, 1993; Fischer, 1990, 2009) – in particular economic policy (Centeno & Silva, 2016) and policy evaluation (Bovens et al., 2008) – and at popular types of expert workers like senior civil servants (Mangset & Asdal, 2019) or foreign affairs analysts (Allison & Halperin,

1972). Across these types of work and workers, the exclusionary character of expertise makes it a problem in the context of public administration:

> Expertise is treated as a kind of possession which privileges its possessors with powers that the people cannot successfully control and cannot acquire or share in (…) Expertise is a problem because it is a kind of violation of the conditions of rough equality presupposed by democratic accountability. Some activities are apparently out of the reach of democratic control … precisely because of imbalances in knowledge (…) we are faced with the dilemma of capitulation to "rule by experts" (Turner, 2013, p. 17).

Based on this problematization of expertise, these studies look at how public workers influence decision-, policy-, and rule-making directly or indirectly. For example, by progressively redefining political questions as scientific ones to absorb them into their jurisdiction (Centeno, 1993) or through the curated representation and use of information, resources, knowledge, and tools to influence government actions (Cohen, 2013). Under this approach, expertise is a necessary yet problematic dimension of public administration whose boundaries must be continuously assessed, supervised, and controlled.

Studies on the politization of expertise and on bureaucratic power argue that the appropriate role for and form of expertise (in the functions and activities of government) is apolitical. Expert workers supply knowledge, evidence, and technical skills and methods, but they must do so without concealing or manipulating information to suit the political context (Cohen, 2013). Workers support decision-makers – political appointees or leaders – with the implementation of policies and programs but should not guard this policy expertise from their principals (Bertelli & Busuioc, 2021). Public administration organizations should continuously develop their expertise through professionalization but without threatening the authority of democratically elected leaders (Boushey & McGrath, 2017). According to this category of studies, there is a correct and incorrect use of expertise in public administration. Yet, normative thought around the form and function of expertise is not fixed. As regimes change and states face new or different challenges, "the realm of the specifically 'political' may either expand or contract [and]… what counts as expertise, and how much autonomy it is granted, also varies over time and space" (Whitehead, 2006, p. 119). As recent examples show, what was once under the exclusive purview of experts (e.g., climate change or vaccination) can transform into political issues contested by majority and minority interests in many parts of the world (Eyal & Medvetz, 2023).

Studies in this first category convey the idea that interactions between expert workers and political actors outside the advisor–advisee model are problematic. The relationship between expert workers and politicians is defined by the separation of "technical skills" – that is, "intellectual capabilities, most often acquired through formal educational processes, which enable an individual to collect, organize, and analyze data on specific subjects, or to employ such information in the making of decisions" – from "political skills" – that is, "the intellectual and personal attributes which make it possible for an individual to influence, mobilize, manipulate, or control other human beings" (Grindle, 1977, p. 403). While politics and administration can interact in various ways, expertise – the core of

administration work – becomes problematic if it is used to influence, mobilize, control, or manipulate the functions and decisions of public administration.

Expertise as Professional

This second group of studies considers members of professions as a vehicle of expertise in public administration. Expertise is defined, as in the prior category of studies, as specialist knowledge and tools obtained by workers through training in a profession. Setting aside questions on politics, studies in this category examine how organizations acquire – and are transformed by – expertise when employing members of a profession. Interest in the employment of professions within public administration goes back at least five decades (Mosher, 1978; Mosher & Stillman, 1977). Coinciding with sociology's interest on the rise of the power and influence of professions around the same time, scholars in public administration began looking at professions that "operate within the constraints and delegations of government" (e.g., law, economics, accounting, and applied sciences) or those "almost exclusively governmental" (e.g., military, foreign service, or city management) (Mosher & Stillman, 1977, p. 632). Since then, scholars see the employment of members of professions as an effort to make government functions more efficient or effective and focus on understanding how these workers – through their abstract theories, tools, and methods – reshape the way public administration works.

The employment of professions fulfills operational requirements and technical mandates of public organizations. For example, accountants work across government organizations in basic functions like internal management, procuring goods and services, auditing, and contract negotiations. They also perform special government functions like taxation, public budgeting, regulation, and accountability (Morse, 1978). Some technical mandates call for the employment of professions like civil or aeronautical engineers (Schott, 1978) and environmental or agricultural scientists (Lambright & Teich, 1978). Besides employing members of professions, public administration can also be a source of new professions that can travel outside its boundaries. For example, mental health professionals (Feldman, 1978), foreign affairs officials (Bacchus, 1977), and urban planners (Baer, 1977) – or government-specific specializations within existing professions like city managers (Stillman, 1977) and school administrators (Mosher, 1977). Examining the close relationship between professions and public administration has led researchers to look at the ways in which these workers support or transform government functions.

The employment of members of professions within public administration transforms the practices and processes of organizations. Besides the use of specialized knowledge and methods, organizations are shaped by the professions' "own particularized view of the world and of the agency's role and mission in it" (Wollan, 1978, p. 107). For example, in the case of policymaking, the employment of natural and social scientists was found to alter "the cognitive frameworks and shared operating assumptions within the policy planning organization" (Bunker, 1978, p. 224; Fischer, 2009). "Thinking like a lawyer" shapes how policies (Wollan, 1978,

p. 105) and regulations (Macey, 1998) are made, influencing their design, discourse, goals, and instruments. Unlike outside committees and expert advisors, when employed within the bureaucracy, the expertise of professions becomes an inherent part of how organizations collect and process information, make decisions, design policies, and oversee their implementation. This influence over how organizations function sparks concerns. Particularly because professions are constituted around a set of values and standards that might contradict or change values traditionally associated with public administration (Nalbandian & Edwards, 1983).

One of the issues that has received most attention is the large-scale employment of economists and their ability to influence and shape policies, administrative reforms, and the way of thinking about and addressing social issues in general (see Babb, 2004; Davies, 2011; Hallett & Gougherty, 2024; Keren, 1993; Popp Berman, 2017, 2022; Rhoads, 1978). The influence of economists in public administration is partially attributed to the success with which they have led efforts to transform or "modernize" states (Babb, 2004; Keren, 1993) and adapted theories, tools, and methods to analyze and evaluate policy alternatives (Dror, 1967; Rhoads, 1978). The influence of this profession in public administration has had lasting consequences because of its ability to shape rationality (i.e., ways of thinking about social issues) and institutionalize economic tools, methods, and standards in decision making and the design of interventions (Popp Berman, 2022). For example, across regulatory agencies and policymaking organizations, it is considered standard to use tools like benefit–cost analysis, forecasting models, and insights from behavioral economics (Boardman et al., 1993; Cranor & Finkel, 2018; de Campos, 2022; OECD, 2017; Shapiro & Morrall, 2012; Sunstein, 2014). Even beyond the boundaries of the profession, economic thinking became part of the standard training that public affairs and management students receive before joining the public service (Hallett & Gougherty, 2024).

Looking at the professions employed across organizations is one way to improve our understanding of expertise in public administration. While this category of research only looks at workers that can be identified as members of an established profession, these workers play an important part below the top and behind the frontline of organizations. Like scholars acknowledged five decades ago (Mosher & Stillman, 1977), professions and government shape each other in various ways and there are many professions that need greater attention. In recent years, studies in this line of research have focused mostly on economists or natural scientists in advisory roles, leaving many of the other professions that inhabit public administration underexplored. While we have learned about how professions shape public administration processes and functions, it is also important to learn how the administrative and political dynamics inside organizations reshape the work of professions. I elaborate on potential lines of research in the final part of this essay.

Expertise as Institutional

The last category of studies examines what I call institutional expertise. It refers to workers' ability to perform tasks and fulfill mandates by navigating the formal

and informal structures, relationships, norms, and practices that facilitate and constrain action within public administration. Unlike the previous two groups that define expertise as exclusively specialist knowledge and tools linked to professional training, these studies examine the expertise that workers develop, through experience and practice, on the inner workings of government. Institutional expertise is close to Weber's notion of bureaucratic expertise, involving specialization and "habitual virtuosity" around a particular function (Weber, 1978, p. 988). Yet, it refers not only to mastering technical tools and methods but also the knowledge, relationships, formal and informal procedures and practices, and political sensitivity necessary to fulfill organizational mandates. Institutional expertise is an opportunity to appreciate "the value-laden and relational nature of knowledge and expertise, showing how its formation is endogenous to political processes" (Slayton & Clark-Ginsberg, 2018). It shows how workers simultaneously react to the social, administrative, political, and technical conditions of their organization and how they reconcile multiple and at times competing demands through their work.

Because of its almost invisible character – at least in quantifiable or formal terms – and close interaction with the political context, institutional expertise is overlooked. It is not as easily identified and conceptualized as professional expertise (i.e., formally recognized outside the boundaries of public organizations). Also, it can spark concerns over technical neutrality or bureaucratic power as workers take into account and influence the politics around decisions, policies, and regulations. To illustrate what institutional expertise entails, and its importance for understanding the functioning of public organizations, I draw on studies of policymaking and bureaucratic or administrative work. These two cases offer the opportunity to explicitly and pragmatically examine the realities of government work below the top and behind the frontline. In the rest of this essay, I will argue that institutional expertise is a more fruitful line of inquiry to both expand our understanding of expertise and develop a better understanding of how public organizations function.

In recent decades, and given its importance for governing society, the work of policymaking has received significant attention. Policymaking involves problematizing social situations, discussing possible interventions, making recommendations, designing policy interventions, and planning and overseeing their implementation. It is not about "'making policy' in the sense of making an authoritative decision such as passing a law or changing a budget"; it involves the work of "developing, running, or evaluating a program or scheme" (Page & Jenkins, 2005, pp. 55, 58). Policymaking is a complex phenomenon because of the diversity of organizations, workers, and dimensions it encompasses. It is conducted across a large variety of organizations and agencies within public administration, all of whom have some policy responsibility as part of their organizational mandate. Policymaking involves a wide range of workers within these organizations, most of whom operate not at the top or at the frontline but across the middle. Most importantly, policy work does not occur in a vacuum. Workers "face all manner of structural, institutional and organizational constraints, challenges and opportunities in framing, designing, implementing and

evaluating policy" and how they respond to these circumstances "is heavily conditioned by the skills, expertise, experience and creativity that they bring to their role" (Considine et al., 2014, p. 222). For these reasons, the work of policymaking is one of the most fruitful ones to understand expertise in public administration.

Policy workers, policy analysts, or policy bureaucrats have captured the attention of scholars who seek to identify and characterize them and to understand the important role they play in public administrations. Early accounts identified these workers as "experts," "professionals," "sometimes a specialist, sometimes a generalist" that "helps formulate solutions to problems of public policy" (Meltsner, 1976, p. 1). The role of policy analysts (Meltsner, 1975, 1976) or bureaucratic analysts (Feldman, 1989) was first understood as simply providing information to policy and decision makers on the best alternatives to design and implement a policy. Like the professional workers in the previous category, policy analysts were social or natural scientists that appreciated the opportunities for power and impact afforded by their position in government (Meltsner, 1975). Yet, as time passed and policy work became a distinctive feature of public administration, the diversity of policy workers increased, and our collective understanding of policy work became more nuanced.

Some of the most insightful research comes from rejecting the myth of the top official as the main figure in policymaking (Page, 2015) and looking "at the middle": "where much of the detail of policy work is done" (Page & Jenkins, 2005, p. 19). Research on middle-ranking officials found that although these workers have a university education and come from disciplines as varied as sociology, public administration, business studies, biochemistry, law, economics, or linguistics, "it is not a degree that makes them specialists" (Page & Jenkins, 2005, p. 35). Their expertise comes from their job experience. This experience is not gained by staying on the same job for many years but by constantly moving across jobs involving diverse policy subjects and various aspects of the policymaking process (Page & Jenkins, 2005). While similar to Weber's notion of expertise as coming from long-term specialization (Weber, 1978), this specialization comes not from doing a single task over a long period of time but by learning about how policies are made across diverse issues, sectors, and stages in the iterative process of policymaking. This accumulation of experience is key to institutional expertise.

Another important dimension of policy work – and institutional expertise – is the ability to combine "political and bureaucratic activities" (Page & Jenkins, 2005, p. 55). For example, Feldman's (1989) study of bureaucratic analysts shows how producing information for policy and decision making requires as much technical knowledge as sensitivity for the political context. To address problems of uncertainty and ambiguity in policymaking, workers interpret data and frame it by taking the political context into consideration. Subsequent studies (Albæk, 1995; Cairney, 2016; Page & Jenkins, 2005) have also found that policy work entails not only producing facts and information but framing it in a way that is useful for decision makers and more likely to gain political support. The expertise of policy workers involves developing close relationships with officeholders in order to develop their political sensitivity and secure better conditions for policy

design and implementation (Batten et al., 2006). Thus, policymaking shows us how institutional expertise is not about workers' ability to maintain technical and scientific knowledge separate from political concerns. Rather, workers' expertise involves the ability to combine technical, political, and administrative dimensions in a way that makes policy design and implementation possible.

Looking more closely at this ability to do one's job and keep public organizations operational – despite a complex political environment or potentially contradicting demands – is bureaucratic or administrative work. Here, I include studies on administrative work or "knowing the rules" (Wagenaar, 2004); authoritative expertise or "knowledge and skills stemming from the experience of service in itself" (Mangset & Asdal, 2019, p. 579); and bureaucratic expertise (Liu et al., 2017). In general, these strands of research point to the expertise that workers develop, through experience and practice, related to the inner workings of government. This expertise involves knowledge, techniques, practices, and interactions that are specific to working within public administration, are necessary and transferable across organizations, and allow workers to operate in a complex and ever-changing administrative and political context. Similar to policymaking work, it involves concrete knowledge on the formal rules and processes of public administration but also the ability to navigate formal and informal norms in order to get the job done.

In his theory of "administrative work as practice," Wagenaar (2004) draws on symbolic interactionism to examine the hidden aspects of administrative work that can account for more visible elements like decisions, reports, negotiations, procedures, rules, or structures. These are:

> Effectuations, enactments of the hidden, taken-for-granted routines: the almost unthinking actions, tacit knowledge, fleeting interactions, practical judgments, self-evident understandings and background knowledge, shared meanings, and personal feelings that constitute the core of administrative work (Wagenaar, 2004, p. 643).

Institutional expertise refers to this taken-for-granted know-how that is the result of workers making sense of their context together and learning how to navigate it to fulfill their mandate. This notion of expertise allows us to appreciate the relational character of public administration work (Bartels & Turnbull, 2020) and to extend its study to all types of workers found within the bureaucracy. Workers make sense of situations collectively, they act in interaction with others to align interpretations of what is going on, and they are thus able to achieve action and cooperation despite conflicting or evolving technical, administrative, social, or political conditions (Wagenaar, 2004).

Research shows that government work requires more than knowing the rules or possessing technical or scientific knowledge and tools.

> In a bureaucracy, it is presumed that the rules dominate, and the rules are a public transcript. The hidden transcript, though, is the use of the rules. In terms of the work of public administrators, they do not simply follow rules; they use rules. In doing so, they create situations rather than simply respond to them (Heidelberg, 2016, p. 736).

Across functions and levels of public administration, workers require skills and networks to circumvent everyday challenges (Liu et al., 2017). For example,

research on the work of senior civil servants shows that it takes more than professional knowledge (i.e., in economics or law) to assert their power and influence decision making. Senior workers learn specific ways of writing to get the attention of political actors, they correct and improve notes collectively, and they gain and share this expertise through the ongoing training and supervision of younger officers (Mangset & Asdal, 2019). Analysts in rulemaking also use their knowledge of the process (Balla, 2015; Potter, 2019; West, 2004), the political and administrative context, and their experience on what rules work best – or do not work at all (Heidelberg, 2016) – to influence how and what regulations are made in line with their organizational mandate. As these studies show, understanding institutional expertise requires going beyond official accounts of what organizations know and do and looking into the day-to-day work of public servants, how they establish their authority and legitimacy, and how they perform their work.

Institutional expertise – through policymaking, bureaucratic, or administrative work – shows that in order to make public administration operational, workers need to combine knowledge and skills related to the administrative, political, and technical dimensions of government. It goes beyond professional training and knowledge. It encompasses aspects of relational (Pakarinen & Huising, 2023; Sandefur, 2015) and procedural (Barley et al., 2020) expertise – knowledge on "social processes" and "communicative practices" (Barley et al., 2020, p. 62) and on "how to navigate the relationships involved in getting work done" (Sandefur, 2015, p. 911). Yet, institutional expertise is specifically about the art of government. It involves knowing how to navigate the intricate system of laws, actors, and organizations and it requires "political knowledge" – understood as "what individuals know about political systems, structures, institutions, norms, and rules as well as how politics works and what is going on in politics" (Liu et al., 2017, p. 719). Institutional expertise does not entail a "one best way" to run public organizations nor does it assume that there is one bureaucratic rationality that can be tapped into and understood. This form of expertise recognizes and adapts to the diverse and complex character of public organizations in which conflicting or contradictory forms of knowledge and control interact (Carnevale & Stivers, 2019). Unlike research under the politics and administration dichotomy, this third category understands that getting the job done requires knowing, navigating, and answering to the political context of public administration.

A FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Research on the meaning, role, and challenges of expertise in public administration is limited and fragmented. On the one hand, expertise has been primarily understood as professional or scientific knowledge and practices that take place around specific mandates and functions and through dedicated spaces and workers. Outside these pockets of professional or scientific expertise, the knowledge, tools, and practices that public workers use to fulfill the various functions of public administration and address its problems and challenges

are understudied. Beyond compiling policy knowledge to make recommendations or assessing the technical criteria of subject-specific regulations, how do workers within and across public organizations generate, mobilize, accumulate, and share the expertise required to govern? On the other hand, a large focus across studies has been the clash between these selected pockets of expertise and the political context of public administration. These studies show that public administration cannot be isolated from politics and that the political context conditions and shapes government work. Yet, how do various workers experience, understand, and address the political context? How does it shape their expertise? And how do they adapt their work and fulfill their mandates – "keeping the lights on" of government – across changes in political ideologies and leadership? The ability to respond to the political context and interact with political actors, rather than remain apolitical, seems an important yet underexplored dimension of expertise in the context of public administration.

In an effort to address these limitations, I argue that we need to go beyond conceptualizing expertise as apolitical or professional and focus on understanding it as institutional. This involves a systematic study of how workers – in interaction with each other and other actors – generate, apply, and recognize the different types of knowledge, tools, and techniques necessary to address the problems and challenges (Pakarinen & Huising, 2023) of public administration. In particular, I propose expanding our study of institutional expertise in three ways. First, to study the "political" dimension of expertise – including negotiations, (re)interpretations of rules and mandates, (re)definitions of public value, or mobilizing and influencing interests and decisions –, in combination with technical and scientific knowledge and tools. Putting the politics-administration dichotomy to rest means not only acknowledging the various ways in which politics interferes with government work but also understanding workers' efforts to deal with political issues as a key element of their expertise. Second, to go beyond selected pockets of scientific or professional expertise and understand how workers within and across bureaucratic organizations generate, apply, and recognize knowledge, tools, and techniques central to government work. This involves going below the top and behind the frontline, systematically looking at "the middle" (Page & Jenkins, 2005, p. 19), to unpack the "technical superiority" (Weber, 1978, p. 987) of public bureaucracies. Third, to expand our understanding of expertise in public administration by looking at more diverse and challenging contexts. Most research has focused on the Global North, precisely because these settings best adhere to ideal types of expertise and administration as scientific and professional. Yet, in the Global South, workers' expertise can play a unique role in fulfilling organizational mandates amid adverse conditions. With little or no career protection (Dussauge Laguna, 2011; Kearney, 1986), patronage and clientelism (Bearfield, 2009; Oliveros, 2021), and the need to address grand challenges with limited economic and institutional resources (McDonnell, 2020), workers creatively draw on their knowledge, tools, and techniques to keep government operational. Understanding expertise across a wider variety of workers and contexts can help us understand what the work of government entails and why public organizations function the way they do.

Looking at the Political Dimension of Expertise

Expertise in the context of public administration is conditioned by the political actors, institutions, groups, and interests that shape the exercise of government. So far, the relationship between expertise and the political context of public administration has largely been examined as a problem. Concerns over technical neutrality or fears of bureaucratic power are based on the assumptions that expertise involves only technical or scientific knowledge and practices – exclusive to certain workers, functions, or spaces – and that these are incompatible with political interests, dynamics, and decisions. Yet, while these literatures address important issues on the integrity of public administration work, they limit our understanding of expertise. They recognize expertise only in relation to the use of scientific and professional knowledge and support the notion that there is one correct way of enacting expertise – one that adheres to the politics-administration dichotomy. What is missing is an understanding of how workers, as part of their expertise, use knowledge, tools, and practices to navigate the changing political context and conduct their work.

Future studies can expand our understanding of expertise by paying attention to the more "informal" or "political" aspects of public administration work – such as negotiations, (re)interpretations of rules and mandates, (re)definitions of public value, or mobilizing and influencing interests and decisions. This political dimension of expertise, understood in interaction with technical and scientific practices, can account for how officials conduct their work and how public organizations function. It can help us understand how – in constant interaction with public opinion, notions of public interests, techno-legal mandates, and the political context – workers use skills, knowledge, and methods to get the job done and keep public administration working. Going beyond the problematization of "political skills" (Grindle, 1977, p. 403) can shed light on the types of work that are instrumental in reconciling the administrative, technical, political, and social realities of public administration. It can redeem the intricacies of expert work and counter the assumption that public organizations are machines that can be tuned, through legal-administrative reforms, to protect and isolate expertise.

Based on some of the insights discussed throughout this essay, I propose that we look at expert work as continuously shaped by workers' interpretations of the political context. Expert workers within public bureaucracies are bound by administrative rules that govern what they can and cannot do (Gailmard & Patty, 2007). Yet, they also respond to how the information and advice they produced is used and reframed (McQuade, 2016). Workers depend on the support of political actors, like politicians or legislators, for the design, implementation, and continuation of policies (Bersch & Fukuyama, 2023; Carpenter, 2001; Christensen, 1991; Heredia & Schneider, 2003). And lastly, because of the public nature of their work, they are mindful of the expectations of citizens and how their work is assessed by the public (Bechky, 2021; Karunakaran, 2024). Expert workers are constantly making sense of and negotiating the boundaries of their work and opportunities for action.

Studies have already signaled that workers use dimensions of their expertise, like technical or scientific knowledge, strategically – depending on public attention

or political disagreement over goals (Eckert, 2018; Lundin & Öberg, 2014). For example, in the context of policymaking, interactions between bureaucrats and politicians involve "expertise bargains":

> In expertise bargains, bureaucrats offer politicians some form of knowledge or skills in exchange for some degree of administrative responsibility and discretion. Yet, expertise bargains vary in the emphasis on bureaucrats' expertise relative to their political loyalty, in the kind of knowledge bureaucrats provide (e.g., specialized expertise in economics or law, generalist skills, or political process knowledge), and in the degree of autonomy bureaucratic experts enjoy. Expertise bargains may be deeply institutionalized and persist over time, but can also break down and give way to new bargains (Christensen, 2024, p. 80).

The way officials conduct their work and fulfill organizational mandates varies as a function of the political context and while this might be problematic in some cases, it deserves attention. The ability to successfully navigate the political context might in fact account for more influential or resilient forms of expertise. Like the *técnicos* in Grindle's studies: "dichotomized models of *técnicos* and *políticos* are inadequate to explain the reality of political and administrative processes in Latin America… it is the *técnicos* who also have political skills who are increasingly important in policy making functions" (Grindle, 1977, p. 402). Future studies should look beyond the function of policymaking to understand other ways in which expert workers perform their work in response to political and other social or administrative factors.

Besides looking into the everyday work of public administration, understanding expertise as politically constructed also entails looking at how ideologies and interests drive the development or adoption of new forms of expertise and how changes in the political context over time can affect the role and practices of expert workers. Some of the studies I discussed on the employment of professional workers within public administration already show the way political interests and ideologies support the dominant role of some professions (Keren, 1993; Popp Berman, 2017) and even the development of the profession itself, beyond the boundaries of public service (Babb, 2004; Hallett & Gougherty, 2024). Looking at other groups of workers (besides economists), it is important to acknowledge that public organizations – created with a techno-legal mandate linked to expertise – are ideological and political products. Organizations are created to enact and fulfill a mandate which responds to ideological, political, and temporary visions of the role and function of government (Bertelli, 2006). As political leadership and administrations change, the expectations of political actors and constituents on the mandate and work of these organizations might also change (Demortain, 2004). "As a result of external changes, such as a change of government or an economic crisis, political leaders may no longer see the particular knowledge and skills offered by bureaucrats as relevant for achieving salient political goals" (Christensen, 2024, p. 80). The practices, tools, knowledge, and processes used by workers can become challenged (Demortain & Borraz, 2022), and they must adapt to procure the survival of their organization.

Research looking to understand the political dimension of expertise could answer questions like how do workers understand the political context and how do they adapt their work accordingly? What is the relationship between (a group

of) workers and political leaders and how do workers manage this relationship as part of their work? Across leadership changes, how do workers perceive and adapt their work to protect their mandate and organization? What is the political context that supported the rise of a particular class of workers or function and what accounts for their demise? How do workers experience and address challenges brought on by populism and democratic backsliding? What happens when workers fail to align their work with the political vision and mandate of leaders? How do workers successfully navigate leadership changes? These and other questions can help us abandon narrow notions of expertise as exclusively scientific or professional knowledge and capture the realities of government work.

Looking Below the Top and Behind the Frontline

The study of institutional expertise requires looking within organizations to understand how expertise is developed and shared through practice, interactions, and across generations of workers. In particular, future studies should look beyond top officials and senior civil servants (Page & Wright, 1999; Rhodes et al., 2007) or frontline and street-level workers (Arnold, 2014; Campos & Peeters, 2022; Cecchini & Harrits, 2022; Chang & Brewer, 2023; Fineman, 1998; Lipsky, 2010; Masood & Nisar, 2022; Zacka, 2017) to enrich our understanding of how government works. There is an immense variety of public workers who have systematically received little attention, leaving us without theories and concepts to accurately identify and characterize the work of those "in the middle" (Camp, 1972; Page, 2015; Page & Jenkins, 2005): "those at the top make the rules, those at the bottom simply apply them, but what the people in the middle do is harder to understand, as is the mix of creativity and constraint by rules and expectations that characterizes their work" (Page & Jenkins, 2005, p. 18). This "mix of creativity and constraint" is key to advancing our understanding of institutional expertise in public administration.

While the work of top officials or frontline workers is easier to identify and define – because of the decision-making or implementation role they fulfill in the system of public administration –, workers in the middle have a much more elusive role. In some contexts, vocabulary to identify types of workers in public administration has looked at the separation between politics and administration as guide (Salazar-Morales & Lauriano, 2020). While terms like "political appointee," "career civil servant," or "loyalist" might help illustrate the degree of influence that politicians have over public administration work, it does not help us explore how these workers perform tasks and play a role in the operation of public organizations. The most productive efforts to look "at the middle" have occurred in relation to a specific government function, like policymaking (Camp, 1972; Page, 2015; Page & Jenkins, 2005), or to members of a particular profession (Keren, 1993; Wollan, 1978). Possible lines of inquiry for future studies are to deconstruct the different forms of work and expertise that get grouped as "policymaking" or "rulemaking," to look beyond these two main functions and identify others, and to consider professions that have received less attention.

In the coming years, we need to substitute the notion of "middle" for a richer vocabulary that showcases the intricacies of public organizations, functions, and work. Studies should look at how, for example, techno-legal mandates are translated into specific tasks and functions within organizations – the groups of workers involved and the interactions between them. While some of this distribution of work can be inferred by looking at organizational charts, studies in institutional expertise have shown that looking closely at the day-to-day activities and dynamics of organizations can help us better understand the configuration of expertise. By looking at the office level, we can account for how the top makes decisions and how the street level executes them. Workers in the middle conduct the key functions of translating laws and decisions into rules, programs, and activities that make government a reality. Efforts to understand how workers do this will inevitably show the importance of balancing technical, political, and administrative concerns.

Expertise in the Global South

The last way in which I propose to enrich our understanding of expertise in public administration is by exploring the richness of Global South contexts. As evident by looking at the majority of studies citied in this essay, studies of work, expertise, and public administration published in the main journals of our professions have focused overwhelmingly on countries of the Global North – in particular, the United States, the United Kingdom, and selected European countries. Perhaps because countries in the Global South are further away from normative ideals of public administration – that emphasize professionalization, formalization, and strict separation with politics (Du Gay & Lopdrup Hjorth, 2024; Wilson, 1887) –, the efforts of their workers are often ignored or misunderstood. Yet, in the Global South, workers' expertise can play a unique role in fulfilling organizational mandates amid adverse conditions.

When we look at the selected studies that take place in the Global South, it is clear that these can enrich our understanding of government work and expertise and, most importantly, on how this work makes organizations operational despite complex or hostile institutional environments (Campos & Peeters, 2022; Canales, 2011; McDonnell, 2017). A focus on work and expertise can allow us to understand how states – even without Anglo-Saxon legal systems; low inequality; high economic development; or professional bureaucracies (Berwick & Christia, 2018; Savoia & Sen, 2015) – are able to display administrative state capacities. For example, by bending rules to address the needs of citizens (Canales, 2011); creating and protecting a bureaucratic ethos based on strategic recruitment, socialization, and symbolic rewards (McDonnell, 2020); or repurposing patronage to access necessary yet scarce resources and align efforts (Toral, 2024).

Across the world, workers face administrative, social, and political conditions that vary with their institutional context. For example, their level of autonomy vis-à-vis politicians (Balla, 1998, 2015; Bolton et al., 2016; Calvert et al., 1989; Grimes & Simmons, 1969); (lack of) protection through a civil service (Dussauge Laguna, 2011; Gailmard & Patty, 2007; Kearney, 1986; Moynihan, 2022); prevalence of patronage appointments (Hollibaugh, 2017); demands for accountability

and transparency (Bennett, 1997; Bovens et al., 2014; West, 2004); and threats from corruption or organized crime (Arellano-Gault, 2019). All of these variations will affect how expert workers conduct the functions and fulfill the mandates of their organizations. By focusing overwhelmingly on the Global North, the richness of insights afforded by these contexts is foregone.

Relevant to contemporary public administration challenges, studies in the Global South can also help us better understand how organizations and their workers are affected by, adapt to, or counteract attacks from democratically elected leaders. Populism and democratic backsliding have emerged as important topics in the resilience and future of public administrations around the world (Arellano-Gault, 2020; Bauer, 2023; Bauer & Becker, 2020; Clarke & Newman, 2017; Moynihan, 2022). Selected studies, particularly in the Global South, have begun to look at how workers respond to and adapt to these challenges. For example, a study of policymaking during Bolsonaro's government in Brazil looked at how expert workers bargain with politicians to fulfill their mandates, depending on "the nature of the attack (local or extensive), the knowledge base's and epistemic community's level of cohesion, and the advice system's degree of institutionalization" (Koga et al., 2023, p. 378). Another study, also in Brazil, examined how environmental agencies are able to resists (or not) the president's efforts to dismantle them and obstruct their work, depending on their "leaders' previous experiences and their ability to learn, adjust, and tighten their grip on the instruments of the state" (Bersch & Lotta, 2024, p. 27). When it comes to the crisis of expertise and expert work (Eyal, 2019; Eyal & Medvetz, 2023; Reed & Reed, 2022), the continuous exclusion of Global South contexts as important cases for studies comes at the risk of limiting our understanding and imagination of how workers and organizations can adapt to new and future threats.

Research on expertise in the Global South can ask how do workers develop and share the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the administrative and political context? How dimensions of technical, scientific, or professional expertise imported from the Global North are adapted to work in more complex settings? Studies can explore variations and similarities on how workers experiencing similar challenges – like patronage or populism – conduct and adapt their work. Research can look at organizations with techno-legal mandates that have managed to survive leadership changes and fulfill their functions and at how workers expertise makes this possible. By looking at Global South contexts, studies can more successfully abandon the illusion of the politics-administration dichotomy and focus on understanding how workers combine knowledge, tools, and techniques to address the functions and challenges of government.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, and drawing from a synthesis of the literature, I have discussed the ways in which expertise and expert work have been understood by scholars in the context of public administration. I traced notions of expertise present in foundational texts for the study of public administration and explained how these

classical notions shaped our understanding of expert work – defined by its separation from politics – in the following decades. As a first effort to expand our appreciation of what expert work in the context of public administration can entail, I identified and organized empirical studies in three categories. Studies looking at the problematic relationship between politics and expertise; studies looking at the employment of members from professions; and studies on what I call institutional expertise – workers' ability to navigate the intricate world of public administration. Using these studies as inspiration, I proposed a future research agenda that looks at the political dimension of expertise; at workers below the top and behind the frontline; and at administrations outside of the Global North. I argue that these three lines of inquiry can lead us to improve our understanding, not just of expertise, but also of how governments function and can function better.

Throughout the essay, I made the argument that we need to leave behind the politics and administration dichotomy and grasp the different ways in which these two dimensions are inextricable. This requires that we accept the claim that "politics and administration are a coherent whole that cannot be partitioned" (Tsao, 2009, p. 1021) and that the expertise of workers is part of what makes the two dimensions work in practice. Leaving the dichotomy behind can help us adopt a more holistic understanding of expertise – as involving more than the technical skills and knowledge possessed by a professionally trained group of workers. As Weber (1978) once remarked, expertise in public bureaucracies is developed, shared, and accumulated by workers that not only received professional training before joining the organization but that collectively developed a special know-how on the inner workings of government. With this essay, I invite us to consider how do workers acquire, develop, and accumulate expertise inside public administration? What kind of problems or challenges does their expertise allows them to manage or circumvent and how? How do forms of expertise in this context relate to other profession-specific forms of expertise? And what can this expertise tell us about the administrative, technical, and political dimensions of government work?

This essay contributes to the study of expertise in and around organizations by looking into a context (i.e., public administration) that has not been the focus of sociology, management, or organization studies. The richness of conditions, phenomena, and workers that is found in public administration is bound to enhance current bodies of work. The essay also contributes to the study of public administration by offering a new way in which we can better understand how government organizations work and how they can work better. Understanding how workers perform central tasks and reconcile legal, technical, administrative, and political concerns can shed light on the effectiveness of government organizations and the ways in which administrative and governmental capacities are achieved.

NOTES

1. I searched for *expertise* (and variations, like expert) in the title and across topics including *government*, *public organization*, or *public administration* (and variations).

2. Using the SCImago Journal Rank indicator, I included: Public Administration Review, Public Management Review, Public Administration, Public Personnel

Management, International Review of Administrative Sciences, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, American Review of Public Administration, Administration Society, Review of Public Personnel Administration, Public Performance Management Review, International Public Management Journal, Governance, Organization Studies, Policy Studies Journal, Public Policy and Administration, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Regulation and Governance, Policy Sciences, Organization Science, Policy Studies, British Journal of Management, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Journal of Management Studies, Academy of Management Journal, Politics and Society, Administrative Science Quarterly, Social Forces, Social Science Quarterly, Work Employment and Society, Gestión y Política Pública, Organization, Policy and Society, American Sociological Review, Sociological Forum, American Journal of Sociology, Social Science Research, Sociological Perspectives, Academy of Management Review, Sociological Review, Work and Occupations, Academy of Management Perspectives, British Journal of Sociology, Journal of Management, and Sociological Quarterly.

3. While outside this review, this line of inquiry is also found in studies that look at political influence over outside scientific advisors or expert committees (Jasanoff, 1998; Lavertu & Weimer, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2010) and the influence of corporations or politicians, shaping deliberations over scientific matters (Priest et al., 1984; Smith, 2010).

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