

The Politics- Psychology Nexus and the Future of the Public Service

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Motivation

- Politicization of the civil service is seen as a proximate cause of decreasing morale among civil servants and deterioration in agency performance, but little research has focused on the psychological traits that affect how civil servants respond at an individual level.

Project Description

- Conduct a survey of federal bureaucrats to collect information on their psychological and political traits
- Match it with original data collection on their supervisors and managers and the broader political environment
- Examine how individual and institutional characteristics interact

Context

- Current research, to the extent it focuses on individual traits when examining responses to politicization, tends to focus on occupational traits, political preferences, and (sometimes) Public Service Motivation components
- Other individual differences, like personality traits, risk preferences, time preferences, and the like, are likely to affect civil servant responses (and have been shown to affect responses to changes in the political/organizational environment in different contexts)

This project will
examine the
psychological traits
underpinning how
public servants
respond to
politicization of the
civil service



Project Deliverables

- Original survey of federal bureaucrats
- Collection of original data on the background characteristics of public managers
- Initial data analysis to be completed by August 2023 and grant proposal to be submitted to the NSF (Accountable Institutions and Behavior) for additional survey waves and data collection
- First paper to be presented at an academic conference in September 2023 (based off the NSF proposal) and revised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal in early 2024.
- Book manuscript to be completed in early 2025.

Potential Impact

- Expand our understanding of how individual psychological and political traits among public servants influence how they respond to changes in their political environment
- Fuller understanding of the effects of politicization and centralization on public bureaucracies

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