

Bridging bureaucracy and democracy in Europe: A comparative study of perceived managerial excellence, satisfaction with public services, and trust in governance

Eran Vigoda-Gadot, Aviv Shoham and Dana R Vashdi

University of Haifa, Israel

Abstract

The cross-country study of public administration based on citizens' surveys in Europe is a relatively novel approach to analyzing the social and political dynamics of the continent. The goal of this study is to examine some aspects of bureaucracy and democracy as perceived by knowledgeable citizens in six countries (Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia, and Spain). A rationale is developed to support hypotheses about the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy. The study also proposes hypotheses about differences between the countries in terms of satisfaction with public services, trust in governance and public administration agencies, and a set of managerial-oriented variables of the public sector (i.e. perceived innovation, responsiveness, professionalism, organizational politics, leadership and vision, ethics and morality). The study's findings indicate that various aspects of bureaucracy and democracy differ across countries and that democratic longevity may be a good explanation for these differences.

Keywords

bureaucracy, citizens, democracy, satisfaction, trust

Corresponding author:

Eran Vigoda-Gadot, Center for Public Management & Policy, School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel.

Email: eranv@poli.haifa.ac.il

Introduction

The current state of democracy and bureaucracy in Europe is the subject of growing research in political studies, administrative sciences, and governance. Democracy, as a governmental method, is the most accepted model of political order in liberal Western and non-Western societies, and is typical of modern, advanced nations (Inglehart, 1997). Bureaucracy, on the other hand, is not restricted to democratic regimes and serves as the most popular, effective, and efficient administrative order in organizations, especially in governmental agencies (Olsen, 2005). Moreover, every democracy relies on the advantages of the bureaucratic model and, at the same time, must endure its weaknesses. Studies are thus frequently interested in the nature and development of either democracy or bureaucracy in an attempt to better understand their mechanisms, inner dynamics, and *modus operandi* (e.g. Epstein and O'Halloran, 1994, 1999; Huber and Shipan, 2002; Rohrschneider, 2005). However, efforts to examine the potential nexus between them are rare. Research regarding the mutual tradeoffs between the democratic and bureaucratic systems, especially from the point of view of citizens, has been scarce, and even less has been empirically grounded in national or cross-national data.

Thus, the goals of this study are twofold: first, to enrich the discourse on the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy from the perspectives of knowledgeable European citizens, and second, to put some of the suggested relationships to an empirical test that is both comparative (cross-national) and generic. Following other studies and influential thematic essays (e.g. Gawthrop, 1998; Goodsell, 2006; Huber and Shipan, 2002; Olsen, 2005; Thompson, 1983; Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2008), the article focuses on several aspects of good managerial practices in public administration such as responsiveness, innovation, professionalism, organizational politics, leadership and vision, and ethics and morality. We then try to relate these examples of excellent public management to indicators of strong democracy such as trust in governance, satisfaction with state services, and the overall image of the bureaucratic and democratic system. We use an original European data set collected in six countries during the period 2003–5. The participating countries were Ireland, Israel, Norway, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Spain.¹ Whereas most of these countries belong to the European Union, or were about to join during this period, Israel is an exception. However, Israel maintains a strong relationship with the European Union (e.g. its accompanying position in the EU research framework program) and has many cultural, political, and economic similarities with EU countries. Therefore, we believe it deserves consideration in this study.

The article begins with a theoretical review of the potential link between democracy and bureaucracy as suggested in the political science and public administration literature. It then suggests several specific, testable hypotheses about the expected nature of these tradeoffs in the countries under study. Next we discuss the empirical phase, the findings, and the implications and conclusions about the nature of bureaucracy and democracy in the European region.

Bureaucracy and democracy: The paradox and the bond that lasts

Thompson (1983: 235) suggests that 'democracy does not suffer bureaucracy gladly' (and perhaps also vice versa). In fact, bureaucracy and democracy make an odd couple, but nonetheless an inseparable one. Bureaucracy is based on a conventional hierarchical model where substantial power is granted to high-ranking managers or public officials who are given the authority to lead and make decisions. Democracy, on the other hand, is based on an inverted hierarchical model where such power is granted, at least theoretically, to the people, who in turn decide to whom it should be delegated. However, at the same time, these two sociopolitical mechanisms are almost inseparable. Without the mechanisms of bureaucracies, democracies could not respond to their citizens' needs. Therefore, in modern nations democracy and bureaucracy still must reconcile, operate, and cooperate with one another, even if they do so unhappily. To aid this process, Gawthrop (1998: xii–xiii) suggests that in public administration more attention be paid to 'ethical-moral values that pervade the spirit of democracy and constitute the pathways to the common good' (p. xii).

In an extensive discussion of the role of bureaucrats in modern democracies, Huber and Shipan (2002) provide a comparative theory of statutory control by building a model in which incentives for statutory control interact with broader institutional arrangements in a democratic system. Their theory makes a strong case for studying several determinants of statutory discretion beyond the ideological or policy conflict between the legislature and implementing bureaucracy. The empirical integration of theory with data from states in the United States and parliamentary democracies in the International Labour Organization illustrates the systematic underpinnings of statutory discretion and exemplifies another aspect of the conflict between democracy and bureaucracy. Huber and Shipan's study is actually a development of principal–agent theory (e.g. Epstein and O'Halloran, 1994, 1999), which tries to explain the delegation of power between democracy and bureaucracy and the control/regulatory mechanisms of the state and its institutions. The tension between politicians and bureaucrats can be used to understand the role of citizens in government and to explain bureaucratic behavior and differences between countries in that regard (e.g. Shipan, 2004).

In the face of the contention that many of the elements of bureaucracy conflict with those of democracy, an important theoretical and practical challenge emerges – finding fresh thinking and methods that can bridge the odd couple, especially in the European context. Since the end of World War II, and even more so following the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, many European nations have embraced some form of democratic government. Using bureaucratic terms, most of the older and younger European democracies have also tried to be more responsive to citizens' needs and demands, to listen to and communicate with social organizations, and to transform their policies to meet at least some of the aspirations of various segments of society. The challenge of understanding how to bridge the gap between democracy and bureaucracy has become particularly relevant in the European setting where

types of democracy and forms of bureaucracy differ across countries owing to diversity in culture, history, and national orientation. A study by Rohrschneider (2005) examined 15 European countries to come up with generic conclusions. He found that, when national administrative and judicial institutions work well, citizens are also more likely to believe that parliaments and governments are attentive to their interests. Hence, despite some fundamental differences, the bond between democracy and bureaucracy must last in order to ensure the prosperity and continuity of the liberal democratic state (in Europe and beyond) and the continuing ability to supply high-quality services to citizens (e.g. Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000).

Following these ideas, recent studies (e.g. Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003; Vigoda-Gadot, 2009) have suggested a citizen-based conceptual framework for understanding the nexus between bureaucracy and democracy. According to this line of thinking, how citizens view the performance of the public sector may affect democratic values such as trust in administrative agencies and trust in governance, as well as participatory behavior of various types. Similarly, researchers who deal with public opinion put a stronger emphasis on citizens' trust in governance in Europe and in other countries. They argue for a relationship between this trust and satisfaction with public services. One example of this indirect relationship is a study by Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), who found that more trust in the national government implies a decrease in support for EU integration owing to satisfaction with the national agencies.

Bureaucracy, democracy and the European citizen: Essential constructs and possible tradeoffs

To investigate the potential tradeoffs between bureaucracy and democracy in Europe, especially from the point of view of citizens, it is essential to consider several elements such as the operative construct of bureaucracy, the expressions of democracy, and their meaning for the European citizen. A dominant paradigm, strongly anchored in public administration and political science thinking, is the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine. According to this view, governments should adopt businesslike theories and practices and citizens should be treated as clients of government agencies (Van Ryzin, 2004, 2005). In practice, this means paying increasing attention to the image of bureaucracy and democracy in the eyes of citizens, who are the customers and owners of these institutions (Stipak, 1980; Van Ryzin, 2004). This approach has gained increasing support, especially in a market-oriented public sector where the opinions of the public are expected to be heard and seriously considered before long-term policy decisions are made by bureaucrats and politicians. It has become evident that citizens are an essential part of the trilog of collaborative public management, together with public agencies and the private sector (Vigoda-Gadot, 2003).

In keeping with this approach, there are a handful of previous studies that used citizens' evaluations as indicators of the quality of management in public bureaucracies. These studies identified a long list of elements reflecting bureaucratic efficiency. Some of these elements are citizens' reports of innovativeness, responsiveness, morality, ethical and professional procedures and decisions, leadership

and vision, and internal organizational politics in bureaucracies. A short review of these indicators of managerial excellence may be useful for following the logic of the current study.

First, public sector *innovation and creativity* serve as an essential engine for renewal, development, and continuous advancement towards the collective organizational vision. Traditionally, public sector organizations are viewed as uncreative and stagnant entities. However, managerial innovation and creativity are essential for those administrators and systems that seek to perform better and compete successfully with other organizations from the private sector or from the third sector (Golembiewski and Vigoda, 2000).

Second, *responsiveness* to citizens as clients may be regarded as the Holy Grail of modern public administration. A responsive bureaucracy delivers services and goods with optimal speed and accuracy (Chi, 1999; Vigoda, 2000). Thomas and Palfrey (1996) argued that responsiveness attests to the speed and accuracy with which a service provider responds to a request for action or for information. Speed can refer to the waiting time between citizens' request for action and the reply of the public agency. Accuracy means the extent to which the provider's response is appropriate to the needs or wishes of the citizens.

Third, the *professionalism* of public servants, as well as quality *leadership* and the infusion of *vision* by senior officers, are important components of excellent public management. Excellent managers in all sectors are expected to provide employees with supportive work environments. It is the managers' responsibility to provide vision but, at the same time, to suggest tools for translating this vision into action. As mentioned in various other studies, an efficient, skillful, professional, and committed public service will support the government in its work (e.g. Hart and Grant, 1989; Holzer, 1989).

Fourth, managerial excellence is also based on a broad set of values, norms, and unwritten rules that build a fair and just administrative culture. Hence, standards of *ethics and morality* may be seen as the hidden underbelly of bureaucracies. Although every bureaucracy is characterized by a formal set of regulations and laws, their implementation is weighted by the way in which they are interpreted by managers (DeLeon, 1996; Gawthrop, 1998; Lui and Cooper, 1997). All the above studies have agreed that managerial quality also encompasses ethical standards, integrity, fair and equal treatment of citizens as clients, and appropriate criteria for rewarding public servants.

Finally, the minimizing of *internal politics* in public administration is a good indication of quality bureaucracy and governance. Thompson and Ingraham (1996) defined organizational politics as the art of competition among individuals while striving for divergent objectives. They suggested that a political analysis of organizations contrasts with rational models that portray organizations as directed towards the achievement of a single set of mutually agreed upon goals (1996: 292). Innovative, responsive, moral, ethical, and professional leaders blessed with vision and unencumbered by organizational politics raise the level of trust in and satisfaction with the public sector and improve its image in the eyes of citizens.

Cross-European comparisons and hypotheses

Based on the assumption that Europe is still far from being the ‘united states’ of the old continent and that diversity among its nation-states is still vast, we suggest that European countries also differ in their expression of managerial excellence and how the people view their democracies. This assumption, when examined in light of the citizens-as-clients approach, should result in differences across countries in the variables mentioned above (trust, satisfaction, managerial excellence, etc.).

Building on the citizen-oriented approach and the NPM doctrine (Hood, 1991; Lynn, 1998), it may be argued that it is the citizens in each country who can and should be involved in the assessment of government. Such involvement is democracy at its best and leads to constructive criticism of bureaucracy. The public’s views should be seriously considered when policy-makers determine the next steps in policy planning and implementation (Box et al., 2001). Some studies even call for more ambitious models of collaboration with citizens and private organizations that can boost the delivery of goods and services to the public even further (Vigoda-Gadot, 2003). Because each European country has its unique heritage, history, administrative and political structure, and traditions and methods of policy-making that are based on separate ideologies and sociopolitical considerations (Inglehart, 1997), the views of their citizens should differ substantially. Thus, our arguments are based on the assumption that (1) there will be differences between countries in perceptions of managerial excellence, trust in governance and public administration, public sector image, and satisfaction with public services; (2) there will be differences between countries in perceptions of various facets of trust in governance and public administration; and (3) there will be differences between countries in perceptions of various facets of satisfaction with public services. The power of these assumptions will be demonstrated and illustrated more clearly later in the article.

We thus return to our original argument that democracy and bureaucracy still represent a lasting bond, regardless of national or regional boundaries. We propose that the link between managerial excellence and (1) public sector image, (2) satisfaction with public services, and (3) trust in governance and public administration is positive and generic across the continent, and even beyond.

The rationale for this argument builds on several ideas. First, the argument draws substance from the ‘new vision for public administration’ as suggested by Goodsell (2006). According to Goodsell’s view, the ‘administrator’s highest purpose is to build the public trust that makes democracy possible’ (2006: 623). Therefore, trust in governance and in public administration, which is an expression of political support in a democratic entity, is expected to be one of the major outcomes of a well-performing bureaucracy.

- H1:** Trust in governance and public administration is positively related with managerial excellence across countries.

In addition, studies of organizational image and reputation as well as other studies that specifically focus on public sector image (e.g. Dutton et al., 1994) convincingly argue that these perspectives and attitudes are formed gradually based on reciprocity with the customers and the clients' previous experiences with the system. When citizens face a managerial machinery that functions well in procedures, outcomes, and moral standards, they rank it higher in their assessments of image, satisfaction, support, and willingness to take part in its activity. According to equity theory (Adams, 1965), a public sector that delivers high-quality and timely goods to its citizens will earn, in return, public recognition and legitimization over time. Hence, we expect to find positive relationships between public managerial excellence, image, and satisfaction in the countries that participated in the study. This expectation is in line with other thematic and epistemological ideas of Gawthrop (1998), Goodsell (2006) and others. Thus, two additional hypotheses are suggested:

- H2:** Public sector image is positively related with managerial excellence across countries.
- H3:** Satisfaction with public services is positively related with managerial excellence across countries.

Beyond the analysis of bureaucratic and democratic expressions suggested thus far, we also believe that perceptions of democracy and bureaucracy may change over time. This rationale is based on the idea, previously suggested and empirically supported by Hofstede (1991), that social and organizational culture is subject to environmental dynamics and to changes in values and norms in each country. Thus, we distinguish between European countries based on their democratic longevity and suggest that, with time and the nurturing of democratic standards, bureaucratic mechanisms and attitudes towards public administration will be transformed as well.

For example, let us consider public sector image. Like other images, a cognitive construct expresses an overall picture of the quality of the public service. This image is affected by experiences, knowledge, values, and basic assumptions of the individual in a specific sociopolitical sphere (Dutton et al., 1994). Like trust and satisfaction, a positive public sector image is an indicator of a strong democracy and a working bureaucracy that needs to be built over time. Assuming the relationship between democracy and bureaucracy is as proposed above, more established, stable democracies are apparently also those that are successful in making bureaucracy efficient over time. Countries such as Norway, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands are ranked highest in quality of life and in quality of services to citizens. Such data are available in the Human Development Index, published annually by the United Nations. This index ranks nations according to their citizens' quality of life rather than strictly by the nation's traditional economic figures.² The criteria for calculating rankings include life expectancy, educational attainment, and adjusted real income. Not surprisingly, according to another independent ranking calculated annually, the Economist

Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, the same countries also have a long and rich democratic heritage. Moreover, these political entities have survived intermittent crises and enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of their people. Thus, established democracies are the most likely political entities to demonstrate productive tradeoffs between democracy and bureaucracy. Other countries, from Eastern Europe and Africa, are ranked much lower both on the democratic index and on various quality of life indexes.

Hence, a careful look at European democracies reveals that most of them enjoy a liberal ideology nourished and encouraged by effective managerial tools of the bureaucratic system. From the opposite point of view, most, if not all, European bureaucracies that excel in effective mechanisms of service and vision and make sound executive decisions flourish under liberal democracy where the voice of its citizens are heard and positively affect strategic decision-making and policy formation (e.g. the UK, France, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries). In contrast, newly independent nations (e.g. East European countries and other countries in Asia and Africa) tend, at best, to favor a more authoritarian type of democracy, which is less participatory, less transparent, and less flexible. Although the highly autocratic model of democracy can function well in the short term, it will ultimately face growing problems of efficiency, effectiveness, and budgetary constraints, which will lead to a decline in its perceived efficacy.

In the same vein, fledgling democracies need to build trust gradually among their citizens and earn their confidence over time. Worldwide measures of trust, in Europe and beyond, clearly indicate that trust is higher in countries with a higher quality of life (see, for example, the Eurobarometer data). Providing superior public services may be a step towards achieving that trust and strengthening civil society. It may also empower constructive leadership and encourage the democratic values of trust, political participation, and community involvement (Gawthrop, 1998; Goodsell, 2006). However, it is still noteworthy that the positive relationship between trust and satisfaction is not trivial. A comparative study from Norway, Sweden, and the United States between 1964 and 1986 found that all three countries suffered from a decline in public trust in government (Miller and Listhaug, 1990), yet satisfaction with public services was stable and high. The same evidence has been found in Britain, Italy, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, and Ireland (Nye et al., 1997). These findings testify to the complex relationship between those variables.

Nevertheless, based on expectation theory (Vroom, 1964), we further argue that, in the newer democracies, citizens may be more suspicious of governments and express greater mistrust based on past experiences. Similarly, expectations of rapid positive change in bureaucratic outcomes may be unrealistic in these democracies and even amplified by the inevitable comparison with other, more established neighbor-democracies where the quality of bureaucratic systems is higher and administrative agencies are more stable. From another point of view, institutional and neo-institutional theories (Campbell and Pedersen, 2001) also support this argument, suggesting that building strong institutions, quality public services, and responsible management takes time and effort. However, it is the safest path

for ensuring public legitimacy, nourishing democratic stability, and encouraging genuine trust by citizens in state authorities (Frederickson, 1999).

- H4:** Public sector image, satisfaction with services, and trust in governance and public administration are positively related with democratic longevity.

Six-country European study: Method and tools

Method and sample

Six countries were examined in the study, and data were collected during the period 2004–5 as part of a Europe-wide research project under the 5FP (Framework Program) of the European Commission. Our original intention was to collect data in nine countries but, owing to a very low response rate in the UK, the Netherlands, and Sweden, we finally used data from only six countries: Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia, and Spain. In each of the countries, data were collected from *knowledgeable* citizens, who were senior or mid-level managers of third sector organizations working closely with the public and with public sector agencies in social and healthcare services. The managers were authentic representatives of civic groups (third sector organizations), as well as knowledgeable informants on governmental agencies in the fields of social services and health services. Unlike conventional public opinion studies and surveys of the broader population, this approach allowed us to minimize bias resulting from a lack of awareness of public service outcomes and subjective evaluations based on word of mouth. These two problems frequently bedevil ordinary citizens' surveys and limit their contribution, especially when they deal with perceptions of public services, satisfaction measures, trust, and other attitudes towards governmental agencies (Stipak, 1980).

Thus, our study focuses on respondents with tenure of at least five years within their organizations to maximize their awareness of public outcomes in their fields of expertise. In each country the researchers approached a selective sample of between five and 10 major third sector organizations in the fields of healthcare and/or social services. The criteria for selecting these organizations were the influence and centrality they have in each country and their representation of large numbers of citizens. Managers in these organizations were selected randomly, with an emphasis on mid-ranking and high-ranking managers who could best attest to the outcomes of public agencies. Contact with the organizations was established by mail and by phone calls. Only the organizations that expressed interest in the study participated in the survey. Managers were then asked to fill in a questionnaire that requested both information about the relevant variables and some demographic information about themselves. The respondents in each country were asked to provide data based on their own experience and contact with various public agencies. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was assured throughout the process.

All together, we distributed 1156 questionnaires in eight countries (the group from the UK was excluded in the early stages of the study for technical reasons).

A direct distribution and return method was used to maximize potential participants' commitment and to reassure the participants that the data they provided would be used responsibly. Country research teams met in person at least five times during the two years of preparations for the study. Meetings were held in the participating countries and, during these meetings, the research tools were developed. The distribution and collection of data for the pilot study and for the main study were conducted between December 2004 and March 2005.

A total of 626 usable questionnaires were returned from the eight countries. However, the total number of responses from the Netherlands and from Sweden was less than 50 (a minimum level accepted in the social and behavioral sciences for normal distributions). Thus, a total of 562 questionnaires were used in our final analysis (an overall response rate of 49%). Received/distributed questionnaires and response rates (in parentheses) by nation were: Ireland: 118/200 (53.6%); Israel: 102/140 (72.8%); Lithuania: 68/120 (56.7%); Norway: 121/225 (53.8%); Slovakia: 81/120 (67.5%); Spain: 72/120 (60%). The combined multinational sample included 66 percent females, an average age of 45.12 (SD = 17.55) and an average of 15.62 (SD = 4.08) years of education. Regarding income, 40.6 percent earned an average income in their country, 32.7 percent were below the average, and 22.6 percent above it.

Tools and measures

A special questionnaire was developed for the purposes of this study. We produced an English version that relied on previously published scales with acknowledged validity and reliability. The English version was then translated into Norwegian, Irish, Hebrew, Spanish, Lithuanian, and Slovakian using a back-and-forth translation method. A pilot study of up to 10 individuals in each country was conducted to verify the clarity of the final versions. The construction of each of the variables is reported in detail below. In most cases, respondents were asked to report the degree to which they agreed with the items.

Innovation: This variable includes three items that reflect entrepreneurial actions, creativity, flexibility, a willingness to adopt new ideas, and the initiation of original enterprises to improve services to the people (Borins, 2000, 2002). The sample item was 'Creativity is encouraged in the public social/health sector'. Country-level internal reliability ranged from 0.68 to 0.90, and the overall reliability was 0.82.

Responsiveness: This variable includes three items that refer to the accuracy and speed of public sector reaction to citizens' demands (Thomas and Palfrey, 1996). The sample item was 'In general, the administration of the public social/health sector responds to public requests quickly.' Country-level internal reliability ranged between 0.77 and 0.89, with an overall reliability of 0.84.

Professionalism: This variable includes two items that refer to the professionalism and quality of public personnel as perceived by citizens. The sample item was 'Employees in the public social/health sector in my country are professionals

and highly qualified.’ Country-level internal reliability ranged between 0.60 and 0.85, with an overall reliability of 0.76.

Organizational politics: This variable includes three items that reflect the level of political considerations in administrative work and decision-making as perceived by citizens. The sample item was ‘The actions of the public social/health sector administration serve only the purposes of a few groups or individuals, not the public interest in general.’ A higher score reflects a higher perceived level of organizational politics. Country-level reliability ranged between 0.62 and 0.84, with an overall value of 0.68.

Leadership and vision: This variable includes two items that represent views about the quality and vision of leading administrative groups, managers, and senior bureaucrats. The sample item was ‘Senior managers of the public social/health sector in my country have a clear vision and long range view as to where we are going.’ The reliability scores ranged from 0.71 to 0.82 across countries, with an overall value of 0.76.

Ethics and morality: This variable includes two items that describe attitudes about the ethics, morality, and fairness of civil servants. The sample item was ‘In this country most civil servants in the public social/health sector show high moral integrity.’ Higher scores represent a more positive (moral and ethical) view of the public sector. Excepting Spain, country-level internal reliability ranged between 0.69 and 0.82, with an overall value of 0.74.

Trust in governance and public administration: This variable refers to the level of citizens’ confidence in state authorities and administrative branches (Citrin and Muste, 1999). Respondents indicated how much trust they had in each on a five-point scale (1 = very low trust, to 5 = very high trust), with an option of indicating whether they had enough knowledge to evaluate each service/institution. Analysis was conducted only for those who indicated that they had sufficient knowledge to make such judgments. With the exception of the Netherlands, country-level reliability ranged between 0.68 and 0.82, with an overall value of 0.79.

Satisfaction with public services: This variable refers to satisfaction with six groups of institutions and organizations that deliver various services (the public social/health sector, the public educational system, police, the public transportation system, welfare and social security, and employment services). Respondents were asked to report how satisfied they were with the treatment they received. Country-level reliability ranged between 0.60 and 0.85, and the overall reliability was 0.72.

Public sector image: This variable refers to the reputation and prestige of public bureaucracies in the eyes of citizens and was based on a scale suggested by Dutton et al. (1994) and Oswald (1996). We adopted a two-item scale: (1) ‘Many of my acquaintances think that a job in the public social/health sector is a respectable and good one,’ and (2) ‘I believe that a job in the public social/health sector is a respectable and good one.’ Country-level internal reliability ranged between 0.64 and 0.76, with an overall value of 0.69.

Findings

Prior to testing the research hypotheses we examined cross-country differences for the major variables. We found meaningful differences in managerial excellence, trust, and satisfaction across the countries, which testifies to the uniqueness of the sociopolitical and administrative state of each of the studied countries.³ Next, we applied a correlation and multi-level regression analysis (a correlation matrix for the combined six-country sample is presented in Table 1 of the web appendix). Cronbach's alpha were found to be satisfactory and zero-order correlations were in line with hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.

Hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 called for an examination of the relationship between variables that represent managerial excellence and trust in governance and public administration, satisfaction with public services, and public sector image respectively. Because the data from the different countries were combined in order to examine these hypotheses, we took into consideration the multi-level nature of the data (i.e. respondents' belonging to countries). We used the Random Coefficient Modeling (RCM; Goldstein, 1987) approach, which allows for testing the nesting of respondents within countries.

The advantage of RCM is that, by modeling residuals at the higher level (i.e. country level), such models acknowledge that respondents living in the same country may be more similar to one another than to respondents living in different countries (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992). We analyzed our data using the SAS-MIXED procedure.

As can be seen in Model 1 in Table 1, the first hypothesis is partially supported. Public sector image is related to responsiveness, professionalism, and leadership and vision and not related to innovation, organizational politics, and ethics and morality. The random variance of the country was marginally significant, showing some indication that the multi-level model is appropriate and that respondents in the same country are more similar than respondents in different countries. The second hypothesis is also partially supported (Table 2, Model 2) since all independent variables apart from organizational politics were significantly related to satisfaction with public services. The random variance for the country was not significant, indicating that the results would have been similar without a multi-level analysis. Finally, the third hypothesis is also partially supported since all independent variables, with the exceptions of organizational politics and leadership and vision, were significantly related to trust in governance and public administration. In this model, too, the random variance of the country was marginally significant, showing some indication that the multi-level model is appropriate and that respondents in the same country are more similar than respondents in different countries. As can be seen, in all models organizational politics was not found to be related to any of the dependent variables.

To test the fourth hypothesis, which posited a relationship between democratic longevity and trust in governance and public administration, satisfaction with public services, and public sector image, we conducted an analysis at the country

Table 1. Multi-level analysis for the effect of managerial excellence on public sector image, satisfaction with public services, and trust in governance

	Public sector image Model 1		Satisfaction with public services Model 2		Trust in governance Model 3	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Intercept	1.37***	0.28	1.44***	0.17	1.47***	0.17
Innovation	0.09	0.04	0.11***	0.03	0.07**	0.03
Responsiveness	0.13*	0.05	0.14***	0.03	0.14***	0.03
Professionalism	0.25***	0.05	0.11***	0.03	0.10**	0.03
Organizational politics	0.04	0.043	-0.009	0.02	-0.03	0.02
Leadership and vision	0.13*	0.057	0.09**	0.03	0.03	0.03
Ethics and morality	0.07	0.05	0.07*	0.03	0.15***	0.03
Country random variance	0.02 [#]	0.02	0.006	0.005	0.02 [#]	0.01
-2 loglikelihood	1187.7		669.8		633.3	
Model fit statistics without multi-level analysis ^a						
R ²	.23		.33		.36	

Notes: SE, standard error.

^aExplained variance in a uni-level regression analysis.

[#] $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Independent samples *t*-test for the comparison of the relationship between democratic longevity (greater, lesser) across the research variables

	Mean		<i>t</i> -test (sig.)
	Greater democratic longevity (N = 341)	Lesser democratic longevity (N = 221)	
1. Innovation	<u>2.80</u> (0.80)	3.04 (0.95)	.002**
2. Responsiveness	<u>2.67</u> (0.80)	2.37 (0.78)	.000***
3. Professionalism	<u>3.59</u> (0.87)	3.26 (0.76)	.000***
4. Organizational politics	3.19 (0.98)	<u>3.08</u> (0.82)	NS
5. Leadership and vision	2.96 (0.86)	<u>2.91</u> (0.83)	NS
6. Ethics and morality	<u>3.22</u> (0.92)	2.93 (0.87)	.000***
7. Public sector image	3.65 (0.86)	<u>3.38</u> (0.88)	.001***
8. Satisfaction with public services	3.00 (0.58)	<u>2.90</u> (0.56)	.04*
9. Trust in governance	2.94 (0.60)	<u>2.71</u> (0.56)	.000***

Notes: Highest and most significant mean in row is underlined. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

level because democratic longevity is measured at this higher level of analysis. We aggregated the three democracy variables (i.e. trust in governance and public administration, satisfaction with public services, and public sector image) to the country level and examined the correlation between these country-level variables and democratic longevity.⁴ The correlation between democratic longevity and public image was .67 ($p = .14$), the correlation between democratic longevity and trust in governance was .76 ($p = .08$), and the correlation between democratic longevity and satisfaction with public services was .67 ($p = .15$). The lack of significance for some of these correlations is owing to the small sample size.

Figure 1 illustrates the above correlations and presents the average values of image, satisfaction, and trust in each of the studied countries based on their original year of becoming a sovereign democracy. In addition, Table 2 provides a comparison between countries with relatively high democratic longevity (Norway, Ireland, Israel – 61–104 years) and those with lower democratic longevity (Spain, Lithuania, Slovakia – 16–34 years). As can be seen, with the exception of innovation, which is higher in younger democracies, all other variables score higher in the older democracies (responsiveness, professionalism, ethics and morality, as well as the outcome variables of public sector image, satisfaction with services, and trust in governance). These findings suggest again that democratic longevity has a positive relationship with the quality of public services and with the stability and legitimacy of the democratic system in Europe. They support the results presented earlier and point to the potential centrality of democratic longevity in future studies of bureaucracy and democracy in Europe and beyond.

Discussion and summary

This study made a cross-country effort to explain the relationship between several elements of modern bureaucracy and aspects of democracy in the European context. This relationship has become a challenging research area in political science (Barber, 1984; Huber and Shipan, 2002; Rohrschneider, 2005; Ulbig, 2002; Verba et al., 1995), in administrative sciences, and in the field of policy studies (Epstein and O'Halloran, 1994, 1999; Kelly, 1998; Peters and Pierre, 1998; Thompson, 1983; Waldo, 1977). The conflicts between democracy and bureaucracy are daunting and sometimes seem impossible to reconcile. This study suggests that we must merge the ideals that underpin liberal democracy with the realities that govern effective bureaucracies. We must also combine notions of an open society and trustworthy governance with the need to produce a well-performing public sector. In the face of this challenge, it is no wonder that models of New Governance (Buss et al., 2006), New Public Management (Hood, 1991; Lynn 1998; Terry, 2005) and third-way ideology (Giddens, 2000; Powell, 1999) have become so popular worldwide. Their popularity is drawn from trying to bridge the gap between democratic values and bureaucratic outcomes. Nonetheless, a common denominator of all these approaches and doctrines is the belief that reconciliation can be achieved between public administration under pressure and democracies under threat.

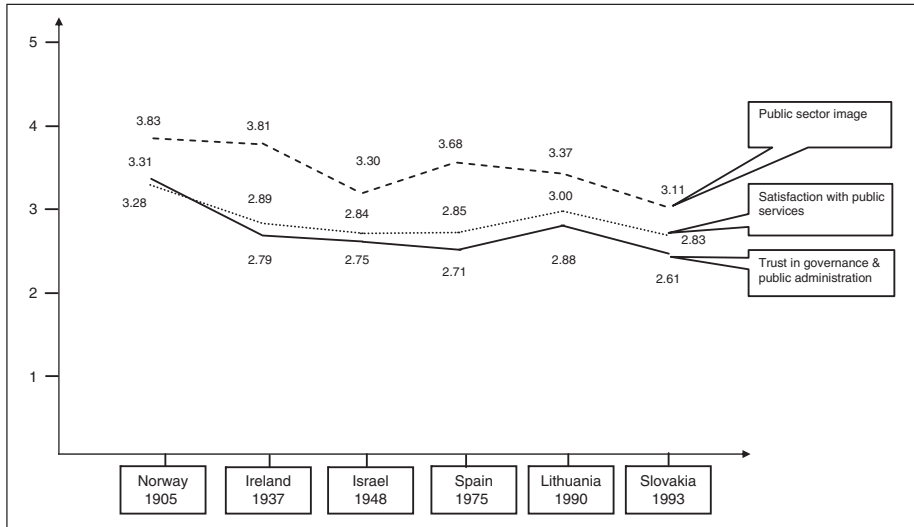


Figure 1. Change in public sector image, satisfaction with public services, and trust in governance and public administration across countries and democratic longevity.

Our study seeks to add to the empirical knowledge about the relationship between bureaucracy and democracy in Europe in order to reconcile the paradoxes between the two (Woller, 1998). The theoretical foundations of our study are based on democratic ideas, bureaucratic and administrative knowledge, theories of expectation, and institutional and neo-institutional approaches. We attempt to fill the gap in the literature by using data from several countries that are substantially different in culture, democratic-historical background, and heritage.

The findings of the study should be considered from several perspectives. First, they confirm that Europeans may have different views of the bureaucratic and the democratic systems in their homelands. We found substantial differences in assessments of the excellence of public services across countries. For example, Norway was the country with the highest scores in professionalism, leadership and vision and ethics and morality. It also earned the highest evaluations of its public sector image, satisfaction and trust in governance and public administration. We believe that these findings testify to the quality of bureaucratic and democratic systems in this country, which are a result of many factors – managerial, cultural, and sociopolitical. At the other end of the scale, Slovakia scored lowest on most aspects of managerial excellence such as responsiveness and professionalism, but also on perceived image, satisfaction, and trust in governance and public administration.

Beyond these interesting but descriptive findings, the more analytical results show meaningful relationships between aspects of an excellent bureaucracy and facets of an advanced and trustworthy democracy. More specifically, we found a relationship between the degree to which the bureaucracy is perceived as responsive and professional and the extent to which the citizens view the examined aspects of a democracy

favorably. Interestingly, both the responsiveness and the professionalism of a bureaucracy have been defined in respect to the speed (efficiency) and accuracy (effectiveness, skillfulness) with which a service provider responds to a request for action or for information (Thomas and Palfrey, 1996). It seems that, in order for citizens to have trust in governance, they should express satisfaction with public services and adopt a favorable image of state agencies. In addition, trust in governance, which is the variable most used to capture the stability and legitimization of a democracy (Van Ryzin, 2004, 2005), was found to be related to the extent to which the bureaucracy is viewed as innovative, ethical, and moral. The relationship between views of an innovative bureaucracy and trust in governance is especially interesting. It stresses the need for European countries, with both long and short democratic traditions, to advance modernity and innovation in their administrative systems. One more finding that is worth noting is that organizational politics was not found to be related to any of the democratic variables. This finding somewhat contradicts previous studies on the major role of internal politics in the bureaucratic process (e.g. Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2008) and can be explained by the lower awareness that citizens usually have of internal dynamics in governmental agencies. Nonetheless, future studies should try to replicate our findings before firm conclusions are drawn.

Following the theoretical ideas suggested by Huber and Shipan (2002), Rohrschneider (2005), Epstein and O'Halloran (1994, 1999), Gawthrop (1998), and Goodsell (2006), we can point to a generic relationship between the quality products of the managerial/administrative machinery and the legitimization and quality of the democratic system across the studied countries. For example, our understanding of the conflict between legislators and policy-makers (Huber and Shipan, 2002; Epstein and O'Halloran, 1994) may be enriched in light of our findings that demonstrate the interdependence of the two spheres (the political and the administrative). According to our findings, the legitimization of the democratic system, as reflected in citizens' trust in governance, may be highly dependent on the quality of policy outcomes and managerial success in implementing public initiatives wisely.

Furthermore, although the causal direction of the relationship was not tested here (because the study was not longitudinal), we can still argue that bureaucracy and democracy feed each other with outcomes and outputs that build and safeguard the quality of life of citizens. Therefore, our study extends previous findings on satisfaction (e.g. Van Ryzin, 2004, 2005) and those on the relationship between trust and satisfaction in light of bureaucratic and managerial excellence (Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003). A noteworthy implication of this study, which builds both on the principal-agent theory (Epstein and O'Halloran, 1994, 1999) and on the relationship between legislators and bureaucrats (Huber and Shipan, 2002), may be that improving the managerial qualities and capabilities of the bureaucratic system, at least as far as the perceptions of knowledgeable citizens are concerned, can lead to a more stable and legitimate democracy.

Another interesting finding supports a theory of democratic longevity and adaptation over time. Democratic longevity was found to be related to public sector

image and trust as well as to satisfaction. Owing to our small country-level sample size, we could not examine the additive contribution of this variable to the bureaucratic excellence variables, but in their relationship to the democracy variables it is plausible to assume that democracies that survive are also more likely to provide better services to their people, and vice versa. Thus, knowing how to offer better services to the people, over more years of democracy, contributes to a country's stability and legitimizes its governance in the eyes of its citizens.

From a conceptual point of view, we feel that our findings help reduce the skepticism that bureaucracy and democracy constitute different entities that frequently cannot harmoniously coexist. Using the analogy of Holzer and Kloby (2005), we suggest that this can be 'a happy marriage,' depending on the characteristics of the national system and the quality of the adaptation and interfaces between the two. Our findings demonstrate that in some European countries a 'happy marriage' does exist. Future studies on either bureaucracy or democracy should bear in mind the linkage between them, but pay close attention to local and national characteristics that shape the nature of the relationship.

In addition to the benefits of the study, several limitations should also be mentioned. First, we collected data in eight countries but valid data were available for only six. One may legitimately argue that firmer conclusions can be drawn only when additional data are available from more countries. Second, the overall number of usable questionnaires obtained from the countries was limited and should be increased in future studies. Third, we studied well-established democratic nations as well as relatively new democracies, various geographical locations, and multiple cultural environments. This variety of factors might have influenced the results and they should therefore be interpreted with caution, especially regarding new democracies such as Lithuania and Slovakia (and maybe Spain).⁵ Owing to their histories of governance and attitudes towards surveys, the data collected in these countries may differ from those of more established democracies such as Norway or Ireland. Fourth, the Europe-wide endeavor and the method of approaching knowledgeable citizens also forced us to shorten the questionnaires as much as possible, which resulted in very condensed scales for the studied variables. Thus, we suggest that future studies try to enrich the scales with additional items that may contribute to the validity and reliability of the scales. In addition, no causal interpretations can be made based on our findings, because the research design was not longitudinal. Finally, the study may suffer from a common-method or common-source bias and also from some methodological differences in the way the data were collected in each country. Although we expended a great deal of effort in ensuring a unified form of sampling, data distribution, and data collection (including a centralized team that controlled the data collection, frequent face-to-face meetings with the countries' teams and routine updates about the progress in each country), we recommend that future studies look for even better ways to coordinate cross-country data collection of this type.

Nevertheless, we feel that this study adds to the knowledge about the meaning, interpretations and tradeoffs between bureaucracy and democracy in the

European realm, especially from the point of view of elite groups of knowledgeable citizens. As concluded by Goodsell (2006: 633), public administration is a bureaucratic tool in the hands of many (e.g. elected officials, political appointees, legislative bodies, judges and the press) but it is also 'a social asset at the core of democratic governance... responsible for ongoing missions that meet the long-standing and long-term needs of the society.' A vital purpose of actions by public administration and bureaucracies in Europe, the United States and worldwide is 'building and maintaining the level of public trust in government that makes a democracy possible.' Our study has offered a theoretical pathway for a better understanding of this linkage and vision. Our empirical examination may also guide future studies that strive to reconcile the puzzling interaction of bureaucracy and democracy in the European Union and modern nations.

Notes

1. Other countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands were also part of the study but a low response rate led to their exclusion from the final analysis.
2. See One World – Nations Online, at http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/human_development.htm (accessed 15 February 2010)
3. For the descriptive statistics and *F*-tests for the research variables across countries, as well as a breakdown of the participants' responses to questions about satisfaction with public services and trust in governance and public administration across countries, please see the web appendix.
4. The aggregation was justified after examining the Rwg (within-group agreement) for each variable (mean Rwg for public sector image = .65, with values ranging from .57 to .72; mean Rwg for trust in governance and public administration = .85, with values ranging from .81 to .91; mean Rwg for satisfaction with public services = .84, with values ranging from .75 to .93).
5. Richer information is available today on the state of bureaucracy and democracy in various European countries – for example, the Eurobarometer project, at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm, and the European Social Survey project, at <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org> (accessed 15 February 2010).

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