

# **Bureaucratic Polarization**

by

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Bureaucrats must cooperate to implement public policies. This means working with colleagues from different public organizations, lawyers and accountants from oversight agencies, political appointees, elected officials, etc. Each of these actors holds different, oftentimes conflicting, organizational identities. These attachments go beyond their rational interests and, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, become comparable to other social identities, like race, partisanship, and gender. This means that while bureaucrats see their colleagues as in-groups who share similar values, those working at different organizations are their out-groups who will most likely see the world through different lenses. Relying on a measurement that is well-established in social psychology, I demonstrate that the social distance between different public sector actors helps to understand conflict and cooperation in implementation processes. I refer to this phenomenon as bureaucratic polarization and show that it can change public policies and organizations. The empirical evidence combines face-to-face interviews conducted in two Brazilian states and multiple surveys and experiments fielded in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. These multiple pieces of research validate the generalizability of bureaucratic polarization as a theoretical framework and an estimation strategy to better understand coordination in public administration and the politics of policy implementation.

**Keywords:** Bureaucratic polarization, intergroup relations, comparative public administration, coordination problems, implementation politics.

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## **Dedication**

Com muito amor e gratidão, dedico este trabalho ao meu pai (João Victor), minha mãe (Maria Virginia), meu irmão (Paulo Victor) e minha noiva (Maria Fernanda).

## Epigraph

“Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict, but is achieved in conflict, resolving it through dialogue and open, honest and patient negotiation. Conflict between different groups if it abstains from enmities and mutual hatred, gradually changes into an honest discussion of differences founded on a desire for justice.”

—*Pope Francis, The Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti (2020)*

## 1.0 Introduction

David is an experienced engineer working at the state department of infrastructure in Ceará (northeast Brazil). In 2009, his boss told him that the Spanish government was partnering with his department to sponsor the elaboration of an infrastructure project. David offered a few thoughts and, according to him, the Spaniards loved the idea of transforming an old cargo railway into a tram line to improve public transportation in Fortaleza (the state's capital). They sponsored the project and the governor obtained enough federal funds to implement it. However, instead of concluding the public works by 2014, private contractors were still struggling to build stations in 2020.

There are many cases like this one when bureaucrats fail to implement policies as originally expected by their formulators. The state of São Paulo (Brazil) offers another example. In 1992, Governor Fleury promised that by 2005 he would drink water straight from the Tietê river. This was a response to a petition with 1.2 million signatures demanding the cleaning of the major river that crosses Brazil's economic powerhouse. He was greeted by the international leaders who attended the United Nations' Earth Summit in the same year and received massive loans from the Inter-American Development Bank. Still, he was not able to fulfill his promise. In fact, the Catholic priest Palmiro Paes claimed in 2020 that the Tietê was still so polluted that it was possible to walk on the water.

Delays in policy implementation are common in Brazil and most parts of the world. In many cases, this is a matter of resources. Bureaucracies may be underfunded or lack specialized personnel. This was not the case of Ceará or São Paulo. They had access to federal and international funds, and their civil servants had vast expertise in infrastructure projects. Another explanation is political instability. Since politicians come and go, newcomers may abandon their predecessors' ideas. Again, this does not explain the delays in the selected cases. The state government of Ceará has been dominated by the same political group at least since 1991. In São Paulo, one political party won every single election for governor since 1995. In both cases, all governors supported the selected policies.

Regardless of resources and political stability, problems of coordination are a major bar-

rier to the implementation of public policies. It is rare to find cases when a single individual can turn policies into public goods without interacting with anyone else. Most often, individuals of different organizations must work together to get things done. In Ceará and São Paulo, policy implementation depended on engineers and lawyers, career bureaucrats and political appointees, employees of the infrastructure department, the public prosecutor's office, etc. Each of these individuals sees the world through different lenses and, in many cases, has conflicting interests. Nonetheless, they must find coordinated solutions to implement policies.

This argument is not novel. There are decades of research on the rational interests of bureaucrats (Niskanen 1971; Tullock 2005), their willingness to resist undesirable policies (O'Leary 2014; Brehm & Gates 1999), and the role of organizational identity in shaping individual action (March & Olsen 2010). I argue, however, that we lack an integrated theory combining rational and normative interests, showing their combined role in coordination problems during policy implementation, and offering a measurement for such phenomena.

This thesis offers comprehensive tools to understand and quantify coordination problems in public administration. I borrow theoretical elements of social psychology to demonstrate that identity-formation in the bureaucracy resembles what happens to other social identities, for instance, ethnicity (Bogardus 1947) and partisanship (Iyengar et al. 2012). Individuals that belong to a group, share their values, and become emotionally involved with their *in-groups* end up seeing other individuals as *out-groups*. The farther apart the in-groups and the out-groups are perceived to be, the more difficult it is to find cooperation. This is like the concept of affective polarization, which Iyengar et al. (2012) developed to explain the animosity between Republicans and Democrats in the United States. Here, I move away from partisanship and adapt this notion to public administration. I call it *bureaucratic polarization* (BP). In the following chapters, I demonstrate that, as a concept, BP helps to understand and explain coordination problems; as a measurement, it is relevant to explain past and current failures, and to identify conflicts before they harm the state's ability to produce public goods.

This is to say that not everything has to be about conflict. There are many cases in which bureaucrats find solutions, coordinated or not, to overcome the perils of bureaucratic



polarization. One of the problems that the implementers of the depollution policy faced in São Paulo regarded interbranch coordination. SABESP, the state-owned public utility, built large sewage treatment stations but needed the cooperation of some municipalities to collect sewage. However, their mayors belonged to a party that opposed the governor. They believed that their voters did not care about sewage collection, and this could indirectly benefit neighboring mayors who they did not support. This led to the treatment stations' underutilization for almost two decades and the continuous discharge of wastewater in the river. Furthermore, these conflicts resulted in severe animosity between bureaucrats and appointees from SABESP and local governments. The public utility's directors solved the problem only after long political and legal disputes. They completely took over water and wastewater management in these municipalities. This allowed the public company to get things done without any coordination with local governments. Sewage treatment improved considerably.

The solution to coordination problems and intergroup animosity does not need to be absorption. In Ceará, one of the main barriers was the distrust between the department of infrastructure's implementers and the public prosecutors who oversaw the implementation process. They saw the policy through completely different lenses and believed that the other side had deplorable intentions hidden behind their actions. This inhibited them to sit down and coordinate solutions to improve the policy and make it happen. By coincidence, David (the engineer who created the policy) and Flavia (a public prosecutor) became classmates in a master's program offered for civil servants. Class by class, they started seeing each other as individuals dedicated to improving government and their state. They kept disagreeing on the tram's benefits, but they trusted each other. This allowed them to create a bridge between their organizations and to coordinate solutions that would satisfy both sides. Only after that, the project moved forward at a decent pace.

In both cases, there is an endogenous process in which coordination problems lead to greater bureaucratic polarization, and greater bureaucratic polarization leads to coordination problems. This does not differ from other identity clashes that are common all over the world. Race, gender, class, and partisanship are just a few examples. Still, in all of them, groups may find a common place to become closer to each other. This does not mean that they

do not see each other as out-groups. Even when they do, the lower social distance allows them to work together. In the long run, this may generate a spiral of positiveness, in which polarization decreases to minimal levels.

## 1.1 The Cases

I begin the empirical analysis of bureaucratic polarization with two case studies: Ceará's tram and São Paulo's river clean-up. They illustrate many cases of intergroup animosity that impact decision-making in policy implementation. Implementers fought against overseers, and career bureaucrats rejected the interventions of political appointees. There were also turf wars between civil servants who shared similar responsibilities, and interbranch disputes for power and budgets. Thus, they are helpful to understand the wide scope of bureaucratic polarization. Furthermore, it provides a closer observation of the mechanisms that cause and result from intergroup social distance in public administration.

These two cases are relevant because they offer a contrast between two considerably different state governments. In economic terms, São Paulo is considerably wealthier than Ceará. This did not affect the capacity to finance the selected policies. They counted on, respectively, foreign and federal funds. However, these differences may influence the professionalization of the bureaucracy. They also differ in political terms. Despite the stability of their leadership, these two states were governed by opposing political groups (the center-right and the center-left), and many of the implementers identified with the ruling party. Despite these economic and political differences, I found bureaucratic polarization and coordination problems in both cases.

If bureaucratic polarization is truly a generalizable phenomenon, this should also influence governance outside of Brazil. Thus, I tested the theoretical propositions in the United States and the United Kingdom. These cases are very different from Brazil. According to [Peters \(2021, p. 120\)](#), the American and British civil service are guided by a contractual administrative tradition, that is, the state wants to “maintain order and allow for individual development” through the enforcement of contracts. In Brazil, as in most Continental Eu-

rope, the bureaucracy is not seen as an instrument, but as the representation of a powerful state.

If that is the case, bureaucratic polarization would be more detrimental in Brazil than in the US and the UK. There is consistent evidence that these countries are indeed very different. Bertelli (2021) demonstrates that their party system (bipolar in the US and UK, multipolar in Brazil) also produces different levels of accountability in their bureaucracy. Furthermore, Dahlström et al. (2012) show that Brazilian public employees enjoy much more protection than their peers in Anglo-Saxon systems. Again, this reinforces their ability to refuse to coordinate with out-groups.

This makes Brazil an easy case to identify the presence and consequences of bureaucratic polarization. Since the US and the UK are harder cases, I selected them to test the generalizability of my theory. I conducted surveys and experiments with bureaucrats from both countries (as well as from Brazil) and collected secondary survey data from American and Brazilian public employees. I show that, despite tradition and institutional protections, bureaucratic polarization is a relevant conceptual construct to understand, explain, and predict coordination problems in public administration.

## 1.2 Organization of the Dissertation

I present the theoretical foundations of bureaucratic polarization after this introductory chapter. My first goal with this chapter is to differentiate my proposition from other studies of coordination problems in public administration. I focus this discussion on three streams of research: public choice, bureaucratic resistance, and organizational identity. Rather than dismissing their propositions, I show that it is possible to integrate them into a new theory that also considers recent advances in social psychology. This discussion leads to the formulation of a model in which I present how individual perception of intergroup conflicts can be estimated. This will be relevant to test and apply bureaucratic polarization even when the variable is not being measured through survey responses. This is because it serves as a parameter to comprehend individual and group interactions.

This is followed by two chapters in which I provide qualitative evidence for the presence and consequences of bureaucratic polarization. Chapter 3 deals with the tram implementation. I began the data collection in 2019 when I traveled to Brazil to interview state bureaucrats in Ceará. I aimed at talking to all actors who made relevant decisions in the implementation of the tram. This included, for instance, David, who thought about the policy in 2009; the public prosecutors who managed to slow down and modify the policy over the years; a vice-governor who supported the policy and a legislator who opposed it. In total, I interviewed over 30 actors, including politicians, bureaucrats, private sector engineers, activists, lawyers, scholars, and residents. Most of them were identified on government websites or through a snowball procedure. I also collected official documents and news reports.

With these data, I re-built the story based on the episodes when each of these actors had to coordinate with each other. I wanted to explain what they had in mind, how they felt about each other, and which decision they took. In Chapter 3, I expose how organizational type and intergroup social distance lead to outward change, that is, change in the policy that is being implemented (fast-track, delay, block, or modification).

In 2020, I traveled to São Paulo and followed the same path to analyze the river's clean-up. I interviewed former governors and other politicians, presidents and directors of the public utility, and other bureaucrats and activists. Again, I used the interviews and documents to trace interactions, perceptions, and decisions. I present the analysis of this material in Chapter 4. There are many similarities between this and the case of Ceará. However, here I dedicate greater emphasis to the role of organizational culture and inward change. The latter refers to changes that occur not necessarily at the policy but at the organizations that are implementing them. This includes stability, adaptation, and absorption.

To quantify these sentiments, I adapted the measurement of affective polarization to what I call *bureaucratic polarization*. That is, I designed a survey in which I asked respondents how much they identify with their own workgroup (e.g., professional group, agency) and how close or distant they feel toward other workgroups. The absolute difference between these two variables is the perceived social distance of each dyad, that is, the bureaucratic polarization. This goes back to the model explained in Chapter 2. I presented the data and

its analysis in Chapter 5.

I fielded this survey with convenience samples of bureaucrats from the United States and the United Kingdom. I also asked them a battery of questions regarding their professional experiences and asked about their expectations when they must work with different out-groups (the same ones that I used to calculate their bureaucratic polarization). Finally, I asked them a series of open-ended questions, in which they were supposed to say the stereotypes of each out-group and to tell stories of episodes when they had to work together.

These data demonstrate that it is possible to measure bureaucratic polarization; that it correlates to expectations regarding what will happen during policy implementations; and that the perceptions of bureaucrats regarding their out-groups and their experiences when cooperating with them are similar regardless of country. In respect to the latter, the stories these American and British respondents told me in their survey responses resemble the problems I heard of when interviewing civil servants in Brazil.

One of the most common animosities that I found in the three countries is the traditional conflict between administration and politics. In the case of São Paulo, for instance, there were several attempts to absorb organizations, that is, politicians and bureaucrats often tried to take over out-groups when they were not able to find coordinated solutions. Thus, I collected additional survey data to assess the consequences of this type of bureaucratic polarization. My goal was to assess the attitudes of those bureaucrats who are part of the out-group which is being taken over.

To write Chapter 6, I collected secondary survey data from large projects conducted in the United States and Brazil. In both countries, bureaucrats were asked whether they considered leaving their public jobs and whether they thought that politicians were trying to take over their organizations (the questions were worded in different ways but related to the excessive power of politics over the administration). Relying on mixed-effects multilevel models, I show that, regardless of country, these attempts of taking over by an out-group increase in-group de-identification and the desire to leave the bureaucracy.

Then, for Chapter 7, I investigated the perceptions of those who stay. For that, I fielded a set of survey experiments with bureaucrats from the three countries (Brazil, the US, and the UK). I tested whether they would be willing to block the implementation of a policy that

they deemed to be unbearable or, in other words, in which the political world was clearly overstepping its boundaries. The data confirm what I found during the interviews in Brazil: most respondents are willing to resist. This resembles, for instance, what I found in Ceará, where dissatisfied bureaucrats tried to modify, delay, or even block the policy.

I conclude the dissertation by recapping the main findings of the empirical chapters and arguing how they add up to our current understanding of coordination problems in public administration. In that final Chapter 8, I also discuss the practical contributions of this dissertation. That is, how is it that we can improve policy implementation now that we know that intergroup social distance influences our decisions? This type of question often leads to the need for future studies. I end with a debate on the elements that must be investigated to further develop this research agenda.

## 2.0 A Theory of Bureaucratic Polarization

When bureaucrats interact with each other, they consider their own organizational identity and the social distance they have with other public sector actors. Since these psychological attachments influence their willingness to cooperate with other public employees and elected officials, intergroup dynamics are essential to understand the state's ability to implement public policies and its capacity to sustain the stability of democratic institutions. In this chapter, I lay out the theoretical foundations of this proposition.

This dissertation is not the first study of coordination problems in the bureaucracy. Other scholars address these issues through the perspectives of rational choice ([Niskanen 1971](#); [Tullock 2005](#)), bureaucratic resistance ([O'Leary 2014](#); [Brehm & Gates 1999](#)), and organizational identity ([March & Olsen 2010](#)). While they identify collective action problems and investigate their impact on public administration, they often fail to offer a proper measurement for the affect between public workgroups. This inhibits their ability to predict the existence and the extent of conflict in the bureaucracy. I address this gap by intertwining the existing knowledge in public administration with that of different fields of research, especially social psychology.

Consider the following theoretical construct. Individuals socially identify with different groups throughout their lives, including those related to their gender, race, national origin, among others. This means that they become aware of their group membership, share the values of their in-groups, and, at times, become emotionally invested in them ([Tajfel & Turner 1979](#)). Whenever this happens, those individuals who do not share the same identity become out-groups, which may be seen as rivals competing for resources ([Sherif & Sherif 1969](#)) or allies for possible collaborations ([Schlueter & Scheepers 2010](#); [Savelkoul et al. 2011](#)).

Understanding that the animosity between groups is not the same in all cases, especially at the individual level, [Bogardus \(1925, 1947\)](#) proposes measuring these *social distances* based on a battery of questions that assesses how close individuals are of different out-groups. More recently, [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#) simplified this scale relying on a feeling thermometer across groups. That is, asking individuals how positive they feel toward their in-group in

comparison to their sentiment toward out-groups. This estimation shows that individuals hold different levels of in-group attachment and out-group animosity and that this varies not only by person but also by reference group. That is, while social distance is helpful to understand intergroup conflicts, it is also an essentially individual-level variable that is dependent on the relevant group dyad.

The same logic should hold for intergroup relations in the bureaucracy. We already know that individuals tend to identify with their own workgroup ([Akerlof & Kranton 2010](#)), meaning that they develop a sense of attachment with the professional organization they belong to. One of the classic examples in the literature of public administration is that of the forest rangers, who strongly identify with the mission of their public agency (see [Kaufman 2006](#)). Connecting the theory of organizational identity to the well-studied literature of intergroup relations ([Tajfel & Turner 1979](#)) and social distance ([Bogardus 1925](#)), I propose that bureaucrats see certain workgroups as their out-groups and hold different levels of proximity or animosity toward them. I call this social distance *bureaucratic polarization* and, in the following chapters, demonstrate that this is behind the failure and success of policy implementation.

This lends at least three major contributions to the literature of public administration. The first is theoretical. By bringing the perspective of social psychology to the study of collective action in public administration, I bridge the divide between normative institutionalism and public choice. While the latter is often focused on behavior as an outcome of a shared understanding of appropriateness ([March & Olsen 2010](#)), the latter portrays bureaucrats as purely rational actors ([Tullock 2005](#)). The intergroup relations logic suggests that whereas animosity may be an outcome of distinct organizational identities ([Tajfel & Turner 1979](#)), this could also be enhanced by a history of conflicts over resources ([Sherif & Sherif 1969](#); [Bobo 1988](#)).

The second contribution is empirical. The measurement of bureaucratic polarization helps scholars to estimate the extent of the coordination problems they identify in public administration. This means assessing which intergroup conflicts are the most problematic, how they evolve across time, and when they become unbearable. Based on these insights, it is possible to implement the same measurement to compare a plethora of cases, causes, and



outcomes. My empirical chapters show some of these possibilities.

Finally, I add to the scope of studies investigating coordination problems. The vast literature on inter-agency collective action problems includes multiple themes and approaches: from institutional design to leadership style (Boston 1992), from rational preferences to organizational ethos (Peters 1998). Still, authors are predominantly engaged in explaining these problems by understanding when bureaucrats (and their agencies) decide to cooperate (e.g. Peters 2013; Bardach 1998). Here, I go one step back, proposing to study the problem of coordination by flipping the variable. That is, rather than asking when bureaucrats engage in cooperation, I investigate when they engage in conflict. In this sense, I bring more clarity to the problem of (lack of) coordination before proposing how to solve it.

In the next section of this chapter, I clarify the main concepts utilized in this dissertation. This is followed by the scope conditions in which we should observe bureaucratic polarization. Next, I describe the main streams of research that interact with my propositions and discuss why they are insufficient to understand coordination problems in the bureaucracy. This debate lends the tools to lay out the theory of bureaucratic polarization and present its empirical implications. Finally, I briefly summarize this chapter.

## 2.1 Main Concepts

### 2.1.1 Implementation Politics

Policy implementation is at the heart of the democratic process (Ingram et al. 2016). In many cases, bureaucrats have enough knowledge and discretion to influence the policy process, even though they are not directly selected by the voters (Downs 1964). In the words of T. B. Smith (1973, p. 198), “It is at the implementation stage of the policy process when the policy may be abandoned by the government, implemented or modified to meet the demands of the interested parties.”

This is true even with the seminal calls of W. Wilson (1887) and Weber (2004) for the separation between administration and politics. In fact, Peters (2018d) proposes that this

separation creates an environment that facilitates the politicization of the implementation process. He argues that

“For public administrators, this presumed separation (...) allows them to engage in politics (organizational rather than partisan) without being held accountable politically for the outcomes of their actions. Further, they can engage in policy-making—presumably using technical or legal criteria for their decisions—without the interference of political actors who might otherwise recognize political or ideological influences on policies and make demands upon them to modify those policies (...). Thus, the actions of administrators may be regarded by politicians, the public, and even by themselves as the result of the simple application of rational, legal, or technical criteria to questions of policy.” (Peters 2018d, p. 164)

Ultimately, the political power attributed to public employees and this stage may affect redistribution, participation, and civil liberties, among other core elements of the modern state (Ingram et al. 2016). The continuous growth of government (Higgs 1987; Coyne & Hall 2018) and the embeddedness of public administration as a core element in the policy process (Peters 2018d) reinforce the relevance of placing public employees at the center of the study of politics.

This is not to be confused with the abandonment or modification of policies that are still in the policy design stage (Pressman & Wildavsky 1974). Several authors discuss this preliminary phase. For instance, while Tsebelis (2002) presents the different players that may veto the formulation of a new policy still in the legislative process, Ames (2002) shows that vetoes occur even before a policy reaches the legislature’s floor. Acknowledging the relevance of policy design and the necessary link between design and implementation as highlighted by Linder & Peters (1987), my study focuses solely on policy implementation.

There are different ways to conceptualize this stage of the policy process. T. B. Smith (1973, p. 205) relies on a Schumpeterian view of reorganization of production factors, that is, “old patterns of interaction and institutions are abolished or modified and new patterns of action and institutions are created.” O’Toole Jr (2000, p. 266) considers its temporal aspect, or “what develops between the establishment of an apparent intention on the part of the government to do something, or to stop doing something, and the ultimate impact in the world of action.” Van Meter & Van Horn (1975, p. 477) merge both perspectives to suggest that

“policy implementation encompasses those actions by public and private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives outlined in prior policy decisions. This includes both one-time efforts to transform decisions into operational terms, as well as continuing efforts to achieve the large and small changes mandated by policy decisions.”

Moving beyond implementation as a stage in the *policy* process, I am interested in the *politics* of implementation. This means investigating the multiple tensions that occur after a policy has been designed.<sup>1</sup> T. B. Smith (1973) highlights possible conflicts between an implementing agency (i.e., a public bureaucracy) and target groups (e.g., political parties, a segment of the population) or, even, within each of these actors. One of his examples is “when an administrative unit is instructed to implement a policy for which the unit has inadequate personnel in numbers or skills for policy execution” (T. B. Smith 1973, p. 205).

While this view is mostly restricted to state capacity, O’Toole Jr & Montjoy (1984) present the politics of implementation as a problem of *horizontal coordination*. After all, “Many government policies (...) require the effort of two or more agencies during implementation” (O’Toole Jr & Montjoy 1984, p. 492). Thus, when organizations are not governed by the same authority or do not share a sense of duty, mutual interests, or the desire to exchange benefits, collective action is likely to fail (ibid.).

The same is true for the relationship between political authorities and the bureaucracy—what Adam et al. (2019) call vertical coordination.<sup>2</sup> The authors propose that one should evaluate the “transaction costs” in the relationship between policy designers and implementers, which includes policy demands, institutional capacity, and political barriers. In many aspects, this follows a similar logic as horizontal coordination since it considers the role and interests of the different players involved in the implementation process. In sum, this stage contains a political process that is at least equally complex as policy design.

To compare the politics of both stages, the triad proposed by Brehm & Gates (1999)—to

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<sup>1</sup>Here, I follow the long tradition in the Public Administration literature (e.g., Peters 2018a) that considers implementation as the stage that comes after elected officials have agreed upon a piece of legislation that now needs to be put into practice. This does not mean that bureaucrats must not *design* any additional regulation or rules of procedure, but that their work builds upon what was previously designed by the political world and is now intended to make it happen.

<sup>2</sup>The term vertical coordination may also refer to the interbranch relations (see Guedes-Neto 2022), for instance, the state government and a municipality. This dyad is also relevant to the concept of bureaucratic polarization. I exemplify it in Chapter 4 when discussing the case of São Paulo. Here, I follow Adam et al. (2019) who refers to the interactions between politicians and bureaucrats.

work, shirk, or sabotage—represents some possible bureaucratic responses that position civil servants as veto players in implementation processes (Peters 2018c). That is, if Tsebelis (2002) referred to veto power in the stage of policy design, Peters (2018c) argues that they also exist during policy implementation. Going further, this type of political action is not restricted to the high-level administration. Street-level bureaucrats also have the power to use their own criteria to influence policy outcomes (Zacka 2017; Lipsky 2010). Tandler (1997), for instance, demonstrates how motivated civil servants were essential in the delivery of different public goods in a Brazilian state.

Bureaucratic polarization, as I propose, is a core element in the politics of implementation. It implies that the way bureaucrats see different actors will affect vertical and horizontal coordination, thus shaping the outcomes of policy processes. By directly influencing decision-making processes, bureaucratic polarization has the potential to affect state capacity, the delivery of public goods and services, and, ultimately, democratic governance.

### 2.1.2 Workgroups in Public Administration

Throughout this and the other chapters, I emphasize the role of social identity for inter-group relations. Individuals are members of multiple groups at the same time. This includes, for instance, their country and town of origin, gender, race, ethnicity, occupation, sector of employment, educational background, place of work, etc. Yet, only in some of these cases, individuals tend to share the values that are often associated with the group and, ultimately, become emotionally involved with them. Whenever this happens, it is possible to say that the individual socially identifies with that group (Tajfel & Turner 1979).

In political science, the concept of social identity is often used to talk about racial (Herring et al. 1999), gender (Conover 1988), religious (Bloom et al. 2015), and partisan (Iyengar et al. 2012) attachments. Yet, this is also linked to one's association with the workplace in the fields of Economics (Akerlof & Kranton 2010) and Management (Ashforth & Mael 1989). This type of identification will lead individuals to internalize the set of norms and values that are associated with their organization (March & Olsen 2010), thus affecting their perception of economic incentives (Akerlof & Kranton 2010) to the extent that they

will see the fate of their organization as their fate ([Ashforth & Mael 1989](#)).

According to [Stewart & Garcia-Prieto \(2008, p. 657\)](#),

“Workgroup identification is an individual’s perception of oneness with the workgroup, along with the tendency to internalize the group’s successes and failures (...). Individuals with high workgroup identification are more likely to take the workgroup’s perspective and act in its interest, and exhibit more favorable attitudes and behaviors toward other workgroup members than those less identified.”

The reader will notice that I use the terms *workgroup* and *organization* interchangeably and am purposefully vague when referring to them. This is because, as done by [Akerlof & Kranton \(2010\)](#), I aim at allowing for multiple possibilities in terms of reference groups. They could be bigger groups as a whole ministry or a sub-secretary, or smaller ones, as the political appointees working at a department of infrastructure or a group of engineers from an environmental protection agency.

One of the benefits of this approach is that this allows capturing more nuanced attitudes and behaviors than would be possible if I were to focus solely on larger organizations. Consider the case of the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Created in 2001, it resulted from the merging of 22 different federal entities ([Zimmerman 2011](#)). It led to a supersized department responsible for politically salient topics such as immigration, narcotics interception, and terrorism prevention. The vast list of attributions also includes counterfeit currency and saving life at the water, among others. This plurality is also reflected in the legislative oversight that it attracts. According to [Hudson \(2020\)](#), “90 committees and subcommittees maintain some jurisdiction over DHS—three times the number of panels that oversee the Pentagon.”

Even with such complexity, levels of organizational commitment at the DHS are comparable to those at more cohesive federal agencies, as the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services ([Hur & Perry 2020](#)). Yet, even without any reliance on data, it is hard to claim that, for instance, military personnel working at the US Coast Guard (a sub-unit at the DHS) equally identifies with both their sub-unit and the whole department. Attachment to closer workgroups tends to be higher than to broader organizations.

According to [Van Knippenberg & Van Schie \(2000, p. 139\)](#), “it would be an oversimpli-

fication to depict an organization as a single indivisible entity, without acknowledging that organizations are also networks of groups that may elicit feelings of identification in themselves.” The authors find support for this proposition based on surveys conducted in the Netherlands with samples of public employees and university faculty. The authors use different concepts for workgroup and organization to compare identification with each of these. While the workplace is the smallest group of which the employee is a member, the organization regards the whole government or university. For both public employees and professors, [Van Knippenberg & Van Schie \(2000\)](#) find that workgroup identification is substantively stronger than organizational identity.

One complexity of this proposition is that individuals identify with multiple groups at the same time. There are studies considering group formation in the workplace based on race ([Stewart & Garcia-Prieto 2008](#)), profession ([Vough 2012](#); [Johnson et al. 2006](#)), and hierarchical level ([Horton et al. 2014](#)), among others. This allows investigating the several intergroup interactions that take place in the implementation of public policies. For those interested in *horizontal* coordination, the researcher would look at how public employees from different agencies at the same level interact with each other (e.g., [Dahlström et al. 2017](#); [Guedes-Neto 2022](#)). If the focus is *vertical* coordination, then one would look into how bureaucrats interact with elected officials (e.g., [Rockman 1993](#); [Gailmard & Patty 2007](#)) or how subordinates respond to supervisors (e.g., [Brehm & Gates 1994, 1999](#)).

While these possibilities may open new doors for the study of collective action problems, this also comes with the burden of disentangling the effect of each social identity is the most salient in each coordination process. This concern is shared by [Wichardt \(2008, p. 128\)](#), who explains that

“Identity in general will be composed of the individual’s membership in, or association with, many different in-groups (a workforce, a political party, a sport’s club, a family, etc.). And although there is no reason to expect the interests of the various in-groups to be mutually exclusive, it seems reasonable to expect them not to be perfectly aligned either.” ([Wichardt 2008, p. 128](#))

This complexity has to do with the degree of identification that individuals hold toward the multiple groups they are members of. As it was clarified earlier, group membership is not sufficient to create a social identity. This also requires sharing the values associated with

that group and becoming emotionally involved with it. Thus, it is possible that, e.g., those engineers working at an environmental protection agency may strongly identify with each other at the same time they see little or no association with other members of the same organization, say, political appointees or architects.

These different degrees of identification also permit a more nuanced perspective when considering the level of analysis. As I will further discuss in this chapter, while Public Choice theorists place heavy emphasis on individual behavior, Normative Institutionalists focus on group behavior. Utilizing the tools of social psychology, it becomes possible to argue that while some individuals will identify with their organization and, thus, share its values and goals; others will not. Thus, it makes sense to investigate intergroup relations from the lenses of methodological individualism, at the same that we understand that individuals will rely on different levels on the logic of appropriateness that comes with group attachment.

## 2.2 Scope Conditions

### 2.2.1 Contextual Conditions

Identity formation and intergroup relations are part of human life. Regardless of context and time, individuals will associate themselves with groups they are part of, they will favor in-groups and discriminate against out-groups. Yet, context is still relevant for setting boundaries to these attitudes and behaviors.

Consider the interactions between bureaucrats and elected officials under authoritarian rule. [Schmitter \(1972\)](#) affirms that, during the military regime in Brazil (1964–1985), many federal-level civil servants became loyal to the generals in power. This allowed them to sustain their status quo, more importantly, life. At the time, confrontation against the government would most likely lead to dismissal, jail, exile, torture, or death. More recently, the same took place in Venezuela. [Muno & Briceño \(2021\)](#) list three strategies adopted by Chavismo-Madurismo to repress bureaucratic dissent: repression and firing, circumventing and neglecting, and militarization. Many of these strategies were adopted by the Brazilian

military regime and reflect an attempt—by force—to reduce animosity between government officials and bureaucrats.

Of course, autocratic regimes have multiple elements that come close to my theoretical framework. For instance, the strategy adopted by Chávez to replace bureaucrats from the state-owned company PDVSA by his loyalists (the so-called “List Tascón”<sup>3</sup>) (Muno & Briceño 2021, p. 211) is similar, at least in principle, to the selection mechanism proposed by Coyne & Hall (2018) when discussing self-selection, socialization, and (forced) exit in the public service. Furthermore, confrontation resembles what Ding (2020) calls *performative governance*. That is, a manner of pretending to be complying with the expectations of the autocratic regime while, in fact, civil servants are not. Still, these special circumstances have enough complexities to require their own analysis. Thus, while my framework may be helpful to understand workplace identity and intergroup relations under autocratic regimes, I focus on cases of democratic governance.

This is not to say that all democracies are the same or even equally stable. In fact, I discuss in the manuscript how bureaucratic polarization may lead to (Chapter 6) or prevent (Chapter 7) democratic backsliding. These discussions emphasize the relevance of my theoretical construct for the growing literature that deals with the interactions between public administration and liberal democracy (see Bauer et al. 2021; Peters & Pierre 2020, 2019).

Another difference among democracies regards their *administrative tradition*. In line with the propositions of Normative Institutionalism (March & Olson 1983; March & Olsen 1995, 2006, 2010), Peters (2018d) proposes that the organizational culture developed and absorbed by public agencies and bureaucrats reflect the culture of the system in which they are embedded. These systemic differences lead to several administrative traditions, which help explain the differences in bureaucratic behavior across countries (Peters 2021).

Consider the Anglo-American tradition. Peters (2021) posits that the United States and the United Kingdom represent a most-different case, in which they depart from clear differences (e.g., size, government type, administrative system), yet they are still guided by similar cultural heritage. The US and the UK follow a *contractual* mode of governance,

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<sup>3</sup>According to Muno & Briceño (2021, p. 211), this is “a database listing the names of the 3.2 million voters who requested the realization of the presidential recall referendum of the year 2004.” These individuals were filtered out from any recruitment process.



which reflects the understanding that the purpose of the state is to “maintain order and allow for individual development” through the enforcement of contracts (Peters 2021, p. 120). Peters (2021) argues that this is the opposite to the case of Continental Europe, where the formation of national states preceded, in many aspects, the development of society. For the public service, this means that while in Continental Europe public employees are on moral high ground for representing the state, in the Anglo-American tradition they are just an instrument of the will of the people.

The New Public Management reforms adopted by Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990) and Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) helped to reinforce this instrumental mode of governance. Peters (2021, p. 123) explains that

“Anglo-American administrative systems can be characterized as emphasizing management rather than law in the performance of public tasks. This statement should not be taken to imply that illegality is favored, or even tolerated, but only that legal issues tend to be considered as a matter for legal experts rather than line managers. Thus, lawyers tend to be kept in separate bureaus within line departments and are called upon when needed for specific advice. Those line managers are interested primarily in designing programs and getting their programs implemented, taking legal advice as and when necessary.”

These cultural constraints lead to several implications for the study of bureaucratic polarization. First, they emphasize the need for accountability toward both elected officials and the population. Rather than a separated body, the bureaucracy is an instrument of the people. Thus, in the balance of power between the administrative and the political worlds, the latter tends to gain more influence than the former if compared to other administrative traditions. Second, the relationship between these two worlds, as well as between the different actors within the administrative world, will rely less on legalistic issues and more on mutual agreement.

Overall, this should lead to less intergroup animosity and, whenever this is high, its consequences should be less detrimental than in countries guided by other traditions. Thus, assuming that these are least-likely cases where bureaucratic polarization will be critical, the United States and the United Kingdom become ideal countries to be investigated. Furthermore, this case selection is benefited by their clear differences (e.g., presidential vs. parliamentary systems), which were noted earlier in this section.

Yet, to demonstrate the generalizability of my theoretical propositions, I also include a third case in this manuscript: Brazil. The first and most obvious reason is that it falls outside the Anglo-American tradition. To a certain extent, Brazil followed many of the steps given by the United States throughout history. In 1891, it adopted a constitutional design that mirrored that of the US. In that period, even the country’s name was adapted to resemble that of the northern ally: the Republic of the United States of Brazil. However, as [North \(1989\)](#) describes, the history and culture of these two countries were so starkly different that this attempt failed to develop similar informal norms (see also [North et al. 2000](#)). Since then, Brazil enacted five other constitutions—the most recent one, in 1989, has a minimal resemblance to the American Bill of Rights. In common, both countries have a large population and territorial extension, and are governed through a federal, bicameral presidential system.

More recently, Brazil implemented New Public Management (NPM) reforms that mirrored those designed by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Actually, Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira, a professor of public administration and the minister responsible for the administrative reforms, recalls that he visited England as soon as he took office to become more familiarized with the British reforms ([Bresser-Pereira 2000](#)). While the government that pushed these reforms forward was in power for two administrations (1994–2002), analysts suggest that cultural and political barriers inhibited the full implementation of the NPM agenda. They argue that this model was rejected by part of the bureaucracy, which was guided by a legalistic system ([Peci et al. 2008](#); [Rezende 2002](#)).

These conclusions are in line with the Theory of Administrative Traditions ([Peters 2021](#)). The author posits that while Latin America has a strong cultural heritage deriving from the colonial period, it has been free from European crowns for roughly two centuries. One of the stark elements it retained from the Napoleonic tradition is that of legalism:

“if a citizen wants to engage in any government activity, (...) there may be multiple steps and multiple signatures required. Failure to perform those bureaucratic tasks in the right order and in the correct manner may lead to an inability to receive the service without extensive court action” ([Peters 2021](#), p. 169).

Added to this complexity, the Latin American legalism is also influenced by an “orga-

nizational proliferation and associated corporatist structures” (Peters 2021, p. 169). This interacts with bureaucratic polarization in at least two fashions. First, it requires a great degree of specialism to navigate the formal rules of the administrative world. Overall, civil servants possess more knowledge of such procedures than politicians, which grants them considerable power to influence the policy process (Downs 1964). The greater the complexity of the administrative system, the more powerful bureaucrats are going to be. This means that they may bar the implementation of public policies simply by following all steps required by law or by invoking certain regulations that other actors are unfamiliar with. While bureaucrats may utilize this power to stop policies for reasons other than bureaucratic polarization (e.g., legal issues, lack of funds), legalism also facilitates conflict motivated by affect.

Second, it creates additional layers of organizational and workgroup identity in the public service. As I argued before, while individuals tend to identify with the broader organizations they are part of, there will also be a strong identification with the smaller, narrower workgroups that they interact with the most. The more workgroups exist and the more complex they are, the more likely it is that they will hold contrasting identities and interests. In contrast to the United States and the United Kingdom, these factors make Brazil a most-likely case, in which I should find greater levels of bureaucratic polarization, as well as more detrimental outcomes whenever it takes place.

Finally, the addition of Brazil also responds to a constant call in the literature for the study of comparative public administration (Haque et al. 2021) especially when it comes to developing countries (Bertelli et al. 2020). Here, I also follow the specific recommendation made by Ames et al. (2012), who suggest the need for further face-to-face interviews and other types of data collection to better understand implementation politics in Latin America and, more specifically, Brazil.

### 2.2.2 Workgroups and Bureaucrats

While I impose certain contextual restrictions on the study of bureaucratic polarization, I am considerably flexible when it comes to the identification of relevant agents. First, they may be identified at any administrative level of the public sector. That is, for the cases

of Brazil and the United States, we are likely to find intergroup conflicts at the federal, state, and local levels. In the United Kingdom, this should be true for the central, devolved, and local governments. While the types of political pressures exercised over bureaucrats of different administrative levels will vary, all of them are likely to have their own types of confrontation.

There are different illustrations of such conflicts throughout this dissertation. For instance, I conducted a series of face-to-face interviews with Brazilian bureaucrats in Ceará (Chapter 3) and São Paulo (Chapter 4) to find conflicts within the state bureaucracy, as well as between civil servants in the three administrative levels. In Chapter 5, I present survey data from all levels of government in the US and the UK to show this variable is not connected to inter-agency animosity. This is followed by evidence of administrative-political conflicts at the federal level of the American government and in Brazilian states (Chapter 6). Finally, in Chapter 7, I show evidence of shirking and sabotage in face of democratic backsliding again in all administrative levels.

Furthermore, I do not restrict public employees' occupation or hierarchical level. While other authors interested in bureaucratic conflicts tend to focus on the high administration (see Allison 1969) or at least middle management (see Niskanen 1971), I argue that intergroup animosity is likely to exist amongst all types of civil servants.

Many of these conflicts will indeed become more salient when they take place between powerful supervisors. Yet, as proposed by Lipsky (2010), street-level bureaucrats still have considerable administrative discretion and may influence the implementation of public policies. For instance, it ultimately depends on a policeman to fine or not a driver who decided not to use a seat belt (considering that it is the law). Or a public-school teacher may opt for ignoring certain rules when interacting with students or parents if that is believed to be the appropriate course of action. In fact, Lipsky (2010) suggests that each teacher becomes a minister of education when doing his or her job. While the impact of a bureaucrat in the high administration will certainly be greater, all these interactions are likely to be influenced by intergroup relations and may impact the delivery of public services.

I also adopt a flexible approach to the decision of what is or is not a workgroup or an organization. As I have already discussed in this chapter, individuals may identify with

a whole ministry or the close group of colleagues that they interact with in their daily work. Furthermore, they may identify with multiple workgroups or organizations at the same time but with different degrees. This flexibility could become problematic as the empirical researcher would never have enough data to assess all the different relationships at play in the bureaucracy. Yet, it opens doors for the investigation of the several social identities that are formed in the workplace.

To conclude, it may even be possible that the strongest type of identification is that with the whole civil service, which would be in line with the arguments made in the Public Sector Motivation literature (see [Perry & Wise 1990](#)). This would certainly go against the thesis that the bureaucracy is not a unified body. Yet, looking at intergroup conflicts through these lenses would allow extrapolating my theoretical construct to understand conflicts between the public and the private sectors, or between the public sector and non-governmental organizations. The qualitative data presented in Chapters 3 and 4 suggest that this may be the case. Yet, I leave this discussion for future works.

## **2.3 The Insufficiency of Existing Theories to Understand Coordination Problems**

The study of coordination problems in the bureaucracy is not specific to a single stream of research. The main divide in the literature regards, perhaps, how we understand the motivations that guide bureaucratic action. Part of literature sees civil servants as rational actors who are solely interested in maximizing the power and budget of their agencies (see [Niskanen 1971](#); [Tullock 2005](#)). This school of thought, often labeled as Public Choice, expects public employees to see out-groups as enemies because they may represent competitors in the pursuit of higher gains. Following the economic problem of scarce resources, the growth of other agencies or workgroups limits the ability of one's in-group to maximize its utility. Thus, self-interested bureaucrats will only cooperate with out-groups if that allows them to flourish.

While this view emphasizes the role of individual autonomy in decision-making pro-

cesses (i.e., methodological individualism), [March & Olsen \(2010\)](#) propose that action is often bounded by pre-existing collective values or what they refer to as the *logic of appropriateness*—i.e., the most appropriate behavior given the institutions that individuals are members of. In this Normative Institutionalism, “individuals are not atomistic but rather are embedded in a complex series of relationships with other individuals with collectivities” ([Peters 2019](#), p. 31). Coordination problems arise when organizations are guided by antagonistic values or missions, thus providing incentives for conflict that follow from the lack of understanding between the different collectivities.

My work does not settle the intergroup conflict between Public Choice scholars and Normative Institutionalists. In fact, I adopt a less ‘polarized’ position suggesting that ‘it depends.’ In the words of [Peters \(2018d, p. 22\)](#), “attempts at bureaucratic ‘empire building’ may be closely related to the desire of the agency to survive and also to perform functions that it considers essential to a high quality of life for the society.”

In the following subsections, I dig deeper into these two streams of research. I explain their rationales and why we are better off integrating both perspectives to understand intergroup conflicts in public administration. To be sure, even if the title of this section may suggest so, I do not affirm that these studies are insufficient to understand coordination problems due to inconsistencies or methodological limitations. In many cases, they were simply not dedicated to the same object of research that I am. Furthermore, they are essential to my own theoretical and empirical constructs. Yet, as I will propose, looking at these problems as a matter of *bureaucratic polarization* opens new doors for better comprehending collective action that would not be possible if we were restricted by existing theories.

### 2.3.1 Public Choice

William [Niskanen \(1968, 1971, 1975, 1979\)](#) is among the main exponents of the analysis of bureaucratic behavior based on the assumption that public employees seek to maximize the budget of their agency at all costs, which explains his skepticism that a bureaucracy will produce efficient outputs. In his model, [Niskanen \(1979, p. 518\)](#) assumes that bureaucrats “value income, perquisites, power, prestige, the public, and an easy life in roughly the same

proportions as other people.” All these factors are maximized with increased budgets.

The rationale is that under no competition, a public organization functions as both a monopoly (“the government ‘buys’ the service only from the bureau”) and a monopsony (“bureau ‘sells’ its service only to the government”) (Niskanen 1975, p. 618). In the absence of a dynamic price mechanism, it becomes unfeasible to estimate the optimal performance and the ideal costs of public services. Thus, bureaus act as producers whose interest is not to benefit consumers (citizens) but their own members (bureaucrats). Added to the proposition that public employees are more knowledgeable about their agency than citizens or elected officials (Downs 1964; Niskanen 1971), we should expect continuous government growth, oversupply, and inefficiency (Niskanen 1979).

The assumption of budget-maximizing bureaucrats comes from Niskanen own experience in the public service (Niskanen 1975). In fact, he wrote the initial paper (Niskanen 1968) and his seminal book (Niskanen 1971) after working at John F. Kennedy’s and Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration—Niskanen was one of Secretary Robert McNamara’s *whiz kids* (Dudley 1968). He would then return to the federal government during Nixon’s presidency in 1970-1972. He left the Office of Management and Budget after disagreements over increased expenditures (Zycher 1968).

One of his propositions was to introduce competition in the public sector with both the creation of new bureaucracies and the permission of existing bureaus to produce goods and services already being produced by other organizations (Niskanen 1968). In a similar fashion to the logic of polycentric governance (V. Ostrom et al. 1961), this would allow the calculation of adequate costs and performance, thus permitting the government to reward those agencies delivering the best services. According to V. Ostrom et al. (1961, p. 832), “Competition among them may produce desirable self-regulating tendencies similar in effect to the ‘invisible hand’ of the market.” Or, as Niskanen (1979, p. 523) puts it,

“The primary reason why some conflict and redundancy are important is that, in many areas, it is not clear what is the best thing to do. In many areas, competition among bureaus has been the primary reason why the government did something right, rather than everything wrong.”

Even seeing it as efficient, these authors do acknowledge the negative consequences of

bureaucratic competition. [V. Ostrom et al. \(1961, p. 832\)](#) believe that “Collaboration and competition among governmental units may also (...) have detrimental effects, and require some form of central decision-making to consider the interests of the area as a whole.” [Niskanen \(1979, p. 519\)](#) writes that “competition among bureaus will appear messy, uncoordinated, and lacking direction.” After all, even in competitive governments, public organizations may seek increased budgets through the abuse of political power or advocacy coalitions rather than improved performance.

Once reforms introduce decentralization and competition, [V. Ostrom et al. \(1961\)](#) argue, agencies still have an incentive to seek cooperation, especially through informal arrangements. This is because excessive conflict may motivate central governments to reduce their autonomy through the merger of public departments (for an analysis of the negative effects of integrating federal agencies in the US, see [Niskanen 1971](#)) and the creation of steering organizations to facilitate coordination (see [Dahlström et al. 2017](#); [Guedes-Neto 2022](#)).

In fact, the growing relevance of steering organizations highlights that the problem of cooperation is not restricted to cases of redundancy. Two historical factors contribute to this: the continuous growth of government ([Higgs 1987](#); [Coyne & Hall 2018](#)) and the New Public Management reforms that took place in many parts of the world. While the first represents a greater amount of resources and power available for the public sector, the latter led bureaucracies to become increasingly decentralized, autonomous, and specialized in their tasks ([Peters & Savoie 1996](#); [Peters & Pierre 2000](#)). Thus, agencies have become more distant from each other and the political world. This explains the rise of center of government institutions<sup>4</sup> all over the world ([Dahlström et al. 2017](#); [Guedes-Neto 2022](#)).

One possible view is that growth and decentralization boost inter-agency animosity when fighting for budgets. Yet, the literature shows that this is not the only cause for conflicts. [Bardach \(1998\)](#) proposes that many public managers are motivated by what they believe to be the *public interest*. Since organizations have become increasingly specialized in their areas, it becomes more likely that the understanding of public interest will vary from agency

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<sup>4</sup>According to [Alessandro et al. \(2014, p. xvii\)](#), center of government institutions are “the organizations and units that provide direct support to the country’s chief executive (president or prime minister), generally for the political management of the government’s actions, the strategic management of its priorities, the coordination of policy design, the steering of policy implementation, the monitoring of performance and delivery, and the communication of results.”



to agency. According to [Bardach \(1998, p. 200\)](#)

“Managers of each of the separate partner organizations in the inter-agency collaborative capacity will have their own view of the most worthwhile destination for the inter-agency collaborative capacity. It would be surprising if this view did not also have a bias toward construing a public interest that contained a large component identified with the mission of his or her agency.”

[Allison \(1969\)](#), whose work on the Cuban missile crisis became famous among students of Public Administration, sees the problem of cooperation similarly. He argues that “What each analyst sees and judges to be important is a function not only of the evidence about what happened but also of the ‘conceptual lenses’ through which he looks at the evidence” ([Allison 1969](#), p. 689). That is, even if cooperation problems may be guided by conflicts over budgets but they are also motivated by the different ways organizations look at the same issue.

These factors are not completely ignored by Public Choice theorists. Rather than considering the budget maximization assumption, [V. Ostrom & Ostrom \(1971, p. 205\)](#) affirm that public employees (as all other individuals) seek “the highest net benefit as weighed by his own preferences.” [Niskanen \(1968\)](#) simplifies the utility maximization proposition assuming that bureaucrats will seek greater budgets. Still, the utility function may also include their view of public interest ([Bardach 1998](#)). Even though the Public Choice literature has intensified its focus on material benefits over time, there are multiple calls to a return to a broader understanding of utility maximization ([Aligica et al. 2019](#)).

Furthermore, the assumption of incomplete information ([V. Ostrom & Ostrom 1971](#)) is compatible with what [Allison \(1969\)](#) calls conceptual lenses. In times of decentralization and over-specialization, it is natural that bureaucrats of different agencies or workgroups will look at the same problems through different perspectives and will see different best solutions given their specialisms.

Finally, the methodological approach adopted by [Niskanen \(1971\)](#) may give us the false impression that all individuals (in his case, all public managers) pursue the same interest regardless of the workgroup they are members of. [Tullock \(2005\)](#) incurs the same mistake when assuming that in all bureaucracies subordinates would necessarily be loyal to their superiors as a manner of assuring personal benefits (e.g., promotion). Yet, the counter-

argument of another Public Choice theorist is that “No single theory of teams or coalitions is appropriate to all decision-making arenas” (V. Ostrom 1975, p. 846).

Following the relevance of group membership highlighted in the previous paragraphs, each organization operates under its own formal and social norms, thus creating different incentives for its members. Furthermore, other than articulated by Niskanen (1971) and Allison (1969), there is life outside of organizational management. The work of Lipsky (2010), for instance, reinforces the relevance of street-level bureaucrats in implementation politics. If we aim at truly understanding intergroup cooperation in public administration, we should focus on how all public employees act bounded by the formal and social norms imposed by their workgroups.

In sum, the theory of bureaucratic polarization does consider many of the elements proposed by Public Choice, particularly, methodological individualism, the notion of utility-maximizing interests, and incomplete information. However, I place more emphasis on how workgroup membership (and identity) shapes information (or conceptual lenses) and guides the basket of motivations that guide utility maximization. In that sense, even though my basic unit of analysis is the individual, I heavily rely on the psychological role of institutions.

### 2.3.2 Normative Institutionalism

One of the few points of agreement between Niskanen (1971) and March & Olson (1983) is that bureaucratic reorganization is doomed to fail. Yet, they share this belief for different reasons. While Niskanen (1971) sees reorganization as a manner of curtailing competition and thus efficiency, March & Olson (1983) argue that failure is an outcome of lack of pre-occupation with the organizational culture. After all, “Organizations are cultural systems embedded in a wider culture” (March & Olson 1983, p. 289-290). Thus, change becomes problematic especially in the short term as it must be followed by shifts in the social values and norms of those involved in the reorganization process. However, they may become successful in the long term through the “incremental adaptation to changing problems with available solutions within gradually evolving structures of meaning” March & Olson (1983, p. 292).

The most important conclusion of their seminal study is, perhaps, that “governance is an interpretation of life and an affirmation of legitimate values and institutions. It provides symbolic and ritual confirmation of the possibility of meaningful individual and collective action” (March & Olson 1983, p. 292). That is, organizations have values that guide the behavior of their members. Then, in many cases, rather than pursuing utility maximization through higher budgets, all that individuals do is follow the expected action that comes with their group membership.

March & Olsen (1995) further differentiate themselves from Niskanen (1971) by explaining that the exchange approach to individual action (i.e., Public Choice) is based on the perception of existing alternatives, their consequences, and the values embedded in each of them. Yet, in their institutional perspective (i.e., Normative Institutionalism), behavior is “built around ideas of identities and conceptions of appropriate behavior” (March & Olsen 1995, p. 7). Therefore, before acting, individuals ask themselves: “What kind of person am I? What kind of situation is this? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this?” (ibid.).

It is not that rational choice is completely abandoned, but that Normative Institutionalists “picture rational exchanges as framed by and dependent on political norms, identities, and institutions” (March & Olsen 1995, p. 29). In this vein, this perspective also allows for the incorporation of other mundane attitudes, like emotions, which are often relegated in the works of Public Choice but still have a significant influence over intergroup relations. According to March & Olsen (1995, p. 33-34),

“Emotion is an aspect of human behavior. People have feelings. (...) They love, hate, cry, and laugh. (...) They have attachments that link their own emotions to others. Sentiments (...) are made appropriate to particular identities in particular situations. In this conception, emotions are rule-based interpretations of identity.”

Interestingly, the view that March & Olsen (1995) put forward is not completely foreign to the philosophical origins of Public Choice. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, A. Smith (1982, p. 19) postulates that “We may judge the propriety or impropriety of the sentiments of another person by their correspondence or disagreement with our own” (p. 19) and, whenever we do not share the same notions of propriety, “We become intolerable to one another. I can

neither support your company, nor you mine” (A. Smith 1982, p. 21).

The role of sentiments within groups has been explored in-depth in the literature of social psychology. Consider Tajfel & Turner (1979), which is often credited as one of the most seminal pieces in the study of Intergroup Relations Theory. Individuals are naturally members of different groups at the same time, for instance, based on their race, gender, national origin, etc (Thoits 1983; Deaux 1993). In some cases, they share the values associated with one or more of these groups and, eventually, become emotionally attached to them (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Whenever this happens, it is possible to say that this individual socially identifies with that group. This social identity is often linked to positive attitudes to other members of the group (*in-group favoritism*) and negative attitudes toward members of different groups who, oftentimes, are seen as enemies (*out-group discrimination*) (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Sherif 1966; Sherif & Sherif 1969).

There are many ways in which the lenses of Normative Institutionalism and Intergroup Relations Theory help understand bureaucratic action. Consider the Theory of Representative Bureaucracy. This suggests an improvement in the delivery of public goods and services when public employees and citizens are connected by a shared social identity (Meier 1975; Meier & Stewart Jr 1991). Two recent experimental studies illustrate this proposition when assessing the relevance of race for police’s reputation. In the US, Riccucci et al. (2018) find that African Americans tend to evaluate the police better when most policemen are black—a trend that is reversed among white subjects. Dantas Cabral et al. (2021) identifies similar results in Brazilian *favelas*. They show that, “For policing, participants were more likely to believe that a representative leader would be capable of improving how the local population was treated” (Dantas Cabral et al. 2021, p. 15).

While this stream of research focuses on the shared identities of civil servants and citizens, they tend to relegate the main feature of Normative Institutionalism: bureaucrats’ identification with their colleagues through their shared workplace institutions. March & Olsen (2010, p. 21) conceptualizes institutions as “collections of interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate action in terms of relations between roles and situation.” This mirrors the shared values, which Tajfel & Turner (1979) list as a core element of a social identity, the way Akerlof & Kranton (2010) describe organizational identity, and the illustration

developed by [Kaufman \(2006\)](#) when discussing forest rangers.

Of course, saying that bureaucrats socially identify with their bureau is not innovative. Scholars spent the last decades telling the same story with different words. Besides [March & Olsen \(2010\)](#), one seminal example is [Clark & Wilson \(1961\)](#). They do acknowledge that individuals may join and remain in organizations due to material incentives. Yet, they also argue that this could be due to the possibility of sharing the same goals of the organization and given a “sense of group membership and identification” ([Clark & Wilson 1961](#), p. 134). More recently, [Coyne & Hall \(2018\)](#) similarly propose three mechanisms that reinforce organizational identity in the public service: bureaucrats self-select into agencies that hold a mission they believe in; they are recruited based on their alignment to the organizational culture; and quit (or are forced to quit) if they do not fit the agency. These sorting mechanisms assure that at least a significant share of bureaucrats strongly identify with their workgroup.

Yet, there are at least two benefits in adopting a social psychology perspective to understand intergroup relations in the bureaucracy. The first of them regards the benefits of the terminology and empirical measurements to assess conflicts. [Clark & Wilson \(1961\)](#), [March & Olsen \(2010\)](#), and [Akerlof & Kranton \(2010\)](#) are mostly interested in explaining conformity with organizational norms. In the language of social psychology, this means focusing on how individuals interact with their in-groups. Yet, there is still more to say about how individuals interact with out-groups. What happens when a bureaucrat is supposed to engage with a public employee who does not share the same organizational identity?

[Bardach \(1998\)](#) proposes that inter-agency collaboration will be likely to fail when managers do not share the same interpretation of public interest. The results of a series of surveys conducted by [Mitchell et al. \(2015\)](#) with US federal and local-level bureaucrats support this theory. They find that leadership, willingness, and common purpose among the core elements that facilitate cooperation.

These shared values and purposes are in line with [March & Olsen’s \(2010\)](#) logic of appropriateness, [A. Smith’s \(1982\)](#) notion of sympathy and propriety, and what social psychologists call intergroup solidarity ([Schlueter & Scheepers 2010](#); [Savelkoul et al. 2011](#)). While these are similar concepts, the added value of the social psychology perspective is the possibility

of measuring the distance between groups—what [Bogardus \(1925, 1947\)](#) calls *social distance* and I further explain in the following pages and apply especially in Chapter 5.

The second benefit of adopting a social psychological perspective is the possibility of moving beyond group-level explanations to understand how individuals see the different groups they interact with—including their own. One of the contrasts between Normative Institutionalism and Public Choice is their unit of analysis. Most often, the former will assume that individuals will follow their organization and, if there is anyone who should be studied, that will be the organization’s manager. Even though the latter also tends to place heavier emphasis on managers, they assume individuals have their incentives which need not rely on their institutional mission.

On the one hand, even scholars within the Public Choice tradition consider the relevance of organizational identity (e.g., [Coyne & Hall 2018](#)). On the other, not everything happens at the agency level. We know that bureaucrats may revolt against their agency ([O’Leary 2014](#)), subordinates may deviate from supervisors’ expectations ([Brehm & Gates 1999, 1994](#)), street-level bureaucrats (and not only managers) matter for the delivery of public services ([Lipsky 2010](#)), and, in many cases, utilitarian motivations do make a difference ([Niskanen 1971](#)).

Adopting the perspective of social psychology, here presented through the lenses of *bureaucratic polarization*, allows us to evaluate the attachment of individual bureaucrats toward their own workgroup (their in-group) and competing groups (the out-group). This permits capturing more nuance about how likely someone is to sympathize with close and not-so-close colleagues. Furthermore, it helps us understand why not all bureaucrats of a certain agency will act alike. Individuals may belong to different groups at the same time and identify with each of them at different levels, thus justifying a plethora of attitudes and behaviors that are misunderstood or misrepresented by a pure Normative Institutionalist or Public Choice approach.

## 2.4 A Theory of Bureaucratic Polarization

### 2.4.1 The Rationale

Bureaucratic polarization is the social distance of the attitudes that public sector actors hold toward their own workgroup and toward a workgroup with which they are supposed to cooperate with. Depending on its nature and degree, bureaucratic polarization may result in the modification to the policy, the delay of its implementation process, or deadlock. As a measurement, it is a tool to understand why policy implementation fails or succeeds. As a phenomenon, it is essential to understand bureaucratic behavior in scenarios where intergroup conflict should be avoided.

The different operationalizations proposed for the study of bureaucratic polarization materialize in horizontal or vertical hierarchies and the individual or collective levels. Each of these varieties should be responsible for identifying the unit of analysis at hand. To recapitulate, the vertical perspective poses that bureaucrats in the different stages of hierarchy (e.g., federal vs. local level, head of department vs. street-level bureaucrat) may polarize, therefore influencing the final result of the policy implementation ([Pressman & Wildavsky 1974](#)). Horizontal relationships, on the other hand, represent intergroup relations within a specific government (e.g., the departments of agriculture and environmental protection) that, if marked by polarization, could lead to inefficient cooperation in joint-projects ([Kalkman & Groenewegen 2019](#)).

The individual and collective levels of bureaucratic polarization are, as these terms suggest, dependent on the actors selected to be the unit of analysis. At the individual level, bureaucrats may polarize against a department with which they are expected to cooperate. At the collective level, one agency polarizes against another. In this case, the aggregate preferences of the civil servants working for a specific organization should determine the distance between two agencies within the same government.

The central thesis of this dissertation is based on three core elements. First, public sector preferences are formed based on expected rewards and workplace identity. Second, these preferences are specific to each agency and individual and relative to the agencies

and individuals the selected actors are supposed to cooperate with. In this sense, if the selected actors identify with their workgroup and hold negative attitudes toward a workgroup they are supposed to cooperate with, we should expect to see intergroup conflict. Third, since individual and agency-level preferences may be dissonant, these intra-group conflicting preferences should moderate the outcomes of bureaucratic polarization.

Whereas the existing literature may have suggested, in different terms, the existence of what I refer to as bureaucratic polarization, it fails to determine (1) whether these conflicts are individual or collective phenomena, (2) whether this phenomenon is based on rational interests or organizational commitments, and (3) how these social distances should be measured. It also misses part of the story due to its focus on cooperation, rather than conflict. Furthermore, and especially for those works dealing with organizational loyalties, the literature is still in the early stages of incorporating the existing knowledge on the psychology of social identity and intergroup relations as seen, for instance, in [Sherif \(1966\)](#), [Tajfel & Turner \(1979\)](#), and [Akerlof & Kranton \(2010\)](#). By relying on this framework, it is possible to propose, for instance, that workplace identity plays a strong role in the individual-level organizational commitment (instead of on its collective form) and that it differs from simply following the rules and norms of the organization, thus representing a case of social distance motivated by social identity.

### 2.4.2 The Model

The different preferences, affects, and interests within the public service result in *bureaucratic polarization*. When public service actors distance themselves from each other, they create barriers to the implementation of public policies that require intergroup collaboration. Following the existing literature on other types of polarization, I propose an empirical operationalization for this phenomenon.

The baseline method relies on the simplified approach to social distance as adapted by [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#) from the original measurement of [Bogardus \(1925\)](#). Consider Equation 1, where  $bp_i$  is the degree of bureaucratic polarization of actor  $i$ ,  $a_{ii}$  is the attitude of actor  $i$  toward her own workgroup, and  $a_{ij}$  is the attitude of actor  $i$  toward workgroup  $j$ . This



social distance should determine the level of perceived polarization for each public service actor and requires measuring the attitudes of only one actor.

$$bp_i = |a_{ii} - a_{ij}| \quad (1)$$

There are a set of assumptions behind Equation 1 that deserve further explanation. First, the equation is calculated at the individual level but also serves to understand attitudes at the workgroup level. The latter, which I refer to as upper-case  $A$ , could be calculated as the aggregation of individual attitudes  $a$ . In this sense,  $BP_i = |A_{ii} - A_{ij}|$  is the workgroup-level degree of bureaucratic polarization of workgroup  $i$  against workgroup  $j$ .

Second,  $a_{ii}$  is as relevant as  $a_{ij}$  to assess bureaucratic polarization. If  $a_{ii}$  is too low, the preferences of the public sector actor should not be expected to be aligned to those of the institution—that is, the individual should not identify with the workgroup. This assumption should hold for both the social identity and rational choice approaches. As proposed by Sherif (1966) and Tajfel & Turner (1979), group membership is not a sufficient condition to hold a specific social identity. Identification as such is also necessary for that purpose. Furthermore, bureaucratic polarization is an essentially relative measurement. It depends on how distant attitudes are when two different workgroups are compared.

Third, workgroup, as explained before, also regards structures within structures. For instance, the US Department of Education (DoE) may have its high-level administration, specialists located at the organization’s headquarters, teachers assigned to work in different schools, among others. Beyond, bureaucrats may be political appointees, tenured civil servants, temporary employees, etc. Each of these sub-agency units represents a different organizational structure with their preferences (Calvert 1995; Brehm & Gates 2008). Thus, the organization where actor  $i$  works and the organization  $j$  may also be sub-agency structures, allowing different approaches to the study of bureaucratic polarization.

Fourth, as made clear in Equation 1, individual-level bureaucratic polarization is a central concern of this dissertation. Whereas the Bureaucratic Politics Model was concerned with the conflicting attitudes of department heads (Allison 1969), this operationalization of bureaucratic polarization also considers public employees in different levels of hierarchy. Following Lipsky (2010) and Pressman & Wildavsky (1974), the assumption is that, at least

in certain cases, the attitudes of line personnel, clerks, and others are also relevant since they may be on the front line of the cooperation between different agencies. Furthermore, this empirical strategy also allows aggregating individual attitudes per workgroup to determine the organizational degree of bureaucratic polarization.

To be clear, aggregation may be problematic, for instance, due to the risk of ecological fallacy. This may be done following the assumption that the group is homogeneous. Otherwise, one could consider the aggregation of attitudes by small or smaller workgroups. One example outside the scope of bureaucratic polarization is [Hameduddin & Fernandez \(2019\)](#), who aggregate the attitudes of managers and subordinates by agency to better estimate group preferences.

Fifth, actor  $i$  is a member of different workgroups at the same time. Consider a tenured civil servant working as a clerk at the headquarters of the DoE. In this case, the preferences of actor  $i$  could be understood based on her department, function, contract type, workplace, or even external groups, like race, gender, family status, etc. Similarly, at the agency level, each of these characteristics could be aggregated and treated as a different structure. This operationalization is in agreement with the conceptualization of institutions proposed by [March & Olsen \(2006\)](#). By investigating the attitudes of actor  $i$ , Equation 1 considers the preferences of actor  $i$  within the multiple groups to which she may belong to or identify with. The aggregation of individual preferences per organization is considered to be the collective preferences of the specific agency as properly identified in the empirical design.

Sixth, I intentionally refer to attitudes in a broad way. Originally, social distance is measured based on the absolute difference between affect toward the in and the out-group ([Iyengar et al. 2012](#); [Bogardus 1925](#)). Yet, this formulation does not necessitate a restriction to this unit of analysis. The variables  $a$  or  $A$  may refer to policy preferences, ideological leanings, partisanship, affect, or other measurements. The resulting social distance ( $bp_i$  or  $BP_i$ ) should determine the level of perceived polarization for actor  $i$  in relationship to  $j$  on the selected measurement. In this case, it is possible that actors  $i$  and  $j$  are polarized in, for instance, ideological leanings but not on affect.

Finally, as in any aggregation of individual-level attitudes,  $BP_i$  and  $bp_i$  need not be identical. The identification of cases where bureaucratic polarization exists in only one of

these two levels leads to a natural comparison between  $BP_i$  and  $bp_i$ . Consider the following illustration, which will be further explained in Chapter 3. In the Department of Infrastructure, most of its employees strongly identify with their agency and hold a very negative affect toward its oversight agency. This means that whenever both agencies are expected to work together, coordination problems will be common. Yet, assume that one of the public employees at the Department of Infrastructure deviates from his agency’s average attitude and has a strong connection to the oversight agency. This individual could work as a bridge between both agencies, thus alleviating potential conflicts. Naturally, the opposite could also be true. If that is the case, one individual could represent a barrier to cooperation depending on her role within the organization. This logic reinforces the relevance of looking at this phenomenon at the individual level.

## 2.5 Empirical Implications of the Theory

On the one hand, if bureaucrats are purely rational actors whose behavior is solely oriented toward higher budgets, social distance should be unlikely to exist and, if it does, it should not affect cooperation. After all, public employees will be more worried about seeking personal benefits regardless of emotional attachments to any workgroup. Of course, this pure Niskanen view is unlikely to exist as pointed out even by some of those who subscribe to the Public Choice tradition (e.g., [Aligica et al. 2019](#); [Coyne & Hall 2018](#)).

On the other hand, if organizational culture is the core determinant of bureaucratic behavior, public employees should blindly follow the logic of appropriateness of their organizations. Dissent should be very unlikely to take place, after all, individuals self-selected and were socialized to follow the formal and informal norms that guide their workplace. Again, this does not match the reality described in the literature of Public Administration, for instance by [O’Leary \(2014\)](#), who discusses bureaucratic resistance or, in her terms, guerrilla government.

The theory of bureaucratic polarization suggests that organizational identity matters but at different degrees for each individual. This is because each public employee will hold

their own level of attachment toward the organization or the workgroup (the in-group) and a different level of proximity or animosity toward the out-group. Thus, the first two empirical implications of this theoretical proposition are that (1) bureaucrats within the same organization will socially identify with their own in-group at different levels and (2) will hold different levels of bureaucratic polarization toward the same out-group. Thus, rather than an atomistic or organization-centered perspective, I propose that there is individual-level variance placing the bureaucracy between the worlds of Public Choice and Normative Institutionalism.

While these are attitudinal measurements, they have the potential to influence behavior. Consider two fictional dyads between a civil servant and a political appointee. In the first dyad, John Doe (the civil servant) holds a null level of bureaucratic polarization against political appointees. That is, even though these are different workgroups, he does not see appointees as an out-group. The cooperation between John Doe and a specific appointee may be harmed by several factors, e.g., lack of resources, red tape, and unrealistic expectations. Yet, we should not expect that the civil servant will begin the cooperation process with a grudge against the political appointee.

Now, consider John's colleague, the civil servant Richard Roe. Different than his colleague John, Richard had bad experiences with political appointees and tend to see them as enemies. His level of bureaucratic polarization is quite high, as he strongly identifies with other career bureaucrats and starkly dislikes public employees coming from the political world. Whenever Mr. Roe is expected to work with a political appointee, the starting point of the cooperation process will be more problematic due to the distrust held by the civil servant. This could mean that, holding other variables constant (e.g., lack of resources, red tape, and unrealistic expectations), the behaviors of Richard will be more likely to lead this cooperation to fail. I provide preliminary evidence of these phenomena in [Chapter 4](#).

The divide between the administrative and the political worlds is a concern since the early writings of [Weber \(2004\)](#) and [W. Wilson \(1887\)](#). However, this divide should be more problematic to Richard Roe than to John Doe. I provide evidence for these differences in [Chapter 5](#), in which I assess the effects of political meddling on organizational attachment. If the political world tried to take control over a certain organization, its logic of appropriateness

will be affected, as civil servants will be expected to comply with the expectations of elected officials rather than to follow the organizational culture they were socialized with. This should not be a problem for John Doe, who does not hold any animosity against the political world. Yet, this will matter for Richard Roe. He will perceive political favoritism and other forms of intervention and, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, will disidentify with his agency to the point of wishing to quit or move to another public agency.

What if Richard Roe decides to stay? Will he comply with unwanted expectations of the political world? In Chapter 7, I show that for those who strongly identify with their workgroup, bureaucratic resistance is substantively more likely to be considered in face of abuses coming from the out-group. This does not mean that John Doe (the civil servant with null levels of bureaucratic polarization) will peacefully accept these abuses. However, his likelihood of confrontation will be way lower than that of civil servants who, like Richard Roe, want to protect their in-group.

Before concluding, there are two caveats to be considered. First, this is a story of attitudes that may or may not translate into behavior. Considerations about turnover or resistance are not the same as actual turnover or resistance. This means that, let us say, if 10% of the bureaucracy thinks about leaving their job, this does not imply that the same 10% will actually leave. The actual number could be null. Yet, it is hard to believe that an employee who thinks about leaving or resisting will work with the same performance as those who do not. The literature on job satisfaction has done a good job highlighting these issues at least since Kornhauser & Sharp (1932).

The second caveat is that bureaucratic polarization is not exclusive to the public sector. There are several studies dealing with organizational identity in the private sector (e.g., Ashforth & Mael 1989; Akerlof & Kranton 2010; Stewart & Garcia-Prieto 2008). Thus, the theoretical lenses and empirical approaches proposed in this manuscript should be easily applied to different types of organizations. Yet, it is in the public sector that these intergroup relations become essential to the delivery of public goods and services, and, as I show in the following chapters, may influence democratic stability. This explains my focus on the public administration.

## 2.6 Summary

*Bureaucratic polarization* is the individual-level social distance that public employees hold when comparing their attachment to their own organization or workgroup (the *in-group*) to their proximity or animosity towards other organizations or workgroups (the *out-groups*). This applies to inter-agency relations, as well as to other types of dyads, for instance, the interactions between civil servants and political appointees.

Besides other perils that may affect collaboration in the public service, coordination problems may be modeled as a function of bureaucratic polarization. That is, the greater the social distance between the bureaucrats' in-group and out-group, the more likely it is that implementation will fail. Directly related to public employees' social identification with the workplace, bureaucratic polarization is also a relevant determinant of turnover intent and bureaucratic resistance, among other types of behaviors and attitudes which relate to implementation politics in democratic contexts.

### 3.0 Moving the People in Ceará

In October 2007, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) announced that Brazil would host the 2014 Soccer World Cup. Besides visibility and tourism, hosting this mega event means implementing massive infrastructure reforms. In pursuit of federal and international funding, governors of all Brazilian states engaged in intense lobbying to become the host of some games. In 2009, the northeastern state of Ceará was selected as one of them. The governor, whose party was in the presidential coalition, rushed to request funding for infrastructure projects that were planned long before FIFA picked Brazil. As it happened in other states, the implementation of many projects failed to be delivered by 2014 despite the availability of financial resources and political motivation.

One of the infrastructure projects in Ceará, the construction of a light rail vehicle to take tourists from a port to a stadium, demonstrates that bureaucratic polarization is a core determinant of the implementation process. With enough funding to be concluded by 2014, this was not yet fully operational six years later because of the disputes between different public departments.

What happens to policies when agencies decide to fight against each other instead of following the expectations of policymakers? In this chapter, I use the light rail vehicle case to demonstrate some of the consequences of bureaucratic polarization to the implementation process. I propose four ideal types of policy change: *fast-track* (accelerating the implementation process); *delay* (forcing the implementation to last longer); *block* (inhibiting the implementation process to move forward); and *modification* (creating processes and outcomes that differ from the original plan). I refer to these consequences as outward changes since their object is the policy and not the organizations. I explore inward changes in Chapter 4.

The case is also helpful to expand the theoretical discussion on the relevance of Public Choice and Normative Institutionalism to explain coordination problems in public administration (see Chapter 2). I divide agencies into two ideal types: *implementers* and *overseers*. While the first is intended to transform a statement of purposes into public goods, the latter is dedicated to making sure that any bureaucratic action complies with the law. These differ-

ent logics and interests lead to a natural inter-agency polarization, which I call the problem of bureaucratic oversight.

This does not mean that implementers will get along among themselves, or that it will happen among overseers. Several agencies have duplicated tasks or share similar jurisdictions and expertise. Bureaucratic overlap may create rivalries on how to define or solve certain problems, besides the problem of turf wars. I also expose this type of bureaucratic polarization when analyzing the case of Ceará.

I theorized before (Chapter 2) that bureaucrats identify with their agencies and see other public organizations as out-groups. This leads to varying degrees of social distance, which explains the willingness to cooperate. As I explained before, these attitudes and behaviors encompass rational and normative sentiments, thus offering an extension to Public Choice and Normative Institutional theories. Now, I expand this proposition

Reporting interviews conducted with bureaucrats, politicians, private sector agents, scholars, and activists, I demonstrate the reinforcing relevance of different logics of appropriateness and expected rewards to enhance (or alleviate) inter-agency conflict finally leading to inward changes in the implementation process.

Besides the theoretical contributions of this paper, this empirical strategy also addresses recent calls in the literature for the study of comparative public administration ([Haque et al. 2021](#)) especially when it comes to developing countries ([Bertelli et al. 2020](#)). I follow [Ames et al.](#)'s (2012) recommendation, who suggest the need for further face-to-face interviews to better understand implementation politics in Brazil. This coincides with the growing demand for more studies relying on the qualitative abductive approach in public administration ([Ashworth et al. 2019](#); [Nowell & Albrecht 2019](#)).

The remaining parts of this paper are divided as follows. First, I develop the theoretical framework to lay out the connection between organizational type, bureaucratic polarization, and outward change. Next, I present the selected case based on a theory-testing process-tracing methodological approach. It is followed by a discussion, where I develop the relevance of paying attention to bureaucratic polarization when studying policy implementation. Finally, I present a summary of this chapter.



### 3.1 Organizational Type and Outward Change

#### 3.1.1 Types of Organizations

In a seminal work about inter-agency conflict, [Allison \(1969\)](#) demonstrates that agencies assigned to implement a policy together need not cooperate simply because that was the expectation of elected officials. His *Bureaucratic Politics Model* poses that “The leaders who sit on top of organizations are not a monolithic group. Rather, each is, in his own right, a player in a central, competitive game” ([Allison 1969](#), p. 707). [Preston & 't Hart \(1999](#), p. 55) summarize that bureaucratic actors “have diverging and conflicting interests, and they are involved in multiple-n game contexts with one another, requiring cooperation in areas of disagreement because of the necessity for future policy interaction.”

Bureaucratic overlap may motivate improved performance due to competition for resources and political power ([Landau 1969](#); [Niskanen 1971](#); ?; [Miranda & Lerner 1995](#)). It may also be a strategy for elected officials to select bureaucrats or agencies that best fit their interests ([Hammond 1986](#); [Ting 2003](#)). For instance, bureaucratic duplication has been used several times throughout Brazilian history to create islands of efficiency that comply with presidential orders ([Costa 2008](#)).

Improved performance may come at the expense of coordination problems, as those that [Allison \(1969\)](#) explores. [Carpenter \(2001\)](#) proposes that bureaucrats have incentives to create a reputation that their agencies deliver unique services in the government. This differentiation from other agencies grants relevance, assuring not only their survival but also enhanced political power. This leads to greater levels of bureaucratic polarization and, when that is the case, it is more likely to find coordination between agencies whose responsibilities are not duplicated.

If a bureaucrat has veto power over a decision (or cooperation) that may reduce her or her agency’s utility, “she will use it to further her interests” ([Ganghof 2003](#), p. 2). [Pressman & Wildavsky \(1974\)](#) illustrate the relevance of veto powers in the analysis of a federal program implemented in an American city. The improper assessment of incentives and constraints led to a series of failures that were not foreseen by policymakers in Washington, D.C.

The underlying argument is that the institutional design creates conditions so that players block decision-making processes. In *The Power of the Purse*, [Fenno \(1966\)](#) argues that the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives has functioned as a veto point in the expansion of public expenditures in the United States. As a ‘guardian of the federal treasury,’ this committee has the legal responsibility of filtering the proposals of the legislature whenever they are expected to affect the federal budget—a role duly respected by its members ([Fenno 1966](#)).

Whereas individual preferences play a role in the veto process, it is the legal framework that gives them the tools to exercise this power. [Kiewiet & McCubbins \(1991\)](#) demonstrate that Democrats and Republicans have managed to pursue their interests by filling the Appropriations Committees’ seats with legislators committed to their party’s preferences.

I propose an adapted mechanism that takes place involving bureaucratic oversight during the implementation process. When *overseers* see their role as following the due procedure above the role of government in adopting new policies (*implemeters*), they will not refrain from blocking the implementation process if it is perceived to deviate from their interpretation of the law. Thus, the institutional design creates a prerequisite to placing bureaucrats (or their agencies) in different poles of the policy process: one, dedicated to implementing the policies designed by elected officials; and the other, engaged in blocking them whenever they deviate from what they perceive to be the legitimate course of action.

[Power \(1997\)](#) uses the case of audit agencies and their unintended consequences. As auditing became more common in the public service, innovation and trust decreased. The logic is that by following the law, audit agencies became strict veto players inhibiting civil servants who intended to try new practices in their daily work. The law is indeed the same for everyone. Furthermore, to restrain misconduct is not the same as bureaucratic polarization. However, in settings where the legal framework is unclear or unrealistic, strict auditing may be caused by inter-agency conflict and may trigger polarized attitudes against the oversight organization, thus deteriorating coordination.

Overall, these views are at least partially related to the understanding that “institutions are carriers of identities and roles and they are markers of a polity’s character, history, and visions” ([March & Olsen 2006](#), p. 4). In this view, *implemeters* implement and *overseers*

oversee not only because they will be rewarded for that, but because that is the appropriate behavior. Thus, the inter-agency conflict between these two types occurs not only due to dissonant rewards but also because of their different values.

### 3.1.2 Outward Change

Implementers and overseers are often expected to work together in implementation processes despite any bureaucratic polarization. The same is true for overlapping organizations, as when different implementing agencies are supposed to agree on details regarding certain projects, or when different oversight organizations must monitor the same policy. Throughout these processes, they learn about each other, feed existing stereotypes, and develop new ones. The bureaucratic polarization resulting from these institutional arrangements and histories should influence the policy that is being implemented.

Furthermore, the outward change caused in the policy should affect the future interactions between the actors involved in the implementation process. Bureaucrats are socialized into their organizations to learn what the appropriate behavior is; such socialization involves learning what to expect from different organizations. When these expectations are based on undesirable memories, bureaucratic polarization tends to grow. In the long run, that is an endogenous process of reinforcements.

Consider the possibility of *fast-tracking*. This is more likely when the agencies involved in the cooperation process hold low levels of bureaucratic polarization. This occurs when they had previous successful experiences that led to a trust relationship; or the implementation, as it is, is highly desirable for both organizations. In these cases, bureaucrats will identify fast-track mechanisms to accelerate the process.

In 1989, for instance, officials from the US Food and Drug Administration (overseer) and the Department of Health and Human Services (implementer) agreed to fast-track the distribution of experimental AIDS drugs before Phase II clinical trials. Back then, Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said “We can be humanitarian and do good science” ([Marshall 1989](#), p. 345). The same immunologist supported fast-tracking the approval of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021.

The opposite outward change is to *delay*. This may occur when there are higher levels of bureaucratic polarization and at least one of the actors involved in the implementation process can exercise veto power. This is especially true to overseers, which can use their functions to add difficulties to licensing processes (Carpenter 2003), auditing (Power 1997), and other forms of monitoring (West 2004), besides, of course, their legitimate role to block unlawful activities.

In addition to that, delays may be a necessary element in the coordination process. Bureaucrats may produce this outward change when they fail to reach an agreement that is relevant to the policy. In any case, agreements can be more easily obtained when the different parties hold lower levels of bureaucratic polarization.

In many cases, these delays will happen because overseers or implementers are following the law. One cannot blame bureaucratic polarization for that. However, polarized attitudes may create additional incentives to produce delays when the law protects the exercise of veto powers. That is, the mere existence of a veto power does not mean that it must be exercised in every case. Actors most often have the discretion to decide when this mechanism is the most adequate. Furthermore, previous episodes of delays may enhance bureaucratic polarization and deteriorate coordination in future implementation processes.

The most radical form of exercising veto power is entirely *blocking* the policy. There is an overlap between this outward change and *delay*. Bureaucrats may attempt to delay a policy until it becomes obsolete, thus blocking it. Alternatively, they may pursue more direct channels to completely block it without incurring delays. Or, in cases of failure, an attempt to block a policy may end up resulting in a delay and, still, the implementation process is completed at some point. These dynamics and their outcomes will depend on the level of intergroup animosity and the power of each actor involved in the coordination process.

Another possibility is that bureaucrats will be able to block part of the policy, thus resulting in the fourth type of outward change: *modification*. This occurs when, following an agreement or necessity, the policy is changed so that implementers can turn the statement of intent into a public good. Besides cases when part of the policy is blocked, this may also be the outcome of a negotiation between the implementers and/or overseers. Again, bureaucratic polarization and the power of each actor should contribute to each possible

outcome.

### 3.2 The Case of VLT Parangaba-Mucuripe

Ashworth et al. (2019) make a call for more studies in public administration that follow a qualitative abductive approach, that is, a combination of inductive and deductive methods that complement the proposed theory with insights from the field. After all, one of the advantages of the qualitative method is to “provide detailed description of a phenomenon as it occurs in context” (Nowell & Albrecht 2019, p. 350). Here, this approach allows a thorough investigation of the impacts of bureaucratic polarization on policy implementation.

The selected case is the implementation of light rail transit in the city of Fortaleza, northeastern Brazil. The state government of Ceará, the policy’s owner, expected to conclude the implementation by early 2014 but this only happened after 2020. I conducted 29 pre-scheduled face-to-face interviews plus additional conversations with line workers, affected residents, and other actors especially during a public hearing in June 2018. I list them in Table 3.1. They were selected because of their role in the implementation process. Some were identified on websites of public organizations and others were recommended by the interviewees.

The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to three hours and included general questions (e.g., the respondents’ view on their organization’s values, their perception about their work, their opinions on the infrastructure project and the government) and more specific inquiries that were related to their role in the project (e.g., how long it has taken to take a specific decision, which was the main challenges faced in each of the implementation steps, who were the main actors that either made things easier or more difficult than expected).

Among the 29 main interviewees, 14 are bureaucrats at organizations labeled as *implementer* (they include political appointees, outsourced employees, and career civil servants), five are public employees working at oversight organizations (*overseers*), five are either scholars or social movement leaders (or both), three are engineers at private sector firms, and two are high-level politicians.

Table 3.1: List of Interviewees in Ceará

Name	Position	Organization
Mario	Public attorney	Public Attorney
Jaqueline	Director	Fortaleza Planning Institute
Edilson Aragão*	Director	Metrofor
Rafael	Director	Metrofor
Flavia	Public Prosecutor	State Public Ministry
João	Public Prosecutor	Federal Public Ministry
Maria	-	Civil Police
Delcio, Joel, Fabio	Engineer	Private Sector
Lineu	Coordinator	State Secretary of Cities
Roberto, David, Jair	Engineer	State Secretary of Infrastructure
Romeu	Executive Secretary	Local Secretary of Infrastructure
Joana, Julia, Betina	Technical Assistant	Local Sec. of Urbanism and Environment
Jose	President	Construction Workers Union
Izolda Cela*	Vice-Governor	State Government
Abelardo	Chief of Staff	State Government
Renato Roseno*	Legislator	State Legislature
Cesar	Director	State Department of Environment
Manoel	Auditor	State Court of Accounts
Carlos	Manager	State Court of Accounts
Clarissa Freitas*	Professor	Universidade Federal do Ceará
Ana, Rosa	Professor	Universidade Federal do Ceará

**Note:** I use pseudonyms to protect interviewees' anonymity, but use real names for public figures that cannot be de-identified (marked with an \*). Not all of them are mentioned in the chapter. Furthermore, the list does not include interviews conducted at the public hearing or with residents and line workers.

The subsections of this empirical analysis are divided as follows. First, I provide the background of the policy, its motivations, and its main barriers. Next, I analyze four cases of bureaucratic polarization (overlap among implementers, overlap among overseers, enforcing compliance with fines, and building a shared identity). They are helpful to demonstrate the impact of bureaucratic polarization and organizational type on outward change in the implementation process.

### 3.2.1 The Policy and its Challenges

In the mid-2000s, the Companhia Cearense de Transportes Metropolitanos (Metrofor), an autonomous enterprise (in Portuguese, *autarquia*) of Ceará's government, proposed a 13.4-km light rail vehicle (in Portuguese, *veículo leve sobre trilhos*, or VLT) to operate on the tracks of an old cargo railway in the center of Fortaleza, the state's capital. In 2010, the state government included the VLT in the matrix of projects dedicated to the 2014 FIFA World. They argued that this transportation mode could bring tourists from the city's port to the stadium. This deviated from the original purpose, which was to facilitate transportation in the city center ([Viana 2015](#)).

This public work required expropriating and removing approximately 5,000 families who lived in the areas surrounding the train tracks ([Contractor & Greenlee 2018](#); [Freitas 2019](#)). A coalition composed of social movements, academics, public prosecutors, attorneys, and a far-left party mobilized the local communities to help them fight the project ([Freitas 2017](#)). Simultaneously, bureaucrats at the State Secretary of Infrastructure (in Portuguese, Secretaria de Infraestrutura, or SEINFRA) struggled with private contractors that were not moving as fast as they expected.

As SEINFRA broke up contracts and organized new calls for proposals, the state's attorney general proposed a solution for the expropriation issue: new legislation to facilitate the relocation of affected families to State-sponsored houses. The State Secretary of Cities (in Portuguese, Secretaria das Cidades, or Cidades), the department responsible for social housing, had the money to build houses but it lacked land on where to build them.

These difficulties delayed and modified the VLT, which was not delivered before the 2014

World Cup. The governor, then, secured new funding through another federal program but the state bureaucracy still failed to conclude the implementation. In 2019, only three stations of the light rail transit were operational (under tests), meaning that the works were far from being concluded five years later.

### 3.2.2 Overlap Among Implementers

David is an experienced career bureaucrat at the state government. He explained that the VLT was born in 2006:

“Spain was passing through some financial problems and their government wanted to stimulate their economy. They offered us 350,000 euros to hire a Spanish consulting firm to prepare an infrastructure project for us. My boss told me to write down a couple of ideas and we showed them five of them. They loved the one that ended up being the VLT. The Spaniards really loved it!”

David proposed using a pre-existing cargo railway to transport passengers. These tracks had been built in 1942 to link an industrial area in Parangaba to the port in Mucuripe. In the intervening years, the city had become more populated, its economic zones had shifted, and the government had built a major port in Pecém. Only three cargo trains remained on the Parangaba-Mucuripe railway.

After a public tendering process restricted to Spanish firms, Metrofor awarded the contract to Eptisa Servicios de Ingeniería. David believed that

“Their proposal was amazing. It included a survey with 4,000 interviews, qualitative focal groups, several engineering studies... Everything! And they did all of that. It was the best project I’ve ever read. Metrofor helped them to improve it. After multiple discussions over the years, the conceptual infrastructure project was ready in 2009.”

Fortaleza was selected in the same year to be one of the host cities of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. This made the city eligible for a reasonable amount of federal funds for infrastructure. This was enough to implement the project, which was budgeted at roughly US\$ 129 million <sup>1</sup>. The project had to be modified, however, to justify its inclusion in the World Cup’s matrix. Metrofor’s engineers extended to get closer to the port in Mucuripe, where tourists would arrive, and to Arena Castelão, where the games would be played.

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<sup>1</sup>R\$ 300 million at the exchange rate of January 1, 2009, that is, R\$ 2.33 to each dollar.



This was not the only change that these engineers implemented. In 2019, the VLT did not look like a traditional tram. It was reasonably fast and, rather than competing for space with cars, its tracks were protected by tall walls. David explained that “the original project aimed at 66,000 passengers per day, 8,000 people at the peak time; however, this was already close to the demand in 2013 and the city grew even more since then.” In the mid-2010s, David and his colleagues agreed to reduce the number of intersections that restricted the tram’s speed. The walls ensured that pedestrians would not cross the tracks and cars would not compete for space.

Despite Metrofor’s role in coming up with the project and making the initial changes to adjust it to the World Cup, this agency did not implement the policy. The governor decided to shift its ownership to the state’s department of infrastructure. Edilson Aragão, Metrofor’s director of development and technology, was unhappy with this change. According to him,

“The decision to make SEINFRA the implementer is very uncommon. Maybe it was about jealousy, enviousness... Or power. Metrofor is very popular because of the size of our projects. The metro cost over US\$ 430 million<sup>2</sup> Everyone wants this kind of project. But it is nonsense. SEINFRA didn’t have enough capacity to build it; we did.”

A professor of architecture, Edilson was no lightweight in politics. He is a close ally of the Ferreira Gomes clan. This family dominates the politics of Ceará since 1991, when Ciro Gomes was elected governor. Edilson was the vice-mayor of Sobral in 1997-2004 during the administration of Cid Gomes (Ciro’s brother). In the 2006, Governor Lúcio Alcântara (formerly, Ciro’s vice-governor) appointed Edilson as Metrofor’s director. He remained in that position during the governments of Lúcio’s successors, Governor Cid Gomes (2007-2014) and Governor Camilo Santana (2015-2022), who had been Cid’s vice-governor. These strong political ties were not enough to win the political battle against SEINFRA’s high-administration.

Rafael, who has no political background, is another director at Metrofor. His experience comes from the private sector and academia, including a master’s degree in civil engineering from the Universidade de São Paulo. He believed that politics played a key role in the decision, but that the modification was also based on technicalities. Rafael said that:

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<sup>2</sup>R\$ 1 billion at the exchange rate of January 1, 2009, that is, R\$ 2.33 to each dollar.

“SEINFRA is supposed to be a department of management, not execution. We, at Metrofor, are qualified to execute. Our structure is better. But the orders come from SEINFRA’s secretary. They will build the new metro line too. It is all about power but maybe it is also about the red tape. Some types of federal funding are restricted to secretaries. Others require financial self-sufficiency. Metrofor is an independent company (*autarquia*) that depends on subsidies from the state government. It was harder for us to get money. Since SEINFRA was the department being funded, they ended up building the VLT instead of contracting us.”

Mario, a leading attorney at the Public Defender’s Office (in Portuguese, Defensoria Pública Estadual, or DPE), disagrees with Edilson and Rafael. In Brazil, the DPE is responsible for representing group that cannot afford a lawyer. While its attorneys are career bureaucrats, they are completely independent of the governor’s office and often sue the state government. Mario believed that:

“In the beginning, we didn’t know which department was responsible for the project; or even if it was something from the state or the city. Metrofor used to attend meetings but there was no dialogue, only truculence. This is probably why they were replaced by SEINFRA. When SEINFRA became the implementer, the dialogue was still limited but at least there were some talks, negotiations...”

Metrofor’s directors were highly discontented with SEINFRA. They blamed the department of infrastructure for forcing a modification in the policy’s ownership. This could have been motivated by fame, funding criteria, or the ability to deal with the population. Regardless, the modification of the policy’s ownership was motivated by the institutional and political differences of these two implementers. Furthermore, it was only possible due to the overlapping responsibilities of Metrofor and SEINFRA.

In the interviews, Metrofor’s bureaucrats revealed there were overlapping responsibilities between their organization and SEINFRA. However, they had different missions: Metrofor was the executor and SEINFRA was the manager. They also affirmed that the change cost them power and budgets. Despite the spike in bureaucratic polarization motivated by the modification, they still had to cooperate. Engineers of both agencies participated in the committees responsible for core decisions in the implementation process. Furthermore, Metrofor was responsible for administering all public transportation in Fortaleza’s metro area, including the VLT after the construction.

This outward change forced SEINFRA to adapt its organizational structure.<sup>3</sup> First, the agency had to mitigate Metrofor’s bureaucratic polarization to facilitate cooperation. Thus, SEINFRA’s head captured Metrofor’s employees who had the strongest identity with the VLT. This included David (the project’s father) and Jair (a civil engineer outsourced from a private company).

SEINFRA also needed to build capacity. Since similar projects were previously implemented by Metrofor, they did not have enough personnel who could coordinate the public works. One of them was Roberto, who self-identified as “Roberto do VLT” to show his exclusive connection to the project. He said that “Most of the 25 people working at our team are outsourced. It helps SEINFRA to keep highly qualified technical personnel who are dedicated to their jobs. If they do not work, they lose their contracts. It is my case. I am not tenured. I must work!”

At the end, when Metrofor interacted with SEINFRA, they were interacting with their former colleagues and highly trained engineers who were engaged in moving things forward. Even under the presence of increased social distance, these strategies alleviated bureaucratic polarization thus reducing the modification’s impact.

### 3.2.3 Overlap Among Overseers

For several decades, cargo ships arrived at the Port of Mucuri (Fortaleza, Ceará) and distributed their goods through the extensive railroad connecting Fortaleza to most northeastern big cities. However, along the twentieth century, many northeastern states built their large ports. For instance, while Mucuri receives roughly 5 million tons in cargo per year, Suape (Pernambuco) receives over 23 million tons and Pecém 18 million tons.

This process made the Port of Mucuri less relevant. In consequence, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of trains using the railroad. The underutilized piece of land in the heart of Fortaleza became a decent destination for poor residents looking for affordable housing near their jobs. This explains the proliferation of informal settlements along the tracks since the 1950s. Many interviewees mentioned that when the Spanish firm

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<sup>3</sup>In Chapter 4, I discuss other cases of organizational change in implementation processes that involve bureaucratic polarization. I refer to it as inward change.

produced the baseline infrastructure project for the VLT, it overlooked the presence of 5,000 families that the government would have to expropriate. This is because these settlements were illegal.

Politicians and bureaucrats at the state government failed to anticipate that this would become a problem. On July 14, 2010, Governor Cid Gomes signed an executive order authorizing the expropriation of any informal settlement occupying the state's land surrounding the tracks. This would potentially affect the up to 5,000 families who had illegally used these areas to build houses and small businesses. Such illegal occupation began in the 1950s and expanded as the city grew, especially since poor families needed to reside near their workplaces. When Mario (the public defendant) complained that Metrofor was truculent when dealing with the population, he was referring to the public agency's actions to take over hundreds of houses that had been located along the tracks for over five decades.

The Spanish company and the bureaucrats at Metrofor and SEINFRA were not the only ones to overlook this problem. This issue should have been addressed by the environmental impact assessment (EIA) and its executive summary (in Portuguese, Relatório de Impacto Ambiental, or RIMA). These documents are required for a license that allows the construction of large projects.

In 2010, Metrofor and SEINFRA could choose if they preferred to obtain the environmental license from the environmental agency of the state of Ceará (in Portuguese, Superintendência Estadual de Meio Ambiente do Ceará, or SEMACE) or from the municipal government of Fortaleza (in Portuguese, Secretaria Municipal de Urbanismo e Meio Ambiente, or SEUMA). This is because even though the whole project is based in a single municipality, it is implemented by a state agency. The management of Metrofor and SEINFRA chose the state's SEMACE.

Jaqueline, a director at Fortaleza's institute of urban planning (in Portuguese, Instituto de Planejamento de Fortaleza) complained that

"This decision was illegal; the public prosecutors said that; the VLT is built only in the city, therefore there is no sense in looking for a license at the state level. They decided to do that because of the fights between Cid Gomes and Luizianne Lins (the mayor of Fortaleza). She didn't like the project. She was unhappy with the expropriations. And planning and cooperation were also not good back then."

In addition to the interbranch conflicts, oversight at the municipal level tends to be harsher. Romeu, the executive secretary of the municipality's department of infrastructure (in Portuguese, Secretaria Municipal de Infraestrutura de Fortaleza, or SEINF), argued that "when you apply at the local level, you need to consider the state-level legislation and the additional requirements of the municipality; the latter is often overlooked by the state's agency."

In sum, legal requirements and political disputes made SEINFRA closer to SEMACE than to SEUMA. Aware of the reduced bureaucratic polarization with the state-level agency, the implementers chose this as their preferred oversight organization.

Cesar, the director of licensing at SEMACE, did not like to slow things down. He was working on his Ph.D. in Ecology and Natural Resources at Universidade Federal do Ceará when he decided to try the first public admission process organized by SEMACE. He was approved as a career civil servant and started working at a laboratory, where he was part of the team that analyzed the VLT's project at its earliest stage. He soon got promoted (three times) and reached his current position in roughly eight years at the organization. Cesar commented that "career growth is based on performance; you must want to develop things. I am restless. I like to get things done fast. That is why they promoted me!" Even though Cesar was supposed to be an overseer, he saw himself as an implementer.

The bureaucrats at Fortaleza's SEUMA had a very different perspective. They were angry that the licensing process took place at Ceará's SEMACE. In 2009, they tried to block or at least delay the project by not including the VLT in the city's master plan. The document, which guides public officials in matters of urban planning, suggests using a bus rapid transit in the same area dedicated to the tram. An employee at SEUMA said that "there was no communication between the city and the state back then; things are much different now with Roberto Cláudio (Fortaleza's mayor in 2013-2021)."

In the late 2010s, SEUMA's architects started working on a new master plan, the Fortaleza 2040. Its architects organized several public hearings to hear the inputs from the population. They still had no power to influence SEMACE's licensing process. However, they used the connections between Mayor Roberto Cláudio and Governor Camilo Santana, both political allies, to modify the policy. One of the agency's bureaucrats explained that:

“Since late 2017, we started working more closely with SEINFRA and Metrofor. In the public hearings, many residents complained about the walls surrounding the tracks. They were used to cross from one side to another to visit their families, go to work, or even visit a small grocery store. We helped the population to send a petition to SEINFRA. Then, they talked to us and Metrofor. All of us agreed to add new pathways to cross walls. The process was really fast. SEUMA often takes 20 days to respond but we did it in five.”

This does not mean that SEUMA’s bureaucrats became supportive of the VLT. One of their architects said that “the tram creates a barrier in the middle of the city. It blocks the passage of residents. The cargo tracks already did that, but there were only a few trains. Now, they are building walls and there will be many trains.” Despite these negative attitudes, they acknowledged that there was no way to block the policy. Thus, they should use their improved relations with SEINFRA to improve the policy as much as possible.

These data are very rich in demonstrating how bureaucratic polarization shaped civil servants’ motivations and outward change in the implementation process. SEINFRA was in a strategic position that allowed its managers to choose the oversight organization. They knew that the local-level SEUMA could impose additional difficulties due to an interbranch conflict and the stricter legislation of Fortaleza. The state-level SEMACE fast-tracked the licensing process also because its director saw himself as an implementer. This created a sense of shared identity with SEINFRA’s bureaucrats, who wanted to move the policy forward as quickly as possible. In other words, SEINFRA’s managers used their understanding of the legislation and their perception regarding other agencies’ polarization to decide with whom they would cooperate.

This increased the inter-agency social distance with SEUMA, which attempted to block or at least delay the policy. They did so through the city’s master plan in 2013 and 2017. However, in the second moment, there was greater political proximity between the mayor and the governor. This helped to reduce the polarization between SEUMA and SEINFRA. The local-level overseer still did not like the policy, but it tried to use its approximation to the state-level implementer to modify the policy. When the modification became feasible, they fast-tracked the process.

### 3.2.4 Enforcing Compliance with Fines

Cesar, SEMACE's director of licensing, believed that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was something very difficult to prepare:

"It is multidisciplinary. It requires biologists, archaeologists, and so it goes. It is only required for large projects or the ones that we expect to have a big impact. Otherwise, there are other simplified requirements. Since we have the technical capacity, SEINFRA needed our support to draft the Reference Note (*termo de referência*, which is the document that explains what should be included in the EIA."

SEINFRA hired the private consulting firm Geoplan Projetos e Consultoria, which concluded the EIA in May 2011. This is roughly one year after the Reference Note was produced. Cesar exclaimed that "this delay was not SEMACE's fault! Once the reference note is ready, we do not intervene in the process because we will have to judge it afterward." After the EIA's delivery, SEMACE made the document available at its library for 45 days and, following the law, hosted a public hearing. This was the last stage before the state-level environmental committee (in Portuguese, Conselho Estadual de Meio Ambiente, or COEMA) could vote on the document's approval.

Various public and nongovernmental organizations helped to mobilize the residents who lived in the informal settlements surrounding the tracks. This included the public defendant, who had previously complained against Metrofor. Many of them attended the public hearing and protested that Metrofor, SEINFRA, and the EIA completely ignored them. They also claimed that SEMACE was fast-tracking a policy that should be better discussed due to its impact on 5,000 families.

Cesar (SEMACE) explained that:

"The project was very polemic but not because of its nature, but because it involved humans. It was all about its social aspects! People can't build houses near train tracks, and they do not want to do that. When they do it, it is because they have no alternative. When the government creates a policy, it takes for granted that there is no one there. After all, there can't be anyone. The government is following the law. That's when the problem starts... People have lived there for a long time. They do not want to move."

Another high-rank public employee responsible for the licensing process agreed with this assessment. However, he downplayed the social aspects of the policy. According to him, the

mobilization had to do with electoral interests. He blamed Renato Roseno, a state legislator (*deputado estadual*) who is a member of the far-left Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL). The civil servant said that:

“Citizens do not complain that much, especially at public hearings. The conflict was probably motivated by the governor’s opposition. This guy wants votes in the next elections. He complains, he calls the justice, then he claims to represent and to help the people. It is about getting votes.”

Deputado Roseno was indeed very engaged in the mobilization. Over the years, he organized several public hearings and forced the legislature to debate the project. He also helped the residents to contact the Human Rights Office Frei Tito, a service offered by the state legislative house to offer free legal advice to poor citizens. The lawyers at Frei Tito helped the residents to approach other oversight agencies. This included the State Court of Accounts (in Portuguese, Tribunal de Contas do Estado, or TCE) and the Federal Public Ministry (in Portuguese, Ministério Público Federal, or MPF). The TCE is responsible for overseeing the finances of public projects and the MPF is the independent watchdog agency responsible for prosecuting against cases of wrongdoings in the public and private sectors.

Both the TCE and the MPF started paying more attention to the policy. This is the case of Manoel, a public auditor who is also a counselor at the TCE’s high council. He believed that there were “some natural tensions” between his agency and SEINFRA due to their different natures. This is in line with the proposition that implementers and overseers are naturally polarized.

Manoel also referred to a tension between the TCE and the MPF. This supports the thesis that bureaucratic overlap also motivates bureaucratic polarization. According to him,

“The Public Ministry grew too much after the Federal Constitution’s implementation in 1988; they became a powerful, autonomous organization. We need to do the same. We need to show society what we are here for. Many of our councilors are political appointees. Not many are technicians. It is some kind of mitigated independence.”

The last statements refer to the governor’s political power over the TCE. Manoel appreciated the government’s technical capacity but wanted to show society that the court of accounts was independent and powerful enough to enforce the law. Carlos, a technical



analyst who works with Manoel, said that “We do not want to slow things down; we just want to make sure that the government is doing the right thing. In most cases, it was.”

The exception, Manoel believed, was the environmental licensing process. He recalled that:

“We often required SEINFRA to provide explanations about their policies. They always responded promptly. However, there were some issues with the environmental licensing process. Some answers were not clear, and they were taking long to respond. Then, we threatened to fine SEINFRA and SEMACE. This forced them to act quickly, provide us with additional information, and fix the policy. This kind of punishment helps to make the government work faster.”

The threat forced SEINFRA and SEMACE to modify the project and acknowledge that the VLT was going to impact the communities. This gave the residents, the overseers, and its political supporters enough ammunition to keep pushing the implementers to delay the implementation process and to find solutions for the affected population. That is, the threats, which confronted the policy’s fast-track, forced a delay and modifications.

SEINFRA and SEMACE were forced to comply despite their agreement with the TCE. A high-rank public employee at SEMACE complained that:

“Many overseers have very little technical knowledge. They ask absurd things sometimes. It is the same thing as asking me: ‘When did you become a mom?’ But I can’t be a mom! I am a man. Do you know what I mean? They may have good intentions, but they don’t even know what to request! And they get angry when we try to explain. The whole process was carried out according to the law. At least they made these complaints before the public hearing. This gave us time to prepare ourselves, to modify the project, and get things done on time.”

Based on the inputs collected at the final public hearing, SEMACE’s bureaucrats quickly published a technical evaluation (in Portuguese, *Parecer Técnico*) and submitted it, together with the EIA, to the Conselho Estadual de Meio Ambiente (COEMA) for approval. The evaluation addressed the questions presented during the public hearing. It also required SEINFRA to modify the project before applying for the additional two licenses that are part of the full licensing process, that is, the installation license and the operation license. These modifications followed the expectations of the TCE. COEMA was satisfied with the EIA and the technical evaluation. The project was quickly approved and sent back to SEMACE.

Twelve days later, the environmental agency gave SEINFRA the first license authorizing the beginning of the public works.

Despite the changes, SEMACE and SEINFRA were successful at fast-tracking the policy. Cesar (SEMACE) explained that “the first license is the hardest one; once you get past it, the rest is much easier because you can already start running the project.” However, as I mentioned before, these modifications legitimized the popular mobilization of the affected communities, which was directly or indirectly supported by the oversight agencies.

Again, this case contains several elements of outward change. They start with the formation of several groups. First, there is an unlikely alliance between SEINFRA’s engineers (the implementer) and SEMACE’s directors (the overseer who saw itself as an implementer), as described in the previous section.

While this coalition tried to fast-track the policy, there was another group attempting to slow it down, modify or block it. Deputado Roseno, the public defender, and their allies helped to mobilize the affected communities, which contacted two oversight agencies: the TCE and the MPF. These organizations were not natural allies; in fact, the TCE’s public auditor held some levels of bureaucratic polarization against the Public Ministry, which he envied for being overly powerful. This may have boosted his motivation to threaten the implementers with a fine.

The threat led to a modification in the policy, which now included some concerns with the local population. This was not enough to solve the potential expropriation of 5,000 families. However, as I discuss in the next subsection, it legitimized the popular mobilization and gave it the proper tools to delay and modify the policy.

### **3.2.5 Building a Shared Identity**

Mario, the public defender at DPE, remembered that:

“The Comunidade dos Trilhos (the community surrounding the train tracks) came to me in July or August of 2009. They told me that a private firm marked an ‘X’ in their doors and did not say anything. Afterward, they approached the residents saying that they must leave. The community kicked them out. I went after the state government to find out what was happening. That’s when we knew it was the VLT. We organized public hearings, seminars, meetings... We collected documents, talked to public authorities. It took almost

all my time! But I've never seen so much social conscience in Ceará before. It was a huge mobilization. And the DPE's role is to implement the poor people's will."

Over the years, Mario helped the community to reach different oversight agencies. The TCE, as mentioned in the previous subsection, is one of them. Over the years, he also reached out to the MPF, where they talked to João. This public prosecutor was already planning to intervene in the case. In 2013, the MPF's federal branch decided to create local taskforces responsible for overseeing the 2014 FIFA World Cup's public works—João was appointed the coordinator of Fortaleza's working group.

The public prosecutor saw a strong connection between the case and his background. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on consensus building in social and environmental conflicts. He believed that the MPF "is the guardian of the law; the actor who mediates conflicts and builds consensuses." This relates to how Manoel (TCE) described the Public Ministry, that is, a politically relevant and autonomous organization that often intervenes in social matters.

Despite his oversight responsibilities and the need to preserve the MPF's independence, João had additional reasons to polarize against implementers from the state government. Over the years, he had multiple confrontations against politicians. In one, the former governor Ciro Gomes told him to hang a watermelon around his neck (*colocar uma melancia no pescoço*, a Brazilian expression used to refer to people who like to show off). In response, the public prosecutor posted a photo on his Facebook profile hanging a watermelon. The media widely covered the issue placing the prosecutor and the governor in opposing political sides. Similar episodes helped to create a social distance between many who worked at the Federal Public Ministry and several politicians and bureaucrats from the state government.

The public prosecutor's bureaucratic polarization against the state's implementers and the popular mobilization increased the MPF's distrust regarding SEINFRA and the real motive behind the VLT. João recalled that:

"the government wanted the VLT to allow the tourists that arrived by cruise in the Port of Mucuripe to go to Castelão (the local stadium). It is an absurdity. It is an old project, maybe to increase housing prices in the region. We knew it was not going to be ready before the World Cup. That's what happened. After 2014, they modified the policy to exclude the stations close to the port and the stadium. The VLT passes through commercial zones and large shopping malls. It is about taking people to work and to shopping; it is not about tourism or the World Cup."

The bureaucratic polarization between this overseer and the implementers motivated João to delay, modify, or block the policy. Of course, this was not the sole reason for this motivation. The prosecutor disliked the policy and legitimately thought that it included different types of wrongdoings. However, these factors were boosted by his animosity against the state government.

First, he wanted to remove the VLT from the list of public works that were dedicated to the 2014 FIFA World Cup. This would force SEINFRA to look for alternative sources of funding or to abandon the policy. In both cases, this would delay the implementation process. He explained that: “Besides the extra money for the project, being part of the package for the event also pressed authorities to allow irregularities so that it would be ready in the first semester of 2014.”

This lawsuit failed to remove the policy from the World Cup’s package. However, it contributed to delaying the process, especially because it legitimized the protests of the affected communities. It became politically costly to expropriate the families’ houses and the contractors refused to move forward with the construction until the situation was settled.

João’s second lawsuit followed a similar rationale to Manoel’s (TCE) complaint against the policy a few years earlier. The MPF argued that the environmental impact assessment was incomplete, and the state government should be clearer about the actions to mitigate the VLT’s social impacts. He also requested the government to explain why they chose a light rail transit mode, rather than a bus rapid transit. The latter was proposed in Fortaleza’s master plan, as explained in a previous subsection.

Again, the lawsuit failed. Still, it consumed relevant resources from the implementers. This increased the delay in the implementation process. In one of the interviews, Roberto do VLT (the private sector engineer working at SEINFRA) complained that he spent most of his time working as a lawyer, instead of doing the engineering work. This is because SEINFRA was forced to modify the policy in many ways to reduce the population’s resistance and the conflicts with oversight agencies.

João explained that:

“Frei Tito (the legal aid office) came to me and other actors, like the DPE. We worked together. In reality, the MPF is very distant from the people. The DPE deals with these

issues every day; we don't. I keep thinking whether there was anything else that I could have done but no. There isn't. We have done even more than what our attributions allowed. We forced the government to modify the policy to save a community; we mediated the negotiations between some residents and the state's attorney general. We also forced the government to improve the conditions of the expropriated families, including new housing and a social allowance until these houses were built. If it weren't for our intervention, the government would have expropriated these families' houses and given them almost nothing. We won a lot of prizes due to our efforts. Justice shouldn't be afraid of delaying the implementation of public policies."

Abelardo, the state's attorney general (in Portuguese, Procurador Geral do Estado, or PGE), led the negotiations on behalf of SEINFRA. He coordinated a team of social workers, engineers, and lawyers, including ten women. They were supposed to talk to every resident included in the expropriation program. He said that "In the beginning, the DPE was very active. They asked us about everything: 'Is it really necessary? Is the payment enough? Can we find a different place to allocate them?' The public prosecutors as well. Step by step, we were solving things. We always prioritized the dialogue."

These solutions included convincing the governor to submit two bills to the state's legislature: One to relocate expropriated families to free houses sponsored through a federal program, and another to create the social allowance. According to Abelardo, "most of the people were open to the negotiations. Some of them didn't allow us to visit their houses, but most did. And when they saw the new houses... They loved them! It was not always possible to build new habitations near their place of origins, but, in some cases, we've done that."

At the end of the World Cup, a judge ruled that the VLT was out of the MPF's jurisdiction. This agency was responsible for projects conducted at the federal level. This was the case before because of the national event. Since this was not the case anymore, the MPF had to be replaced by its state's sister organization, the State Public Ministry (in Portuguese, Ministério Público Estadual or MPE). In 2015, the state-level public prosecutor Flavia was invited to represent her oversight agency at a public hearing called by Deputado Roseno and the state legislature's committee of human rights. The event sought to discuss the compensation offered by the government to the expropriated families, a process still ongoing after five years of debates.

Flavia shared João's organizational culture. She believed that the Public Ministry should work as a "*poder moderador*, a transforming agent, not only an accusing agent as it used to." The term *poder moderador* (moderator power) is often used to refer to the power the Brazilian emperor exercised during the country's monarchy in the nineteenth century. Flavia called for a more active role for the MP, one that "reinvents itself, leaves the office, and shows its importance to society." Furthermore, she agreed that the goal behind the VLT was increasing housing prices and gentrifying the city.

During the public hearing, Flavia listed several problems with the expropriation process: the local communities liked living there, they had a nice view, they were used to their neighbors and the neighborhoods, they had bigger houses than the ones offered by the government, and they could also use their own homes to carry out small businesses like snack shops, hairdressers, etc. This was not possible in the new housing complexes. Furthermore, the social allowance was too low and there were hints that organized crime was already taking control over the newly built neighborhoods. According to Flavia, "the community refers to the acronym VLT not as 'veículo leve sobre trilhos' but as 'vai levar tudo'" ('it will take everything').

In 2015, these discussions created a snowball. Residents refused to leave their properties, blocking the work of the private constructors. Since there was no decision regarding the expropriation, the government ceased payments to firms and residents. The pressures imposed by the MPE did not create any legal impediment to implementing the VLT, but they delayed the implementation process even more. This forced the government to modify the policy in many ways, including changes in tracks' path, more flexibility to allow some families to keep their informal settlements, and improved conditions for the expropriated families.

The relationship between SEINFRA's bureaucrats and the MPE's attorneys has always been polarized. The conflicts related to the implementation of the VLT made the animosity unbearable. They couldn't find solutions through cooperation. However, one coincidental fact helped to build a bridge between both organizations.

The state government made a partnership with the state university (Universidade Estadual do Ceará, or UECE) to offer a master's degree in public policy for state-level civil servants. This educational program was free of charge and opened for public employees only.

Flavia, the MPE's public prosecutor, enrolled in the program. She was surprised to find out that David, the engineer at SEINFRA who created the policy, was her classmate.

Flavia and David attended many classes together, engaged in conversations, and started trusting each other. At first, they saw each other as out-groups who held very different preferences. One was an implementer and the other an overseer. In fact, both civil servants wrote a case study of the VLT for their master's theses. Flavia's conclusions were starkly negative about the policy; David's were very supportive. Yet, they created a shared identity (classmates) that made them believe that cooperation was possible.

After that, they would look for each other whenever there was a conflict between SEINFRA and the MPE. In one of the public hearings, she asked a director of SEINFRA to leave his seat at the table so that David could represent them. "I know that we can trust him; he will get things done," she said. The social mobilization and the MPE were still able to modify the policy but these modifications were aligned to SEINFRA's interests and happened at a fast pace. This reduced the popular resistance and allowed the implementers to move forward with the public works.

Again, this subsection provides additional evidence of the bureaucratic polarization between overseers and implementers, and how it caused modifications and delays in the implementation of the VLT. There are two relevant moments in this process. The first regards the conflict between MPF and SEINFRA. The public prosecutor used lawsuits to block the policy. The bureaucratic polarization was so high, that SEINFRA requested the state's general attorney support to mediate the conflicts between the implementation team and the community (supported by the MPF). While the policy was not blocked, this mediation led to delays and several modifications in the policy, including free housing and social allowances.

In the second moment, the MPE replaced the MPF. Its public prosecutor was even more dedicated to mobilizing the affected communities. The intergroup social distance and the conflicts that it generated delayed the implementation process even more. These conflicts were mitigated by coincidence when Flavia (MPE) and David (SEINFRA) became classmates. The shared identity they built in the classroom created a trust relationship, which helped them to coordinate modifications that were adequate for implementers and overseers.

### 3.3 Discussion

This chapter provides qualitative evidence of how bureaucratic polarization influences policy implementation. I presented different agencies that identified as implementers or overseers to show how organizational type creates natural rivalries. The illustrations were also relevant to demonstrate that these two ideal types are not necessarily going to behave as enemies and that overlapping responsibilities may lead to polarization.

There are several examples for these dynamics. I summarize the most relevant interactions and outward outcomes in Figure 3.1. Among implementers (rectangular boxes), the bureaucrats working at Metrofor were unhappy when SEINFRA took over the policy's ownership. Still, they managed to cooperate because they shared a common goal and due to the department of infrastructure's ability to build a trustworthy team of engineers. Among overseers (oval boxes), public employees at SEUMA were irritated that, instead of choosing them to oversee the licensing process, SEINFRA opted for SEMACE. Furthermore, the public auditor at TCE envied the power and autonomy obtained by the MPF. Despite some animosity, their shared goals led them to adopt similar practices that forced SEMACE (sometimes acting as an implementer) and SEINFRA, its ally, to modify the policy.

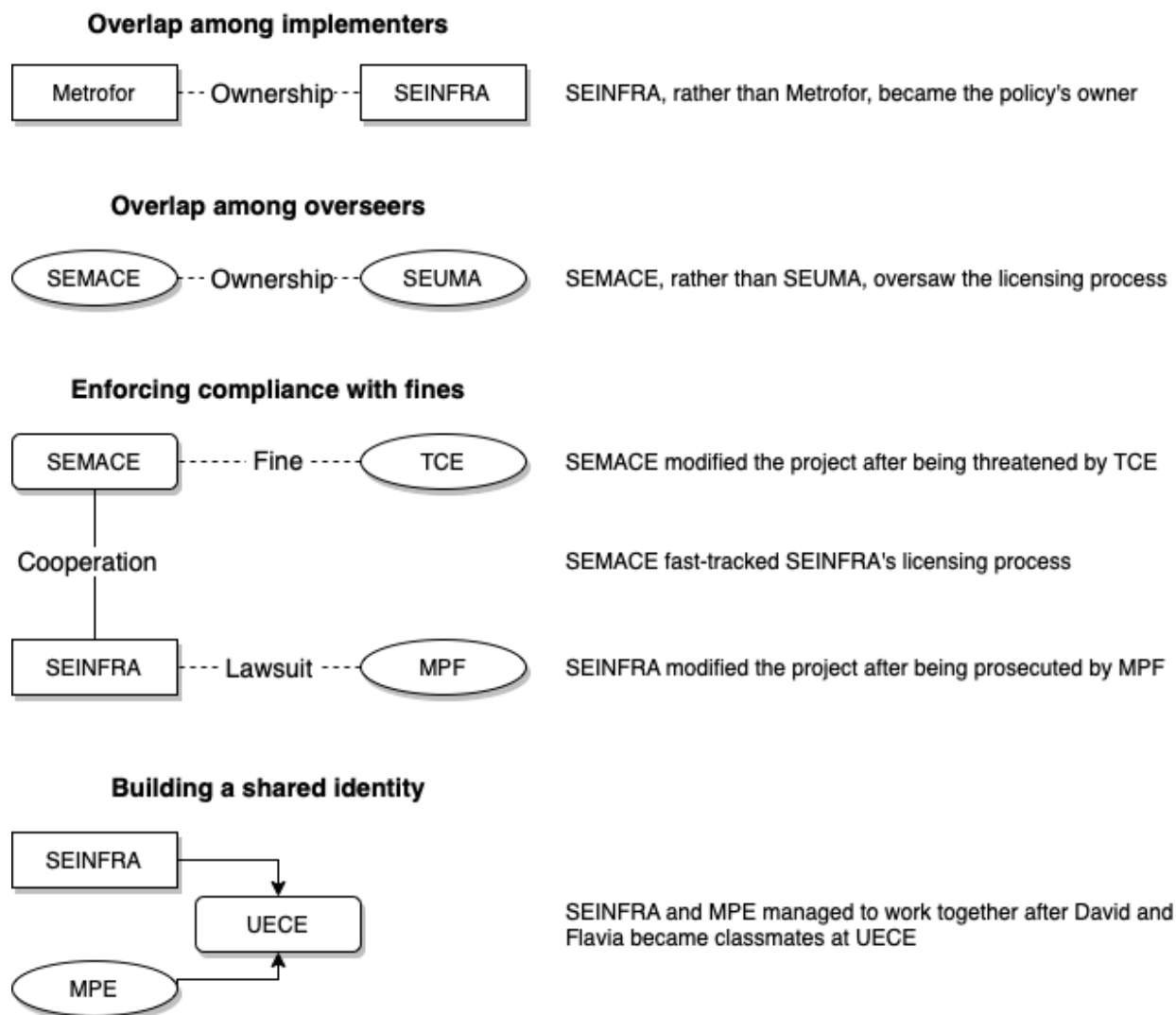
One of the most emblematic cases was the rivalry between SEINFRA's bureaucrats and the MPE's public prosecutor. Neither of them believed that it was possible to cooperate. However, when the leading career bureaucrats of these rival agencies became classmates at UECE, they started trusting each other. This allowed these two actors to overcome their agencies' bureaucratic polarization and find coordinated solutions.

All these interactions resulted in some type of outward change. In cases of low bureaucratic polarization, they worked to fast-track change. This included the environmental licensing process with SEINFRA and SEMACE, and the modifications coordinated by SEINFRA and SEUMA (after both agencies managed to become closer to each other).

When bureaucratic polarization was high, overseers and their allies tried to delay the policy. This happened when the MPF sued the state government, the TCE threatened to fine SEINFRA and SEMACE, and the MPE protested the policy at the public hearings. In many episodes, they aimed at blocking the policy but were satisfied with the delay. One



Figure 3.1: Inter-Agency Relations and Selected Outward Changes in Ceará



**Note:** I use rectangular boxes for implementers and oval boxes for overseers. The exception is one case, when SEMACE acts as both implementer and overseer. Traced lines indicate conflict.

public prosecutor specifically said that the overseers should not be afraid of slowing things down.

Modification, the other type of outward change, happened in cases of low and high bureaucratic polarization. When agencies were able to cooperate, they identified solutions that satisfied all the different interests at play. In cases of high bureaucratic polarization, modification became the tool to reduce resistance and find minimal common ground to move forward. The long list of examples includes the creation of a social allowance and the provision of free housing to the expropriated families.

These dynamics demonstrate how the concept of bureaucratic polarization can be used to understand intergroup relations in implementation processes. It helps to combine rational and normative interests to classify how bureaucrats see each other. Here, talking about identity helps to understand what motivates conflict and what allows cooperation.

### 3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I argue that bureaucratic polarization is an explanatory variable of policy change during implementation processes. I show that this measurement of social distance leads bureaucrats to fast-track, delay, block, and modify policies. The implementation of the VLT Parangaba-Mucuripe (the light rail transit in Fortaleza, Ceará) helps to illustrate this possibility. The case contains implementers and overseers that, depending on the situation, engaged in conflict or cooperation to satisfy their interests.

Based on the case, I show that outward change happens because, due to their professional role and previous interactions, public employees become more (or less) willing to work together and find common solutions. Low bureaucratic polarization allows identifying common solutions more quickly; high bureaucratic polarization motivates resistance, which can delay or block the process. In both cases, bureaucrats may use modification to identify solutions that will mitigate disagreements. Still, it takes them considerably more time (the delay effect) when they see each other as rivals.

## 4.0 Troubled Waters in São Paulo

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that bureaucratic polarization influences how actors interact in the public administration. In cases of high inter-group animosity, individuals become less likely to cooperate, thus affecting how decisions are taken and, ultimately, the outcomes of policy implementation. Exploring the case of Ceará's light rail transit, I establish that these motivations reflect a combination of rational interests and emotional responses. The case study also suggests that formal rules (or institutions) are capable of mitigating (or boosting) the effects of bureaucratic polarization.

However, two gaps remain to be addressed before I present quantitative evidence of bureaucratic polarization in the next chapters. First, the causes of inter-group animosity at the individual and group levels. In this chapter, I determine that the history of interactions between individuals, in-groups, and out-groups matters. In other words, how do interactions lead to different levels of bureaucratic polarization?

I proposed in Chapter 2 that there is a continuous process of socialization that leads bureaucrats to identify with the values of their organization. Contact with co-workers will teach individuals what is appropriate and what is not. One oversimplification, as proposed in Chapter 3, is that some organizations are *implementers* and others are *overseers*. Since bureaucrats are socialized to fulfill one of these missions, they will find it hard to understand or accept the preferences of the out-group. This lack of inter-agreement tends to increase bureaucratic polarization.

In my study of Projeto Tietê, the depollution case, I illustrate another dynamic of socialization and identity formation that led to bureaucratic polarization. In brief, the public utility responsible for implementing the policy was created in the 1970s. This was part of a national policy engaged in creating dominant state-level players by merging and absorbing local public utilities. The pursuit of a dominant culture made it natural for bureaucrats to reject cooperation with municipal actors or, even, other state-level agencies.

The second gap regards the possible responses for those actors who opt for reduced or null cooperation. Here, instead of a dependent variable, bureaucratic polarization becomes

the independent variable. In Chapter 3, bureaucrats decided to *fast-track*, *block*, *modify*, or *delay* the implementation process, thus resulting in a policy (the light rail transit) that considerably differed from the original plan. These three options are outward-looking in that they only affect the object of coordination (i.e., the policy). Still, the organizations involved in this policy barely changed despite their conflicts and, many times, inability to get things done.

In this chapter, I propose two inward-looking strategies (and outcomes of bureaucratic polarization): *adaptation* and *absorption*. Based on the case of Projeto Tietê, I will demonstrate the social distance of those individuals involved in the cooperation process will influence the functioning or composition of their organization.

*Adaptation* occurs when actors engage in behaviors dedicated to adapting their in-group to cooperate (or engage in conflict) with the out-group. A process of absorption takes place when actors use their political or economic power to absorb the out-group, thus (at least in theory) reducing dissent and facilitating the implementation process. The natural alternative, which I do not expand on in this chapter, is stability, in that organizations do not change (or not much, at least) during the coordination process.

The river clean-up policy, which I present in this chapter, is rich in examples of adaptation and absorption. To exemplify, consider the interaction between the public utility and an international financial institution. The policy demanded massive financial resources, which the firm did not have. In pursuit of loans, SABESP's management developed a long-lasting relationship with an international lender. At first, their interactions were sub-optimal, especially due to the public utility's lack of professionalism and the international lender's distrust. Over the years, the state-level organization developed a team of specialists on project finance and proposed several meetings to become closer to the international player. This adaptation strategy selected to reduce the out-group's animosity resulted in large loans and improved conditions.

The same public utility, however, opted for a very different strategy when dealing with municipal governments: *Absorption*. Despite the public utility's creation as a state-level dominant player, not all local utilities were automatically integrated. Starting in the 1970s, there were clashes between state and local actors—some of them directly related to the

depollution policy, which I analyze in this chapter. After several failed attempts to find coordinated solutions (i.e., adaptation), the state-level public utility engaged in an aggressive strategy that resulted in the forced acquisition (or absorption) of local players.

Before turning to empirics, I clarify that this chapter does not intend to propose or test any hypotheses. My goal, as was the case in Chapter 3, is to establish the connection between socialization, bureaucratic polarization, and organizational change. Furthermore, I use this chapter to lay out the conceptual framework behind these terms, especially because they will be relevant for the remaining parts of this manuscript. Therefore, even though I do demonstrate the presence of adaptation and absorption in a case study, this is done through a purely descriptive fashion.

To discuss some potential roots of bureaucratic polarization and the inward-looking strategies of adaptation and absorption, I rely on the study of a massive policy implemented in the state of São Paulo. This differs from the case selected for the previous chapter in many aspects. First, the locus. Both policies were implemented in Brazil, but these two states are substantively different from each other. São Paulo is the country's economic powerhouse, home of a significantly developed state bureaucracy, and professionalized politics. Ceará, located in one of Brazil's poorest regions and has its politics considerably more marked by the leadership of a *cacique* (the Brazilian term for *caudillo*). Furthermore, while São Paulo's state politics is mostly dominated by a single (center-right) party, Ceará was governed by a center-left coalition during the whole implementation of the light rail transit. In both states, bureaucratic polarization is part of the implementation process.

Besides the locus, the object is also considerably different. In Ceará, I investigated the implementation of a relatively simple and inexpensive policy, which involved the use of technologies and practices that were already familiar to the state bureaucracy. In São Paulo, the selected case is the Projeto Tietê, that is, the state's effort to clean up its major river that crosses 37 municipalities, including its capital's metropolitan region. Starting up with a petition with 1.2 million signatures and a formal announcement at a United Nation summit, the policy is sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank and cost over US\$ 3 billion from 1992 to 2020. Therefore, I demonstrate the formation and some consequences of bureaucratic polarization under starkly different conditions. This plurality of cases reinforces

the generalizability of intergroup social distance in public administration.

In the following section of this chapter, I lay out the theoretical foundations of organizational culture, adaptation, and absorption. The first term should be familiar to the reader, given the discussion introduced in the theoretical chapter of this monograph. The two other terms are explored, also because they will contribute to the later chapters on exit, voice, and loyalty. Next, I present the case of Projeto Tietê. After presenting the process of data collection, I discuss four different interactions that illustrate my propositions for adaptation and absorption. Finally, I conclude this chapter by offering an overall discussion to link these two concepts to the previous cases and the next parts of this book, and summarize the chapter.

## 4.1 Organizational Culture and Inward Change

### 4.1.1 Interactions and Culture

I detailed in Chapter 2 that the formation of a social identity requires not only group membership, but identification and emotional involvement with the group's shared beliefs (also see [Tajfel & Turner 1979](#)). This is helpful to understand how individuals adhere to an organization's logic of appropriateness. I argued that organizational shared beliefs<sup>1</sup> are the outcome of a continuous process of interactions between in-groups and out-groups within a set of external conditions.

This is a continuous process of adaptation. In *Tyranny Comes Home*, [Coyne & Hall \(2018\)](#) trace the history of US agencies and laws dealing with domestic liberty (e.g., surveillance, the militarization of police, drones, torture). They propose that military leaders, who were deployed abroad, brought back to the United States the practices and resources that they implemented in foreign interventions. Following their personal histories (or what they have learned to be the appropriate behavior), they became political entrepreneurs in creating new institutions and lobbying for legislation that would allow the development of organiza-

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<sup>1</sup>I use different terms when referring to organizational shared beliefs, for instance, organizational culture and logic of appropriateness. This is further discussed in Chapter 2.

tions whose culture aligned with their beliefs. In most cases, the authors demonstrate that these efforts were based on interactions with politicians and bureaucrats who previously disagreed with the restriction of domestic liberties. The narrative details, for instance, the National Security Agency's creation, the roots of its organizational culture, and its main rivals within government.

In brief, the formation of an organization's shared beliefs (the independent variable) is a process of adaptation. Bureaucrats (or other policy entrepreneurs) manage to adapt institutions; then, its members become socialized to adhere to new cultures of appropriate behaviors. This often results in the development of natural rivalries, which occur against those individuals and organizations (the out-groups) which rejected the in-group's creation or development, or that held interests and motivations that were incompatible with those of the in-group. These natural rivalries are what I call bureaucratic polarization (the dependent variable).

#### **4.1.2 Adaptation and Absorption**

Now, consider bureaucratic polarization as an independent variable. In Chapter 3, I discussed its influence on the implementation of light rail transit in Northeast Brazil. In this process, the different degrees of inter-group social distance influenced the state-level infrastructure department's ability to transform the governor's statement of intent into a tangible public good. After a substantial delay, the policy was implemented. However, the original plan and the outcome were considerably different from each other. The infrastructure department had to change the number of stations, their location, the path for the tracks, the way to deal with informal settlements, the modality of the procurement process, and the expected timeline. All modifications occurred in the object (the policy), not in the implementing organizations.

In this case, the dependent variable was the policy outcome. This included the possibilities of fast-tracking, stability, delay, modification, and abandonment. To a certain extent, this is an *outward-looking* approach to assess the consequences of bureaucratic polarization. However, inter-group interactions may also cause inward-looking changes. Here, rather than

relying on policy outcomes as the object of interest, I focus on organizational functioning. I propose that the influence of bureaucratic polarization over the policy process may also cause organizations to adapt or absorb each other. These possible outcomes represent the dependent variable of interest in this chapter.

The first, and most common type, is adaptation. Some bureaucrats highly identify with their organizations and feel contempt against the organization they are required to cooperate with (a case of high bureaucratic polarization). As a result, these bureaucrats may work to adapt their units from within, so that they are better equipped to implement policies while being protected against the organization they were polarized against (for an example in economics, see [Barr & Saraceno 2009](#)).

Rather than reinforcing rivalries, adaptation may also occur to facilitate coordination. This is the case of groups that hold low levels of bureaucratic polarization but operate based on different formal or informal norms. The proximity between in and out-groups, and the desirability of cooperation motivate them to adapt their organizations to become compatible with each other (for a comparable illustration, see [Swift & Hwang 2013](#)).

The same route may also be followed by organizations that hold high levels of bureaucratic polarization but foresee future contexts in which animosity should be reduced, for instance, to assure survival. In this case, I expect that bureaucratic polarization will decrease during the adaptation process.

Now, consider the second case: absorption. In many of these cases, different groups are forced to co-exist and cooperate. However, there may be situations when actors decide that, instead of co-existing, it is adequate to become a single group. The goal of absorption is to solve a coordination problem and takes place when one of the groups is strong enough to absorb the others (most often, because of high levels of bureaucratic polarization) or both groups agree that they will best achieve their goals by becoming a single organization (low levels of bureaucratic polarization).

Before moving to the empirics, I must clarify two possible tensions. First, adaptation does not require absorption, but the latter may require a certain degree of change. This occurs especially at the absorbed organization, which must comply with certain rules imposed by the acquiring agency (sometimes involving its dismantling). This fact does not undermine



the relevance of absorption as an ideal type.

Second, some cases of inward-looking change (organizational change) will have elements of outward-looking change (policy change) and *vice versa*. An organization may have to change the policy to fit the organization's new structure. In some cases, the policy outcome will be naturally modified in the process of inward change. Similarly, agencies may need to pass through consistent adaptations (or absorption) to implement modified policies. Again, the interaction between both consequences of bureaucratic polarization does not reduce the relevance of investigating inward and outward processes of change separately.

## 4.2 The Case of Projeto Tietê

This chapter relies on public documents, news reports, and face-to-face interviews conducted with high-level politicians, bureaucrats, scholars, and activists (see Table 4.1) to explain some of the barriers faced by the state government of São Paulo in its attempt to clean the Tietê River. I follow the same methodological strategy adopted in Chapter 3, where I investigate the light rail transit. That is, after data collection and the proposition of a theoretical framework, I divide the implementation process into selected cases, which demonstrate the presence of bureaucratic polarization and its consequences. To be clear, this chapter does not offer a detailed account of all the challenges faced by the implementers of the Projeto Tietê. There are relevant barriers left aside, for instance, the delay imposed by the water crisis in 2015. Here, I focus on the selected cases in which bureaucratic polarization influenced decision-making and led to inward-looking changes.

Governor Fleury, who administered São Paulo from 1991 to 1995, announced this policy to world leaders in Rio de Janeiro at the United Nation's Eco-92 Summit after a social mobilization that generated a petition with 1.2 million signatures in favor of the clean-up. By 2020, the Projeto Tietê, as it is called, had cost over US\$ 3.5 billion and involved 37 municipalities, including the city of São Paulo (Brazil's economic powerhouse) and its metropolitan area.

Since 1992, the Projeto Tietê has passed through many transformations and is currently

Table 4.1: List of Interviewees in São Paulo

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Palmiro Carlos Paes*	Catholic Priest	Santa Cristina Parish
Mario	Activist	IDS
Germano	Activist	SOS Mata Atlântica
Marco Antonio Palermo*	Chair	Committee of Water Security
Roberto	Engineer	SABESP and AESABESP
Julia	Manager	SABESP
Carla	Director	SABESP
Hernane	Director	SABESP
Marcelo	Director	SABESP
Monica Porto*	Deputy Secretary	Secretary of Water Resources
Jerson Kelman*	President (2015-18)	SABESP
Dalmo Nogueira Filho*	President (2003-07)	SABESP
Geraldo Alckmin*	Governor (2001-06; 2011-18)	São Paulo
Luiz Fleury Filho*	Governor (1991-95)	São Paulo

**Note:** I use pseudonyms to protect interviewees' anonymity, but use real names for public figures that cannot be de-identified (marked with an \*). Not all of them are mentioned in the chapter. Furthermore, the list does not include interviews conducted at the meetings of São Paulo's municipal water security committee or with residents.

approaching its fourth *etapa* (stage). According to multiple interviewees, each of these *etapas* dealt with a different set of goals, many not anticipated at the beginning of the program. After a pre-implementation phase (1992-1995), the policy had its first stage (1995-1998), in which the main goal was expanding the capacity of SABESP (the state-level public utility) to treat sewage. This regarded the construction and expansion of three large treatment stations (in Portuguese, ETEs). In the second stage (2002-2008), the objective was to improve sewage collection, as most of the stations' capacity was underutilized. In the third stage (2009-2022), SABESP expanded the existing ETEs and sought to reach isolated areas that were not covered by the existing collection network.

Between 1992 and 2020, which is the focus of my study, the implementation process passed through many challenges. For this chapter, I focus on (1) a fight over policy ownership, (2) the struggle to obtain international funds, and (3) the conflict between SABESP and some local governments. These cases are relevant because they regard coordination problems that were motivated by bureaucratic polarization and forced public organizations to engage in either adaptation or absorption to implement Projeto Tietê. I discuss each of these cases after exploring the public utility's history, which is relevant to understanding the formation of its organizational culture and its conflicts against out-groups.

#### **4.2.1 The Birth of Culture and Polarization**

The institutional arrangement of the Brazilian sanitation sector was set during the military regime. In 1969, following the country's growing urbanization and an international push for centralized solutions ([Rosenstein-Rodan 1961](#)), the federal government announced the National Sanitation Plan (in Portuguese, PLANASA). The plan aimed at setting targets for the collection, distribution, and treatment of water and sewage. This was based on incentives for the creation of state-level public utilities (SLPUs) ([Britto et al. 2012](#)). PLANASA was discontinued in the 1990s, mainly due to federal pressures for the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) reforms ([L. C. Pereira & Sping 1999](#)), including the privatization of SLPUs ([Empinotti et al. 2019](#)). Nonetheless, this model of centralized solutions still dominates water governance in most Brazilian states.

Municipalities were allowed to keep their local public utility or to contract a private company to manage water and sewage services. Since very few cities possess access to water supply, local companies still had to contract an SLPU to operate the system. Further, while SLPUs do not have natural monopolies, they are favored by the economies of scale that predominate in the water sector. In São Paulo, this is the case of the Companhia de Saneamento Básico do Estado de São Paulo (SABESP), which became the central actor in the implementation of Projeto Tietê. The state government created it in 1973 through the merger of six regional utilities. Besides taking over the territories of these firms, SABESP became responsible for water supply in several municipalities that had no access to proper public services.

When SABESP was created, one of PLANASA's goals was to expand sewage collection and treatment—a plan that required large infrastructure projects. The state government and its SLPU launched the Sanitation Plan of São Paulo Metro Area (in Portuguese, SANEGRA) in 1975, a master plan whose goal was to collect, intercept, and treat the sewage of 90% of the state's population by the year 2000 (Victorino 2003). The proposal consisted of building three large sewage treatment stations (in Portuguese, ETE) in the capital's metropolitan region, expanding ETE Barueri, and constructing a collection network that would bring sewage from major cities to these stations.

At the time, SABESP faced resistance from some local actors. The municipality of Diadema, part of the ABC region, sued the state government to block SANEGRA based on the fear that it would lead to a deterioration of their water system and because it was linked to another project focused on reverting the flow of the Pinheiros River, a tributary of the Tietê (Victorino 2003). Diadema lost the lawsuit, but this case reinforces the idea that not all local governments were happy with the imposition of a state-level dominant actor in water governance. This is the birth of the interbranch polarization between SABESP and local public utilities.

As a result of the *big push*, SABESP became a major player in the sanitation business; the largest firm of this kind in Latin America. It controls 363 out of São Paulo's 645 municipalities, thus offering services to over 26 million customers (60% of the state's population). This dominance was reinforced by the NPM reforms implemented by Governor Mario Covas

in the 1990s when SABESP became a mixed-economy enterprise. Today, 49.8% of its shares are traded on the stock markets of São Paulo (B3) and New York (NYSE). This means that even though most of its employees are tenured civil servants and the firm's president is appointed by the governor, the public utility must comply with the rigid governance standards imposed by B3 and NYSE.

Part of the NPM reforms involved granting administrative autonomy to the different businesses within SABESP. This also meant that political appointments were no longer welcome; beginning with Covas, most appointees were career bureaucrats. The firm's current administration is divided among three directorates dedicated to substantive topics (finance, technology, and corporate governance) and two geographic regions (metropolitan and regional systems). Each directorate has its *quasi*-autonomous business units—some of them with almost four million clients. For instance, the Metropolitan Directorate has seven units that are dedicated to the collection, distribution, and treatment of water and sewage. SABESP's goal is to make each unit financially sustainable.

Overall, SABESP was created to be a state-level dominant player in the sanitation business and developed its autonomy-oriented organizational culture, especially in the 1990s, boosted by the incremental independence produced by the NPM reforms. In this process, they learned to see politicians as an out-group. In the interviews, all career bureaucrats agreed that presidents (appointed by the governor) must adhere to the firm's logic of appropriateness, otherwise, they will face resistance. According to Roberto, a former director of SABESP's association of engineers,

“We have a strong legal and political status; there is continuity; our institutions and personnel are always the same; we are a safe company for investors. Our president is appointed by the governor, but he must have experience in the sector; at least half of our directors have had a long career here, some of them have worked at SABESP for over 40 years.”

Hernane is among the highly trained and experienced directors who have worked at SABESP for some decades. He agrees with Roberto's assessment:

“The president's role is to interact with the state secretary and to assure the firm's autonomy; we have been here for a long time; there is no way to change things too quickly. Presidents learn the culture of the company. All of the past presidents did a good job on that.”

One of the firm’s former presidents, Jerson Kelman agrees with this assessment. He was appointed by the governor during a severe water crisis in 2015. However, he did not represent the political out-group. A professor and leading authority in hydraulic engineering, Kelman was responsible for the creation of most institutions related to water governance in the country. Furthermore, as he explained, “In all places I work, I do not bring anyone with me. When the person comes alone, he is less likely to face resistance.”

The separation between politics and administration is not a novelty brought by NPM. One of its seminal proponents is [W. Wilson \(1887\)](#). However, according to ([Peters 2018d](#)), reducing political control over public administration does not mean that these organizations will become apolitical. Autonomy allows bureaucrats to pursue their own (sometimes political) interests without the spotlight brought up by the electoral competition. In the case of SABESP, incremental autonomy led career bureaucrats to develop a high level of bureaucratic polarization against the political world. The list of out-groups included political appointees who were not aligned to the firm’s culture and local governments.

#### **4.2.2 Adaptation & Absorption: Resisting the Taskforce**

Governor Fleury announced the Projeto Tietê in 1992 during severe economic and political crises. President Collor, a center-right outsider elected in 1989, had eight different ministers of economy, implemented three different currencies, and was removed from office in December of 1992 after a corruption scandal. In March of 1990, the monthly inflation rate was 81.3%.

Fleury’s expansionary style, including large investments in social and infrastructure programs, also worsened the state’s finances. Domestic and international banks were unwilling to sponsor additional debt. This inhibited SABESP’s ability to build SANEGRA’s new sewage treatment stations and collection networks.

At the same time, the nongovernmental organization SOS Mata Atlântica led a massive mobilization resulting in a petition with 1.2 million signatures in favor of cleaning the Tietê River. Governor Fleury acknowledged the relevance of this NGO but claimed that “coincidentally, we had already been working on a solution for the river and the metro area’s

sanitation problem.” Regardless of the motivation, the governor organized a meeting with representatives from multiple organizations responsible for water governance in the state. The main proposal was turning SANEGRA into the Projeto de Despoluição do Tietê, a specific policy dedicated to the river’s clean-up.

The civil engineer Marco Antônio Palermo participated in this meeting. He was a public employee since 1982 and had worked in multiple agencies and policies related to depollution, including the recovery of Serra do Mar in Cubatão (1987-1991). He recalled that:

“I was already used to talking to governors... I used to take rides with Governor Franco Montoro (1983-1987) during his visits to Cubatão. And since I was already famous for conducting large, innovative projects, I was invited to participate in a big meeting organized by Governor Fleury when he started considering what to do with the Tietê. Everyone from my agency was timid, quiet. I spoke out and they invited me to become the project’s coordinator.”

Fleury did not know Palermo before that meeting. However, Montoro was Fleury’s main political sponsor in the 1988 gubernatorial race. This does not mean that the selection was entirely political. Palermo holds a Ph.D. in hydraulic engineering and worked at an agency that is responsible for diffuse pollution. This was in line with the new policy’s interdisciplinary and multi-agency nature. The governor explained that:

“We had three major problems to solve. First, reducing the discharge of solid waste in the river; second, the chemical contamination produced by industries; third, dealing with SABESP. Its directors were unhappy that we developed the policy outside of the public utility. They didn’t have enough financial capacity; and even if we had wanted them to take the project over, they wouldn’t be able to get things done by themselves given the multi-agency quality. That’s why we created a separated taskforce.”

One of the public utility’s directors agrees with this assessment. All the tasks related to SANEGRA were under SABESP’s jurisdiction, but that was not the case of the Projeto de Despoluição do Tietê. The director explained that “We don’t work with solid or chemical waste, and we didn’t want to work with that; that’s not what we do.” However, the new taskforce still required the public utility’s direct involvement because of the infrastructure projects inherited from SANEGRA.

At the time, there was a mutual bureaucratic polarization between the public utility and the taskforce. They had different goals (diffuse pollution vs. water and sanitation)

and came from different worlds (politics vs. administration). Palermo remembered that SABESP placed him at a table beside the elevator, “not even in an office.” The public utility’s resistance delayed the task force’s ability to create a team with specialists and to conduct any project that involved new infrastructure. According to the coordinator, he spent six months dealing with political issues before he could recruit a team. The project started moving forward only after Governor Fleury intervened in SABESP’s administration—an attempt of the taskforce to *absorb* the public utility’s command and *adapt* its behavior.

Palermo recollected that:

“We hired two firms to manage the project and rented a building in São Paulo’s downtown. We also brought the elite of different agencies, SABESP included, to work with us. In two years, we regulated the operations of over 1,300 firms that were not complying with the environmental legislation, including water and sewage installations.”

These were the task force’s main activities between 1992 and 1995. Governor Fleury claimed that this was possible due to their cooperation with the national investment bank (in Portuguese, BNDES) which financed private firms interested in reducing chemical waste. However, similar funds were not available for the taskforce. This explains why most activities were considerably cheap compared to the costs involved in, for instance, building a new treatment station.

The lack of domestic funds persisted even after Palermo, on behalf of SABESP, signed a loan agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB ) in 1992. Any loan of this kind requires a substantive counterpart investment from the borrower. The national debt crisis, the state’s deteriorated finances, and the resistance among SABESP’s specialists contributed to scaring away domestic banks.

The last factor is especially relevant. It emphasizes the growing bureaucratic polarization between the governor’s taskforce and SABESP. In addition to that, the conflict signals how inter-agency social distance repressed the implementation process. The public utility’s directorate did not want to share the ownership of a policy that they helped to create almost two decades earlier; at the same time, the taskforce was not able to move forward without SABESP’s cooperation. The governor tried to *absorb* the public utility to force compliance. This worked for simple projects, but the firm’s bureaucracy managed to block projects when



they were not under the president's direct sphere of influence. This included the complex red tape involving finances, engineering projects, procurement procedures, and infrastructure maintenance. In the end, Fleury failed to complete the *absorption* process.

Brazil started solving the economic crisis in 1993, when Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the minister of economy, implemented a series of monetary and fiscal reforms. The governor said that, consequently, "the federal government managed to negotiate some special debt conditions with the Paris Club." This was at the end of Fleury's administration. In the following year, Cardoso was elected president. On behalf of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB), he promised austerity, privatizations, and acronNPM reforms. Mario Covas, his co-partisan, won the gubernatorial race in São Paulo.

The new governor delegated Dalmo Nogueira Filho, a senior appointee, to lead the State Privatization Program. This included the transformation of SABESP into a mixed-economy enterprise. As I discussed in the previous section of this chapter, this change made the firm's bureaucracy more autonomous and shielded its directorates from political interventions—like the one from Fleury.

Covas also allowed SABESP to *absorb* the taskforce. This change gave the public utility's directors enough power to abandon the responsibilities related to solid and chemical waste, and focus on the large public works inherited from SANEGRA. In the end, the directors also decided to eliminate their former out-group: the taskforce's political appointees who confronted them during the Fleury administration were fired. Marco Antonio Palermo, who also left the public sector, laughed: "SABESP's directors still hold a grudge against me."

According to Julia (Projeto Tietê's coordinator since the mid-2000s), "SABESP created an *unidade executora* (implementation unit) with internal staff and outsourced personnel." This autonomous unit was never dismantled and grew over the years, from a small team of administrative personnel to a large technocratic body of engineers, administrators, and specialists in project finance. This was the group that absorbed the taskforce in 1995 and concluded Etapa 1 in 1998.

In three years, the team identified domestic sources of finance to complement the IDB's loan, expanded the ETE Barueri, and built three sewage treatment stations (ETEs ABC, São Miguel, and Parque Novo Mundo). Adding up to the ETEs Suzano and Jesus Netto

(a smaller station), Etapa 1 left São Paulo’s metro area with six sewage treatment stations. The following stages of Projeto Tietê concentrated on expanding the collection network and the stations’ capacity but also included the construction of the ETE Laranjeiras in 2020. I present the year and stage when SABESP opened each station in Table 4.2.

The early stage of Projeto Tietê’s implementation contains episodes of absorption and adaptation in response to bureaucratic polarization. On the one hand, Fleury and his taskforce identified with their mission and disliked SABESP’s directors, who refused to support their efforts. On the other, SABESP’s directors, who deeply identified with their organization, believed that they were the natural owners of SANEGRA. Therefore, they saw Fleury and his taskforce as natural enemies who had “stolen” their policy. Their refusal to cooperate meant that neither of them was capable of reaching their goals: the taskforce could not move forward with parts of the Projeto Tietê and SABESP could not expand its sanitation infrastructure.

In the first moment, Palermo convinced Fleury to empower the taskforce to partially absorb SABESP and adapt its practices. While this was enough to allow the taskforce to rent a building and recruit a team, the firm’s directors used their power, red tape, and the economic context to block other initiatives. In the meanwhile, the taskforce had to adapt its practices and expectations to work exclusively with chemical and solid waste. When Covas became governor, he sided with SABESP’s career bureaucrats. In 1995, he adapted the state’s and the firm’s governance; this empowered SABESP’s career civil service to completely absorb the taskforce and to adapt it into a new business unit, or *unidade executora*. After this last absorption and adaptation, the (remodeled) Projeto Tietê moved forward.

### 4.2.3 Adaptation: International Funds

In the previous subsection, I mentioned that the Projeto Tietê has been sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Between 1992 and 2020, this meant over US\$ 1.2 billion in loans to SABESP. The firm benefited from the increased capacity to expand its sanitation infrastructure. In addition, a successful partnership could improve the public utility’s reputation with international lenders, thus helping the other business units

Table 4.2: Sewage Treatment Stations in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo

ETE	Municipality	Creation	Stage
Jesus Netto	São Paulo	1935	Prior to Proj. Tietê
Suzano	Suzano	1982	Prior to Proj. Tietê
Barueri	Barueri	1988	Prior to Proj. Tietê
ABC	São Caetano do Sul	1998	Etapa 1
São Miguel	Guarulhos	1998	Etapa 1
Parque Novo Mundo	São Paulo	1998	Etapa 1
Laranjeiras	Caieiras	2020	Etapa 3

**Note:** Dates and locations based on interviews.

of SABESP. Overall, the firm’s directors have always believed that close ties with the IDB were highly beneficial for the whole organization. I treat it as a case of extremely low (or null) bureaucratic polarization (from the perspective of SABESP’s directors).

However, this was an unrequited love, especially during the 1990s and 2000s. The debt crisis made Brazil and its subnational governments risky partners for international banks. Governor Fleury said that the country was seen as a “*caloteiro*” (deadbeat). To be sure, it is not that the IDB’s directors disliked SABESP, but that they had low trust in the firm’s capacity to honor debts, thus increasing the social distance between the organizations. I treat this as a case of moderate bureaucratic polarization (from the perspective of the IDB’s directors).

This skepticism meant that any loan would require a long negotiation process and would result in worse conditions than those provided for high-trust partners. Consider the data presented in Table 4.3, where I detail the three agreements signed by the IDB and SABESP. The first talks began in mid-1992 and the first public works were done 2.5 years later. As soon as Etapa 1 ended, both institutions began their talks for the second loan. Rather than six months, it took them 2.5 years to sign the agreement. The first procurement processes began four years after the first talks. For Etapa 3, SABESP began the talks before the end

Table 4.3: The Stages of Projeto Tietê and Its Gaps

Stage	Talks	Signature	Works	End	Counterpart	Exp. Cost
1	Mid-1992	Late-1992	Late-1994	1998	49.6%	US\$ 877 M
2	1998	Mid-2000	2002	2008	50.0%	US\$ 400 M
3	2006	Late-2010	2010	2022	25.0%	US\$ 800 M

**Note:** Data extracted from the interviews and the IDB’s portal. ‘Talks’ is when SABESP and the IDB started negotiating; ‘Signature’ is when they signed the loan agreement; ‘Works’ is when SABESP began the constructions; ‘End’ is when the stage was concluded; ‘Counterpart’ is the minimum share of the expected investment that SABESP must cover; and ‘Expected Cost’ includes the loan and the counterpart, as defined in the loan agreements (actual investment is different).

of Etapa 2. While it still took them four years to begin the first public works, the inter-stage gap was reduced to two years. This suggests that the IDB-SABESP relationship deteriorated in Etapa 1 but improved in Etapa 2.

There is another element that reinforces this perception. The first agreement involved a total investment of US\$ 877 million<sup>2</sup> and a loan of US\$ 450 million. In Etapa 2, the counterpart’s share was similar, but the loan decreased to US\$ 200 million. Then, SABESP managed to sign a substantively improved contract in 2010: with a counterpart of 25.0% only (half of the one required in the previous agreements), they obtained a loan of US\$ 600 million.

I argue that the worsened conditions of Etapa 2 and the improved contract for Etapa 3 reflect the different levels of bureaucratic polarization held by the IDB’s directors. The positive shifts in conditions and the reduced polarization of Etapa 3, I propose, result from the ability of Projeto Tietê’s coordination team and SABESP’s president to adapt the public utility to become closer to the international lender. I describe these processes in this section.

In Brazil, public agencies seeking large investments must often talk to an international lender (here, the Inter-American Development Bank, or IDB) and a domestic lender (here, the state-owned federal bank Caixa Econômica Federal, or CEF). Furthermore, all projects that involve contracting international debts must be approved by the federal and state legislatures,

<sup>2</sup>The IDB’s loan plus SABESP’s counterpart investment.

and the minister of economy.

Marcelo, one of SABESP's directors, explained that any negotiation for a loan agreement invariably takes between 18 and 24 months. Nogueira Filho (SABESP's president from 2003 to 2007) adds that this period includes the negotiation of international and domestic finance. The first step is drafting the baseline project, which takes roughly three months. This is followed by additional three months of negotiations with the lender and modifications in the initial project, including estimated costs and the loan's conditions.

Since international lenders often require a counterpart investment before granting loans, SABESP must seek domestic financing. According to Marcelo, "CEF has one window of applications per year and the negotiations may take two years." The process's duration and outcome depend on the governor's political relationships and the firm's financial credibility, but it should take roughly one year. Since the negotiation with CEF is a prerequisite for the talks with the IDB but also depends on the baseline project agreed with the international lender, SABESP must have talks with the IDB before (six months) and after (six months) the roughly 12 months spent with CEF. This explains the expectation of 18 to 24 months.

After the loan agreement is signed, SABESP needs to procure private firms to transform the baseline project into executive plans. These are the detailed projects that will be used by construction companies in their public works. SABESP's directors affirmed that the procurement stage takes three to six months, and the selected firms may take from three to 12 months to deliver the plan. Overall, this is a process of an additional 12 to 24 months. Thus, the total time spent from the initial talks to the first public works ranges from 24 to 48 months.

Marcelo (one of SABESP's directors) learned about this process throughout time, especially because loan agreements became more common at the public utility. Until the 1990s, these were the exception because of the firm's lack of specialization in project finance and the country's debt crisis. In many cases, these negotiations were much more influenced by politics than technical expertise. The first agreement with the IDB in 1992 is an example.

In June 1992, Governor Fleury announced the Projeto Tietê for the world leaders attending the United Nation's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Eco-92). This created positive momentum and strong lobbying for the inflow of international funds in the project. This

provoked an accelerated negotiation with the IDB, which proposed a loan agreement in December. However, the taskforce led by Palermo was supposed to obtain the federal government's approval before the end of the year. Palermo recalled that "Fleury told me to go to Brasília and come back only after the project had been approved by the Comissão de Financiamentos Externos (COFIEX)," the federal committee responsible for foreign loans.

This was right after the impeachment of President Collor and his replacement by Itamar Franco, a co-partisan of Fleury. The governor remembered that "the government vetoed the deal in the last minute; we had to pressure them to accept it." At the last minute, the minister of economy Gustavo Krause, an old friend of the governor, authorized the loan. "I got the signature, flew back to São Paulo on the same day, and gave Fleury the project," Palermo recalled, "That's when I became the owner of the project." This federal permission allowed the taskforce, on behalf of SABESP, to sign its first loan agreement with the IDB on December 17, 1992.

Most interviewees consider six months to be a short period. This is because the taskforce did not have to present the counterpart before signing the agreement. The IDB's directors showed good faith especially because of the political momentum. However, as soon as they figured out the conflicts between the taskforce and SABESP, they blocked the payments. According to Fleury, it was hard to afford the counterpart and the federal government did not facilitate the negotiations with CEF or other public banks. The governor remembered that the IDB's director released the funds only at the end of his government, in late 1994, when the federal government had begun its restructuring reforms and the end of the taskforce was near.

This process deteriorated the relationship between SABESP and the IDB, thus increasing the social distance perceived by the IDB's directors. The public utility was criticized by reputable NGOs, the public works were delayed, and the expenditure was greater than anticipated (US\$ 1.1 billion instead of US\$ 877 million). Germano (SOS Mata Atlântica) recalled that:

"Mário Mantovani (one of SOS Mata Atlântica's leaders) went to the IDB to complain. Only 10% of the project had been done until 1994! After that, the IDB started demanding more from the government; the bank established new deadlines and it really worked out; SABESP built new treatment stations, new interceptors, networks... Things started moving

forward.”

Mantovani helped to increase the IDB’s bureaucratic polarization against SABESP. However, the new leadership of Projeto Tietê knew that the IDB was important for the project and the public utility. This forced them to engage in a process of deep adaptation. The first changes came from the transformational NPM reforms implemented by Mario Covas. This resulted in an immediate professionalization of Projeto Tietê (now, outside the direct sphere of influence of the governor), the abandonment of interdisciplinary elements, and the focus on something that SABESP had significant expertise: sanitation infrastructure.

The *unidade executora* gained independence and budgets to move forward. The latter benefited from the new economic context that began with the reforms implemented by Fernando Henrique Cardoso in the presidency. Economic stability, new channels of domestic finance, and the organizational support of SABESP’s technocrats allowed the Projeto Tietê’s coordination to conclude Etapa 1 in three years (1995-1998).

Some interviewees believed that the IDB’s directors, however, were still not comfortable with SABESP. Even if the project moved forward, three years were not enough time to assure that the new economic and administrative contexts would remain stable in the long run. Thus, their skepticism (which I treat as bureaucratic polarization) created an additional barrier for the negotiation of a new agreement. In fact, their perception of the project had deteriorated since its monumental announcement at Eco-92.

This meant that there was no fast-track for the second loan agreement, which SABESP needed to begin Etapa 2. The organizations started negotiating at the end of Etapa 1 in 1998 and managed to sign a new deal only on July 19, 2000. This is significantly more than the six months spent on the first agreement. Nonetheless, this is in line with the expectations espoused by one of SABESP’s directors and a former president in their interviews.

Besides the lack of a positive reputation with the IDB and the additional requirement of finding a domestic loan before the agreement, SOS Mata Atlântica was responsible for an additional delay in the negotiations. Germano, one of the NGO’s activists, recalled that:

“As SABESP prepared its plans for Etapa 2, we helped the IDB to understand that the problem also involved the population. Then, the bank forced the government to spend part of the budget on environmental education. This led to a modification in the original

project. After negotiations, SOS Mata Atlântica officially joined Projeto Tietê with a team of 5 employees that mobilized 300 groups of citizens to participate.”

Despite the additional requirement, the second loan agreement involved considerably fewer funds. Instead of US\$ 877 million, the expected cost of the second stage was US\$ 400 million. The mandatory counterpart was 50.0%. One competing explanation is that Etapa 2 did not include the construction of new sewage treatment stations. It focused on expanding the existing collection infrastructure, including new interceptors, gravity pipes, manholes, tanks, lift stations, control structures, and force mains. Still, SABESP could have benefited from a larger loan to its wastewater collection system at a quicker pace.

The first public works of Etapa 2 began in 2002 and the stage was concluded in 2008. Despite minor delays, which are common in large infrastructure projects, Projeto Tietê’s team managed to conduct all constructions as planned. Furthermore, it followed the original budget established in the loan agreement, thus showing an increased degree of professionalization.

This was an outcome of the ongoing adaptation process that the team was passing through. One of the changes regarded the increased focus on pleasing the international bank. Julia, a career bureaucrat at SABESP, joined the *unidade executora* in 2004 to manage the contracts with the IDB. She held a bachelor’s in business administration; the public utility, then, supported her to further specialize in project finance. She concluded her post-graduation studies in the field in 2005 and, two years later, was invited to replace an engineer in the coordination of Projeto Tietê. That is, starting in the middle of Etapa 2’s implementation, the policy was being managed by a professionalized team prepared to deal with the IDB.

Furthermore, the public utility’s president and directors learned that international financial institutions were essential to the water and sanitation business. Thus, they concentrated efforts on reducing any skepticism from the IDB, thus approximating both organizations. Nogueira Filho, who presided SABESP from 2003 to 2007, said that:

“SABESP is the IDB’s main client. When their president came to visit us, I took him out of the office and brought him to visit the interceptors that we have in Pinheiros (an upper-middle-class neighborhood in São Paulo). This interceptor is huge. It would be possible to have a metro station inside it. We also took a helicopter to the Córrego do Sapateiro



(a small stream) and Rio Pinheiros. I wanted him to take pictures and show everyone the complexity of the project. The IDB loved to visit the construction site. After the meeting, the president went back to Washington, D.C., to *bater o martelo* (close the deal). He asked me to present the project to the rest of the staff. They were all impressed by how much the pollution stain was reduced.

These strategies were transformational to the IDB-SABESP relationship. It seems that, starting in Etapa 2, the public utility's love was requited. In fact, the IDB passed through its own transformation. It created a division for water governance and started sponsoring water and sanitation projects all over Latin America. The Projeto Tietê became their showcase.

This led to a bilateral motivation to begin the talks for Etapa 3 while Etapa 2 was still being implemented. Julia explained that:

“When the first stage of Projeto Tietê ended in 1998, the second one had not been planned yet; that is why there was a large gap. Now, we do things differently. We started planning the third stage in 2006 while we were still far from concluding the second stage. The whole process took about four years, but since Etapa 2 ended in 2008, the actual gap was of two years only. We also improved this practice for Etapa 4. We should be able to begin the new public works of this new stage before the end of Etapa 3; no gap at all.”

Besides the smaller gap, the loan agreement for Etapa 3 was much more favorable. Instead of 50%, the counterpart's share shrank to 25% only. Furthermore, the parties agreed on a much larger expected investment: US\$ 800 million. This meant that the IDB would provide a loan of US\$ 600, that is, the highest amount since the beginning of the depollution project.

Overall, each negotiation between the SABESP and the IDB took place under different contexts. The first happened during Brazil's debt crisis and right after the political momentum created at policy's announcement at the Eco-92 Summit. They reached the second agreement when the country's economic situation was much better, however, this was after the troubled implementation of Etapa 1. The third negotiation took place under substantially favorable conditions: economic stability, professional implementation, and increased interest in sanitation projects outside of Brazil.

These conditions existed due to the adaptation of Brazil's economic institutions, São Paulo's administrative culture, SABESP's and the Projeto Tietê's managerial practices, and the IDB's interests. The national and state-level adaptation was only indirectly related to the

policy; yet, SABESP's president, its directors, and the manager of Projeto Tietê consciously engaged in the adaptation of their business practices to reduce the IDB's bureaucratic polarization against the firm.

This is a very different strategy if compared to Fleury and Palermo's attempt to absorb SABESP. It also differs from Covas' reforms that empowered SABESP to absorb the IDB. This is a matter of power relations. In the context of policy ownership, both groups foresaw the possibility of absorbing each other. However, this was not a viable strategy when dealing with the IDB. The public utility's directors did not have enough resources in the firm and could not finance the project with domestic loans. Therefore, they were obliged to cooperate with an international financial institution. The IDB, despite its skepticism, was the right partner.

This motivated them to adapt their practices, thus appearing to the IDB as a trustworthy ally. Their adaptation was so successful to reduce the bank's bureaucratic polarization that it considerably improved the loan conditions for Etapa 3. Additionally, SABESP supported the IDB's own transformation. As mentioned, the successful relationship with Projeto Tietê (and the external incentives of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals) motivated them to create a new division dedicated to similar projects on water governance and infrastructure.

#### **4.2.4 Absorption: Interbranch Conflicts**

I mentioned before that, in the late 1970s, the municipality of Diadema sued SABESP to block the implementation of SANEGRA, a state-wide sanitation program. This case represents the many conflicts between the state company and local governments. They mainly occurred in the capital's metro area (e.g., the city of Guarulhos) and a region nicknamed the ABC Paulista. The acronym refers to its main municipalities: Santo Andre, São Bernardo do Campo, São Caetano do Sul, and Diadema. In this section, I demonstrate how the public utility engaged in absorption to mitigate these conflicts and their consequences to Projeto Tietê's implementation.

These conflicts were born in the 1970s when the federal government sponsored the merger

of local utilities into state-level water and wastewater management firms. This allows gains with economies of scale, but many municipalities opted for keeping their local public firm. In other cases, municipalities accepted to cede territorial rights to SABESP in the 1970s but retracted in the 1990s. Governor Fleury remembered that this strategy was adopted by the mayors who opposed his government:

“I had an approval rate of 78% of the population and almost all the mayors supported me. However, there was a *red belt* in the metro area and the ABC; most of the mayors were *petistas* (members of the Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT). We negotiated, and they did the opposite; they broke the contract and created their public utilities.”

These were the same municipalities that resisted the implementation of SANEGRAN in the late 1970s and confronted Governor Covas and his successors in the years after Fleury’s administration. This led to several conflicts and high levels of bureaucratic polarization. In one lawsuit, SABESP asked the judiciary to arrest a mayor.

Local governments adopted this strategy due to political and financial opportunities (on the relevance of political appointments and public expenditure, see [Ames 1987](#); [C. Pereira & Rennó 2001](#); [Panizza et al. 2018](#)). They were able to appoint their political allies for jobs at the local firm, offer subsidized prices to secure votes, and abdicate from paying debts with SABESP to save financial resources (at least in the short term). The latter is possible due to the state-level public utility’s *quasi*-private nature.

According to Porto (deputy secretary of water resources), “since these local utilities did not have access to water sources, they reached an agreement with SABESP; the state-level firm supplies water and treats sewage, and the local-level firms connect all settlements to the state network, collect sewage, and pay for SABESP’s services.” However, municipal governments know that the costs of non-compliance are low. SABESP operates as a private firm, but it still responds to the governor. The firm is aware that the state government will be punished for shutting down the water supply of cities even when they fail to pay water bills. This produces an incentive for non-compliance.

Non-compliance with existing contracts produces long-term debt. When municipalities decided to create their utilities in the 1990s, they had to break the contract that granted SABESP a monopoly over their territory. This led to substantive fines, that were not paid by

current mayors. In the following years, the lack of payments for water supply and sanitation services increased the municipalities' debt with SABESP.

The same conflict inhibited the proper utilization of major sewage treatment stations. These ETEs were built in different regions of São Paulo's metro area to reduce the costs of sewage collection. In the municipalities operated by SABESP, the state-level public utility quickly connected formal settlements to the treatment stations. However, some of the local governments that operated their public utility resisted cooperating.

These mayors opted for not developing their sewage infrastructure and turning a blind eye when residents discharge wastewater and solid waste in rivers. This is a cheaper alternative than investing in infrastructure projects that will only minimally affect electoral chances. Nogueira Filho (SABESP's former president) was a close friend of Santo André's mayor, the *petista* Celso Daniel (1989-1993). The mayor told him that "there was no reason to spend the money from his municipality in a project that would only benefit the city of São Paulo." The state's capital has often been administered by the governor's party, thus producing an additional animosity between these political groups.

This resulted in the underutilization of three treatment stations: ETE ABC (São Caetano do Sul), ETE São Miguel (Guarulhos) and ETE Parque Novo Mundo (located in São Paulo but connected to Guarulhos). According to Nogueira Filho, "ETE ABC was using only 10% of its capacity ten years after the conclusion of Etapa 1."

The activist Mario (Instituto Democracia e Sustentabilidade) blames the political culture and the legal framework for the lack of interest in sanitation. He highlights that even the Estatuto das Cidades, the federal regulation for city management, fails to address these issues:

"There is an old say: there are no votes below the asphalt. That is why 58% of the municipalities in the country have no master plan for sanitation. These plans must define who regulates, who charges, how to design contracts, how social control should function. Municipalities either don't understand or they don't want to. The law talks about sanitation, but it is unclear. It is even worse in metropolitan areas due to conflicts over jurisdictions and ownership."

Governor Alckmin explained that "the best solution was to let SABESP take the local utilities over." Like Governor Covas did to address the conflict between the public utility and

Table 4.4: Selected Acquisitions of Local Public Utilities by SABESP

Municipality	Acquisition	Debt (US\$)	ETE
São Bernardo do Campo	2003	117 million	ABC
Diadema	2014	593 million	ABC
Santo André	2019	876 million	ABC
Guarulhos	2019	1.03 billion	S. Miguel; Pq. Novo Mundo

**Note:** Dates based on the interviews and news articles. Exchanged rates obtained at investing.com.

the task force created to administer Projeto Tietê, the response to interbranch coordination problems was *absorption*. This strategy became dominant during Nogueira Filho's presidency in the early 2000s. However, some of them took almost 20 years to be resolved, thus involving all future administrations of SABESP. I list some examples of this strategy in Table 4.4 and detail them in the following paragraphs.

The first local public utility that SABESP absorbed was that of São Bernardo do Campo in 2003. This was a mix of legal disputes and political negotiations. Since local firms held large debts with SABESP (US\$ 117 million)<sup>3</sup>, the court forced municipalities to either pay outstanding debts or cede ownership to the state government's public utility. The deal also involved the requirement that the acquirer invests US\$ 32 million in infrastructure projects by 2008 (including the expansion of sewage collection).

Diadema, which sued the state government in the late 1970s, created its local public utility in 1995 and refused to cooperate with SABESP. Following an increased debt and talks to SABESP, the mayor allowed the state-level firm to operate locally in 2009. This negotiation broke the local utility's monopoly but did not eliminate its debt, which reached US\$ 593 million<sup>4</sup> in 2014. Following new talks and a lawsuit, SABESP absorbed the local firm in 2018. The deal included voiding the debt and required large investments in sanitation.

In Santo André, the city formerly administered by Celso Daniel (PT), SABESP reached a

<sup>3</sup>R\$ 415 million at the exchange rate of January 1, 2003, that is, R\$ 3.54 to each dollar.

<sup>4</sup>R\$ 1.4 billion at the exchange rate of January 1, 2014, that is, R\$ 2.36 to each dollar.

deal in 2019. The debt (US\$ 876 million)<sup>5</sup> was voided, and the governor assured investment of US\$ 1.75 billion. According to Marcelo (a director at SABESP), after the absorption, “we were able to increase sewage collection from 42% to 75% in the municipality and increase the ETE ABC’s utilized capacity.”

The same is true for Guarulhos, which SABESP was about to take over when the interviews were conducted. In 2018, the local government had a debt of US\$ 1.03 billion<sup>6</sup> and the population faced constant water shortages that lasted over 30 hours. The absorption agreement included voiding the debt and an investment of over US\$ 515 million.

According to Carla, another director at SABESP,

“The ETEs Parque Novo Mundo and São Miguel were built to serve Guarulhos; yet, for political reasons, they never linked their system to the station; the mayors preferred to throw their sewage in natura. They have a private company dealing with sewage, but it has never done anything. We can fix that situation now.”

It is difficult to estimate the impact of these conflicts on the Projeto Tietê’s implementation. When drafting loan agreements with the IDB, the *unidade executora* was mindful of its bureaucratic polarization against some municipal governments and the limitations imposed by territorial jurisdictions. Therefore, the impact on public works was minimal. However, since the sewage treatment stations were underutilized for several years, these conflicts inhibited SABESP’s ability to reduce the pollution stain.

The conflicts began with PLANASA in the 1970s when the federal government sponsored the absorption of local public utilities. A few years later, this interbranch bureaucratic polarization became more heated with SANEGRA. The consecutive elections of opposing political groups for these local governments and the state governments increased the social distance between both branches. In the 1990s, many municipalities attempted to absorb at least part of SABESP’s responsibilities in their territory. It resulted in the absolute inability to cooperate in matters of water supply and wastewater collection.

Municipal governments and SABESP could probably have engaged in adaptation. They could have found common sense by negotiating better agreements. However, adaptation would probably mean political and financial deficits for mayors, and restricted revenues for

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<sup>5</sup>R\$ 3.4 billion at the exchange rate of January 1, 2019, that is, R\$ 3.88 to each dollar.

<sup>6</sup>R\$ 3.4 billion at the exchange rate of January 1, 2018, that is, R\$ 3.31 to each dollar.

SABESP. None of them was willing to compromise.

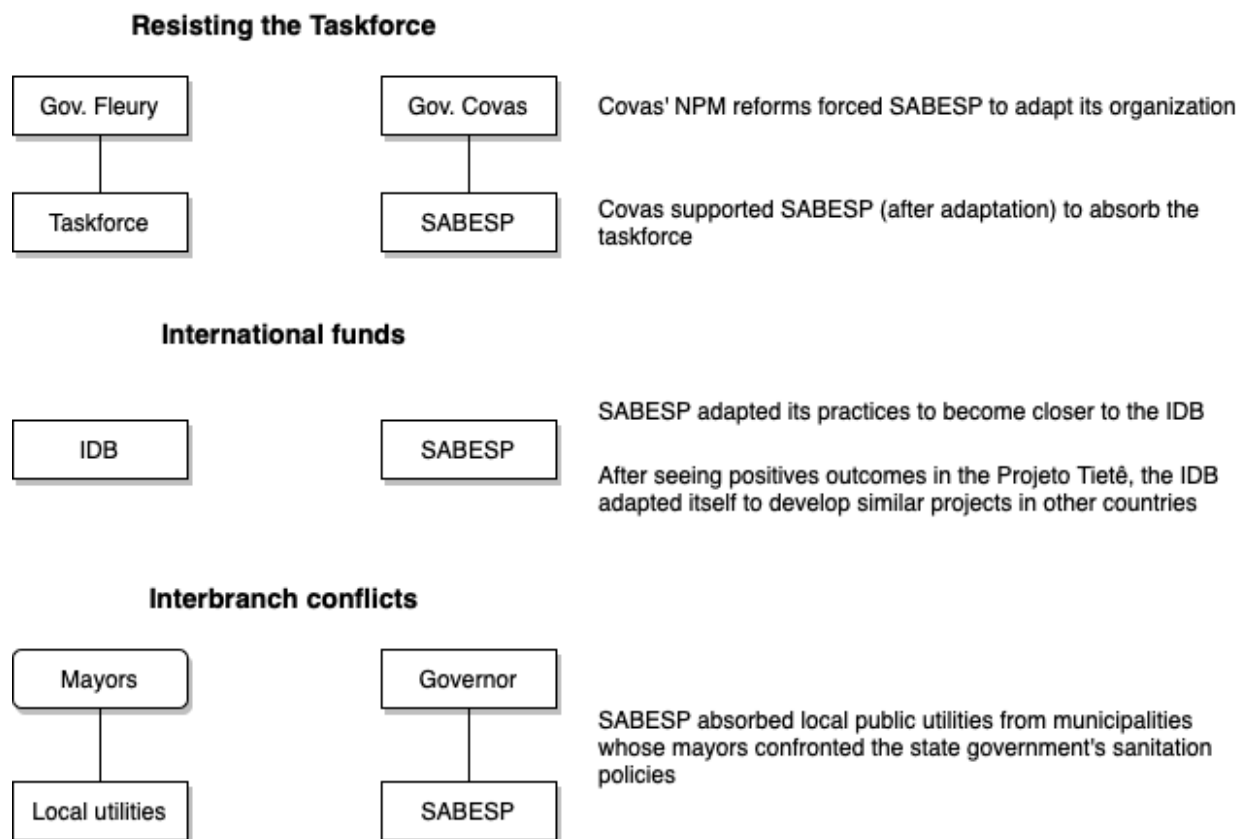
Contextual incentives produced additional reasons to maximize the effects of bureaucratic polarization. Mayors had no interest in paying off debts or making additional expenditures that would not result in votes, even though they could benefit the municipality in the long run. SABESP, which faced losses in the short run, could not shut supply down and saw the growing debts as a long-term opportunity for absorption. That is, starting with Nogueira Filho, the public utility's management knew that this strategy would increase their administrative independence from politics, which was aligned to their organizational culture. After all, the process took over 20 years but satisfied the public utility's quest for autonomy and dominance.

### 4.3 Discussion

Policy implementation often requires inter-group coordination. Politicians need to interact with bureaucrats to create adequate institutional conditions for their daily work; civil servants of different agencies cooperate due to their different jurisdictions and expertise; political appointees work with career bureaucrats to align the interests of the political class with those of the bureaucracy. Each of these groups is guided by a different logic of appropriateness, meaning that their previous experiences and ongoing attachments lead them to see the same situation with different lenses. Thus, it is expectable that disagreements will exist and that they will shape the implementation process.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that these intergroup interactions also lead to organizational change. In face of coordination problems, organizations and their members see the need to find solutions to move forward. This means adapting themselves to deal with an out-group or even absorbing the out-group. Individuals believe that each of these strategies will help them achieve their goals while retaining their organizational culture as much as they can. The implementation of the Projeto Tietê is helpful to illustrate these events. Considering the episodes described in this chapter, I summarize five cases of inward change in Figure [4.1](#).

Figure 4.1: Inter-Agency Relations and Selected Inward Changes in São Paulo





These different cases suggest that power is a relevant variable of this function. SABESP's economic and political power allowed its former president, Nogueira Filho, to start the absorption of local public utilities. When their debts became too high to be paid, mayors were forced to accept the absorption. Yet, SABESP also knew that it could not absorb an international financial organization and that it was important to cooperate with this type of organization to reach greater goals. Thus, the public utility opted for adapting its practices to improve its relationship with the IDB. In fact, this adaptation was so successful that it approximated both organizations and led to an adaptation at the IDB, which created a specific department to develop sanitation projects in other countries.

Power may also create the false impression that absorption is a possible strategy when it is not (at least in the long run). Some municipalities decided to absorb SABESP's responsibilities in the 1990s to increase their political power; Fleury's taskforce attempted to absorb SABESP's management to facilitate the implementation of Projeto Tietê. While these strategies granted independence for some mayors and allowed Palermo to conduct part of the policy, SABESP's directors were able to revert them. Thus, adopting one strategy does not mean that it will be successful or that it will last.

These cases also suggest an additional factor: bureaucratic polarization. SABESP's managers despised the mayors who confronted the state government—a case of polarization between the administration and part of the political world. The negative experiences of SABESP's managers began with the company's foundation in the 1970s. At the time, some local governments refused to participate in PLANASA's integration strategy and SANEGRAN's large-scale solutions. These conflicts lasted over four decades, leading to highly polarized interactions. In one of them, SABESP's lawyers asked the justice to arrest a mayor. Their unwillingness to cooperate made absorption the only solution.

The relationship between the taskforce and SABESP's directorate was equally polarized. SABESP's directors have never forgotten the firm's roots in PLANASA and SANEGRAN. Thus, it was difficult to tolerate that SANEGRAN would be modified to include other agencies; it became worse since an outsider became the program's manager. Thus, they refused to cooperate until Governor Covas allowed them to absorb the disliked out-group.

The IDB, on the other hand, was a case of unrequited love. SABESP's president and

directors knew that the international bank was important for the Projeto Tietê and could help other business units of the company. Since the bank's directors were skeptical of a partnership, SABESP invested in professionalization and lobbying. They adapted the *unidade executora* over the years and managed to reduce the bank's bureaucratic polarization against themselves. As an outcome, the loan agreement's conditions became much more favorable.

Finally, these descriptions have in common the relevance of organizational culture. In the 1970s, the public utility was created to be dominant and autonomous; in the 1990s, it was reformed to become even more independent. Many of its career bureaucrats have worked at the firm for many years, sometimes decades, and learned this culture of autonomy. This was clear in the interviews: Most of them would repeat the same stories, share the same sentiments, and even use the same lingo. All the directors had the same rivalries and, whenever one director presented an out-group as an ally, all others would do the same. This reinforces the relevance of organizational culture to motivate bureaucratic polarization and, ultimately, inform adaptation and absorption strategic decisions.

## 4.4 Summary

Organizational culture helps to explain bureaucratic polarization. This shapes how individuals see their role within organizations and guide their behavior. Furthermore, interactions with other organizations teach individuals whether each out-group should be considered an ally or enemy. These learning processes are directly influenced during the implementation of public policies. Since many of these processes require intergroup coordination, bureaucrats most often must modify their own organization to be able to move forward. This includes the adaptation of their organization and the absorption of the out-group. I refer to these cases as inward-looking change, which contrast to the outward-looking change presented in Chapter 3 (related to modifications in the policy, rather than the organization).

I study the implementation of Projeto Tietê in São Paulo (Brazil) to demonstrate how bureaucrats engage in adaptation and absorption. Based on the analysis of a series of face-to-face interviews and documents, I show that the state-level public utility's organizational

culture is rooted on a dominant and autonomous preferences. This guides bureaucrats' attitudes toward different out-groups, including a taskforce created by São Paulo's governor, the Inter-American Development Bank, and municipal governments. Then, I discuss how organizational culture, bureaucratic polarization, and power influenced SABESP to absorb the taskforce and local public utilities, and to adapt its practices to improve relations with the international bank.

## 5.0 Measuring Bureaucratic Polarization

“In social distance studies the center of attention is on the feeling reactions of persons toward other persons and toward groups of people. In this approach to interpersonal and personal-group relations the main emphasis throughout is on human reactions as guided by the feeling aspects of personality.” (Bogardus 1947, p. 306)

Bogardus (1947) begins his seminal piece on social distance measurement with the quote above. He proposes that, when it comes to intergroup interactions, feelings represent the closest measurement to behavior. Investigating them allows the researcher to assess the true distance in personal-group relations. Karakayali (2009) adds that the main assumption of social distance is that of subjective assessments, that is, those evaluations and rankings developed by each individual (e.g., a fictional John Doe that likes Brits more than he likes Americans). This does not mean that objective categorizations are completely left aside—in fact, as respondents are exposed to several different groups, these are already presented as objective categories (e.g., Americans, Brits). It depends on the respondent’s affect to measure their individual, subjective attitudes toward each objective group.

The measurement, as Bogardus (1947, p. 309) proposes, is an assessment of the ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ of the subject toward different social relations, including “economic relationships of life, political relationships, religious relationships, as well as in the racial and cultural” spheres. This regards a battery of questions, through which the researcher assesses the willingness of the respondent to, among others, be a neighbor, be a close friend, or marry a member of a certain social group. When each of these questions takes only a few seconds to be answered, it is assumed that they will reflect the respondent’s inner feelings. The expectation is that their mean score will predict personal attitudes, that is, the “established tendencies to act toward or against something outside a person’s own psychical nature” (Bogardus 1947, p. 309).

Can we apply the social distance measurement to workgroup relationships in public administration? Does this allow us to measure *inter* and *intra*-agency bureaucratic polarization? And, if it does, will this predict (the lack of) cooperation within the public service? In this chapter, I adapt the measurement proposed by Bogardus (1925, 1947) and more recently

simplified by [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#) to measure the attitudes of roughly 800 American and British civil servants toward different public departments and job types.

I find that social distance is strongly correlated with the expected outcomes of cooperation. This means that the more bureaucrats dislike other agencies in comparison to how they feel about their agency, the higher is the likelihood that they will expect inter-agency cooperation to fail. Still, I demonstrate that the subjective attitudes measured as social distance are moderated by objective, organizational features of public administration. That is, even though bureaucrats tend to dislike oversight agencies more than other organizations, bureaucratic polarization against *overseers* does not annul the fact that *implementers* are legally obliged to work with them.

Furthermore, data collected in the United Kingdom indicates that the bureaucratic polarization of career bureaucrats against political appointees is higher than that of civil servants against different agencies. In fact, the numbers estimated in this chapter suggest that these administrative-political intergroup conflicts are even more divisive than American politics was in the 1970s. To be sure, bureaucratic polarization is not necessarily a partisan phenomenon and, in this chapter, it is not measured based on party politics. However, if compared to the estimations of [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#) for affective (partisan) polarization in the US, it appears that social distance in public administration is indeed a concerning phenomenon.

The remaining parts of this chapter are divided as follows. First, I discuss the adaptation of the measurement originally developed by [Bogardus \(1925, 1947\)](#) to the study of relationships in public administration. This is followed by a theoretical section, where I propose how social distance is correlated with intergroup cooperation when we consider agency type. Next, I rely on surveys fielded with bureaucrats in the United States and the United Kingdom to empirically verify this proposition. I provide further qualitative evidence based on open-ended responses provided by these public employees. I then show that these results are also valid if, instead of agency type, we consider job type. That is, bureaucratic polarization also exists against political appointees, thus validating the well-studied administrative-political clash ([Gailmard & Patty 2007](#); [Peters 2018d](#)). Finally, I conclude this chapter by discussing the implications of these findings. In this section, I compare my estimations to a bench-

mark based on partisan politics to show how substantive this phenomenon is. This helps to emphasize that my proposition is generalizable, meaning that the trends identified in the Brazilian bureaucracy (see Chapters 3 and 4) are also valid for the US and the UK.

## 5.1 Measuring Bureaucratic Polarization

The social distance measurement has been applied to study a plethora of social relations. Still in the early 1960s, Triandis & Triandis (1960) had already mapped multiple examples of its validity. Nowadays, students of social psychology still follow Bogardus (1925, 1947). For instance, they use social distance to understand how ethnocentrism affects resource redistribution (Ford 2016), why groups segregate each other in urban settings (Bhavnani et al. 2014), the effects of altruism toward out-groups among kidney donors (Vekaria et al. 2017), and animosity between supporters of different parties (Iyengar et al. 2012; Ahler & Sood 2018). In most cases, authors rely on a battery of simple questions assessing the willingness of subjects to interact in different ways (e.g., to marry, to be a close friend) with members of different social groups. This often predicts other aspects of intergroup relations.

One of the assumptions developed by the social psychology literature is that individuals tend to group themselves with those who share similar characteristics. This leads them to favor their in-groups (*in-group favoritism*), while they discriminate against out-groups (*out-group discrimination*) (Tajfel & Turner 1979). While the same individual will have different out-groups, social distance helps to understand which are closer or more distant compared to the social identity (i.e., the reference group).

There are many complexities affecting identity formation and intergroup conflict. First, being a member of a group is not enough to classify this relationship as a social identity—individuals must also be aware of their group membership, share the group’s values, and, at times, be emotionally invested in this identity (Tajfel & Turner 1979). For instance, we can only talk about a white identity for those who *are* white and *identify* as such. Second, since individuals are members of multiple groups at the same time (e.g., white, male, Catholic, Republican) (Thoits 1983; Deaux 1993), it is possible that they will identify with each of these

groups to different degrees. Third, predispositions and context should influence how they see different out-groups. For instance, all individuals who identify as Dutch will not necessarily hold the same attitudes toward non-Dutch immigrants. Some will express solidarity while others will discriminate against these foreign-born populations ([Schlueter & Scheepers 2010](#); [Savelkoul et al. 2011](#)).

To put these three points simply, the content of ‘us versus them’ really depends on who ‘us’ and ‘them’ are. This makes social identity and intergroup relations essentially individual-level phenomena. One of the main advantages of the social distance measurement is the ability to assess the specific degree of in-group identification and out-group hostility of each individual. Furthermore, by averaging group attitudes, it becomes possible to measure the overall intergroup social distance of a specific dyad. This is calculated as the absolute difference between the affect toward the in-group and the out-group.

Does it make sense to talk about workgroup identity and social distance within organizations? After all, if the utilitarian thesis is correct, individuals should opt to work in the way that produces the highest gains ([Mill 1967](#)). Following a series of critiques in different fields, [Persky \(1995, p. 221\)](#) affirms that the “*homo economicus* will soon appear on the endangered species list.” [Wilkinson \(1929\)](#) was among the first social psychologists to move toward this skeptical direction. He applied the social distance measurement to occupational groups to show that, somehow in line with the utilitarian hypothesis, university students tended to express smaller social distance toward professions with higher social status. However, there was a substantive difference across students of different majors when it came to specific occupations (e.g., dancer, musician, movie star). This suggests that self-selection and socialization within a career also matter to social relations.

Among economists, [Akerlof & Kranton \(2010, p. 41\)](#) reinforce the relationship between identity and career by suggesting that “Workers should be placed in jobs with which they identify, and firms should foster such attachments. (...) Such organizations work well because an employee who identifies with the firm needs little monetary inducement to perform her job well.” This claim is similar to, yet stronger than, what the students of public and business administration refer to as organizational commitment ([Angle & Perry 1981](#); [Reichers 1985](#)). One of the seminal examples in the literature is that of the forest ranger who, according to

Kaufman (2006), will hardly ever be heard of as deviating from their organization’s mission.

My first proposition is that workgroup identity and social distance are two sides of the same coin in public administration. Even though bureaucrats often hold a broad public service motivation (Perry & Wise 1990), they are also attached to their specific work unit (Kaufman 2006). Clark & Wilson (1961, p. 134) talk about three types of incentives: (1) *material*, or tangible rewards, (2) *purposive*, which regards sharing the goals of the organization, and (3) *solidary*, that is, “rewards as socializing, congeniality, the sense of group membership and identification.” While many may join an organization for material or purposive reasons, they stay mostly due to solidarity.

This is similar to the three sorting mechanisms proposed by Coyne & Hall (2018): *self-selection* into an agency that shares similar goals as those of the individual; *recruitment* mechanisms that filter out those who are not aligned with the organizational culture; and the *exit* by choice or force of those who do not fit the agency. This sorting process most likely supports the development of a workgroup identity, which involves adhering to the logic of which behaviors are more appropriate than others (March & Olsen 2010). With this, come the differing attitudes that these bureaucrats will hold toward other agencies, being influenced, for instance, by their different missions (Allison 1969), competition for resources (Tullock 2005), or the conflicting understandings of how things should be done (Bardach 1998). Thus, we should be able to find social distance within government, as civil servants will identify more closely to their agency and less so toward others.

To be sure, this is an individual-level proposition that may be extrapolated to explain organizational behavior. Individuals identify with a certain agency at different degrees and hold distinct attitudes toward other organizations. While this is possible to aggregate these preferences to speculate about the nature of each organization, it is individual-level attitudes that will determine one’s engagement with in- and out-groups (for agency-level theories, see March & Olsen 2010; Bardach 1998).

One of the ways of demonstrating this is by following the social distance measurement proposed by Bogardus (1925, 1947). This implies asking a battery of questions, for instance, whether civil servants would be willing to marry, be a close friend of, or a neighbor of individuals from different agencies—including the respondent’s workgroup. However, Iyengar



et al. (2012) suggest a simplified approach to measuring social distance. This regard using a feeling thermometer, which asks how much respondents like or dislike members of specific groups. Following, the researcher calculates the absolute difference between respondents' feelings toward their in-group and the out-group. The resulting score is the individual's social distance between these groups. This measurement has been widely applied in political science to measure the social distance between Republicans and Democrats (e.g., Druckman & Levendusky 2019; Marcus et al. 2011; Kingzette 2021).

Here, I apply this simplified measurement to assess social distance in public administration. For each respondent, I calculate the distance between how much they like their own agency in comparison to other agencies. I refer to the resulting workgroup social distance as bureaucratic polarization. Expecting that this theoretical proposition is empirically verifiable, I propose that:

**Hypothesis 1.** *On average, public employees like their own workgroup more than they like other workgroups.*

Again, the proposition here is not that all bureaucrats identify with their agency. I, therefore, begin the hypothesis with 'On average.' Following Tajfel & Turner (1979), social identity requires not only group membership but also group identification. Akerlof & Kranton (2010) clearly differentiate *insiders* and *outsiders*, being that the former are those who identify with their firm and the latter those who do not. This is also similar to the non-solidary incentives proposed by Clark & Wilson (1961). Nonetheless, since work in the public sector often involves the sorting mechanisms proposed by Coyne & Hall (2018), *on average*, the logic of workgroup social identity should hold. Furthermore, rather than following the binary categories proposed by Akerlof & Kranton (2010),<sup>1</sup> I opt for a continuous feeling thermometer that assesses the varying degrees of identification. This is in line with Bogardus (1925) and recent applications in political science (Iyengar et al. 2012).

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<sup>1</sup>In their primary model, Akerlof & Kranton (2010) rely on the binary categorization of insiders and outsiders. However, as they develop their argument, the authors refer to "the degree to which employees identify with their workplace group" (Akerlof & Kranton 2010, p. 52). Thus, my approach is not foreign to the operationalization made in identity economics.

## 5.2 Inter-Agency Bureaucratic Polarization

[Karakayali \(2009, p. 541\)](#) proposes that social distance is not a uniquely subjective attitude, as this regards the assessment of groups that are “already perceive[d] as being distant/distinct from [the subject’s] own group.” This structural element of intergroup conflict reminds us that social identities do not exist in a vacuum. In government, this means that bureaucratic polarization may be motivated by existing rules and social norms that influence how civil servants interact with each other.

Consider the case of bureaucratic redundancy. In public administration, there are multiple examples of organizations that share overlapping responsibilities. [Allison \(1969\)](#) relies on the case of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis to interpret the conflicts between different federal-level US agencies when trying to come up with a solution that would satisfy all of them. In Brazil, there have been different episodes when elected officials purposefully relied on duplication as a manner of ensuring that at least some bureaucrats comply with their expectations ([Costa 2008](#)). Besides political control ([Costa 2008](#); [Hammond 1986](#); [Ting 2003](#)), redundancy is also an instrument to motivate competition within the public sector, thus possibly leading to innovations and improved performance ([Landau 1969](#); [Niskanen 1971](#); [Tullock 2005](#); [Miranda & Lerner 1995](#)).

While differing political loyalties could already lead to social distance, the competitive nature of redundancy provides further incentives to bureaucratic polarization. This is in line with the Realistic Conflict Theory (RCT), which poses that animosity between social groups is enhanced when they are competing for resources ([Sherif & Sherif 1969](#); [Bobo 1988](#)). If the expectations of RCT adequately fit the context of public administration, we should find social distance whenever there is overlap.

However, this should not be the starkest structural factor leading to bureaucratic polarization. In fact, I propose that this will be smaller against overlapping agencies than it is for oversight and unrelated agencies. Since public funds are limited, competition for resources exists between almost every dyad of government agencies ([Niskanen 1971](#); [Tullock 2005](#)). Thus, in some cases, the assignment of a greater budget to a competing organization within the same policy realm could be better than losing resources to a completely unrelated agency.

For some, the growth of a sister agency could mean increased attention to a shared goal, thus mitigating the social distance in comparison to other cases of competition for resources.

Finally, there is a third type of agency that should attract substantive bureaucratic polarization: oversight. Regardless of how legitimate their work is, *overseers* may be seen by bureaucrats as those with the legal conditions to constrain *implementers*' power and budgets. This is the case when oversight forces bureaucrats to go through the red tape that they deem unnecessary or do not understand, thus slowing down the implementation process (Carpenter 2003; West 2004). For instance, Drolc & Keiser (2020) shows that investment in oversight only increases performance among high-capacity agencies. The same logic places oversight as a potential inhibitor of innovation, as implementers may fear breaking laws they are unfamiliar with (Power 1997). Thus, even though oversight is an essential structure of modern bureaucracies, its interference in the implementer's job should lead to bureaucratic polarization.

**Hypothesis 2.** *Public employees have a smaller social distance against overlapping agencies than against oversight or unrelated public organizations.*

To be fair to the proposition made by Mill (1967) over one century ago, the utilitarian view is not that individuals always choose money over other incentives, but rather that they adopt rational decisions that maximize utility (Persky 1995). This leads to methodological individualism and subjectivism, meaning that individuals take into consideration the subjective value they place on incentives to make decisions that are rational according to their reasoning (Hayek 1980; Udehn 2002). To a certain extent, this approximates Mill (1967) and Akerlof & Kranton (2010), since the latter proposes that the worker who identifies with the organization “maximizes her identity utility by exerting high effort” (Akerlof & Kranton 2010, p. 43).

Public Choice theorists apply methodological individualism to the bureaucracy, where *even* public employees follow their own—individual-level—rationality to make decisions (Tullock 2005), thus deviating from Weber's impersonal bureaucrat who acts for the public good. If this is possible to talk about an “identity utility” (Akerlof & Kranton 2010, p. 43) and to assume that rationality is an essentially individual-level calculus, bureaucratic polariza-

tion (i.e., workgroup social distance) could motivate public employees to consciously engage against an agency they dislike. This proposition mirrors what [Bogardus \(1947\)](#) expresses as the link between attitudes and behaviors.

This is not to say that the only barrier to inter-agency cooperation is conscious sabotage. [Bardach \(1998, p. 29\)](#) metaphors that this type of collective action resembles “a polyglot crew of laborers constructing a house out of misshapen, fragile, and costly lumber on a muddy hillside swept by periodic storms.” Self-selection and the socialization processes undergone by civil servants of different agencies make them look at problems in alternative ways, seek conflicting objectives, and, in some instances, be unwilling to work together. Thus, social distance should be negatively correlated with the expectation of successful cooperation in the public service, as corroborated by comparable studies in economics ([Bohnet & Frey 1999](#)) and political science ([Meier & Stewart Jr 1991](#)).

**Hypothesis 3.** *Public employees’ expectation of successful cooperation is negatively correlated with their bureaucratic polarization.*

In the previous paragraphs, I hypothesized that bureaucratic polarization against overlapping agencies should be smaller than against other public organizations ([H<sub>2</sub>](#)), and that bureaucratic polarization should be negatively correlated with the expectation of successful inter-agency cooperation ([H<sub>3</sub>](#)). Thus, the natural outcome would have been that cooperation with oversight and unrelated agencies would be the most likely to fail.

However, there are reasons to believe that the contrary is true at least when it comes to oversight. Again, I return to [Karakayali \(2009\)](#) to propose that structural elements are moderating the world around social distance. In the literature, there are multiple, longstanding examples affirming that oversight agencies can enforce compliance, thus legitimizing their role in government ([Choi 2011](#); [Kempf & Graycar 2018](#); [Gustavson & Sundström 2018](#); [Abraham 1960](#)). This is possible since many overseers hold enough power to collect information, delay implementation processes, and punish wrongdoings, thus providing an incentive for cooperation even when they are perceived as out-groups.

In fact, implementers may dislike overseers exactly because they are forced to comply when cooperation is required. This leads to the expectation of diminishing returns of the

negative correlation between bureaucratic polarization and the expectation of successful cooperation. That is, while this negative correlation should still hold when cooperating with overseers, higher levels of bureaucratic polarization will be less harmful to cooperation when it comes to oversight if compared to other types of agencies.

**Hypothesis 4.** *The negative correlation between bureaucratic polarization and the expectation of successful inter-agency cooperation is smaller when the out-group is an oversight agency.*

I add two caveats to these hypotheses. First, I use the term *cooperation* in the broad sense. It does not imply that agencies or bureaucrats are allies seeking similar goals. In fact, the proposition of bureaucratic polarization implies that, most often, they will pursue different interests. By cooperation, I mean the ability to reach agreements and work together. To illustrate, one possible case of cooperation would be the compliance of an implementer when requested by an overseer to provide certain documents or to modify a policy to comply with the law.

Second, none of the hypotheses linking bureaucratic polarization to the expectation of successful inter-agency cooperation assumes a causal direction. This is reinforced in H<sub>4</sub>. Allison (1969) highlights that cooperation in government is a multi-stage process. Agencies have a history of interactions, which shapes how they see each other. In the same way that bureaucratic polarization may harm cooperation, unsuccessful collective action will also enhance social distance. My proposition in H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub> is that, regardless of the causal direction, one variable will correlate to the other.

## 5.3 Quantitative Evidence

### 5.3.1 Data

I test these propositions based on surveys conducted with a convenience sample of 814 American and British public employees. The 420 respondents from the United States were recruited from Qualtrics' pool of respondents and participated in the survey during October

27-30, 2020. In the United Kingdom, the 394 subjects were identified through Prolific.co and answered the questionnaire during November 22-27, 2020. In both cases, the polling firms selected only those subjects who claimed to work in the public sector. Once they were recruited, I also asked additional questions to confirm that they indeed represent public employees only.

To measure bureaucratic polarization (i.e., workgroup social distance), I adapted the feeling thermometer present in the American National Election Studies (ANES) and widely used in the literature to calculate social distance (e.g., [Iyengar et al. 2012](#)). The main difference is that instead of asking subjects how much they like or dislike groups who identify as Republicans, whites, or other commonly studied social identities, I asked them to express their attitudes toward different public departments—namely, their own department, a department whose responsibilities overlap with theirs, a department that oversees theirs, and a totally unrelated department.

The question is intentionally vague in that it does not specify concrete agencies. This strategy serves to account for the plural pool of respondents used in the data collection. They are from different countries, administrative levels, and policy realms. Thus, abstraction helps to make them as comparable as possible. At a later stage, I describe the strategy adopted to be sure that this plural sample is still speaking about the same type of out-groups. For now, it suffices to argue that most bureaucrats will be familiar with a context in which some agencies have overlapping responsibilities, some are responsible for overseeing them, and others will be completely unrelated to their work. The question was worded as follows:

Please, imagine that you are working for a government that has four organizations (i.e., public departments): yours; a department whose responsibilities overlap with yours; a department that oversees your work; and one totally unrelated to your own department. Whenever possible, please try to think of public departments that you know and share these characteristics.

How positive would you feel towards each of these departments?

Please, answer following a 0-100 scale, where 0 means “Very negative” and 100 means “Very positive.”

For each subject, these responses allow the calculation of the social distance of three dyads, always taking their own agency as the reference group. To measure bureaucratic polarization ( $bp_i$ ), I followed the operationalization described in Equation 2, where  $a_{ii}$  stands

for the affect of individual  $i$  toward his/her own agency  $i$ , and  $a_{ij}$  represents individual  $i$  affect toward another agency  $j$ . Here,  $j$  may represent the oversight agency, the overlapping agency, or the unrelated agency. Since each of these affects ranges from 0 to 100,  $bp_i$  also has the same range.

$$bp_i = |a_{ii} - a_{ij}| \quad (2)$$

Next, I asked them to consider the same out-groups and think of a policy implementation that requires out-group cooperation. The question that follows was intended to capture their expectation of successful cooperation with a different agency. The types of public departments were, again, oversight, overlap, and unrelated.

Now, consider that you are expected to work in a project that involves cooperation with these public departments.

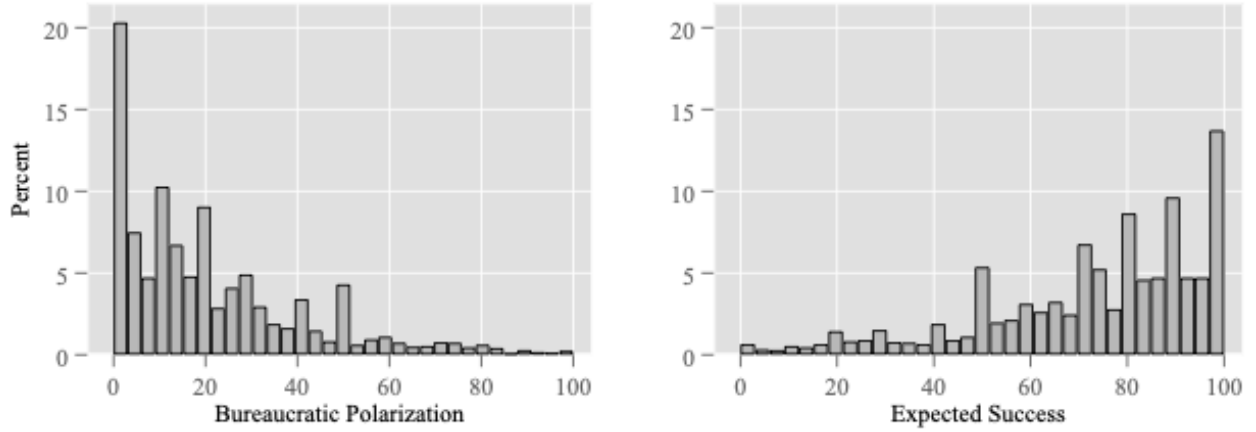
How likely is it that this cooperation would be successful?

Please, answer following a 0-100 scale, where 0 means “It would definitely fail” and 100 means “It would definitely succeed.”

Again, this question leads to three responses per subject. Thus, I paired each of them with the bureaucratic polarization dyad related to each specific agency, generating a total of 2,442 observations (814 subjects  $\times$  3 dyads each). I plotted the histogram of both variables, bureaucratic polarization and expected success, in Figure 5.1 where the distributions disregard the type of out-group agency.

When considering the distribution of these two variables, there are two relevant outcomes to be highlighted. First, the categories with the highest density are those with no bureaucratic polarization at all (12.20% if 0 only, 26.04% if up to 5) and stark expectation of successful cooperation (11.63% if 100). This is in agreement with [Pierre & Peters \(2017\)](#), who affirm that bureaucrats will most often decide to work, even if they disagree with the policy at stake. However, in both cases, there are substantive shares of bureaucrats who hold a social distance against specific agencies and expect to find inter-agency collective action problems. The next steps are to confirm whether, on average, bureaucratic polarization, in fact, exists ( $H_1$ ), whether this is smaller when it comes to overlap ( $H_2$ ), whether it is negatively correlated with the expectation of successful cooperation ( $H_3$ ), and whether there

Figure 5.1: Histogram of Main Variables



is a moderating effect for oversight agencies ( $H_4$ ).

My first model uses bureaucratic polarization as the dependent variable ( $H_1$  and  $H_2$ ). Figure 5.1 shows that this variable is not normally distributed. This is left-skewed, bounded in 0 and 100, and contains only integer values. Thus, it is likely that a generalized linear model will outperform the standard OLS operationalization (Cameron & Trivedi 2013). I, therefore, rely on both OLS and censored tobit strategies.<sup>2</sup> The expectations are that the constant will be positive and statistically significant (i.e., on average, bureaucratic polarization is positive) and that the ‘own agency  $\times$  overlap agency’ dyad will lead to the lowest levels of  $bp_i$ .

In my second model, the dependent variable is expectation of success in inter-agency cooperation ( $H_3$  and  $H_4$ ). Again, this variable is not normally distributed. The only difference, when compared to  $bp_i$ , is that this is right-skewed. Thus, I also opt for the generalized linear approach. Here, besides expecting that the coefficient of  $bp_i$  will be negative and significant (i.e., bureaucratic polarization decreases the expectation of success), I should find that the interaction between oversight and polarization will be positive and significant (i.e., the diminishing effects of oversight on the negative correlation of polarization and expectation of success).

<sup>2</sup>I censor the models in the lower (0) and upper (100) limits of the data.



Table 5.1: Descriptive Statistics of the American and British Surveys

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Polarization	21.249	20.257	0	100
Success	72.701	23.003	0	100
Age	4.344	1.754	1	8
Education	2.969	1.233	1	5
Experience	4.004	2.017	1	8
Discretion	5.688	2.613	0	10
Salary	2.545	0.771	1	3
Appointee	0.050	0.219	0	1
Supervision	0.392	0.489	0	1
Tenure	0.377	0.485	0	1

One relevant note before presenting the results: The surveys included a battery of questions assessing the professional profile of each respondent. This is especially relevant given that my data is not statistically representative of any country or bureaucracy. Thus, by controlling for the different characteristics of the respondents, I reduce the biases caused by the sampling strategy.

Furthermore, the inclusion of control variables tests one of the assumptions of [Akerlof & Kranton \(2010\)](#). According to these authors, *a priori*, there is no reason to believe that demographic factors or even professional characteristics will impact workgroup identity. Identity formation works in different ways for different people. [Lipsky \(2010\)](#) argues that street-level bureaucrats (i.e., line workers) have as many incentives as high-level personnel to identify with the core values of their agencies—one of his examples being teachers, who are in many instances the day-to-day face of the Ministry of Education. Additionally, while experienced personnel could hold a strong identity given their socialization in the workplace, newly hired civil servants could have self-selected into an agency they admire ([Coyne & Hall 2018](#)). Thus, I do not expect to find statistical significance among any control variable; however, as said,

I still add them to control for sampling biases.

These control variables account for age<sup>3</sup>, education<sup>4</sup>, experience<sup>5</sup>, discretion<sup>6</sup>, relative salary<sup>7</sup>, administrative branch<sup>8</sup>, administrative level<sup>9</sup>, and whether respondents are political appointees, supervisors, and tenured. They also help to better understand the convenience sample recruited for this study. As demonstrated in Table 5.1, there is a relatively high share of supervisors (39.2%) and tenured civil servants (39.2%). On average, they have 11-15 years of experience and at least a bachelor's degree. Their degree of discretion is medium (5.688 on a 0-10 scale) and most of them believe they could earn a higher salary in the private sector. When it comes to their organizations, 41.77% work at the local level, 30.84% at the federal or central level, and 25.31% at the state or devolved level (plus, a remainder of 2.09% who answered 'other'). The vast majority works in the executive branch (75.55%), followed by the legislative (13.88%), the judiciary (7.99%), and others (2.58%). While this is a fairly plural sample, this appears to capture a substantive number of mid-level bureaucrats.

### 5.3.2 Results

I present the coefficients of the models predicting bureaucratic polarization in Table 5.2. The two models (OLS and censored tobit) perform similarly well. In both cases, the same coefficients are statistically significant at conventional levels and yield similar correlations to the dependent variable (the differences in the numbers are due to the presentation of the tobit coefficients as log-odds). These are the categorical variables for agency type (created as the reference for each dyad) and the controls for administrative branch (legislative workers being more polarized than those in the executive branch), and country (British bureaucrats

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<sup>3</sup>The age groups were: 18-24; 25-31; 32-38; 39-45; 46-52; 53-59; 60-66; 67 or older.

<sup>4</sup>Subjects could choose between high school or less, vocational education, bachelor's degree, professional post-graduation, and academic post-graduation.

<sup>5</sup>The experience groups were: Less than 1 year; 1-5; 6-10; 11-15; 16-20; 21-25; 26-30; and more than 30 years.

<sup>6</sup>How much autonomy they enjoy in their daily work.

<sup>7</sup>If someone with their experience were to look for a job in the private sector, whether the salary would be lower, the same, or higher.

<sup>8</sup>Executive, Judiciary, Legislative, or other.

<sup>9</sup>In the US, these were federal, state, local, and other. In the UK, they were central, devolved, local, and other. I re-coded them as high, mid, local, and other.

Table 5.2: Predicting Bureaucratic Polarization

	OLS	Tobit
<b>Agency Type (B: Unrelated)</b>		
<i>Oversight</i>	-1.12	-0.96
<i>Overlap</i>	-7.28***	-7.83***
Constant	24.64***	23.26***
Controls	Yes	Yes
Observations	2442	2442
Adjusted $R^2$	0.040	-
Pseudo $R^2$	-	0.006

**Note:** \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

being slightly more polarized than Americans).<sup>10</sup>

Besides supporting my hypotheses, these results also suggest that personal characteristics should not influence identity formation (Akerlof & Kranton 2010). To be sure of that, one would ideally compare bureaucrats clustered by agency. However, the data do not allow this type of test. Here, I demonstrate that the out-group is significantly relevant to determine bureaucratic polarization and this does not appear to be affected by the individual's characteristics.

The main result regards agency type. I plot the predicted probabilities of the OLS model in Figure 5.2 to facilitate the analysis.<sup>11</sup> After controlling for different characteristics, bureaucratic polarization against agencies that have overlapping responsibilities is the lowest one—that is, 16.8 in the 0-100 range. This compares to 22.9 against oversight agencies and 24.0 against those which are completely unrelated to the respondent's agency. These results support  $H_1$ , which proposed that respondents will, on average, like their own agency more than other agencies. Furthermore, this supports the expectation that overlap will lead to less polarization given that they lie in a similar policy realm ( $H_2$ ).

<sup>10</sup>The control variables are omitted from the table.

<sup>11</sup>Since both models yield similar results, I opt for the OLS as the baseline for the sake of simplicity.

Figure 5.2: Predicted Bureaucratic Polarization Toward Different Agencies

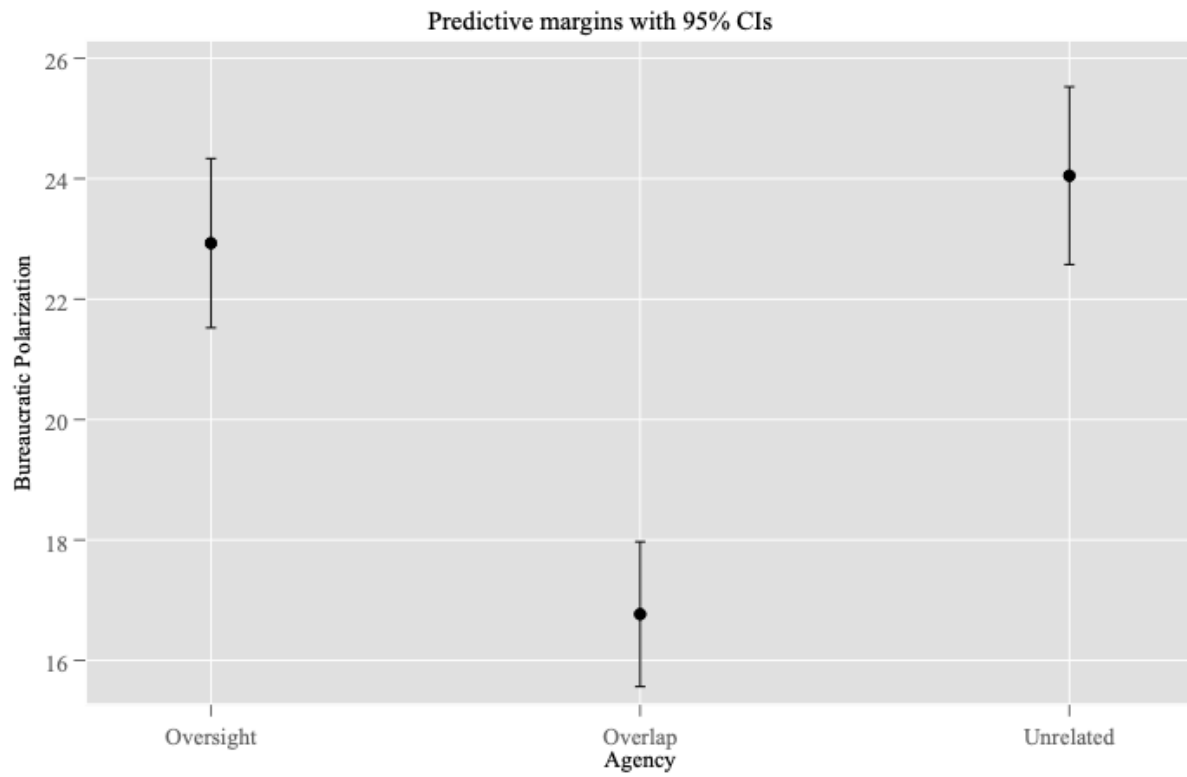


Table 5.3: Predicting Bureaucratic Polarization by Country

	UK	US
<b>Agency Type (B: Unrelated)</b>		
<i>Oversight</i>	-1.891	-0.398
<i>Overlap</i>	-9.381***	-5.312***
Controls	Yes	Yes
Observations	1182	1260
Adjusted $R^2$	0.043	0.030

**Note:** \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

In Table 5.3, I demonstrate that these results remain stable even if we split the sample by country of origin. That is, both in the US and in the UK, the overlapping agency is the target of the lowest level of bureaucratic polarization if compared to the oversight and the unrelated agencies. In these OLS models, the difference in the size of the effect reflects the negative and statistically significant coefficient of the country dummy variable in Table 5.2. If we consider these samples to represent the bureaucracy of each of these countries, this suggests that bureaucratic polarization is slightly higher in the United Kingdom than in the United States.

The second model regards testing the correlation between bureaucratic polarization and the expectation of successful cooperation. The coefficients are presented in Table 5.4. Again, the two models yield similar results. In all cases, they support my theoretical expectations. First, consider the coefficient of bureaucratic polarization. In the OLS regression, each additional level of  $bp_i$  reduces the expectation of successful cooperation in 0.45 units. Considering the range of 0-100 of both variables and in line with  $H_3$ , this has the potential to decrease respondents' expectations by 45 percentage points.

Now, consider the interactive term. Again, I plot the predicted probabilities of the OLS model to facilitate interpretation (Figure 5.3). Among those with the lowest levels of bureaucratic polarization, the expectation of inter-agency cooperation is fairly high and

Table 5.4: Predicting Expectation of Successful Cooperation

	OLS	Tobit
Polarization	-0.446***	-0.475***
<b>Agency Type (B: Unrelated)</b>		
<i>Oversight</i>	5.957***	6.800***
<i>Overlap</i>	8.315***	9.321***
<b>Interaction (B: Unrelated <math>\times</math> Polarization)</b>		
<i>Oversight</i> $\times$ <i>Polarization</i>	0.128*	0.119*
<i>Overlap</i> $\times$ <i>Polarization</i>	0.004	-0.019
Constant	70.363***	72.126***
Controls	Yes	Yes
Observations	2442	2442
Adjusted $R^2$	0.195	-
Pseudo $R^2$	-	0.026

**Note:** \*  $p < 0.05$  and \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

similar regardless of agency—these are 84.7 (overlap), 82.4 (oversight), and 76.4 (unrelated). Still, in accord to  $H_4$ , bureaucratic polarization exercises less effect on the oversight dyad than on the others. The line of oversight crosses that of overlap already at a  $bp_i$  of 20, ending up with the highest expectation of successful cooperation among all three agencies when bureaucratic polarization is at its highest value. In that case, the expectation of success is 50.5 (oversight), 40.5 (overlap), and 31.8 (unrelated). This means a negative rate of change of 63.2% for oversight  $[(82.4 - 50.5)/50.5]$ , 109.1% for overlap  $[(84.7 - 40.5)/40.5]$ , and 140.3% for the unrelated agency  $[(76.4 - 31.8)/31.8]$ .

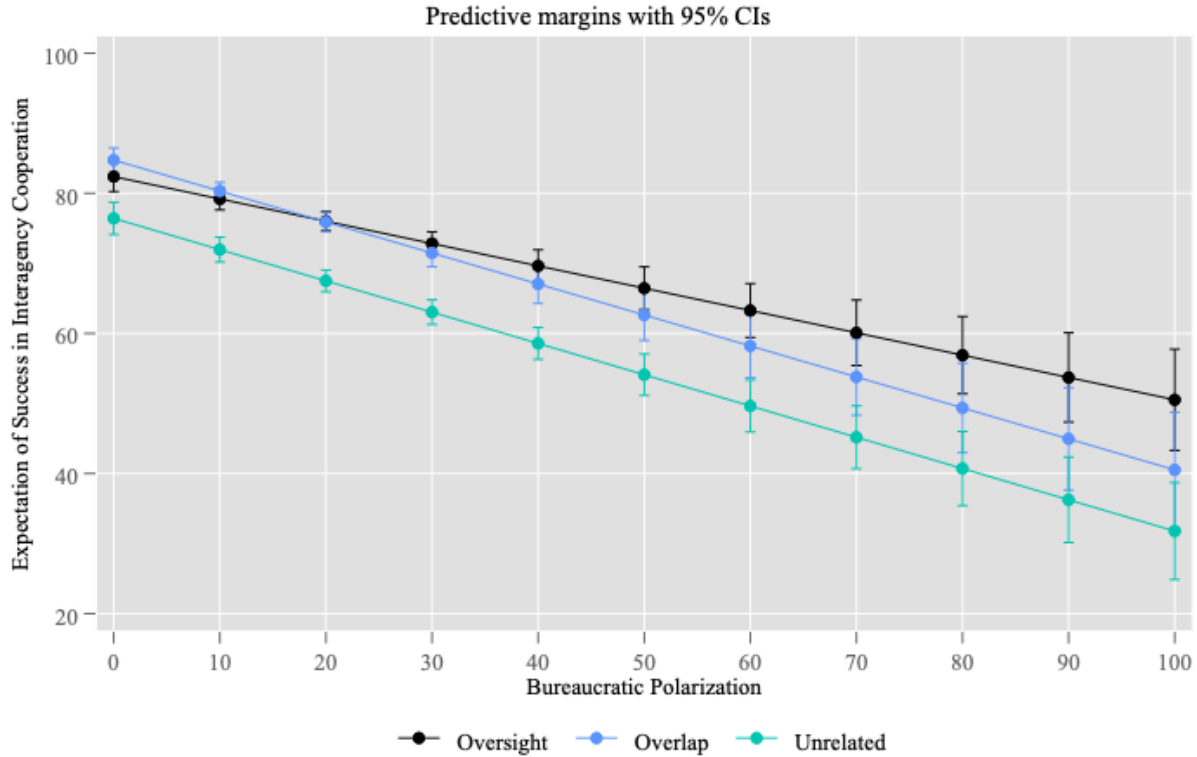
Finally, even though respondents' characteristics did not influence their social distance, some of them were relevant to predict their expectation of success in policies that require inter-agency cooperation. These are not theoretically relevant for this work but should be investigated in the future. In my model, older bureaucrats and those with more autonomy in their daily work tend to be more optimistic about collective action. Still, those who believe they could earn a higher salary in the private sector tend to be slightly more skeptical of successful cooperation.

## 5.4 Qualitative Evidence

These results appear to be in line with the analysis of the Brazilian case presented in the previous chapter. Still, I adopted a complementary strategy to verify their validity in the Anglo-American context. I asked respondents to “think of real examples of public departments whose responsibilities overlap with your own organization, a department that oversees yours, and a totally unrelated department.” Then, they should “write down one adjective that could characterize each of these government organizations.” This led to 814 adjectives for each of these three types of agencies.

This strategy allows a better understanding of the objective-subjective dichotomy that influences social distance (Karakayali 2009). These three types of agencies were objectively created by governments (and here, by the researcher) to allow the delivery of public services. Looking for different incentives (Clark & Wilson 1961), civil servants joined and were social-

Figure 5.3: Expectation of Inter-Agency Cooperation and Bureaucratic Polarization



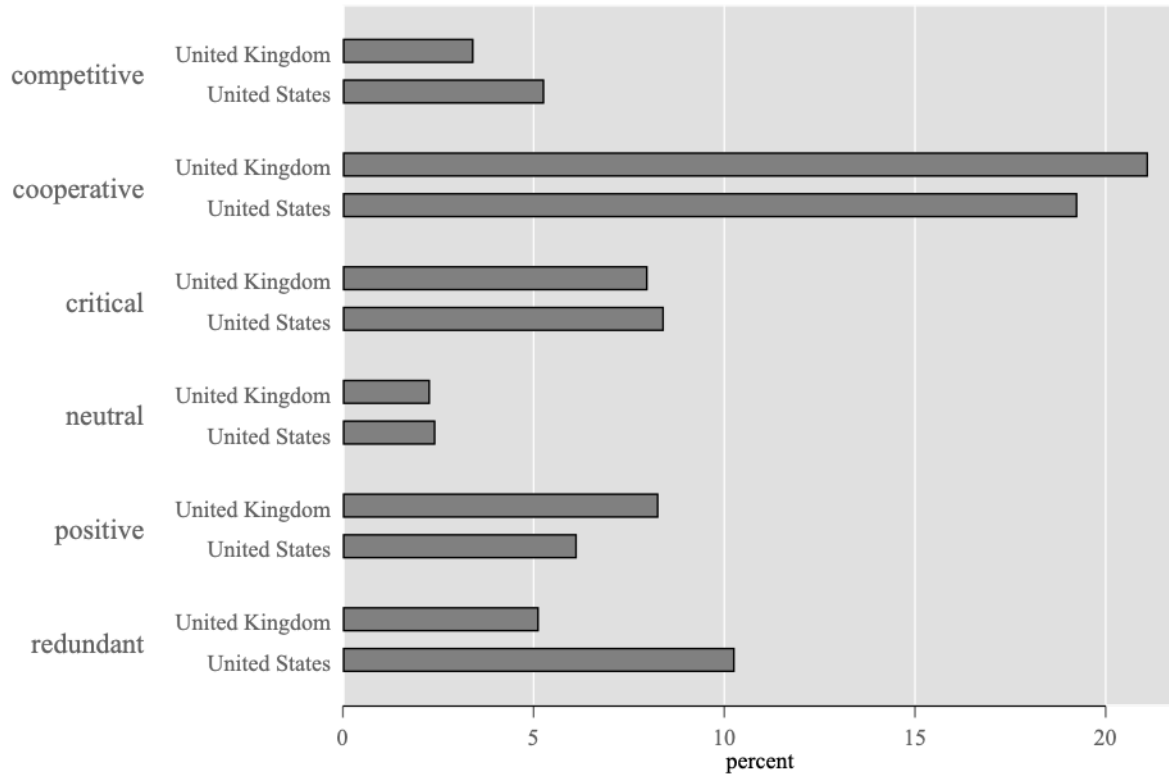
ized into each of these agencies (Coyne & Hall 2018). This led them to develop subjective assessments of the organizations they work with. While the previous sections introduce a quantitative measurement of these preferences, now I further investigate what these numbers mean to the respondents.

Next, I analyze the responses to another open-ended question: “Thinking of your past work experiences, what difficulties have you encountered when attempting to cooperate or coordinate with other government organizations (i.e., public departments)?” These data should help understand which experiences have driven bureaucrats to develop their social distance against certain organizations and how this impacted their optimism toward inter-agency cooperation.

Bardin (2013) recommends categorizing words and expressions to facilitate the descrip-



Figure 5.4: Distribution of Adjectives Related to Overlapping Agencies



tive analysis of text as data. First, this means reading all the responses to identify possible categories. This is followed by the process of categorizing adjectives one by one according to the labels that were previously created. In the sub-sections below, I present the adjectives given to each of the three hypothetical agencies proposed in my survey.

#### 5.4.1 Overlap

After excluding 113 adjectives that were unrelated to the proposed task,<sup>12</sup> the remaining 701 responses were divided across six categories. I present in Figure 5.5 the frequency of adjectives toward overlapping agencies based on country. The first two categories—*competitive*

<sup>12</sup>Some respondents wrote down the agency's name (e.g., Finance, Highways Dept), some said they did not know, and others typed random letters.

Table 5.5: Attitudes Toward Overlap Based on Different Adjective Type

Adjective Type	Polarization		Cooperation	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Critical</i>	24.113	2.099	68.400	2.049
<i>Competitive</i>	21.607	2.573	71.590	2.498
<i>Redundant</i>	19.417	1.923	73.842	2.099
<i>Neutral</i>	17.576	3.348	82.212	3.159
<i>Positive</i>	13.663	1.737	79.663	1.717
<i>Cooperative</i>	13.021	0.711	83.188	0.986

and *cooperative*—are antagonistic. The first includes multiple references to competition and other words in the same lexical family (e.g., “competing,” “competitive”), as well as allusion to conflict, territoriality, and clash. Some respondents opted for strong terms such as “power play,” “empire-builder,” “threat,” and “stepping on toes.” In the opposing pole (*cooperative*), bureaucrats referred to cooperation, collaboration, trust, collegiality, and partnership.

Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the literature that places redundancy as a factor that may trigger competition between different agencies (Landau 1969; Niskanen 1971; Tullock 2005; Miranda & Lerner 1995). This appears to be true for at least 8.69% of the sample (after excluding missing responses). Still, as I propose in Hypothesis 2, overlapping agencies are also capable of cooperating because sometimes they are located in the same policy realm and share similar understandings, bureaucrats end up labeling them as “cooperative,” “helpful,” and “agreeable.” Here, cooperation represents 40.31% of the sample.

These adjectives are directly related to the measurement of bureaucratic polarization and the expectation of successful inter-agency cooperation. As presented in Table 5.5, the average  $bp_i$  among those who labeled overlapping agencies as competitive is 21.6 (0-100 range), and their average expectation of success is only 68.4 (0-100 range). Among those who used adjectives related to cooperation, bureaucratic polarization drops to 13.0, and the expectation of successful cooperation skyrockets to 83.2.

There are four other types of adjectives in the sample. The group labeled as *critical* yielded the highest average polarization (24.1) and the lowest expectation of successful cooperation (68.4). This includes words such as “annoying,” “arrogant,” “cumbersome,” “narrow-minded,” “disorganized,” and even “moochers” and “shambles.” Also negative but less harsh, other bureaucrats labeled the overlapping agency as *redundant*. Besides this word, they used terms like “similar,” “unnecessary,” “duplication,” and “wasteful.” Their average bureaucratic polarization against this agency was about 5 points below those who used a critical adjective but roughly 4 points above those who see overlap as a possibility of cooperation.

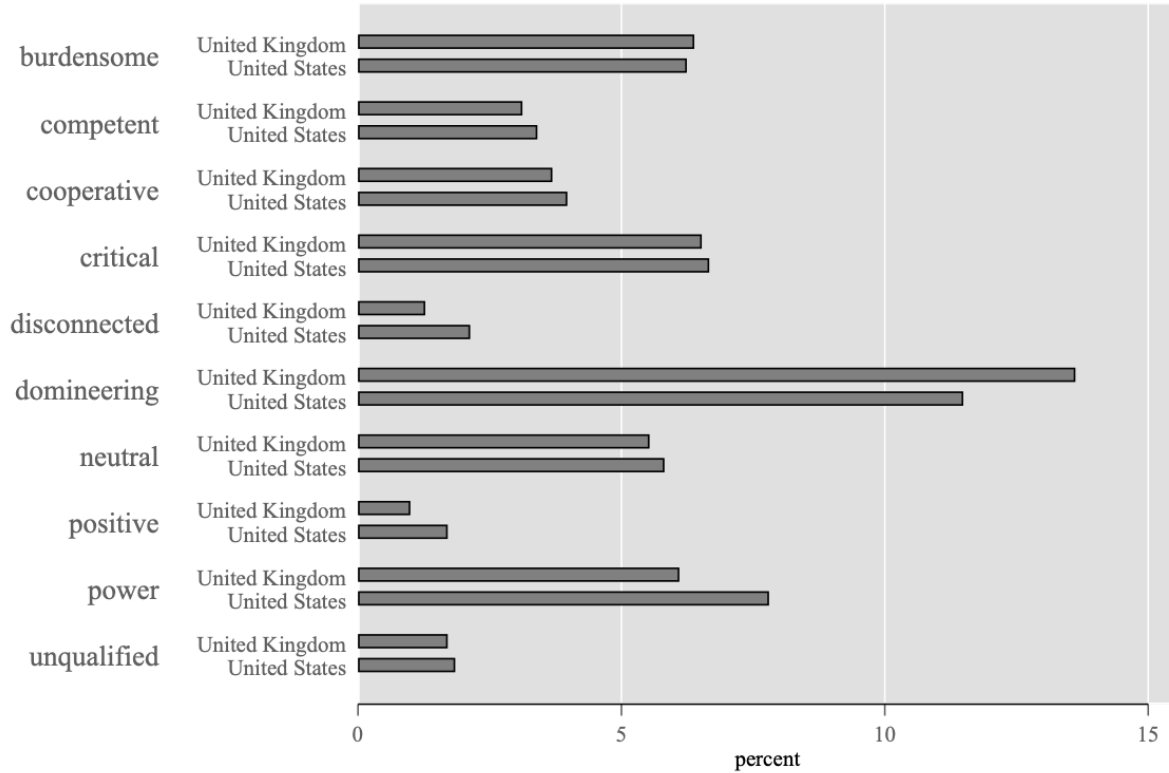
Finally, the remaining two categories were the *neutral* and the *positive* groups. In the first group, respondents opted for mixed terms: “busy,” “indifferent,” and “technical.” In the latter, some positive adjectives were “creative,” “good,” “useful,” “important,” and “hardworking.” Both groups scored considerably high on the expectation of successful cooperation and held relatively low levels of bureaucratic polarization.

Overall, 54.8% of the sample (excluding missing responses) chose a positive adjective (*cooperative* and *positive*); 4.7% opted for a *neutral* word; and 40.5% labeled the overlapping agency with a negative term (*redundant*, *competitive*, and *critical*). The distributions were fairly similar among American and British bureaucrats. The minor differences were that the share of respondents talking about redundancy and competition was slightly higher among Americans, while Britons had mentioned cooperation and positive adjectives more often. This correlates to my findings presented in Table 5.3.

#### 5.4.2 Oversight

Now, let us turn our attention to the adjectives provided to oversight agencies (Figure 5.5). The first noticeable difference is that, instead of six categories, the words were clustered across 10 groups. First, consider the seemingly related categories *power* and *domineering*. Both of them deal with the authoritative role of oversight agencies. However, while *power* refers exclusively to the authority that these agencies possess (e.g., “powerful,” “supervisory,” and “authority”), *domineering* regards the perception that this power is being used in an overbearing manner (“draconian,” “controlling,” and “The Commander”).

Figure 5.5: Distribution of Adjectives Related to Oversight Agencies



These are the two largest categories in the sample, as 25.1% of the valid responses<sup>13</sup> are in the *domineering* category and 13.9% in the *power* cluster. Furthermore, while the negative aspects of oversight power are relatively more salient in the US sample, British respondents tend to point out the neutral aspects of authority more often than Americans. The relevance of differentiating these two clusters becomes more evident if we look at the average bureaucratic polarization and expectation of successful cooperation of the respondents. Those who see oversight as the expression of *power* have an average  $bp_i$  of 17.3 and believe that, most often, cooperation will be successful (80.9). However, among those who perceive oversight agencies as *domineering*, these numbers are, respectively, 25.8 and 71.9 (see Table 5.6 for all averages).

<sup>13</sup>There were 109 responses marked as invalid since they suggest that participants did not understand the task. The resulting sample size is 705.

Table 5.6: Attitudes Toward Oversight Based on Different Adjective Type

Adjective Type	Polarization		Cooperation	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Critical</i>	29.032	2.274	70.333	2.276
<i>Unqualified</i>	28.360	5.269	61.120	5.056
<i>Burdensome</i>	28.303	2.329	72.753	2.298
<i>Domineering</i>	25.751	1.567	71.932	1.703
<i>Disconnected</i>	25.083	4.315	73.750	4.292
<i>Neutral</i>	21.213	2.339	82.425	1.796
<i>Power</i>	18.480	1.688	80.888	1.902
<i>Positive</i>	17.316	3.586	87.421	4.033
<i>Competent</i>	16.630	2.625	80.413	3.135
<i>Cooperative</i>	16.167	2.405	82.481	2.227

The following three clusters do not include clear references to power but still emphasize the dynamics of inter-agency relations with oversight. They are *cooperative* (7.7%), *disconnected* (3.4%), and *burdensome* (12.6%). Consider the latter. [Carpenter \(2003\)](#) and [West \(2004\)](#) present oversight agencies as organizations capable of slowing down the implementation process through the red tape that many bureaucrats consider unnecessary or even do not understand. This is confirmed in my data. Many respondents chose terms like “excessive,” “overbearing,” “micromanagement,” and “bureaucratic” to refer to these agencies. This led to the second-highest level of bureaucratic polarization (28.3)—second only to the broad category of *critical* terms. Additionally, those respondents were among the most pessimistic in terms of successful cooperation (72.7).

Related, some others referred to these agencies as *disconnected* from reality. In many cases, this regards the perception that some demands are unrealistic and may inhibit innovation in the public sector ([Power 1997](#)). Some examples are “clueless,” “unrealistic,” and “ivory towers.” This perception also led to a high average  $bp_i$  (25.1) and a considerably low

expectation of successful cooperation (73.8). To a certain extent, this is the opposite as the small share of bureaucrats who see oversight as *cooperative* agencies. For them, *overseers* are “helpful,” “empowering,” “insightful,” and “supportive.” These optimistic bureaucrats were the ones with the lowest degree of bureaucratic polarization (16.2) and the second-highest expectation of successful cooperation (82.5). The only category with a higher optimism was the broad category *positive*.

Another relevant dichotomy regards the perception of fitness to oversee. While 6.4% of the respondents see oversight agencies as *competent*, 3.5% perceive them as *unqualified*. Using terms as “professional,” “technical,” and “knowledgeable,” the first category yields one of the lowest average bureaucratic polarization (16.3) and a considerably high rate of expected success (80.4). The opposite is true for those who perceive oversight to be *unqualified*. This group has the highest level of polarization (28.4) and, by far, the lowest expectation of successful cooperation (62.1).

The remaining categories are fairly broad and include terms that (*critical*, *neutral*, and *positive*), but do not fit any of the previous groups. The possibilities are quite plural, including “lazy” and “anxiety inducing” (*critical*), “senior” and “regulatory” (*neutral*), and “good” and “determined” (*positive*). Bureaucratic polarization was lowest for those using *positive* terms (17.3), followed by *neutral* (21.2) and *critical* (29.0). Respectively, the average optimism regarding successful cooperation is 87.4, 82.4, and 70.3

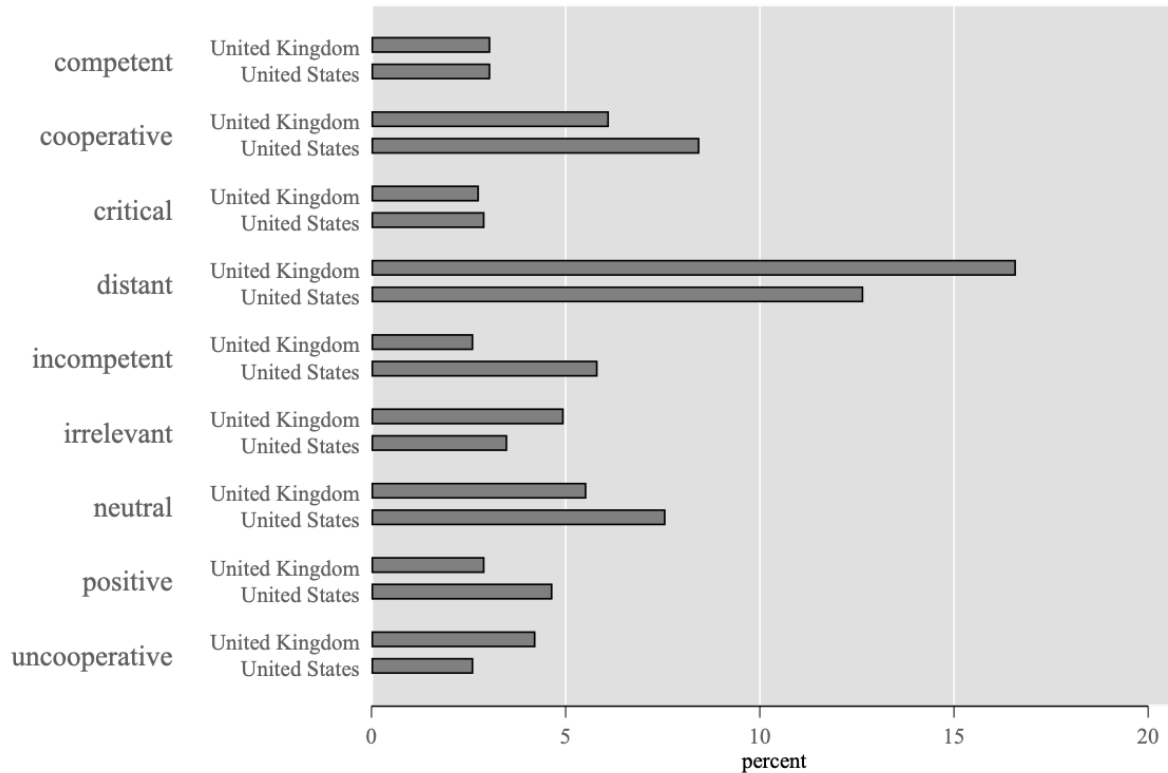
### 5.4.3 Unrelated

I present in Figure 5.6 the distribution of the nine clusters grouping adjectives given to the unrelated agency. In both countries, most respondents thought of this agency as a *distant* organization (24.7%).<sup>14</sup> The most frequent terms in this category were “unknown,” “distant,” and “different.” The idea of distance is also expressed in the cluster named *ir-relevant* (8.44%). However, they appear to be negatively charged in this case. Here, it is not only that these agencies are foreign but also that they are so different that they become “useless,” “unnecessary.” This difference across groups is also evident if we consider the aver-

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<sup>14</sup>After excluding the 127 observations that were either intelligible or demonstrated that respondents did not understand the task.

Figure 5.6: Distribution of Adjectives Related to Unrelated Agencies



age bureaucratic polarization and expectation of successful cooperation (Table 5.7). Those referring to the unrelated agency as *irrelevant* have an average  $bp_i$  of 34.8—the highest in the sample—which compares to 26.0 among those clustered as *distant*. These categories also had strikingly different levels of optimism regarding inter-agency cooperation: respectively, 56.4 and 65.2. In line with the Realistic Conflict Theory (Bobo 1988; Sherif & Sherif 1969), this suggests that it is not only distance that increases the propensity of conflict but the perception that the out-group is absorbing resources to something unnecessary.

The next divide in the sample regards competence and cooperation. Whereas the former clusters imply no intergroup contact, these terms suggest that respondents had some type of direct interaction with unrelated agencies. In the one side, there are the positive categories *competent* (6.1%) and *cooperative* (14.6%). In the other, *incompetent* (8.4%) and *uncoop-*

Table 5.7: Attitudes Toward Unrelated Agencies Based on Different Adjective Type

Adjective Type	Polarization		Cooperation	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Irrelevant</i>	34.845	3.495	56.414	3.657
<i>Incompetent</i>	30.293	3.281	59.379	3.587
<i>Critical</i>	29.641	3.868	56.077	4.493
<i>Distant</i>	25.975	1.480	65.229	1.676
<i>Uncooperative</i>	22.723	3.218	55.872	3.765
<i>Positive</i>	21.577	2.563	72.961	2.735
<i>Neutral</i>	19.600	2.204	70.056	2.952
<i>Cooperative</i>	17.080	1.797	76.750	1.812
<i>Competent</i>	15.429	2.212	70.619	3.715

*erative* (6.8%). These are very relevant to predicting both polarization and expectation of successful cooperation. Competence leads to the lowest  $bp_i$  (15.4) and cooperation to the highest optimism regarding inter-agency collaboration (76.8). However, those who say that the unrelated agency is “unhelpful,” “aloof,” and “annoying” (*uncooperative*) are the ones with the most negative expectation of successful cooperation (55.9). Similarly, *incompetence* is connected to the second-highest average bureaucratic polarization: 30.3.

Figure 5.6 shows an interesting cross-country difference in the frequency of these categories: unrelated agencies appear to be perceived as more *distant* and *irrelevant* in the UK than in the US. Furthermore, British respondents also refer to them as *uncooperative* more often than Americans. The latter, on the other hand, see these agencies as more *cooperative*. This could relate to how agencies are connected in these two countries, suggesting that the distance between seemingly unrelated agencies tends to be perceived as smaller by US bureaucrats.

The remaining categories are relatively broad and, as presented in Table 5.6, yield unsurprising average results when quantitative variables are considered. The clusters are *critical*



(5.68%), *neutral* (13.1%), and *positive* (7.57%).

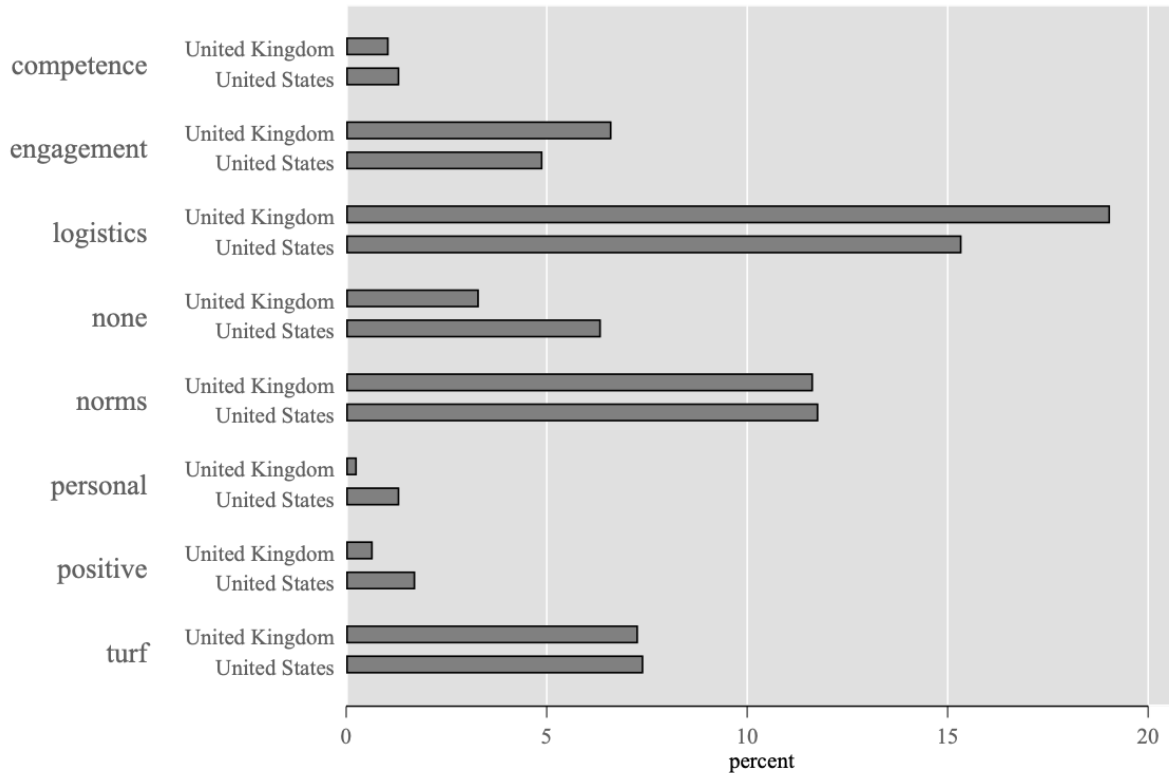
#### 5.4.4 Experiences of Inter-Agency Cooperation

In this subsection, I rely on the same empirical strategy to analyze the answers to the following question: “Thinking of your past work experiences, what difficulties have you encountered when attempting to cooperate or coordinate with other government organizations (i.e., public departments)?” Once again, I do so based on the categorization of responses and the calculation of the average bureaucratic polarization and expectation of successful cooperation. I present in Figure 5.7 the frequencies of the eight categories and the average responses in Table 5.8.

Still, before moving on to these data, I focus on how the responses were clustered since this question led to much more ambiguous answers than the previous ones. In many cases, they could fit two or more categories. This happens because respondents would list different reasons that made inter-agency cooperation more difficult. For instance, one bureaucrat mentioned “Different priorities, different ways of working, finding time for meetings.” In most cases, conflicting priorities were coded as *engagement* because it led one agency to dedicate less efforts than another. The second reason could be categorized as *norms*, as it aligns with the way March & Olsen (2010) would describe the logic of appropriateness of each organization. Finally, I often labeled scheduling conflicts as *logistics*. Whenever subjects wrote multiple issues, I chose either the one that appeared to be the most relevant or the first to be presented. This means that this illustrative case was categorized as *engagement*.

There are three additional factors to be considered. First, as in other cases, part of the respondents did not provide any meaningful answer (7.1%). These were excluded from the analysis. Another group stated that they faced no problems when cooperating with other agencies (*none*, 9.7%) and a smaller share said not only said they had no issues, but that their experiences have always been *positive* (2.4%). Even though these two categories deviate from the proposed question, they were kept in the analysis. As expected, those respondents were among the most optimistic toward inter-agency cooperation—respectively, 76.6 and 78.2—and had relatively low average bureaucratic polarization. The surprising result is that

Figure 5.7: Distribution of Explanations for Unsuccessful Cooperation



for those in *positive* cluster,  $bp_i$  was only the fourth-lowest average in the sample.

Another counterintuitive finding is that the category with the lowest bureaucratic polarization (15.6) and the highest optimism regarding cooperation (79.1) was that of *personal* conflicts. This included those respondents who blamed individuals, rather than organizations. One of them explained that “Someone have resented something about a past department that I worked in and, while not sabotaging our work, chose to personally give any of us grief for it.” Another bureaucrat said that “there are some people who are not very bright and some who are not very diligent workers. Sometimes, too, there are people who are both lazy and ignorant.” This cluster was considerably small (1.5%) and occurred in the United States far more often than in the United Kingdom. This suggests that inter-agency conflict may be the outcome of individualized conflicts and that, when bureaucrats perceive that

Table 5.8: Attitudes Toward Agencies Based on Explanations for Unsuccessful Cooperation

Adjective Type	Polarization		Cooperation	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Turf</i>	23.760	1.155	68.919	1.284
<i>Norms</i>	23.462	0.919	72.166	1.016
<i>Engagement</i>	22.410	1.163	71.375	1.405
<i>Competence</i>	22.019	2.666	65.463	3.697
<i>Positive</i>	20.685	3.164	78.185	2.571
<i>Logistics</i>	20.436	0.711	74.605	0.765
<i>None</i>	16.338	1.273	76.612	1.692
<i>Personal</i>	15.556	3.261	79.111	4.076

this is the case, bad experiences do not lead to a high social distance.

The other clusters are *competence* (2.4%), *engagement* (11.5%), *turf* (14.7%), *norms* (23.4%), and *logistics* (34.4%). Together, the two latter categories represent over half of the responses and regard the way of doing things. Most of the problems related to *logistics* involved scheduling conflicts, communication problems, lack of clarity on the chain of command, incompatibility of technical systems, and red tape. The exact words “Lack of communication” appeared in several responses. For one of the respondents, this meant that “I have found that I don’t know what channels to use to get in touch with them.” Similarly, they referred to the lack of “Awareness of other departments roles and responsibilities.” However, even when the point of contact was clear, communication still failed: “It’s hard to progress without being able to discuss something face to face or by phone. To have to wait on email (or other system) contact can be frustrating.” Finally, there are cases when “Technology does not join up” or the other agency is “using outdated technologies.”

Whereas these *logistic* issues highlight the lack of understanding between agencies, the social distance created by the lack of shared social *norms* appears to be even more problematic. The latter cluster yielded additional 3.0 points in the average  $bp_i$  and decreased

the average expectation of successful cooperation by 2.4 points. This is directly related to how different institutionalists describe the functioning of organizations. Agencies develop their own informal rules, the way it is appropriate to behave, or the expected path to solving problems (March & Olsen 2010; Peters 2019; E. Ostrom 2000; Coyne & Hall 2018). With the government's direct efforts to decentralize their agencies, more agencies will find it difficult to find common sense when working with each other (Peters & Savoie 1996; Peters 2018b).

One of the civil servants illustrated this problem as follows: "One of the biggest [problems] is different policies within the various agencies. It is trying to understand those policies and ensuring that both agencies policies are complied with." For some, this lack of understanding is seen as rude ("They lack common courtesy and do not follow policies.") while, for others, this regards the "Different lingo" adopted by each organization ("Other department not understanding the jargon we use"). One way to put it is that the problem of coordinating different social *norms* is "Mainly understanding how each other works and respecting each other views." My results show that mismatches of the logics of appropriateness appear to exercise a more detrimental effect than *logistic* issues. This lends additional support to Hypothesis 2 which proposes that social distance will be smaller exactly when it comes to overlap, as that out-groups share at least basic principles with the in-group.

Still, this does not mean that the conflict for resources will not matter. Aligned with the propositions of the Realistic Conflict Theory (Bobo 1988; Sherif & Sherif 1969) and Public Choice Theory (Tullock 2005; Coyne & Hall 2018), those who had turf wars in mind when talking about inter-agency cooperation were the ones with the highest average of bureaucratic polarization: 23.8, slightly higher than that among those clustered as *norms*. Many participants used the term "turf" to explain territorial conflicts in public administration. One of them complained that there are "too many hands in the pot" while another said that there are "different parts of government thinking that various things are their responsibility and they then try to control the narrative." Some others referred to a "silo mentality," that is, "Their unwillingness to share data, even when it is not a security risk." There were problems with project ownership, which one bureaucrat summarized as "Ego Ego Ego."

*Turf* wars may be behind at least part of the lack of *engagement* identified by 11.5% of the sample. Most of them complained that agencies have "Differing priorities," that is,

a “General unbalance in incentives and motivations to complete tasks on time to quality.” However, this could simply be a matter of political or geographic relevance. Along these lines, it appears that one of the civil servants used the survey to blurt out about a recent episode:

“I have had trouble coordinating with the department of engineering to get our elevator replaced/repared. Since it’s not in the main municipal complex, it is off their radar. We’re a very busy public library and many of our patrons are being disenfranchised by the elevator being out of service. I had wanted to apply for the [grant]<sup>15</sup> but the CFO wouldn’t approve it, and now we could really use the money.”

Finally, the cluster with the most pessimistic average regarding inter-agency cooperation (65.5) is that of competence. There are only a few cases in this cluster and they may be related to other aspects, as *turf*, *norms*, *logistics*, and *personal*. However, since they are directly attacking the skills of those who work in different agencies and the average  $bp_i$  is significantly low, this deserves its own category. Some of the statements are straightforward: “Lack of competence” and “Incompetent workers.” Still, others offer a more detailed account of conflicts. One of them said that “They want to implement these programs but have no idea the amount of work it entails. And then we have to figure out all the logistics while they get to take some of the credit.” Another complained that

“Just this week I got wrong pay. I worked a holiday standing in rain for 4 hours. They made errors and deducted 8 hours of pay and paid the holiday. I am angry because nobody in the city hall finance fixed it. Nobody has an answer and they said it is a computer problem. Own up to the corruptness of the contract with [private firm].”

## 5.5 Intra-Agency Bureaucratic Polarization

Akerlof & Kranton (2010) use the term ‘workgroup’ rather than ‘workplace’ as a manner of allowing students of identity economics to assess different layers of group identity within an organization. This section of the paper shows that this logic also makes sense in the bureaucracy. Using survey responses from British bureaucrats, I will show that bureaucratic

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<sup>15</sup>Deleted to assure anonymity.

polarization also exists against political appointees and that this is negatively correlated with the expectation of successful cooperation.

The United Kingdom is a relevant case to test this proposition. While the country has a relatively low index of political patronage if compared to other European countries ([Kopecký & Spirova 2011](#)), the relationship between career bureaucrats and political appointees is extremely relevant ([G. K. Wilson & Barker 2003](#)). This is because, among others, the latter is responsible to help coordinate the relationship between the wishes of elected officials and the knowledge and power of the bureaucracy ([Dahlström et al. 2017](#); [G. K. Wilson & Barker 2003](#)).

In recent decades, the role of appointed personnel has been on the rise in the UK ([G. K. Wilson & Barker 2003](#)). This means both an increase in the number of appointments as well as the power they hold. [Sausman & Locke \(2004\)](#) proposes that while we see the politicization of the bureaucracy in many countries, this has a very specific meaning in the UK: Instead of representing a trend of politicized bureaucrats, this means that political patronage is becoming more prominent. This has led to a significant discomfort among civil servants, who were used to control the implementation of public policies ([G. K. Wilson & Barker 2003](#); [Sausman & Locke 2004](#)).

This is not to say that political patronage and the conflicts between the administrative and the political world are exclusive to the British government or even that they are a recent issue. Parties-in-government have relied on political patronage for different reasons in multiple countries around the world, ranging from Post-Communist Europe ([Kopecký & Spirova 2011](#)) to Latin America ([Panizza et al. 2018, 2019](#)) to the United States ([Spiller & Urbiztondo 1994](#)). In the latter, for instance, the Reagan administration became known for the “tight control of career executives by the White House appointees” ([Pfiffner 1987](#), p. 59).

My first proposition builds upon the discomfort that career bureaucrats may feel when it comes to political appointees. Adapting the argument borrowed from [Coyne & Hall \(2018\)](#), bureaucrats self-select into a specific agency and career path and were recruited through a specific merit system to perform the job they do. They are socialized into this career and, if they are not a good fit, they will most likely quit by choice or force ([Coyne & Hall 2018](#)). When they enjoy tenure, as is the case of British civil servants, they know that this group

identification may last a lifetime. Opposed to that, political appointees come and go. They depend on political allegiance to the party-in-government and, in many cases, are recruited to control the bureaucrat's work ([Panizza et al. 2019](#))—a similar characteristic of the often disliked oversight agencies. For that reason, tenured civil servants are likely to hold a high degree of bureaucratic polarization against political appointees.

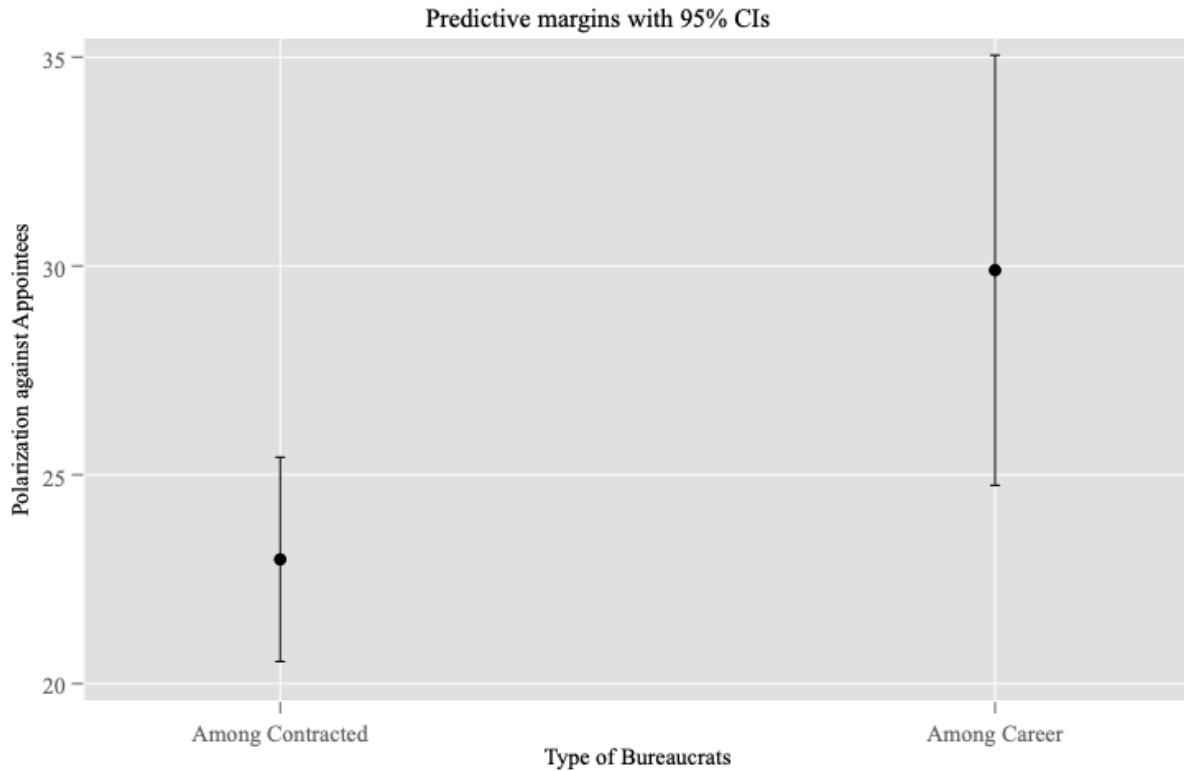
This proposition functions as a proof of concept for at least two elements that are emphasized in this chapter. First, that the historical divide between career and political personnel can be measured through bureaucratic polarization and, second, that this theoretical construct is valid to understand both *inter*- and *intra*-agency conflicts.

Now, I move one step ahead to suggest, once again following [Karakayali \(2009\)](#), that affect is bounded by rules and norms. As I highlighted, the British career civil servant is recruited based on the merit system and enjoys tenure. This is opposed to patronage appointments, which are based on elected officials' desire. Furthermore, appointees often stay in the bureaucracy only during the politician's term. Still, there is one category that falls between these two careers: temporary public employees. Even though this contracted personnel is not recruited through the same merit system as career bureaucrats, they most often pass through a competitive recruitment process. Also, they do not yet enjoy tenure, however, their contract does not depend on the proximity with a political patron. Thus, I propose that even though they may not be equally polarized against political appointees as career bureaucrats are, contracted personnel should still hold a certain degree of animosity against those public employees coming from the political world to control the bureaucracy. I hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 5.** *Bureaucratic polarization against political appointees is greater among career civil servants than among contracted public employees.*

In the survey fielded with British bureaucrats, I asked them whether they were political appointees. After excluding those who are, the remaining sample has 263 contracted public employees and 93 career bureaucrats—totaling 356 observations. Each of them was also asked to use a feeling thermometer to state how close they felt toward their own professional category and political appointees. This allows estimating the degree of intra-agency

Figure 5.8: Predicted Bureaucratic Polarization Against Political Appointees



bureaucratic polarization based on professional category.

Following the same method adopted in the previous section, I ran an OLS regression including a binary independent variable based on whether the respondent is a career bureaucrat or a contracted employee, as well as the same covariates that were included in the previous regressions.

In that regression, the coefficient of interest is positive and statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The marginal effects plotted in Figure 5.8 lends support to Hypothesis 5, as it shows that while the predicted bureaucratic polarization of career bureaucrats against political appointees is 29.9, it decreases to 23.1 among contracted personnel. This demonstrates that there is a substantive difference between these two in-groups and, more interestingly, that the degree of bureaucratic polarization against political appointees is even higher than



when I considered inter-agency conflicts (e.g., against oversight agencies).

Now, I go back to H<sub>3</sub>, which stated that bureaucratic polarization should be negatively correlated with the expectation of successful cooperation with an out-group. To test that, I ran a similar model as the previous one but, instead of using bureaucratic polarization as a dependent variable, this became my main independent variable. Here, the explanatory variable is the bureaucrat's expectation of success if working on a project that requires cooperation with a political appointee.

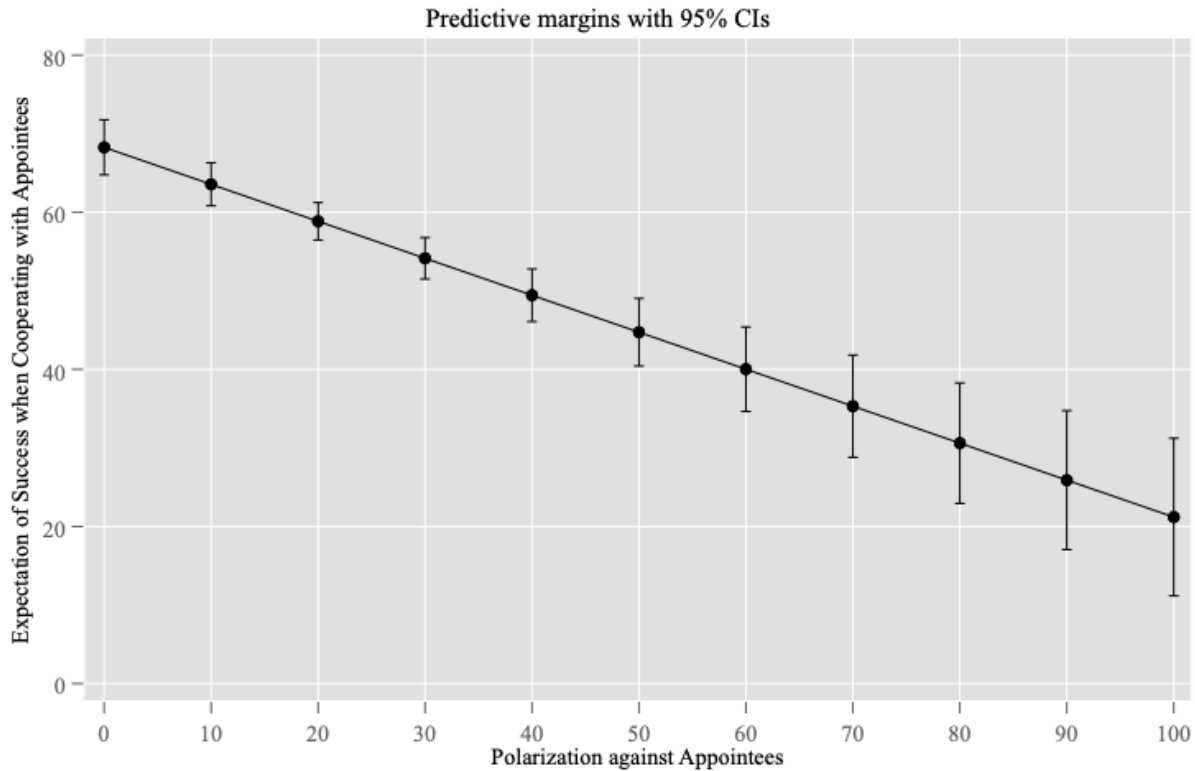
As expected, the coefficient of  $BP_i$  is negative and statistically significant at the 0.001 level. As the marginal effects plotted in Figure 5.9 show, *ceteris paribus*, even those who have no bureaucratic polarization against political appointees are skeptical of a high probability of success if they have to cooperate with that out-group—their predicted score is 68.3. This decreases considerably when it comes to more polarized individuals, reaching a predicted score of 21.2 for those with a  $BP_i$  of 100. That is, in all cases, the predicted expectation of success is much lower when it comes to polarization against political appointees than against different agencies. This finding supports H<sub>3</sub>.

## 5.6 Discussion

In Chapter 3, I narrated the conflicts between the state-level environmental protection agency (SEMACE) and the court of accounts (TCE-CE) in Ceará, Brazil. One high-level bureaucrat of the former was emphatic at saying that he “likes to get things done”—a clear emotional investment to being an *implementer*. The employees of the latter, which I call the *overseers*, expressed that they were “not afraid of blocking an implementation process.” This clash of identities motivated the frustration that SEMACE's employee mentioned when asked about the TCE-CE.

This story helps to illustrate what is uncovered by the data collected in the US and the UK, and analyzed in this chapter. Many bureaucrats identify with their workgroup and, following the same rationale proposed by psychologists (Tajfel & Turner 1979), this leads them to hold a negative bias against other workgroups (H<sub>1</sub>). At least in the US and the

Figure 5.9: Expectation of Intra-Agency Cooperation and Bureaucratic Polarization



UK but most likely also in different parts of the world, this also means that increased social distance equates to a greater probability of failure in the implementation of public policies.

How do we know whether the levels of bureaucratic polarization are high enough to be considered meaningful? One possible benchmark is the data estimated by [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#) when measuring the affective polarization between Democrats and Republicans in American politics. To measure that, the authors asked voters how warm they feel toward each of these parties based on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. Then, they calculated the absolute difference between these scores for each individual. As in my measure of bureaucratic polarization, higher values represent greater social distance. In 1978, the average affective polarization of Democrats against Republicans was 24.1, compared to 20.2 among

Republicans against Democrats. In 2008, this had increased to 39.5 and 30.3, respectively.<sup>16</sup>

Now, let us turn to social distance between bureaucrats. After controlling for a series of covariates, the predicted bureaucratic polarization of a public employee against an overlapping agency is 16.8. This is followed by polarization against the oversight agency (22.9) and the unrelated agency (24.0). Social distance increases to 29.1 when I consider the bureaucratic polarization of career bureaucrats against political appointees—a value that is higher than the social distance held by Democrats against Republicans when Jimmy Carter was the American head of government.

Even though this appears to be low if compared to the 2008 data estimated by [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#), the 1970s were still a period of divided politics. In 1976, Carter had won the presidential election against the Republican incumbent Gerald Ford. In 1980, when the average affective polarization of Democrats was 24.9, Carter lost his seat to Ronald Reagan. My estimations suggest that the bureaucracy, regardless of partisanship, appears to be more divided than the US was when Carter and Reagan were presidents.

Moving back to Brazil, consider once again the clash between the bureaucrats of the SEMACE and the TCE-CE. Even though they disliked each other, the environmental agency seemed to comply with the decisions of its overseers. According to a technocrat from the TCE-CE, “the SEMACE cooperated when we threatened to fine them.” As I propose in  $H_4$ , even though bureaucratic polarization is negatively correlated with the expectation of successful cooperation ( $H_3$ ), there is an institutional feature moderating this relationship: When a public employee may be punished for refusing to cooperate with an out-group, this likely increases the chances of successful cooperation. This explains why, in my econometric models, I find a weaker negative correlation between bureaucratic polarization and the expectation of successful cooperation when the out-group is an oversight agency.

It must be highlighted that while the anecdotal reference of SEMACE and TCE-CE comes from Brazil, the quantitative analysis is based on survey data from British and American bureaucrats. That is, the logic of bureaucratic polarization and the relevance of institutional boundaries appears to be generalizable.

Many of the theoretical propositions of this chapter are also supported by the open-ended

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<sup>16</sup>For these data, see the online supplementary material of [\(Iyengar et al. 2012\)](#).

responses provided by the survey participants. Aligned to the propositions of both Realistic Conflict Theory (Sherif & Sherif 1969) and Public Choice (Niskanen 1971; Tullock 2005), when bureaucrats labeled the overlapping agency as competitive, the average polarization was relatively high (21.6). Still, when they saw it as a possibility of cooperation, this decreased to 13.0. In other words, while redundancy may be seen as a reason for turf wars, this also may represent an opportunity to increase the salience of a policy realm.

I find a similar trend when assessing the relationship with oversight agencies. In the literature, these may be seen as burdensome institutions that slow down the implementation process (Carpenter 2003; West 2004) or, among high-capacity agencies, as a possibility of increasing performance (Droic & Keiser 2020). In the survey, the average  $BP_i$  among respondents who referred to oversight agencies as burdensome was 28.3. On the opposite side, those who view them as competent hold a mean bureaucratic polarization of 16.6.

Finally, one of the standard conflicts that I identified in Brazil was between the administrative and the political worlds. In Ceará, civil servants of the state-owned company of metropolitan transportation (METROFOR) resented losing the ownership of the fast tram to the Department of Infrastructure (SEINFRA). The same concern was common among those working at the public firm responsible for water and sewage in São Paulo (SABESP), who wanted to shield their projects from political interference. The survey data collected in the United States and the United Kingdom evidence that this problem is not unique to Brazil. In fact, my estimations suggest that the bureaucratic polarization of career bureaucrats against political appointees is higher than that of civil servants in their clash against different agencies. This finding reinforces previous studies pointing at the politicization of the bureaucracy (e.g., Gailmard & Patty 2007; Peters 2018d) and call for further investigation about the intergroup dynamics of the administrative-political relationship.

## 5.7 Summary

It is possible to adapt the social distance measurement to estimate the conflicts between different workgroups in the bureaucracy. Relying on survey responses from American and

British civil servants, I show that they polarize the most against those who work at unrelated agencies and their overseers. Lastly, they are socially distant from bureaucrats working in agencies that have overlapping responsibilities. I also find that bureaucratic polarization correlates to the expectation that cooperation during implementation processes may fail. However, inter-agency animosity is not the strongest rivalry in public administration. The data shows that the social distance of tenured employees against political appointees is even higher. This is in line with the literature that discusses the conflicts between administration and politics.

I supplement these statistical findings with the analysis of open-ended responses, in which bureaucrats explained their social distance against different agencies. The explanations reproduce the intergroup disputes that I identified in Brazil in Chapters 3 and 4. These findings provide evidence to the arguments that (1) bureaucratic polarization is a useful theoretical construct to understand, explain, and estimate coordination problems in public administration, and (2) that this is a generalizable phenomenon occurring in different parts of the world.

## 6.0 Partisan Bias and Exit Attitudes

In Chapter 4, I introduced the case of Marco Antônio Palermo, who led the Projeto Tietê during the Fleury administration but lost the policy's ownership when Governor Covas took office. This was a case of absorption motivated by bureaucratic polarization. After losing his appointment, Palermo decided to leave the government for good. He only made a comeback to a public organization almost two decades later to join a local committee dominated by the opposition of Covas' party. Following this example, I use this chapter to empirically verify the effects of attempted absorption on turnover intent.

Recalling the discussion in the previous chapters, partisan bias is not the only factor that may disrupt a conflict of identities in the bureaucracy. Employees are often committed to their workplace because they share the organization's goals and values ([Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller 2012](#)). Yet, several situations may weaken their organizational commitment. Public employees may fight against each other because they identify with different groups within their workplace, for instance, depending on educational background, types of recruitment, age cohort, etc. Along these lines, engineers may tackle problems through methods that may dissatisfy lawyers; career bureaucrats can look at political appointees as holding different goals; traditionalists may feel uncomfortable with the game-changing behavior of more innovative colleagues.

All these scenarios could motivate bureaucratic polarization. In this chapter, I argue that continued conflicts in the workplace and the eventual loss of power to an out-group weaken organizational identity and ultimately increase the likelihood of exit. This is what happened to Palermo in São Paulo and replicates a seminal proposition of the organizational psychology literature, which links perceived organizational support to continuance commitment ([Shore & Wayne 1993](#)).

Relying on surveys conducted with American and Brazilian bureaucrats, I demonstrate that the more political out-groups manage to control the bureaucracy, the more civil servants will be likely to intend to leave. Thus, the perception of partisan bias or political meddling becomes a relevant proxy for out-group absorption and in-group deidentification.

This relationship is helpful to understand the consequences of bureaucratic polarization and contributes to the literature on bureaucratic politics. Indeed, the politicization of the bureaucracy is one of the most studied phenomena in public administration ([Peters 2018d](#)) and is at the center of the ongoing debate as that of democratic backsliding ([Peters & Pierre 2019](#); [Bauer et al. 2021](#); [Peters & Pierre 2020](#)).

## 6.1 Deidentification and Exit in the Bureaucracy

Career civil servants are expected to implement the policies designed by elected officials ([Weber 2004](#); [W. Wilson 1887](#)). Still, since they have their own interests ([Downs 1964](#)) and political preferences ([Gailmard & Patty 2007](#)), clashes are likely to exist. In Chapter 5, I develop the argument that political meddling in the bureaucracy leads to a conflict of identities, that is, between the bureaucrats want to preserve the agency's organizational culture and the political officials want to affect change it. There are multiple accounts of confrontations between US federal bureaucrats and different presidents, including Dwight Eisenhower ([Somers 1954](#)), Richard Nixon ([Aberbach & Rockman 1976](#)), and Ronald Reagan ([Rockman 1993](#)).

Alternatively, bureaucrats may become loyal to the government ([Tullock 2005](#)). Consider authoritarian regimes. In Brazil during the later 1960s, fear of repression and the possibility of gaining certain privileges led many high-level bureaucrats to follow the wishes of the military dictatorship regardless of pre-existing ideological preferences ([Schmitter 1972](#)). More recently, the same took place in Venezuela, where Chavismo-Madurismo engaged in repression, firing, and militarization to capture the civil service ([Muno & Briceño 2021](#)).

This type of loyalism is also common in democracies. [Aberbach & Rockman \(1995\)](#) use longitudinal survey data to show that, from 1970 to 1992, US federal bureaucrats became more conservative, especially under Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. This is a consequence of sequential clashes between the political class and civil service, partisan capture through political appointments, self-defense from persecution, and career self-selection.

Whereas this may also be a matter of shift driven by newcomers, those career bureaucrats

who stay are also responsible for the changes in the ideological leanings of public agencies. In line with the “Exit, Voice, and Loyalty” framework ([Hirschman 1970](#)), [Aberbach & Rockman \(1995, p. 844\)](#) state that,

“Career bureaucrats themselves have incentives to retire or stay depending on the compatibility or incompatibility of their own perspectives and those of the presidential administration in power. Opportunists among the senior executives may adjust their views to make themselves acceptable to the administration.”

This highlights that whereas some bureaucrats will become loyal to elected officials, others may opt to exit. [Richardson \(2019\)](#) conducts an experimental study with US senior bureaucrats (careerists, in his words) showing that the more they see their agency as politicized, the more likely they are to consider exiting. The rationale is that politicization reduces careerists’ influence over the policy process, therefore damaging job satisfaction.

This finding resembles that of [Ali \(2019\)](#), who interviewed federal bureaucrats during the Trump era. She concludes that civil servants “are acutely aware of symbolic messages on how their work is valued from the political world” ([Ali 2019, p. 1489](#)). Furthermore, they “are also deeply connected with their agency mission and had a strong desire for the public and political world to recognize the importance of their work” (*ibid.*).

When these external and internal incentives fail to provide a sense of public sector motivation ([Perry & Wise 1990](#)), bureaucrats’ desire to exit becomes more salient. This expectation of politically motivated turnover intent is in line with normative institutionalists, such as [March & Olsen \(2010\)](#), who propose that actors within an institution are expected to adhere to a logic of appropriateness. Deviating from what is seen as appropriate may become unacceptable, forcing non-compliers out. This could harm the professionalization of public administration and add unwanted political bias to the bureaucracy, thus contributing to democratic backsliding ([Peters & Pierre 2019](#)).

Intergroup conflict becomes even more salient when there is a clash of social identities in the public sector. On the one hand, bureaucrats develop a workplace identity ([Akerlof & Kranton 2010](#)) that reflects the organizational culture of their public department ([March & Olsen 2010](#)). On the other hand, they also have their partisan preferences which, according to [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#), have become one of the starkest social identities at least in U.S. politics



(for a similar argument in Brazil, see [Samuels & Zucco 2018](#)). When elected officials meddle with one's work in the bureaucracy, both social identities—the political and the workplace—are affected. In these cases, elected officials and their loyalists become the out-groups of a considerable share of the civil service.

I argued in Chapter 5 that the degree of perceived partisan favoritism functions as a proxy for the presence of bureaucratic polarization. [Shafranek \(2020\)](#) shows that the co-partisans of their principals expect a certain degree of favoritism in the workplace. Thus, only those who oppose the political views of their colleagues will feel negatively affected by the incidence of partisan favoritism. When this bias becomes more evident, the social distance between agents and principals within a given agency increases. In these cases, the likelihood of quitting among those harmed by favoritism should be higher. I hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 6.** *Intention to quit the government increases the more the bureaucrats perceive partisan bias in their own agency (the quitter hypothesis).*

This proposition applies to individual-level perceptions regardless of context. Yet, the generalized perception of the working environment should also influence turnover intent. Despite the individual's perception, subjects who work in agencies that are perceived to have greater degrees of tolerance toward partisan bias should also be more likely to quit. This is especially true given that these generalized perceptions may disrupt the organizational culture, thus sending mixed signals to its members. Ultimately, the generalized perception of partisan bias weakens the belief that the workplace values its employee's contributions and well-being ([Eisenberger et al. 1986](#)). It harms workplace identity and reduces the motivation to stay. I propose that:

**Hypothesis 7.** *Intention to quit the government increases the higher the generalized perception of partisan bias is in one's agency (the agency-level quitter hypothesis).*

Staying or quitting are not the only alternatives for those who face unwanted experiences at their workplace. Bureaucrats have the possibility to move to a different agency, which could offer a logic of appropriateness that suits them better. This type of self-selection is likely to occur since bureaucrats often take part in coalitions with members of different

organizations who hold similar goals or viewpoints (Sabatier 1988). In the case of Brazil, Leeds (1964) refers to *panelinhas* (literally, saucepans), which are the professional social networks used by individuals to move across organizations in pursuit of better rewards.

In the US federal government, moving across agencies is likely to exist not only because of *panelinhas* but also given the plural nature of organizations. There is strong evidence in the literature that federal agencies have different partisan leanings (Democratic or Republican) and that they occur at different degrees. This has been demonstrated regardless of the empirical strategy, which included mapping the campaign donations made by federal bureaucrats (Bonica 2019; Chen & Johnson 2015; Limbocker 2018), expert assessment through surveys conducted with senior public employees (Clinton & Lewis 2008; Clinton et al. 2012; Richardson et al. 2018), and the mapping of political appointments made by presidents aiming at capturing disloyal bureaucracies (Bertelli & Grose 2011).

The level of expertise that often involves at least part of the civil service constrains the moving hypothesis (Gailmard & Patty 2007). Many jobs require educational background and experience that are not directly applicable to different agencies (Tullock 2005). A rocket scientist from NASA, for instance, may find it hard to adapt to the Department of Treasury. Of course, rocket scientists represent only a minuscule share of the civil service. Still, moving to another agency means re-starting at a position and work environment with limited expertise regardless of previous jobs and field of study (Tullock 2005; Scholl 1981).

The costs of staying must be considerably high to compensate the costs of moving (Scholl 1981). Moving to another agency rather than quitting the government functions as a compromise to retain a certain degree of workplace identity—or even public sector motivation (Perry & Wise 1990)—while avoiding or minimizing clashes that involve political identities. Again, this should be true both at the individual and agency levels. I hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 8.** *Intention to move to another agency increases the more the bureaucrats perceive partisan bias in their own agency (the mover hypothesis).*

**Hypothesis 9.** *Intention to move to another agency increases the higher the generalized perception of partisan bias is in one's agency (the agency-level mover hypothesis).*

## 6.2 Case Selection

I propose that the effects of partisan bias on turnover intent are generalizable. To test this expectation, I rely on a Most Different Similar Outcomes (MDSO) design. This requires selecting cases that are as much different as possible and still identifying the same outcomes (Teune & Przeworski 1970). For that purpose, I analyze online surveys conducted with federal bureaucrats in the United States and state-level public employees in Brazil.

These are starkly different cases. Indeed, Brazil engaged in new public management reforms in the 1990s as an attempt to mirror the American system (L. C. B. Pereira 1998). However, these were incomplete and still left the Brazilian public sector under the heavy influence of political patronage (Praça et al. 2022). Furthermore, Brazil struggles with relatively high unemployment rates and its civil service enjoys a substantive wage premium and legal protections. These variables should constrain turnover intent, thus making Brazil an unlike case.

The inclusion of Brazil as a case also serves the purpose of broadening our knowledge on the politics of the bureaucracy in a larger set of countries. This directly responds to a recent call for the study of public administration in developing countries (Bertelli et al. 2020) and, more specifically, implementation politics in Brazil (Ames et al. 2012).

Finally, each case has its complexity. As I will show, there is substantive variance between agencies in the United States and sub-national units in Brazil. This allows assessing not only the effects of individual-level perceived partisan bias but also generalized perceptions. In the following sections, I describe the data collection processes and the empirical tests.

## 6.3 Exit in the United States

To test hypotheses 6 and 8 in the United States, I rely on a longitudinal survey conducted with roughly 3.4 million federal bureaucrats from 2010 to 2019. The data and analyses are borrowed from Guedes-Neto (2021), which compiled the dataset and conducted similar tests. In accord with the theory, I demonstrate that perceived partisan bias substantively affects

turnover intent in the American public service. These results are consistent in both individual and agency levels, and show that partisan bias has a more detrimental effect than other types of organizational unfairness.

### 6.3.1 Data

Since 2002, the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) surveys federal bureaucrats through the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) (for a detailed discussion of this survey, see [Fernandez et al. 2015](#)). This consists of questions involving their perceptions of the working environment including, for instance, attitudes about their bosses and their degree of job satisfaction. Whereas FEVS was conducted every two years until 2008, starting in 2010 this became an annual survey.

In brief, OPM sends an online questionnaire to every federal bureaucrat, who may opt to voluntarily answer it. There are a few shortcomings that in no way invalidate the merits of this database. First, whereas there is arguably a self-selection bias that could influence responses, the high return rate assures a convenience sample of over hundreds of thousands of responses per year—a substantively large share of all civil servants. Thus, if self-selection is an issue, this is reduced by oversampling.

The second issue regards minor changes in the questionnaire over time. Most survey questions were kept the same in all editions of FEVS. However, these assessing demographic characteristics (e.g., years of experience, salary range) are not stable throughout the years. Added to the fact that this is a longitudinal but not a panel survey, this limits the ability to control for a considerable set of covariates. Still, some relevant characteristics can be controlled for in robustness checks conducted in specific years.

For the sake of comparability, I aggregated all the annual databases since 2010, thus producing a 10-year longitudinal dataset. To increase representation per agency, I excluded all those departments which had less than 1,000 responses per year. According to the classification of the Office for Personnel Management, this strategy resulted in the inclusion of all agencies considered to be very large (i.e., above 75,000 employees) and large (i.e., between 10,000 and 74,999 employees), as well as four mid-sized agencies. After excluding

subjects whose relevant answers were missing, it led to a final data set with 23 agencies, 230 agency-years, and 3,448,244 unique responses.

*Dependent Variable.* One of the questions available at FEVS measures turnover intent. This measurement was used by Moon (2017) and D. Lee et al. (2020) to assess bureaucrats’ desire to exit their own agencies. The exact wording is the following: “Are you considering leaving your organization within the next year, and if so, why?” There are four possible responses which remain the same along the 10 years selected for this study: (1) “No,” (2) “Yes, to take another job within the Federal Government,” (3) “Yes, to take another job outside the Federal Government,” and (4) “Yes, other.” Some questionnaires also include “Yes, to retire” as the fourth option.

Table 6.1: Staying, Moving, and Quitting in the U.S. Federal Bureaucracy

Variable	Frequency	Share
<i>Stayers</i>	2,626,300	76.2%
<i>Movers</i>	681,295	19.8%
<i>Quitters</i>	140,649	4.1%

For the sake of precision and internal validity, I only consider the first, second, and third alternatives (i.e., *stayers*, *movers*, and *quitters*). Following Table 6.1, while 76.2% of the sample intends to stay, 19.8% are considering moving to another agency, and 4.1% wish to quit the federal government. In total, the share of bureaucrats considering the exit strategy is roughly 24%. The goal of this section is to use the bureaucratic polarization framework to predict the conditions that lead to this turnover intent.

These three intentions are distributed across two binary variables. The first takes the value of 0 for subjects who do not intend to leave their agencies (*staying*) and 1 for those who wish to move to another agency (*moving*). The second also uses 0 as the baseline including those who want to stay, but 1 for those who responded they consider quitting the federal government (*quitting*).

*Independent Variable.* FEVS includes a battery of over 70 questions repeated across the years. They consist of statements, which respondents must evaluate on a 1-5 scale based

on their level of agreement. One of them is worded as follows: “Arbitrary action, personal favoritism, and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated.”<sup>1</sup> This question is often used as a component of indexes of organizational fairness and procedural justice (H.-W. Lee 2020; Sabharwal et al. 2019; Vanderschuere & Birdsall 2019).

Here, I use this statement to measure perceived partisan bias.<sup>2</sup> Since agreeing with this sentence would mean lower levels of perceived political favoritism, I invert the scale. The distribution of responses after missing data were excluded is presented in Table 6.2. Whereas the largest share of respondents (55.9%) see low levels of political favoritism in their agencies (1-2), there is still a significant portion (22.6%) who believe that tolerance toward partisan bias is likely to be prevalent (4-5). Following the expectations theorized in this chapter, these latter bureaucrats should be the most prone to intend to move or quit given the presence of this presumed cause of within-agency bureaucratic polarization.

Table 6.2: Perceived Political Favoritism in the U.S. Federal Bureaucracy

Value	Frequency	Share
1 ( <i>lowest</i> )	727,786	19.3%
2	1,380,710	36.6%
3	816,192	21.6%
4	418,491	11.1%
5 ( <i>highest</i> )	432,710	11.5%

*Covariates.* As stated before, the presence of demographic questions at FEVS is not stable over time. There were only two questions that, after aggregation, could be meaningfully included as covariates: supervision status and sex. In a recent study, G. R. Lee et al. (2020) use these two variables aggregated by agency-year but do not find any effects on turnover intent. Yet, I still include them in my models to account for unobservables.

<sup>1</sup>Some may argue that there are two ways to read this statement. Per my proposition, respondents may understand that arbitrary action, personal favoritism, and coercion are all linked to partisan political purposes. Yet, others may understand that only coercion is related to partisan bias. I address this issue in the next subsection of this chapter, where I control for alternative perceptions of non-partisan organizational unfairness.

<sup>2</sup>I use the terms partisan bias, partisan favoritism, political bias, and political favoritism interchangeably.

Table 6.3: Descriptive Statistics for Exit in the U.S.

Variable	Type	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
<i>Moving</i>	Binary	3,114,979	0.20	0.40	0	1
<i>Quitting</i>	Binary	2,608,210	0.05	0.22	0	1
<i>Partisan Bias</i>	Ordinal	3,775,889	2.59	1.24	1	5
<i>Supervision</i>	Binary	3,529,034	0.22	0.41	0	1
<i>Male</i>	Binary	3,472,028	0.55	0.50	0	1

The first control variable regards whether the respondent self-identifies as non-supervisor and team leader (which were assigned the value 0) or supervisor, manager, and senior leader (1). Overall, 22% of the sample identifies as supervisors. Sex is divided into only two categories: female (assigned as 0) and male (1). 55% of the respondents are male. The descriptive statistics of these and all other variables are presented in Table 6.3.

*Models.* As indicated above, the data is based on responses given by bureaucrats who are nested within one of the 23 selected agencies within a longitudinal 10-year data set. Hence, to account for agency-year variation, I rely on generalized multilevel mixed-effects logistic regressions. Multilevel mixed-effects modeling has been widely used in the literature and is recommended for this type of data structure (Steenbergen & Jones 2002; Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal 2008).

To operationalize the model, I include individual attributes in the first level. These are perceived partisan bias, supervision status, and sex. The second level, which relates to contextual attributes, regards the agency-year average of these same variables. The agency-mean partisan bias is used to test the two hypotheses that regard generalized attitudes (H<sub>7</sub> and H<sub>9</sub>).

In Equation 3,  $Y_{ijt}$  is the turnover intent of individual  $i$  nested within the  $j$  agency at time  $t$ ,  $\beta_{0i}$  is agency-year intercept that affects all individuals for agency  $j$ ,  $Bias$  is one of the independent variable of interest (i.e., partisan bias), and  $\Lambda$  is a matrix of covariates. In the second level,  $\gamma_{00}$  is the fixed intercept,  $\mu_{0i}$  is the residual intercept. All remaining variables

are the time-averaged agency means of the individual-level variables. Following an adapted version of Fairbrother (2014), the model is clustered by agency and includes time dummies.<sup>3</sup>

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{ijt} &= \beta_{0i} + \beta_{1i}Bias_i + \Lambda_i \\ \beta_{0i} &= \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}\overline{Bias_i} + \overline{\Lambda_i} + \mu_{0i} \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

### 6.3.2 Findings

The main proposition of this chapter is that the more a bureaucrat perceives partisan bias in the workplace, the greater the likelihood of turnover intent will be. This is measured based on intention to quit (H<sub>6</sub>) and intention to move to another agency (H<sub>8</sub>). Furthermore, I propose that these findings should be valid for generalized, agency-level partisan favoritism as well (H<sub>7</sub> and H<sub>9</sub>). The coefficients presented in Table 6.4 support both expectations.

First, consider *Quitting*. The log-odds of *Bias* is positive and statistically significant at the 0.001 level. When exponentiated, this results in an odds-ratio of 1.721, that is, an increase of 72.1% in the likelihood of quitting for each additional level of perceived favoritism—which ranges from 1 to 5. This supports H<sub>6</sub>. Whereas this coefficient is considerably higher than that of the agency-year mean, the latter is still statistically significant and substantive—an increase of 30.6% for each additional unit of generalized perception of political bias. In agreement with H<sub>7</sub>, bureaucrats are considerably more likely to consider quitting their agency when they and their peers perceive higher degrees of partisan bias.

The results for *Moving* are similar. The main difference is not in the coefficients but the constant. Its log-odds is still negative—as in the case of *Quitting*—but closer to zero, meaning that, overall, intention to move is higher than the intention to quit. When it comes to the effects of partisan bias, the coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.001 level and positive, thus supporting H<sub>8</sub>. It has an odds ratio of 1.690, meaning an increase of 69.0% for each additional unit of perceived political favoritism. Furthermore, as hypothesized in H<sub>9</sub>, the likelihood of moving increases at a rate of 22.5% if we consider the generalized perception of partisan bias—measured as the agency-year mean.

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<sup>3</sup>(Fairbrother 2014) recommends the inclusion of fixed-effects for agency as well. This requires, however, computing power that was not accessible when the models were ran. The inclusion of these covariates should not, the author believes, drastically change the results, but they should be included in future tests.



Table 6.4: The Effects of Political Favoritism on Exit in the U.S.

	DV: Moving	DV: Quitting
<b>Individual Level</b>		
Bias	0.525***	0.543***
Male	0.006 <sup>^</sup>	0.582***
Supervision	-0.124***	0.093***
<b>Agency-Year</b>		
Bias	0.203***	0.267***
Male	-0.089*	-0.349***
Supervision	-0.408***	0.053
Constant	-3.263***	-5.902***
Random Effects	-1.107***	-1.452***
Time Dummies	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,945,453	2,470,238
Groups	23	23
Log likelihood	-1,356,775.718	-457,133.957
Akaike's inf. crit.	2,713,585.435	914,301.913

**Note:** <sup>^</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$  and \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

The addition of *Supervision* as a control variable allows greater robustness to these findings. The results show that political bias influences bureaucratic behavior regardless of position. Yet, it is important to add that bosses are, on average, less willing to move but more likely to quit. Whereas these trends have not been hypothesized, this may be linked to a lower desire to adapt to another organizational culture or internal hierarchies once a supervisory status is reached (Tullock 2005). Furthermore, it could indicate that those who would potentially be able to reach a better-paid job in the private sector, i.e., supervisors, are more willing to quit the government.

### 6.3.3 Relative Effect Size

The effects identified in this section of the paper are substantively high. Yet, comparing the outcomes of partisan bias with other types of unfair behaviors in the workplace would yield a better interpretation of the results. That is, do the negative effects of partisan bias reflect a clash of social identities? Or, is this just embedded in a sense of generalized organizational unfairness?

To be clear, my argument is not that organizational fairness—or its absence—is independent of bureaucratic polarization. There are different paths through which these variables could be related. Yet, partisan bias is arguably the type of unfair behavior with the strongest potential to create a clash between the political and the administrative worlds.

To test that, I rely on the recent study of Vanderschuere & Birdsall (2019). They use FEVS 2012 to propose an index of organizational fairness. This includes my measurement of partisan bias (*Bias*), as well as two other survey questions: one assessing whether prohibited personnel practices are tolerated (*Prohibited*), and another on whether bureaucrats fear reprisal after disclosing suspected violations (*Reprisal*). Whereas these two could be related to political issues, they could also be motivated by different types of unethical behavior.

First, I run separated models in which *Bias* is replaced by *Prohibited* and *Reprisal* to predict *Quitting*. This allows comparing the effect size of each of these variables. Finally, I run a regression where these three independent variables are included together. Here, it is possible to know whether the effects of partisan bias remain stable even when controlling

Table 6.5: Organizational Fairness and Quitting in the U.S.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Individual Level</b>				
Bias	0.543***			0.331***
Prohibited		0.511***		0.083***
Reprisal			0.502***	0.270***
Male	0.582***	0.576***	0.583***	0.597***
Supervision	0.093***	0.082***	0.038***	0.149***
<b>Agency-Year</b>				
Bias	0.267***			1.079*
Prohibited		0.346***		-2.148**
Reprisal			0.366***	0.159
Male	-0.349***	-0.319***	-0.263***	-0.145
Supervision	0.053	0.110	-0.037	0.628^
Constant	-5.902***	-5.736***	-5.884***	-4.261***
Random Effects	-1.452***	-1.442***	-1.436***	-1.610***
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,470,238	2,403,579	2,505,700	2,279,865
Groups	23	23	23	23
Log likelihood	-457,133.957	-442,841.884	-463,704.843	-405,766.531
Akaike's inf. crit.	914,301.913	885,717.768	927,443.687	811,575.061

**Note:** ^  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  and \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

for other sources of organizational unfairness.

Table 6.5 presents the relevant coefficients. While the odds-ratio of *Bias* is 72.1%, it drops to 66.7% for *Prohibited*, and 65.3% for *Reprisal*—all three coefficients being significant at the 0.001 level. This shows that whereas these three aspects of organizational unfairness do motivate quitting, the effect of perceived political bias is greater. This is maintained in the regression that considers all these three independent variables together (Q4). In this case, each additional level of *Bias* still leads to an increase of 39.3% in intention to quit, thus confirming that this specific factor substantively influences the exit strategy and does so more than other detrimental aspects of the workplace environment. In other words, whereas unfairness is a problem, it is a worse matter when it is related to partisanship.

#### 6.3.4 Additional Covariates

There are different motivations behind empirical research. For instance, scholars may be interested in the different pathways behind a certain outcome, or the different effects of a specific independent variable. The first example suggests special attention to the dependent variable and calls for multiple independent variables. Yet, the latter, which better explains this chapter, places a single independent variable at the heart of the empirical approach. To be sure, I am not downplaying the many factors leading to exit (my dependent variable). They merit in-depth studies, as done by Moon (2017) and D. Lee et al. (2020). Yet, my focus here is on investigating the possible outcomes of partisan bias in public administration (my main independent variable).

Along these lines, Achen (2005) recommends avoiding the inclusion variables that are theoretically irrelevant. So far, I have adopted this practice for the sake of prioritizing my independent variable of interest (partisan bias). Yet, this strategy was also the outcome of data limitations. As already mentioned, FEVS does not do a good job at consistently collecting individual-level demographic covariates.

The downside of this approach is the danger of omitted variable bias (L.-F. Lee 1982). Even though part of the literature is skeptical about the inclusion of covariates to reduce this type of bias (Clarke 2009, 2005), I test the effects of my main independent variable after

adding a set of covariates. This is possible if I focus on 2011 instead of 2010-2019. This is when the largest number of demographic information was made available.

The first difference regarding the previous models is the disentangling of the variable regarding supervisory status. Instead of a binary categorization, 2011 allowed three categories: non-supervisory status and team leader (baseline), supervisor, and manager/executive. To further differentiate jobs within the bureaucracy, I control for pay grade. Here, the baseline category is the federal wage system (FWS), followed by GS1-6, GS7-12, GA13-15 (most often, the highest paying jobs), and SES/SL/ST/Other (mostly related to political appointments).

I also include two variables that regard years of experience—one exclusive for the current agency where the civil servant is allocated, and the second for years of experience in the federal government. These are categorized by groups of years. In 2011, FEVS also makes age available. Yet, since this is highly correlated to the previous two variables, this is omitted in the results. The model considers whether respondents work in the field or at the agency's headquarter. Lastly, for the sake of comparability, I also control for the two attitudinal variables that were included in the models of the previous subsection (*Prohibited* and *Reprisal*).

The coefficients are presented in Table 6.6. They result from similar operationalization of the previous models: multilevel mixed-effects logistic models nested by agency and demonstrated as log-odds. As already said, the most relevant coefficients are those of *Bias*. As in the previous section, there show substantive effects even when compared to those of perceived tolerance to prohibited practices and fear of reprisal. After exponentiating the log-odds, we see that each additional level of perceived partisan bias in the 1-5 scale leads to an increase of 34.1% in the likelihood of moving and 42.4% for quitting. These results remain starkly high even with the addition of several demographic covariates.

To avoid deviating the attention from the main phenomenon, I do not dedicate too much attention to the remaining covariates that are unrelated to partisan bias. Yet, they may lead to spin-off studies dedicated to an in-depth explanation of exit in the federal bureaucracy. Overall, the data suggest that experienced personnel—especially bosses—are the ones more likely to consider quitting and moving. This may be the case given the possibility of earning higher salaries in the private sector. Yet, this is not true when it comes to years in the

Table 6.6: Moving and Quitting in the U.S. in 2011

	Moving	Quitting
<b>Attitudes</b>		
Bias	0.294***	0.354***
Prohibited	0.235***	0.101***
Reprisal	0.268***	0.285***
<b>Demographics</b>		
Male	0.048***	0.682***
<i>Supervisory Status (Base: up to team leader)</i>		
1. Supervisor	0.188***	0.395***
2. Manager/Executive	0.233***	0.965***
<i>Pay Grade (Base: FWS)</i>		
1. GS1-6	0.130***	-0.249***
2. GS7-12	0.119***	-0.665***
3. GA13-15	-0.250***	-0.952***
4. SES/SL/ST/Other	-1.082***	-1.016***
Location (Field vs. HQ)	-0.421***	-0.224***
Experience in government	0.152***	-0.129***
Experience in current agency	-0.437***	-0.071***
Constant	-2.986***	-4.282***
Random Effects	-1.018***	-0.814***
Observations	178,056	152,935
Groups	41	41
Log likelihood	-70,084.371	-22,813.256
Akaike's inf. crit.	140,198.742	45,656.512

**Note:** \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

current agency. The more time someone spends in the same agency, the less prone this bureaucrat will be to wish to move or, to a lesser degree, quit. This could be related to the adherence to an agency-specific organizational logic ([March & Olsen 2010](#)) or, as I discuss in different parts of this dissertation, workplace identity. Furthermore, those who already hold a high pay grade are less prone to adopt the exit strategy, since this would mean abdicating from high incomes. Naturally, there are plausible counterarguments to these results. For instance, high-paid civil servants may be more prone to find better-paid jobs in the private sector. These variables deserve new studies.

### 6.3.5 Causal Inference

Another issue that arises from the previous tests is that of reverse causality. Counter to the recent findings of [Richardson \(2019\)](#) and my theoretical proposition, some may suggest that it is turnover intent that generates perceived political bias. One possible argument is that, after deciding to move or quit, employees could try to denigrate their current agency regardless of the presence of any type of organizational unfairness.

The data presented in this section do not possess any experiment. Furthermore, the survey was not fielded in a way that could allow an individual-level panel analysis. Yet, the large number of agency-years permits the aggregation of responses to create a panel of agencies. This should allow testing the causal direction proposed in the agency-level hypotheses 7 and 9, which, at least to a certain extent, replicate the individual-level propositions in hypotheses 6 and 8.

To do that, I calculate the agency-year mean partisan bias and turnover intent for both moving and quitting. Then, I run fixed-effects regressions for each of the (now continuous) dependent variables (see [Angrist & Pischke 2008](#)). The independent variables are bias and the fixed effects for each year. The coefficients, which support  $H_7$  and  $H_9$ , are presented in Table 6.7. First, consider quitting. Each additional degree of agency-level bias increases the average turnover intent by 6.5%. Only this variable has an explanatory power of 0.783 when it comes to within-agency variations. The results for moving are even higher—for each additional unit of bias, intention to move increases 15.4% with an explanatory power of

Table 6.7: Panel Analysis of U.S. Federal Agencies

	Quitting	Moving
Bias	0.0648***	0.154***
Constant	-0.138***	-0.204***
Fixed Effects (Time)	Yes	Yes
Observations	230	230
Within R-Squared	0.783	0.630
Overall R-Squared	0.413	0.329

**Note:** \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

0.630. These findings provide additional evidence that perceived political favoritism increases turnover intent among bureaucrats in the U.S. federal government.

## 6.4 Exit in Brazil

As already said, the argument I put forward in this dissertation is that bureaucratic polarization is a universal phenomenon. Regardless of the contextual differences that may influence its outcomes, I argue that we should still verify in different parts of the world a greater propensity of exit (as opposed to loyalty) when bureaucratic polarization increases. That is, the consequences of bureaucratic polarization are generalizable.

In this section, I demonstrate the effects of bureaucratic polarization on exit in Brazil. This follows the same logic of the previous section, where this relationship was tested with U.S. data. Here, I benefit from the online surveys conducted by Barry Ames from 2014 to 2018 with over 10,000 state-level bureaucrats of seven Brazilian states: Espírito Santo (ES), Goiás (GO), Maranhão (MA), Minas Gerais (MG), Pernambuco (PE), Santa Catarina (SC), and São Paulo (SP). I refer to this as the Brazilian Bureaucracy Project (BBP).



### 6.4.1 Data

This data set differs considerably from FEVS. First, it was conducted by an independent researcher, rather than the government itself—even though in all states but ES it was the state government, not the researcher, who e-mailed the survey to potential respondents. Second, this was a one-time-only survey. These factors help to explain the low response rate. Third, the questions were not identical to those used in FEVS. Still, as I will argue in the following paragraphs, they are similar enough to allow comparison.

Finally, there is a difference in the administrative level. Whereas FEVS is conducted with federal-level bureaucrats, BBP considered only those public employees working at the state level. This is ideal for this chapter, which is dedicated to showing that the same phenomenon is identified regardless of context—in this case, country and administrative level.

*Dependent Variable.* All respondents were asked whether they intend to leave the government in the next years.<sup>4</sup> Their answers were coded as a binary variable, which takes the value of 1 for ‘yes’ and 0 otherwise. This question is comparable to the quitting alternative in the previous tests conducted with the sample of U.S. federal bureaucrats. This allows testing the hypothesis that poses that intention to quit increases the more the bureaucrats perceive partisan bias in their own agency ( $H_6$ ). Among the 9,310 respondents, 2,271 (24.39%) stated that they intended to quit—a significantly high share, especially when compared to the American sample.

In Table 6.8, I present turnover intent by job type, that is, whether the respondent is tenured & appointed; tenured only; appointed only; and contracted (i.e., neither tenured nor appointed). This categorization is in line with the distribution of the Brazilian public sector—as well as many comparable systems. Consider the *tenured* category. Career bureaucrats enjoy many civil protections in the country, one of them being tenure, which makes it starkly difficult to fire a careerist (Odilla 2020). To join this type of career, candidates must pass through a very competitive and formally designed selection process. In most states, this type of bureaucrat represents the largest share of the payroll.

Yet, the state may also hire temporary employees, which may be contracted for highly

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<sup>4</sup>In Portuguese, “Você pretende deixar o governo estadual nos próximos anos?”

skilled positions (e.g., engineers, architects) or manual jobs (e.g., janitor, waiter). These *contracted* employees may be easily fired by the government, even though the selection process is public and unlikely to be influenced by politics.

Alternatively, elected officials or their high-level subordinates may appoint their political allies to certain positions (Praça et al. 2022). Whereas some of these appointment positions are restricted to those who already hold a tenured job in the civil service, other appointment jobs are opened to any individual regardless of attachment to the public sector. I label these two types of public sector employees as *tenured & appointed* and *appointed only*, respectively.

Indeed, these appointees are not necessarily partisans. In contexts where the party system is only lowly institutionalized, parties do not have enough specialists to lend to the government. Praça et al. (2022) show that this is also the case in Brazil, where most appointees are not affiliated to any party especially when the Partido dos Trabalhadores is not in power. Yet, in all cases, there is at least a minimal political connection between patrons and appointees.

Table 6.8 shows that whereas most professional categories have roughly 26% of quitters, this number decreases for those who are tenured & appointed—the category which tends to enjoy the highest income and status in their departments. Despite this difference, it is interesting to notice that turnover intent rates are similar among those who are and are not tenured—a surprising distribution given the significant benefits of being a career civil servant in Brazil and the relatively high unemployment rates (World Bank 2017).

*Independent Variable.* The questionnaire includes two sets of questions that proxy the influence of political bias over the bureaucracy. First, subjects were asked to which extent political meddling in strictly administrative matters represents a problem in the respondent's daily work.<sup>5</sup> The 4-point scale of responses ranges from 'This isn't a problem' to 'This is a very serious problem.' There were two variations of this question. Political meddling was phrased as being made by the governor or by political parties.

As a strategy to reduce the size of the survey, different sets of similar questions were randomly excluded from each questionnaire. In the end, this means that 1,833 subjects were

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<sup>5</sup>In Portuguese, "Intromissão do [governador do estado / partidos políticos] em assuntos estritamente administrativos."

Table 6.8: Quitting by Job Type in Brazilian State Bureaucracies

Job Type	Quitting		Total
	No	Yes	
<i>Tenured &amp; Appointed</i>	1,642 (80.65%)	394 (19.35%)	2,036
<i>Tenured only</i>	3,239 (74.41%)	1,114 (25.59%)	4,353
<i>Appointed only</i>	641 (73.93%)	226 (26.07%)	867
<i>Contracted</i>	1,471 (73.83%)	522 (26.18%)	1,994
<i>Total</i>	6,994 (75.61%)	2,256 (24.39%)	9,250

exposed to the question regarding the governor and 1,854 regarding political parties. In total, only 302 civil servants were exposed to both questions. In these cases, there was a correlation of 0.532 between the responses.

Assuming that these types of political meddling are similar enough, I merged both questions. When only one of the questions was available, the unique value was taken. In case both questions were asked, I considered their average. This led to a total of 2,861 responses—still roughly one-fourth of the full sample. The resulting variable has a correlation of 0.865 with the variable considering the governor only and 0.885 when only political parties are considered. Thus, this independent variable is a proxy for political meddling.

The alternative measurement regards the perceived relevance of political-partisan affinity to be picked among career civil servants to become a political appointee.<sup>6</sup> There were five possible responses, ranging from ‘Not relevant’ to ‘Very relevant.’ The wording is interesting, since it allows a type of political affinity that is not exclusively partisan. The Brazilian party system has relatively low levels of party institutionalization. Thus, political appointments are often based on non-partisan political attachments (Praça et al. 2022).

The main advantage of this question is that it was responded to by 8,093 civil servants, representing almost the entirety of the sample. Furthermore, it is directly related to the

<sup>6</sup>In Portuguese, “Importância de fatores para cargo de confiança entre servidores: Afinidade político-partidária.”

measure utilized in the previous section of this chapter, which is focused on the United States. I show in the histograms plotted in Figure 6.1 that the distribution of the two alternative independent variables in the Brazilian study is reasonably similar. In both cases, they are left-skewed with over 30% of respondents perceiving no political bias over the bureaucracy. In the other extreme, 15-20% of state bureaucrats see a high influence of politics over their jobs.

*Covariates.* The list of covariates includes the two control variables used in the previous section of this paper: supervision responsibility<sup>7</sup> and sex. This data set also allows the inclusion of new controls. First, partisanship. Here, respondents were asked both if they are registered as a member of any party, as well as whether they identify with any party. I tested these two variables and created a third one, which regards a binary choice of 1 if the subject is a partisan of any type and 0 otherwise. Additionally, I also control for job type considering the four previously mentioned categories: tenured & appointed; tenured only; appointed only; and contracted (i.e., neither tenured nor appointed).

*Models.* I replicate the same models used in the previous section of this chapter (see Equation 3). That is, I use generalized multilevel mixed-effects logistic regressions with individual responses nested within state clusters (Steenbergen & Jones 2002). Individual-level responses are included in level 1 of the regression, while state averages are used in level 2 (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal 2008). Since it is not possible to identify the specific agency of each respondent, I only test the quitter ( $H_6$ ) and the mover ( $H_8$ ) hypotheses. Yet, I still control for state averages. This helps to isolate the level-1 variation regardless of context.

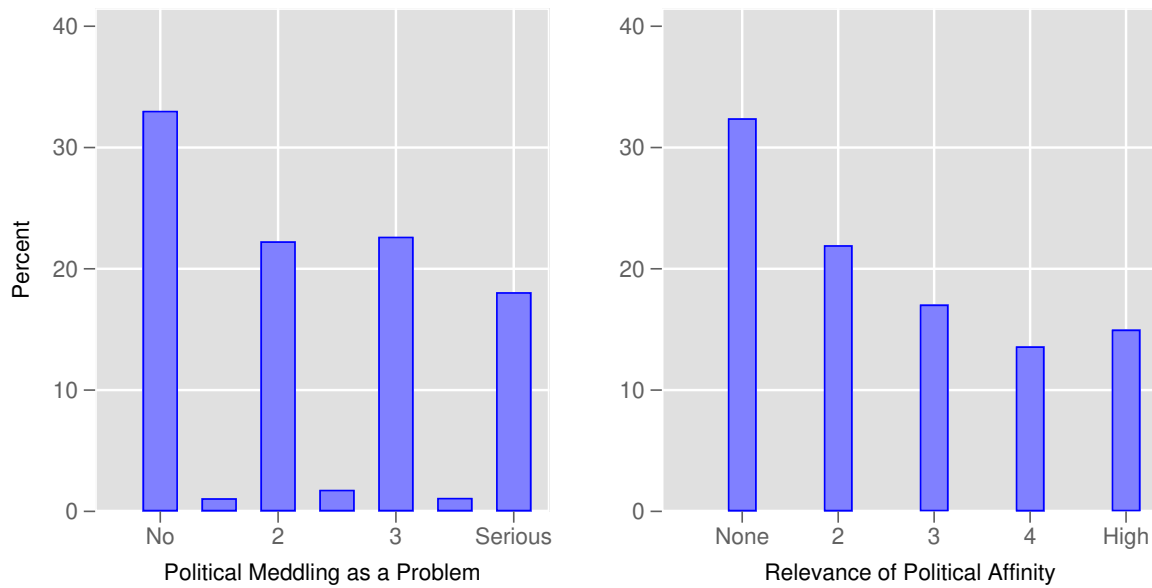
## 6.4.2 Findings

The results are presented in Table 6.10. They confirm that political bias does influence turnover intent regardless of job type, partisanship, sex, and supervisory status. First, consider model EB1, where the independent variable of interest is perceived political meddling. For each additional degree of meddling, there is an increase of 0.202 log-odds in the probability that the respondent will affirm that he is considering leaving the state government in

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<sup>7</sup>In Portuguese, “Na sua atividade atual, você coordena ou dirige outras pessoas?”

Figure 6.1: Perceived Political Bias in the Brazilian State Bureaucracies



**Note:** The distribution of “Political Meddling as a Problem” reflects the strategy to build this variable based on two survey questions. When respondents were exposed to the two questions, the variable regards the average between both responses. However, most respondents were exposed to only one question. This explains the low frequencies of 1.5, 2.5, and 3.5.

Table 6.9: Descriptive Statistics for Exit in Brazil

Variable	Type	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
<i>Quitting</i>	Binary	9,310	0.24	0.43	0	1
<i>Meddling</i>	Continuous	2,861	2.28	1.11	1	4
<i>Political Affinity</i>	Ordinary	8,093	2.57	1.44	1	5
<i>Boss</i>	Binary	9,009	0.38	0.47	0	1
<i>Male</i>	Binary	9,318	0.48	0.50	0	1
<i>Partisan (all)</i>	Binary	9,168	0.31	0.46	0	1

the next years. I plot the predicted probability of being a quitter in Figure 6.2. This shows that those civil servants who perceive that political meddling in administrative matters has not been a problem have a probability of 20.8% of being a quitter. Yet, among those who see this as a serious issue, the probability of turnover intent is 32.3%—an increase of 55.3%.

Now, consider the effects of the politicization of appointments on turnover intent (model EB2). For those who do not believe that partisan-political identification with one's boss is a determinant factor in being appointed for a commissioned position, the probability of intending to quit is 22.6%. For those in the other extreme, that is, when there is a high perception of this political affinity, the probability of turnover intent rises to 27.7%—a variation of 22.8%. As shown in Table 6.10, this result is also statistically significant at the 0.001 level and reflects a log-odds of 0.069 for each additional degree of required political affinity.

At the state level, the log-odds of both *Meddling* and *Political Affinity* are significant at the 0.05 level. Yet, the nature of the data would make any interpretation unrealistic. This happens because of the very small variation captured in the sample. The state average of *Meddling* ranges from 2.11 to 2.39 while from 2.44 to 2.80 in the case of *Political Affinity*. Thus, I only keep them in the models to control the individual-level results for contextual factors.

Finally, in opposition to the results obtained with the U.S. sample, the coefficient of *Supervision* is statistically significant and negative in both EB1 and EB2. This suggests that while American bosses are more likely to quit than their subordinates, Brazilian bosses are more likely to stay when compared to other bureaucrats. Even though this is not the focus of this work, it is possible to speculate that this difference reflects the (lack of) availability of jobs for former high-level bureaucrats in the two selected countries.

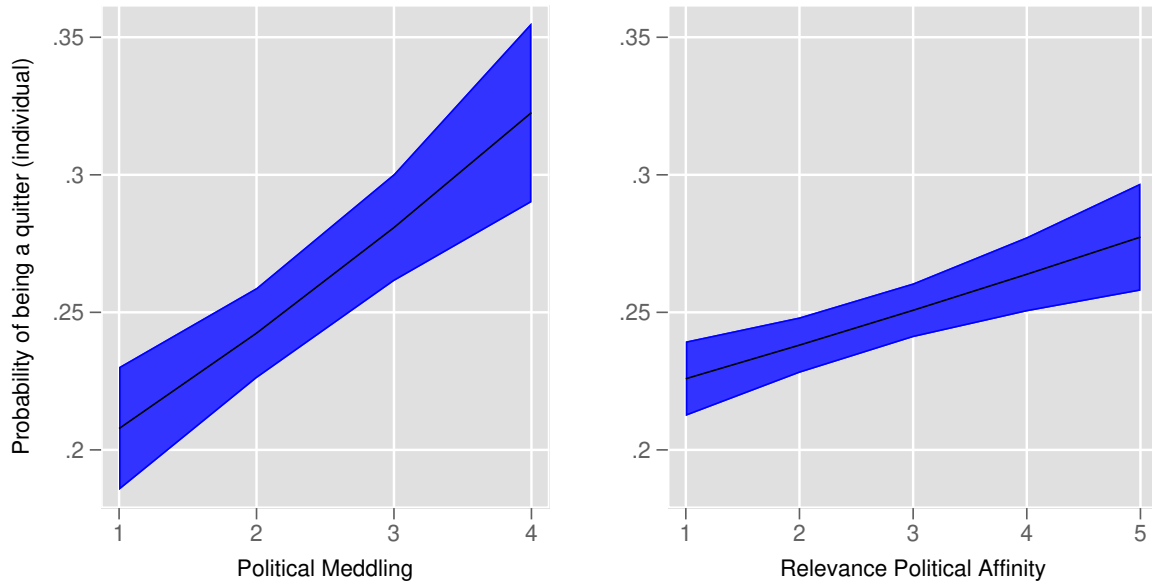
The other control variables suggest additional interesting trends. Males are more likely to quit only in Model EB2—this should be further investigated by scholars dedicated to gender and politics in the workplace. The independent variable for partisanship, which includes both bureaucrats who are members of or simply like a specific party, does not yield a statistically significant coefficient. This may be related to the findings of [Praça et al. \(2022\)](#), who demonstrate that only a minor portion of Brazilian bureaucrats is affiliated

Table 6.10: Predicting Exit in Brazil

	EB1	EB2
Meddling	0.202***	
Political Affinity		0.069***
Supervision	-0.199*	-0.139*
Male	0.075	0.107*
Partisan	0.042	0.042
Type of Job (Baseline: <i>Tenured only</i> )		
<i>Contracted</i>	0.054	0.054
<i>Appointed only</i>	0.087	0.087
<i>Tenured &amp; Appointed</i>	-0.310***	-0.310***
Constant	63.361*	103.566***
Random Effects	-18.295	-10.465
State means	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,822	7,980
Groups	7	7
Log likelihood	-1567.449	-4,392.302
Akaike's inf. crit.	3,164.898	8,814.603

**Note:** \*  $p < 0.05$  and \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Figure 6.2: The Effects of Political Bias on Turnover Intent in Brazil



with any political party and that this is not necessarily what determines favoritism from patrons.

The last piece in the model is a categorical model that controls for the different job types in the Brazilian civil service: contracted personnel, tenured bureaucrats, appointees with no tenured position, and those civil servants who are tenured and hold a political appointment. When compared to those who are tenured only, only those who are tenured and appointed are less prone to intend to quit. This is possibly related to the high status enjoyed by these bureaucrats in government, meaning more power and a higher salary. Yet, since this is directly related to the clash of identities discussed in this chapter, I further investigate this result in the next subsection.

### 6.4.3 Effects by Job Type

This chapter assumes that civil servants acquire a workplace identity in their public departments that is congruent with the mission of the organization. When elected officials



or another politically-motivated out-group attempt to influence the public department, bureaucrats face a clash of identities. Should they adapt to the new logic of appropriateness imposed by politicians, or should they clash against these out-groups? The proposition in  $H_6$  is that these scenarios will increase the social distance between civil servants and elected officials, thus driving the likelihood of quitting up.

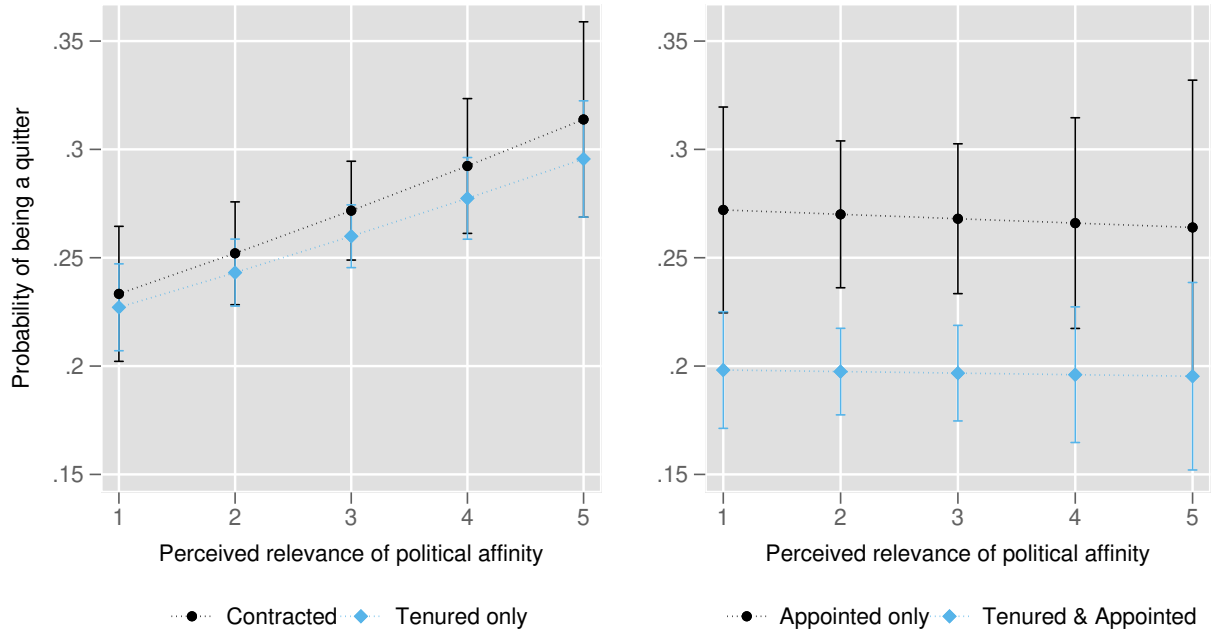
If that is correct, the perception of political bias should not influence those who hold some type of politically appointed position. That is, those who have already adhered to the logic of their political principals should have inelastic quitting preferences regardless of their perception of political bias. On the other hand, those who are still independent of elected officials should be negatively influenced by the perception that politics matters. These non-appointed bureaucrats will see partisan bias as aggression to their workplace identity, thus becoming more likely to quit.

To test this proposition, I run a regression where I interact the perceived relevance of political affinity (*Political Affinity*) and the categorical variable for the job type. The expectation is that those who are either tenured only or contracted will have their quitting preferences affected by *Political Affinity*. Yet, we should see no effect among those who hold any type of political appointment, i.e., appointed only and tenured & appointed.

I plot the predicted probabilities of the interaction in Figure 6.3. The findings support the proposition that turnover intent is inelastic to the perceived relevance of political affinity among public employees who are either appointed only or tenured & appointed. Also as expected, the effect is positive for contracted and tenured only personnel.

Among those civil servants who were contracted through a regular recruitment process but are not tenured, the likelihood of turnover intent is 23.3% if they perceive no relevance in political affinity. This increases to 31.4% for those who believe political affinity is very important—an effect of 34.5%. For those who are tenured but hold no political appointment, turnover intent increases 30.1%, spiking from 22.7% to 29.6%.

Figure 6.3: The Effects of Political Bias Among Job Types in Brazil



## 6.5 Discussion

In his seminal work on the politics of bureaucracy, [Tullock \(2005, p. 15\)](#) suggests that “For some employees transfer to non-government employment is relatively easy, but for the bulk of government employees making such a shift would involve significant personal sacrifice.” The same is true for moving to different agencies. In the author’s words, “Most civil servants, especially at the higher levels, are, therefore, committed to a career of finding out what their superior want (...) and doing it in the hope that these superiors will then reward such behavior with promotions” (*ibid.*).

Whereas his explanation is based on the assumed rationality of civil servants, this expectation is not exclusive to Public Choice theorists. Exiting also means resigning—or at least distancing—from one’s workplace identity ([Akerlof & Kranton 2010](#)) and, specifically for bureaucrats, abdicating from a job linked to a public sector motivation ([Perry & Wise 1990](#)). This will occur under drastic situations, such as a negative shift in the balance be-

tween costs and benefits or a disappointment caused by a clash of identities. Most likely, it is a mix of both (Shore & Wayne 1993; Eisenberger et al. 1986).

My main argument is that bureaucrats become attached to their workplace due to a series of factors, for instance, self-selection, an adjustment to the organizational culture, and an expectation of relevant achievements for society. In this process, bureaucrats develop a social (workplace) identity, which results in in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination—as identified in other examples of intergroup conflict (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Since multiple workplace identities co-exist, the specification of the out-group should vary. In this chapter, the out-group is the actor who attempts to bring partisan politics to the bureaucracy.

Political bias in the bureaucracy worsens intergroup conflict if we understand partisanship as another social identity, as done by Iyengar et al. (2012) in the United States and Samuels & Zucco (2018) in Brazil. When this happens, the conflict becomes not only a matter of organizational unfairness (see Vanderschuere & Birdsall 2019), but the meddling of a political out-group in the work of the bureaucrat. These contexts result in enhanced bureaucratic polarization against the out-group and, eventually, a disidentification with one's group (Shore & Wayne 1993), given that its organizational culture may have been modified by the political actor.

The data analyzed in this chapter clearly shows that there is a link between political meddling and exit. That is, the more civil servants perceive the influence of politics over the bureaucracy, the less they want to stay in their public departments. This result holds under different conditions.

First, consider the American case. Relying on a massive longitudinal survey conducted with federal bureaucrats, multilevel mixed-effects regressions demonstrate that the more a bureaucrat perceives partisan favoritism in the workplace, the higher will be the likelihood of turnover intent. The effects of this perception are substantive for both moving to another agency or quitting the government. On a scale from one to five, each additional degree of perceived partisan bias increases the propensity of quitting by 72.1%—a maximum increase of 3.6 times the original turnover intent. The effect on moving is similarly high: 69.0%.

Whereas these results are already high at the individual level, they are enhanced in cases of generalized perception of partisan bias. The more the members of a certain department

share this perception, the higher the individual turnover intent is. For each additional average point, it increases intention to quit by 30.6% and to move by 22.5%. I present causal evidence for this agency-level trend by conducting a fixed-effects regression based on a longitudinal panel of U.S. federal agencies. Furthermore, these results remain substantively high even when I consider other aspects of organizational unfairness ([Vanderschuere & Birdsall 2019](#)) and a set of demographics accounting for potential omitted variable bias ([L.-F. Lee 1982](#)). The most conservative estimate for the 2010-2019 timeframe is that quitting increases 39.3% for each additional level of perceived bias, while 31.0% for an additional perception of reprisal against those who denounce wrongdoings, and 8.7% for the presence of prohibited behaviors. Multiple additional reasons could lead to moving and quitting: the status of one's agency, budgets, power, salary, experience, etc. All of these should be further explored in the future. Yet, following this chapter's main goal, I confirm with robust and substantive results that politics and identity clashes matter.

One issue to be addressed in the future is the differentiation between moving and quitting. The only finding that yields from the data analyzed in this chapter are that moving is way more likely than quitting. This could be easily anticipated, given the high costs of abandoning a public job in the federal bureaucracy. This is likely to occur only under extreme circumstances or when the civil servant has already identified a potential job in the private sector. However, the counter-intuitive finding is that, regardless of these costs, increased perception of partisan bias does motivate quitting.

To show that these results are generalizable, I also conducted similar tests with a sample of state-level bureaucrats in Brazil. Here, the scenario is even more extreme, given the high unemployment rates in the private sector and the well-known advantages of being a civil servant ([World Bank 2017](#)). The average turnover intent among those who perceive no political meddling in their administrative work is 20.8%. For those who assess this as very common, quitting behavior raises to 32.3%. The effects of believing that political affinity with the principal is relevant to be appointed for a higher position are similar: an increase of 22.8% in turnover intent. This result speaks directly to the work of [Tullock \(2005\)](#), who portrays the bureaucracy as an environment where such relationship is often mandatory. I demonstrate that some bureaucrats do not perceive this as mandatory. Furthermore, those

who see it are more prone to exiting.

Interestingly, the data in Brazil also allows supporting the proposition that turnover intention is driven by a clash of identities. For those who have already assimilated the political identity of their superiors (i.e., political appointees), the perception that partisan affinity matters does not influence the desire to quit. Yet, it has substantive effects among those who do not hold any appointment. In agreement with the institutional theory of [March & Olsen \(2010\)](#), these two groups of bureaucrats hold different logics of appropriateness. When non-appointees are forced to comply with something that deviates from their organizational identity, they become more prone to adopt the exit strategy.

It is possible to argue that, from the perspective of the principal, the exit of non-compliers may be a positive outcome ([Hirschman 1970](#)). Yet, this may not be ideal for the public bureaucracy. First, if principals of a certain political preference force out those who hold different views, the democratic balance of the department is harmed. When power alternation occurs, the next leader will find it especially difficult to implement the new agenda. To a certain extent, this implies the formation of a bureaucratic machine that works in favor of a leader or party, rather than on behalf of the people—a likely step toward democratic backsliding ([Bermeo 2016](#)), not to mention the detrimental effects on the public sector professionalization and state capacity.

The second problem occurs when bureaucrats move to different agencies. Whereas this may reduce within-agency bureaucratic polarization, this increases the social distance between agencies. That is, organizational cultures may become even more different, increasing the negative affect that bureaucrats have toward other agencies. If governments want to reduce coordination problems, enhancing the divergence among public departments is counter-productive.

## 6.6 Summary

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that one possible consequence of bureaucratic polarization is absorption. That is, when actors find it hard to cooperate and believe that incorporating

the out-group will allow implementation processes to move forward, they will attempt to adopt this strategy.

In this chapter, I investigate how bureaucrats react when elected officials try to absorb their organization. Relying on massive surveys with bureaucrats from the United States, I demonstrate that civil servants become substantively more likely to wish to leave their organization when they believe that politicians have too much control over it. I identify the same correlation in Brazil, where the premium for being a civil servant is considerably higher than in the United States. Furthermore, I confirm that this has to do with the polarization between administration and politics because political appointees are not affected by the perception of political meddling in their workplace.

## 7.0 Policy Disagreements and Voice Attitudes

I develop in Chapter 6 the argument that bureaucratic polarization may lead to non-compliance, ultimately motivating several public employees to opt-out of civil service. Still, the analyses of the American and the Brazilian cases show that a significant share of bureaucrats still decides to remain in their jobs even after reporting dissatisfaction with administrative-political clashes. In this chapter, I investigate what happens with those bureaucrats who stay. Will they abdicate from their organizational identity to comply with requests coming from their political superiors? Or will they see their principals as out-groups and fight against them to preserve their organizational culture and social norms?

The natural similarities between this and the previous chapter exist because both follow the “Exit, Voice, and Loyalty” framework proposed in [Hirschman \(1970\)](#) and applied to this discussion as possible outcomes of bureaucratic polarization. Exit and voice, as opposed to loyalty, should function as correction mechanisms whenever members of an organization (or their consumers) are dissatisfied with the ongoing situation.

I developed the exit alternative in Chapter 6. Now, consider the dichotomy between voice and loyalty among those who stay. Loyalty occurs when the civil servants who opted for staying decide to follow the existing organizational culture, regardless of whether this is guided by pre-existing social norms or rules that were newly imposed by the group those civil servants polarize against. For comparability with the exit discussion, in this chapter, the out-group is set as principals who are either elected officials or their loyalists.

### 7.1 Bureaucratic Polarization and Resistance

In the public administration literature, it is well-established that principals affect the ideological leanings of public bureaucracies ([Aberbach & Rockman 1995](#); [Bonica et al. 2015](#); [Scholz et al. 1991](#)). Furthermore, [Aberbach & Rockman \(1995, p. 844\)](#) argue that “Opportunists among the senior executives may adjust their views to make themselves acceptable to

the administration.” Overall, principals may impose tasks or even an organizational culture that is dissonant with the workplace identity of certain bureaucrats who, after deciding to stay, must opt between becoming loyalists or voicing their opposition.

This is to say that *not all stayers are loyalists*. [Hirschman \(1970, p. 30\)](#) explains that “To resort to voice, rather than exit, is for (...) the member to make an attempt at changing the practices, policies, and outputs of the (...) organization to which one belongs.” There are, as he says, different ways to voice dissatisfaction: “through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests” ([Hirschman 1970, p. 30](#)). Here, I am specifically interested in the latter voice strategy: “various types of actions and protests.” As I argue in the following paragraphs, these include shirking and sabotage—two possible bureaucratic reactions developed in [Brehm & Gates \(1999\)](#).

To put this argument in perspective, the original proposition is that voice is a residual of exit ([Hirschman 1970](#)). Those who are unable to leave their organization and are discontent enough to reject loyalty will find different mechanisms to express their dissatisfaction. According to [John \(2017, p. 518\)](#), “Exit occurs when voice fails.” Ultimately, this reaction could lead to negative returns to the organization, especially in the political realm and when it comes to operational capacity ([Hirschman 1970](#)). This logic also applies to the public service ([Aberbach & Rockman 2017; Golden 1992](#)). In contexts where quitting may lead to high social costs (e.g., unemployment, loss of public service benefits), bureaucrats look for alternative ways to protest the imposition of political ideas, unwanted interagency cooperation, or policies they reject.

Some of these bureaucratic responses are proposed and tested by [Brehm & Gates \(1999\)](#) in their seminal book “Working, Shirking, and Sabotage” and, more recently, expanded by [Guedes-Neto & Peters \(2021b\)](#), who consider this framework as a (voice) response to undemocratic policies. It is true that, in a footnote, [Brehm & Gates \(1999, p. 30\)](#) suggest that at least shirking is an appendix to voice and exit—rather than a type of voice. They refer to this additional strategy as “neglect,” which was appended to Hirschman’s trichotomy by [Rusbult et al. \(1982\)](#) when studying romantic relationships. According to them, this means



“passively allowing a relationship to atrophy” (Rusbult et al. 1982, p. 1,231).

*Shirkers* may seek the atrophy of a policy they dislike. Still, the definition of dissent-shirking—“not working because one is opposed to a particular policy output” (Brehm & Gates 1999, p. 30)—is directly related to how Hirschman (1970) defines the protest aspect of voice. That is, given the undesirability of the exit strategy, civil servants who antagonize the political ideas of their principals will voice their opposition by shirking or sabotaging the implementation process. Thus, acknowledging the possibility of alternative interpretations, I refer to shirking and sabotage as different types of voice.

Before explaining the theory of voice as a possible outcome of bureaucratic polarization, consider the practical example illustrated in Chapter 3. There, I described the implementation of Projeto Tietê. The reader should recall that, aiming at the depollution of the Tietê River, the governor of São Paulo (Brazil), Luiz Fleury, appointed the bureaucrat Marco Palermo to move from his agency to SABESP, the public firm responsible for water and sewage systems in the state. He became the executive head of a taskforce involving different agencies in the river’s clean-up.

On his first day at this new workplace, rather than an office, Palermo was given a desk in the hallway right beside the elevator. This was one of a series of measures adopted by the water and sewage company to undermine the project. The sabotage of SABESP’s managers against the Projeto Tietê was strong enough to delay its implementation process until Fleury’s term was over. When Mário Covas became the new governor, the balance of power changed, especially because the level of bureaucratic polarization between the public firm and the Governor’s Office decreased substantially. SABESP’s managers became the owner of the project and Marco Palermo *quit* the government. These events highlight that while interagency bureaucratic polarization led Palermo to exit, SABESP used voice as its strategy against elected officials and their loyalist.

Some dissatisfied lovers react with neglect by “ignoring the partner or spending less time together, refusing to discuss problems, [or] treating the partner badly emotionally or physically” (Rusbult et al. 1982, p. 1,231). Workers respond similarly to different types of workplace dissatisfaction. Some examples include calling in sick, being late, or even making more errors (Farrell 1983). Withey & Cooper (1989) identify neglect in work environments

as a response to prior dissatisfaction when voice is too costly. At the same time, voice occurs among the employees who were previously satisfied and believe that speaking out may solve an existing problem.

These findings apply to the government. In public departments, *voice* is possible because many bureaucrats enjoy significant levels of discretion (Kerwin & Furlong 2018), have substantive expertise in the job they do (Downs 1964; Gailmard & Patty 2007), and are restricted by incomplete information in their ability to monitor the performance of their peers and subordinates (Brehm & Gates 1994, 1999). I propose that bureaucratic polarization is another factor that allows and motivates *voice* in the government. Social distance has the potential to negatively affect job satisfaction but a substantive share of public employees decide to stay in their job despite intergroup animosities (Chapter 6). Among those who stay, I argue, shirking represents a likely outcome of conflicts related to workplace identity.

The puzzle is that, after reviewing the literature in public administration, Pierre & Peters (2017) find that shirking is not common among bureaucrats. Those individuals who self-select into a government career are likely to have an intrinsic motivation to work for the public (Perry & Wise 1990), thus constraining their incentives to refuse to work (Pierre & Peters 2017). Additionally, among those who are guided by rational behavior, shirking is an unlikely strategy because this may reduce the chances of being promoted or obtaining other benefits that require compliance with the principal's interests (Tullock 2005; Pierre & Peters 2017). Finally, there is the collaborative nature of public jobs: civil servants are often expected to work in groups and are influenced by the opinions of their peers (Pierre & Peters 2017). In these settings, shirking oftentimes means increasing the amount of work that a colleague must do.

I contend that even after considering these inhibitors, bureaucratic polarization increases the likelihood of shirking in government. The context of democratic backsliding illustrates this proposition. When illiberal leaders are elected, they attempt to undermine existing institutions to enhance their control over the country (Bermeo 2016). In many cases, this means designing policies that will be approved by the legislature and authorized or at least tolerated by the judiciary system. The next step, the policy implementation, requires the efforts of another group of actors: the bureaucracy (Peters & Pierre 2020, 2019). Using the

terminology proposed by Tsebelis (2002), this places civil servants as potential veto players in the process of democratic backsliding (Guedes-Neto & Peters 2021b).

In these contexts, some bureaucrats will become loyal to illiberal leaders. This happened in Brazil during the military regime (1964-1985) (Schmitter 1972) and, more recently, in the case of Venezuela under Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro (Muno & Briceño 2021). Still, civil servants have strong incentives to refuse cooperation. First, following similar expectations as those developed by March & Olsen (2010), implementing policies that go against democracy may deviate from the organizational culture of the public department, leading to a conflict between the social norms of the bureaucrat and the goals of elected officials and their loyalists. The same should be true when it comes to the public service as a whole, since government employees may understand these policies as attempting against the population and, thus, eroding their public service motivation (see Perry & Wise 1990).

Finally, bureaucrats are also part of the public. As such, we should expect that those with strong preferences for democracy will also see the interests of elected officials as conflicting with their own attitudes. All these factors should drastically intensify the bureaucratic polarization between public employees and elected officials and ultimately increase the likelihood of non-compliance. Applying this to the possibility of shirking as a voice strategy, I hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 10.** *The likelihood of shirking increases when bureaucrats are asked to implement a policy that they consider to be undemocratic.*

Brehm & Gates (1999) show that functional preferences are likely to lead bureaucrats to work rather than not. This is true especially when working is compared to sabotage. After all, if shirking is an anomaly (Pierre & Peters 2017), sabotage should be an even rarer reaction. However, O’Leary (2014, p. 8) finds consistent evidence of what she terms “guerrilla government,” that is, “the actions of career public servants who work against the wishes—either implicitly or explicitly communicated—of their superiors.” She explains that

“Guerrillas may cultivate allies among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) within their policy areas, slip data to other agencies, and ghostwrite testimony for others. They may hold secret meetings to plot unified staff strategies, leak information to the press, and quietly sabotage the actions of their agencies” (O’Leary 2014, p. 6).

O’Leary (2014) provides different reasons for these behaviors. Some of them are guided by the literature on organizational theory. First, guerrilla may be a response to disagreements with the existing organizational culture. That is, “Most [bureaucrats] have a wider conceptualization of their work than that articulated by their agencies’ formal and informal statements of mission” (O’Leary 2014, p. 6). Still, this may also occur as a manner of protecting an existing organization: “Many are committed to particular methodologies, techniques, or ideas” (O’Leary 2014, p. 6). This is in line with the findings of Hollibaugh Jr et al. (2020), who show that the less a policy is aligned with the civil servant’s code of ethics, the more likely it is that sabotage will exist. Furthermore, this supports previous literature that links whistle-blowing to the preservation of one’s ethics and social norms (Caillier 2017; Lavena 2016).

These reactions follow the logic of bureaucratic polarization in contexts of democratic backsliding. As earlier stated, the assumption is that civil servants have at least three reasons to embed democracy in their workplace culture: their public service motivation to serve the population, the preservation of their organizational culture free from political meddling, and their status as citizens of a democratic country. When democracy is at risk, they should polarize against elected officials and loyalists who intend to use their agency to implement policies that are seen as illiberal. This conflict of identities (i.e., the bureaucrat versus the undemocratic principal) will make sabotage more likely to exist. In empirical terms,

**Hypothesis 11.** *The likelihood to sabotage increases when bureaucrats are asked to implement a policy that they consider to be undemocratic.*

So far, shirking and sabotage were presented as independent behaviors. In fact, bureaucrats may opt for a combination of working, shirking, and sabotage depending on the situation at hand. Thus, one behavior does not necessarily exclude the other. Still, if the voice strategy is to be adopted, civil servants still must reflect on whether shirking or sabotage is the most appropriate reaction for a given moment. Who is more likely to opt for each of these strategies?

Overall, the costs of sabotage tend to be considerably higher than those of shirking (Brehm & Gates 1999). O’Leary (2014) starts her book by remembering that she was

punished after sabotaging her boss in a public department. Her participation in decision-making bodies was curbed, ultimately motivating her to quit. Here, I assume that exit is possible but not a desirable option for those who stay (for that, see Chapter 6). Therefore, bureaucrats should be mindful of the risk of forced exit that their behavior entails.

One solution is to see these possibilities according to Guttman's hypothesis of scalability, that is, the expectation "that the entire universe of items forms a scale for the entire population of people" (Guttman 1947, p. 249). Applied to the context of this study, this means that only those who would shirk could consider the possibility of sabotage. Since sabotage is too costly, those who are not willing to shirk would also not be willing to sabotage. The natural outcome is that, *ceteris paribus*, shirking should be more common than sabotage.

I argue that this is the case only when bureaucrats have a low level of identification with their agency. As already discussed, shirking often means increasing the burden of a colleague, who may be tasked with the implementation of that policy, or who may have to solve the problems created by this neglect (Pierre & Peters 2017). Furthermore, whereas shirking may delay the policy process, its implementation continues. Going back to a setting of illiberal politics, this means that shirking bureaucrats will risk punishment, worsen workplace relations, and still allow the undemocratic leader to control the agency in the long run. Thus, this strategy should work better for those who are not committed to the preservation of their agency's organizational culture.

On the other hand, strong workplace identity should lead to a starker predisposition to engage in intergroup conflict (Tajfel & Turner 1979). That is, when bureaucrats fiercely identify with their agency, they will be willing to take radical measures to protect their organizational culture from unwanted external influences. As said before, the literature shows that bureaucrats are willing whistle-blow (a type of sabotage) if it means preserving their code of ethics (Hollibaugh Jr et al. 2020; Caillier 2017; Lavena 2016). Still, this should be the case only when they hold a strong commitment to the organization's social norms.

In brief, bureaucrats will be willing to shirk and sabotage policies that they deem as undemocratic. On the one hand, when they hold a low level of identification with their agency, shirking will be the most likely reaction. On the other, sabotage should be more common among those with strong organizational identity. In line with these expectations, I

hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 12.** *Organizational identity moderates upward the likelihood of shirking and especially sabotage in comparison to working when a bureaucrat is expected to implement an undemocratic policy.*

## 7.2 Data and Case Selection

I test these hypotheses based on survey experiments conducted with public employees from Brazil, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Recently, these three countries have faced, in their own way, the rise of populist politics (Norris & Inglehart 2019). In all cases, this affected the bureaucracy. Consider Brazil first. Hunter & Power (2019, p. 81) classify president Jair Bolsonaro as having “illiberal inclinations.” According to Silva (2020), during his administration, some bureaucrats who support human rights have faced persecution and were forced to implement policies that go in the opposite direction of their previous work.

This is similar to how the literature sees Donald Trump. Even after winning the dispute for the presidency in 2016, he insisted “that the election results were or would be marred by massive fraud” (Puddington & Roylance 2017, p. 111). In 2020, attacks on US institutions became even more bellicose. A few months before Trump’s defeat, a CNN journalist affirmed that “The most dangerous threat to the integrity of November’s election is coming from the man sworn to protect it, the President of the United States” (Collinson 2020). Moynihan & Roberts (2021) recall that this anti-system behavior also includes attacks on federal employees who opposed Trump’s views.

In the United Kingdom, the rise of the populist UK Independence Party is linked to the referendum resulting in the decision to leave the European Union (Ford & Goodwin 2017). This was followed by “a close five years of disorientation and paralysis” until the general election of December 2019 gave prime minister Boris Johnson a coalition big enough to move forward with Brexit (Whitehead 2020, p. 81). These events drastically affected the British civil service, including those bureaucrats who opposed the policy change: “There were 16,000

civil servants working on Brexit in the run up to a potential no deal exit in March. Over 1,500 were moved within or between departments, and from their day-to-day jobs to contingency planning” (Owen et al. 2019, p. 11).

This is not to say that Brazil, the US, and the UK should be seen as most similar cases. They are not. As noted by Pierre & Peters (2017, p. 2017), “shirking is more likely in traditional career civil service systems in which civil servants have tenure and may have less motivation to perform.” Each of these countries operates under different administrative traditions. According to Painter & Peters (2010), this regards the culture, myths, and rituals that guide civil service behavior in different countries. In their seminal book, the authors propose nine geographical regions with their own traditions. The cases selected for this chapter represent two of them: the Anglo-American (the United States and the United Kingdom) and the Latin American (Brazil) cultures.

Following Painter & Peters (2010), Salazar-Morales & Lauriano (2020, p. 7) highlight that “Whereas Anglo-Saxon bureaucracies tend to be more pragmatic, arguably Latin American or Mediterranean ones, resort to more legalistic procedures.” It is true that, at first, the differentiation of administrative systems suggests that political connections are more relevant in Latin America than in the Anglo-American public service. Still, the legalistic tradition also involves less flexibility for policy change, thus favoring those actors who are interested in preserving the status quo. In these systems, it becomes more likely that shirking and sabotage are done through legal means, thus facilitating the role of bureaucrats as veto players.

Furthermore, these legalistic dissent strategies are protected by the degree of closedness of the Brazilian civil service—in fact, according to an expert survey conducted by Dahlström et al. (2012), Brazil is among the most “closed” bureaucracies in the world. This means that the country has a remarkable presence of protections as “career stability, lifelong tenure, and special laws that cover the terms of employment for public sector employees that differ from the country’s general labor laws” (Dahlström et al. 2012, p. 658). Even though civil service protections also exist in the pragmatic systems of the US and the UK, they are far below in the ranking of bureaucratic closedness.

It is important to say that the bureaucrats surveyed for this study are not representative

of their countries. Thus, cross-national comparisons can only be done in speculative terms. In Brazil, civil servants were recruited based on a partnership with the government of two mid-sized municipalities located in the states of Minas Gerais and Santa Catarina. Both have between 70,000 and 90,000 inhabitants, a relatively high Human Development Index (0.7–0.8), and roughly 2,500 public employees. In both cases, the department responsible for administrative affairs agreed to send a message to all bureaucrats who have an e-mail address inviting them to voluntarily participate in the study through an online questionnaire. This was done right after the election of Jair Bolsonaro, between November 2018 and January 2019. In total, 128 bureaucrats participated in the study. Part of the results was already published in [Guedes-Neto & Peters \(2021b\)](#).

The recruitment in the US and the UK followed a different approach. In these cases, I hired firms that have their pool of participants—Qualtrics in the US and Prolific in the UK. In both samples, participants were screened to make sure they work as public employees. This led to more plural samples than in Brazil, including bureaucrats from different states and administrative levels. Overall, my samples include 420 American and 394 British bureaucrats. In the US, the survey was fielded during the week of the 2020 presidential election, that is, between late October and early November. One month later the study was conducted in the UK. This was the period of the final stages of negotiations to reach the Brexit deal with the European Union. Part of the results of these experiments is presented in [Guedes-Neto & Peters \(2021a\)](#).

### 7.3 List Experiments

The first test proposed to assess whether bureaucrats are willing to work, shirk, or sabotage if assigned to implement an undemocratic policy is a list experiment. This approach is adequate to assess attitudes especially when social desirability bias is expected to influence respondents. According to [Druckman \(2011, p. 124\)](#), this design “allows respondents to respond without encouraging, inducing, or exerting pressure on them to do so.” For instance, [Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. \(2012\)](#) find that Nicaraguan voters who would otherwise deny en-



gaging in practices of vote-buying were keen to report it through list experiments. In the field of Public Administration, [Oliveros \(2016\)](#) use this approach to assess clientelism in the Argentine bureaucracy—again, a thorny topic. This also is the case here, since I want to identify dissent in the public service, that is, the intention to refuse to comply with one’s supervisor.

The logic behind this approach is that, after reading a list of items, subjects are asked to state the number of items they would pick in response to a question ([Peters & Guedes-Neto 2020](#)). The experimental design regards randomizing participants into two conditions: the control group, which reads only four items; and the treatment group, which reads these four items plus an additional item—the one the researcher is interested in. Assuming that the randomization was properly done and, therefore, subjects in the control group serve as a counterfactual to those in the treatment group, the difference-of-means in the number of selected items is the share of respondents who would pick the fifth item.

### 7.3.1 Shirking

At the beginning of the online questionnaire in all three countries, participants were exposed to the following text:

“The following [c: four / t: five] scenarios are common in public departments around the world. There is evidence that some of these scenarios demotivate several civil servants, leading them to dedicate less effort than they would dedicate to other activities. For instance, they may try to assign another colleague to do these tasks, they may do them partially, miss deadlines, or do not do them.”

Right below this text, subjects were presented with at least four baseline conditions as described below:

A civil servant was assigned to work in a project that...

- (1) is very similar to every other project that she/he has always worked at.
- (2) favors only her/his own political group.
- (3) is entirely new to her/him, requiring training and additional efforts.
- (4) creates a political advantage to groups that she/he is against.

These four items were designed based on two recommendations dedicated to reducing bias in the estimators. First, [Kuklinski et al. \(1997\)](#) recommend including at least one item

that is likely to be picked by most, if not all, subjects. Here, the expectation is that all respondents would select at least item 4. Second, Glynn (2013) states that the alternatives should be negatively correlated, that is, subjects who are likely to pick two baseline options are expected not to pick the other two. This explains why alternatives 1 and 3, and 2 and 4 are negatively correlated. These recommendations result in the avoidance of minimum (0) and maximum (4) responses.

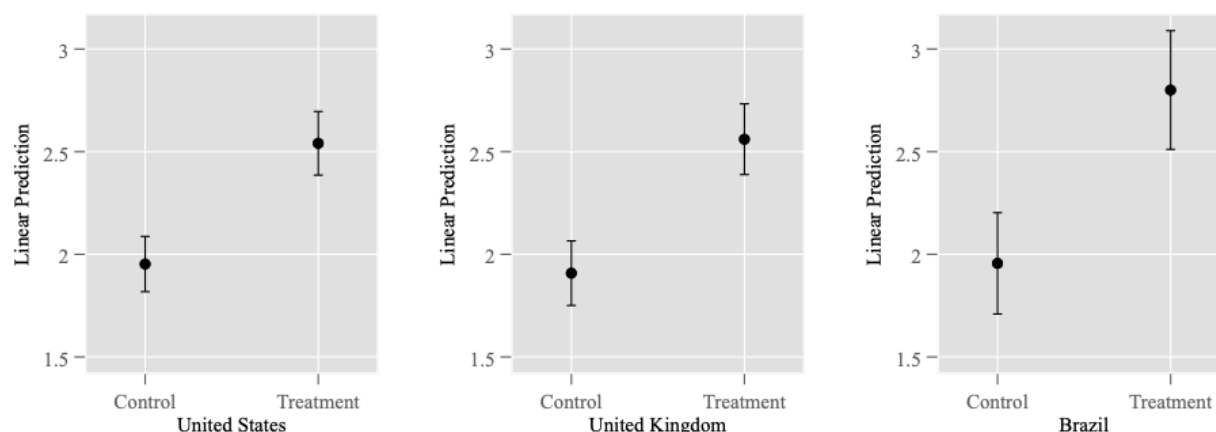
Those subjects who were randomly assigned to the treatment condition read the fifth item: "... it reduces citizens' political rights, such as the freedom of expression or press." This is directly related to hypothesis 10, which states that bureaucrats will become more likely to shirk when they are assigned to implement an undemocratic policy. To test this proposition, I asked subjects: "How many of the previous scenarios would lead a standard civil servant to dedicate fewer efforts to the project in comparison to other activities?" The strategy is, once again, to reduce any type of social desirability bias by asking about "a standard civil servant" rather than the intended behavior of the respondent. The expectation following  $H_{10}$  is that the difference-of-means will be positive and statistically significant in all countries.

First, I run a two-way t-test with the responses of the whole sample to assess the difference-of-means. The 475 subjects assigned into the control group stated that a standard civil servant would shirk, on average, in 1.935 (SD=1.050) out of these four situations. The 467 subjects in the treatment condition picked, on average, 2.582 (SD=1.179) items. This led to a difference-of-means of 0.648 (p-value<0.0001), meaning that 64.8% of the surveyed bureaucrats believe that their peers would shirk if they were assigned to implement an undemocratic policy. This result is valid with an exceedingly high estimated power (1.000) considering an alpha of 0.05. This strongly supports  $H_{10}$ .

Second, I test whether these results are valid across the three countries. I plot the means and standard deviations in Figure 7.1. In all cases, the average responses of the control group are fairly similar: 1.953 in the US, 1.908 in the UK, and 1.956 in Brazil. Furthermore, the difference-of-means is always positive and statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Still, there is a substantive difference in the magnitude of the results depending on the country. The effects obtained with the American and the British sample are close to each other. In the US, 58.9% said their peers would be willing to shirk in face of an undemocratic

Figure 7.1: List Experiment: Shirking in Three Countries



policy, in comparison to 65.2% in the UK. However, the treatment effect in Brazil is considerably higher: 84.4%. Whereas this could be an outcome of the lack of representativeness of the data, this is plausibly explained by the differences in the administrative traditions of each country.

### 7.3.2 Sabotage

After participating in this first experiment, participants were asked to do a related task. The difference this time is that, rather than shirking, the scenario regards the possibility of sabotage. Public employees read the following text:

Now, consider the possibility of undermining a project. A common reaction in different public departments is that some civil servants decide to work against a project at which they were assigned to work at. In other words, instead of implementing it, they decide to do whatever they can so that the project does not move forward.

Again, subjects were assigned into either a control or a treatment condition, which was identical to the one in the previous experiment. They were asked the following question: “How many of the previous scenarios would lead a standard civil servant to work against the project instead of implementing it?” According to the expectation that bureaucrats will be more likely to sabotage the government if assigned to implement a policy that they deem

undemocratic ( $H_{11}$ ), the difference-of-means between the two experimental conditions should be positive and significant.

The average response of the 475 subjects randomized into the control group was 1.453 ( $SD=1.098$ ). Similar to what was obtained in the previous experiment, these data show that the design performs considerably well considering the recommendation that we should avoid minimum (0) and maximum (4) results and that items should be negatively correlated (Kuklinski et al. 1997; Glynn 2013). For those 467 bureaucrats who were exposed to the treatment, the average response was 2.143. This leads to a difference-of-means of 0.691 ( $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ), that is, a treatment effect of 69.1%. This supports  $H_{11}$  and suggests that the likelihood of sabotage is even higher than that of shirking, which achieved a treatment effect of 64.8%. Again, the result reaches a robust statistical power. This finding supports  $H_{11}$  and, in line with  $H_{12}$ , indicates that Guttman's hypothesis of scalability (Guttman 1947) may not be at play if we compare shirking to sabotage.

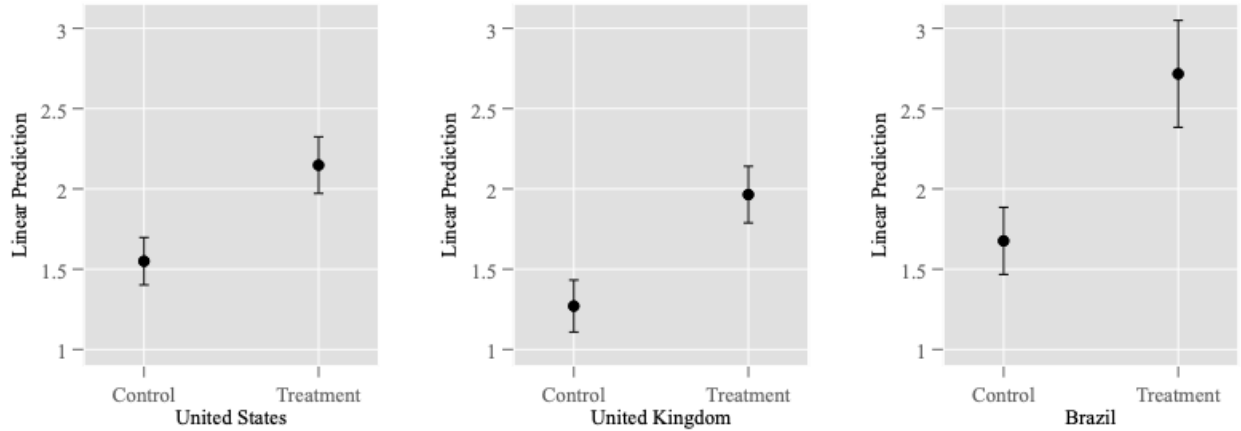
Again, I test how bureaucrats from each of the three selected countries differed from each other. Here, differences across countries are more evident. The averages for subjects in the control group were 1.550 (US), 1.270 (UK), and 1.676 (Brazil). If these results are supposed to represent national attitudes, it appears that Americans are the least likely to consider the sabotage alternative, while British and Brazilian civil servants are more likely to confront principals.

When it comes to treatment effects, the differences become even more salient. In the United Kingdom, undemocratic policies motivate sabotage in 59.9% of the cases, in comparison to 69.4% in the United States. In Brazil, the treatment effect reaches 104%. That is, when Brazilian bureaucrats are exposed to the possibility of an undemocratic policy, they not only become completely engaged in sabotaging it but are also triggered to sabotage other policies.

### 7.3.3 Shirking, Sabotage and Organizational Identity

The last theoretical proposition of this chapter is that the treatment effects identified in the previous subsections should be moderated upward by the bureaucrats' organizational

Figure 7.2: List Experiment: Sabotage in Three Countries



identity especially ( $H_{12}$ ). That is, those with a higher identification should espouse greater treatment effects, especially when it comes to sabotaging. To test this hypothesis, I included the following question when running the surveys in the United States and the United Kingdom:

Please, imagine that you are working for a government that has four organizations (i.e., public departments): yours; a department whose responsibilities overlap with yours; a department that oversees your work; and one totally unrelated to your own department.

Whenever possible, please try to think of public departments that you know and share these characteristics.

How positive would you feel towards each of these departments?

Please, answer following a 0-100 scale, where 0 means “Very negative” and 100 means “Very positive.”

As explained in Chapter 5, this question is adapted from the seminal study of [Bogardus \(1947\)](#), who introduced the measurement of social distance in the field of social psychology. Originally used to assess affect toward different racial and ethnic groups, this methodology was picked up by the Political Science literature especially after [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#) adapted it to the study of affective polarization, that is, the individual-level social distance between Republicans and Democrats. Under the proposition of bureaucratic polarization, here this approach is re-adapted to measure affect toward different public departments.

Table 7.1: Treatment Effects according to Organizational Identity

		<b>Identity</b>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<b>Experiment</b>	<i>Shirking</i>	51.1%	64.8%
	<i>Sabotage</i>	39.6%	73.9%

Still, this chapter requires a different operationalization than that adopted in the other chapters of this dissertation. Since here the goal is not to capture *inter*-agency bureaucratic polarization but social distance *within* a single agency, it suffices to rely on how much bureaucrats identify with their agency. This means selecting only the feeling thermometer regarding one's agency.

In both the US and the UK, the affect was considerably high. Only 29.61% of the sample chose a value below 80 in the 0-100 scale. Assuming that this should function as a threshold of whether bureaucrats highly identify with their organization, I split the sample into two groups depending on whether they chose a low (0-79) or high (80-100) number in the feeling thermometer. Respectively, these groups have 241 and 573 subjects each. Then, I run the two-way t-test for each of these two groups.

For ease of interpretation, the treatment effects are presented in Table 7.1. Consider the first row, which shows the different outcomes of the shirking experiment depending on the level of organizational identity: 51.1% of those who do not strongly identify with their agency will see shirking in response to an undemocratic policy, in comparison to 64.8% of those with high organizational identity. This is interesting that while the propensity of shirking in the first group already is considerably high, it becomes even higher in the second group. The overall increase is 13.1 percentage points, or a rate of change of 26.8%  $[(64.8-51.1)/51.1=0.268]$ .

The variation in the second line is even more striking. When it comes to sabotaging, those with a low degree of organizational identity are considerably reluctant. That is, only 39.6% would be willing to confront their principals if they were assigned to implement an

undemocratic policy. This effect drastically increases to 73.9% among those who are strongly attached to their department. This represents a rate of change of 86.6%  $[(73.9-39.6)/39.6]$ , that is, three times more than that of shirking. Thus, there is robust support for  $H_{12}$ .

Now, to dig deeper into the data, the means of each condition are plotted in Figure 7.3. The first highlight is that, even though the treatment effect of shirking is higher for those with a strong organizational identity, the propensity of shirking in the baseline condition is considerably lower for this group. While those in the low identity group picked, on average, 2.15 items of the 4-item list, the average for those with a high organizational identity is 1.85. This is a decrease of 16.2%  $[(2.15-1.85)/1.85=0.162]$ .

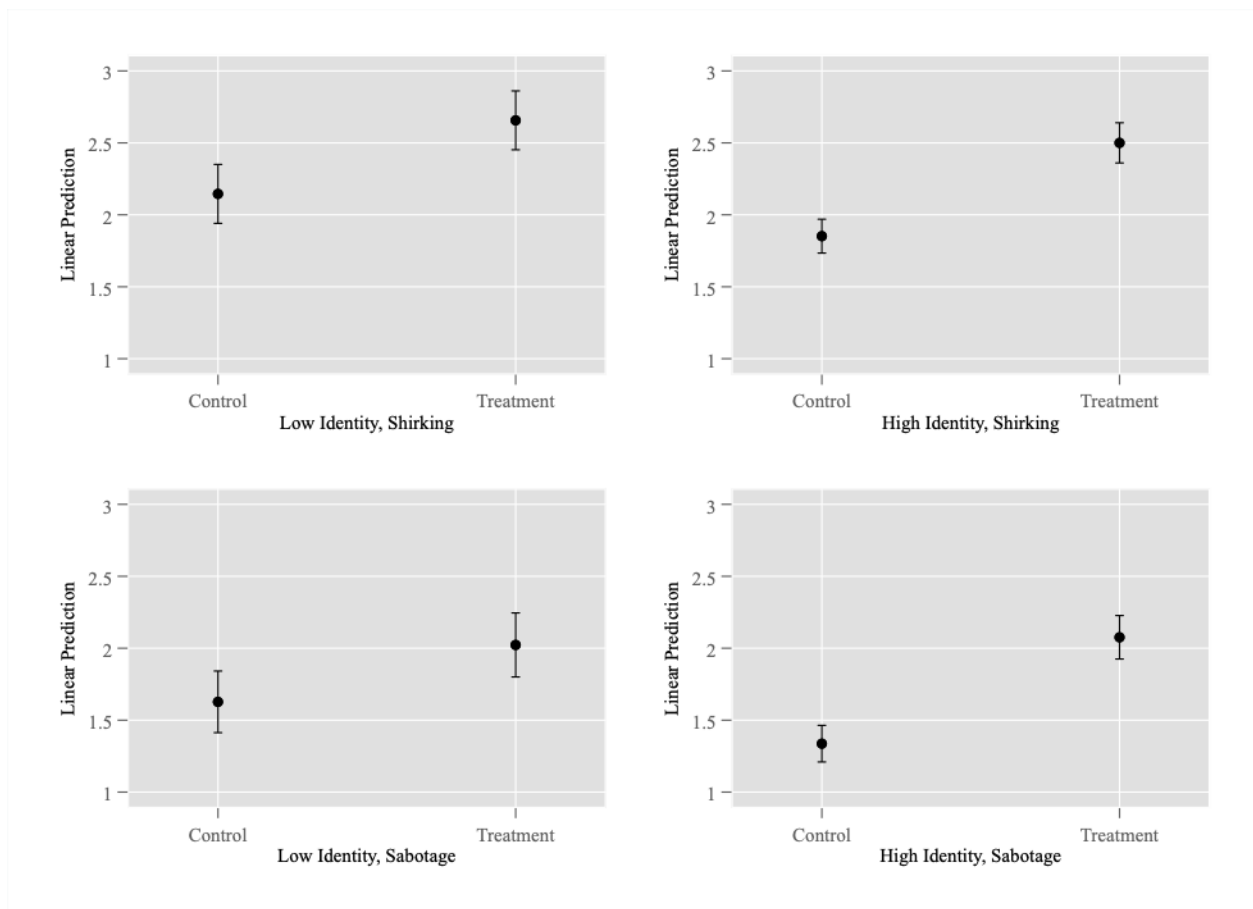
The same trend is found in the experiment assessing sabotage. Those with a low organizational identity selected, on average, 1.62 items among the baseline options. This decreased 21.8%  $[(1.62-1.33)/1.33]$  for those who are highly committed to their public departments, ending up with an average of 1.33 items. This provides strong evidence that, following the literature, organizational identity reduces the likelihood of shirking and sabotage in normal conditions but maximizes these behaviors when bureaucratic polarization between agents and illiberal principals is at play.

## 7.4 Vignette Experiments

The possibility of reducing social desirability bias is, at the same time, the blessing and the curse of list experiments. This approach has the potential of making respondents more sincere about their attitudes. Still, this may also create the unrealistic perception that there are no social costs for undesirable behavior. This may lead to an overestimation of the statistical outcome, especially because we know from the literature that shirking and sabotage are very costly (Pierre & Peters 2017; O’Leary 2014).

To account for that possibility, the participants of the three samples also passed through a vignette experiment. This consists of randomizing subjects across different groups and exposing each of them to varying “social situation[s] which contain precise references to what are thought to be the most important factors in the decision-making or judgment-making

Figure 7.3: Affect and Dissent in the US and the UK





processes of respondents” (Alexander & Becker 1978, p. 94). Following the same logic of the list experiments, the varying condition is whether the policy to be implemented is considered to be undemocratic. Subjects read the following text:

Paul is a civil servant. Recently, he was assigned to work in a project which he disagrees with. According to Paul, “this project [c: does not reduce / t: reduces] the freedom of expression and press of the population [c: but / t: and] it is a terrible policy for the country.” Using his autonomy, Paul decided to not carry out his tasks related to this project.

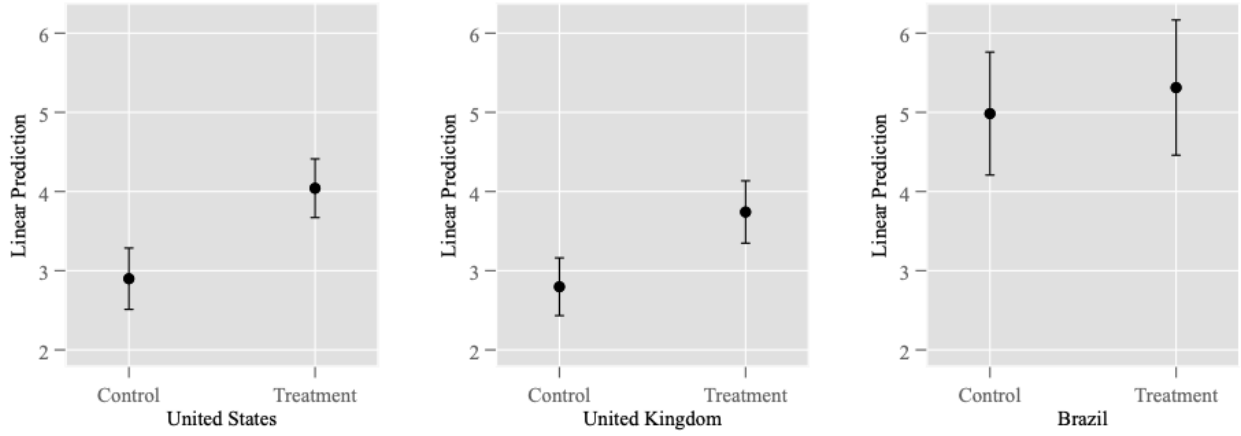
There are three main elements to be noticed. First, Paul (referred to as Paulo in the version for Brazilian bureaucrats) dislikes the policy in both conditions. That is, regardless of the treatment condition, there is always a baseline justification for shirking. Second, the (very) specific variation is whether the policy is democratic. This allows ruling out the hypothesis that any treatment effect derives from a rejection of the policy instead of a rejection of its undemocratic nature. Third, Paul deliberately decided to dissent-shirking, to use the term adopted by Brehm & Gates (1999). After the vignette, subjects were asked the following question:

If you were in Paul’s shoes, what is the probability that you would have not carried out your tasks related to this project as well?  
Please, use the 0-10 scale, where 0 means “very improbable” and 10 “very probable.”

Following  $H_{10}$ , the expectation is that treated subjects will state a higher probability of shirking than those in the control group. First, consider the difference-of-means of the whole sample. Among the 438 subjects assigned to the control group, the average response was 3.16 (SD=2.79). This increased to 4.09 (SD=2.99) for the 504 bureaucrats exposed to the treatment condition. Resulting difference-of-means of 0.93 (p-value<0.001) supports my theoretical expectation evidencing an increase of 29.4%  $[(4.09-3.16)/3.16]$  in the probability of shirking.

Now, I take the same empirical strategy adopted in the previous section and separate the results by country. As it happened with the list experiment that considered shirking, the average responses of those in the United States and the United Kingdom are very similar. For those in the control group, the averages were 2.90 and 2.80, respectively. Among those who were treated, the probability of shirking increased to 4.04 and 3.74. This means that

Figure 7.4: Vignette Experiment: Shirking in Three Countries



the treatment effects were 1.14 among Americans and 0.94 among British bureaucrats. In both cases, the difference-of-means was significant at conventional statistical levels.

However, the Brazilian case was abnormal both in terms of baseline responses and difference-of-means. For those bureaucrats, the treatment did not lead to any significant increase in the probability of shirking—the difference-of-means of 0.33 achieved a p-value of 0.575 in the two-way t-test. This is quite different than the substantive effects obtained in the list experiment. Still, this does not mean that those respondents were not willing to shirk. In fact, their averages were much higher than those in the American and the British samples. In the control group, the average response of 4.98 (on a scale from 0 to 10). For those who were treated, the mean was 5.31. This could be explained by a motivation to shirk in face of undesirable policies even if they are not undemocratic. Thus, support for  $H_{10}$  is only encountered in the United States and the United Kingdom, but not in Brazil when the test includes more costs than those in the list experiment.

The final test regards a replication of the proposition that organizational identity should affect dissent. Since the vignette experiment only considered the possibility of shirking, the data do not permit testing  $H_{12}$ . Still, it is still informative, as it shows whether the same trends identified in the results of the list experiment's shirking portion are also valid in a setting with more social costs. The average response of each experimental group and

Table 7.2: Vignette Experiment: Shirking and Organizational Identity

	<b>Identity</b>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Control</i>	2.15	1.85
<i>Treatment</i>	2.66	2.50
<i>Difference-of-means</i>	0.51	0.65

their respective difference-of-means are presented in Table 7.2. In both cases, the result is statistically significant at conventional levels.

In general, bureaucrats who hold a workplace identity are the least likely to shirk. Consider those in the control condition. They were exposed to a policy that they disagree with despite the fact this is not undemocratic. For those who are non-identifiers, the average probability of shirking is 2.15 (on a scale from 0 to 10), while this is 1.85 for those who are committed to their organization—a difference of 16.2%  $[(2.15-1.85)/1.85=0.162]$ . Even in the treatment condition, the probability of shirking is higher for those who do not hold high levels of affection toward their workplace. However, the effect of the treatment is 27.5%  $[(0.65-0.51)/0.51]$  stronger for those who identify with their workplace. These results replicate the trends identified before, confirming that bureaucrats who identify with their workplace are less likely to shirk in general, but more likely to dissent in face of a threat to their organizational culture.

## 7.5 Discussion

Social psychologists have been studying intergroup relations for several decades. The baseline assumption of most scholars is that individuals will develop an attachment to their own group (i.e., social identity) to a point that they will end up favoring their peers and engaging in conflict with those who hold an opposing identity (i.e., out-groups) (Tajfel &

Turner 1979). Bureaucratic polarization is an application of this logic to public administration. After investigating the possibility of exit, that is, group disidentification, in Chapter 6, now I focus on how those bureaucrats who decide to stay react to intergroup conflicts.

I frame this discussion based on recent episodes of democratic backsliding (see Bermeo 2016) and follow the Public Administration literature that has been exploring the recent rise of illiberal leaders all around the world (Peters & Pierre 2019, 2020; Bauer et al. 2021). I propose that when illiberal politicians and their loyalists try to force bureaucrats to implement policies that go against their organizational culture, civil servants will see these principals as out-groups and will engage in some form of confrontation. For this chapter, I rely on the framework of “Exit, Voice, and Loyalty” (Hirschman 1970) applied to the seminal trichotomy “Working, Shirking, and Sabotage” (Brehm & Gates 1999). That is, if bureaucratic polarization indeed exists and guides bureaucratic behavior, civil servants should become more likely to shirk or sabotage their principals if assigned to implement a policy that they deem undemocratic.

This is not to say that shirking and sabotage, or even bureaucratic polarization, will only occur under such extreme conditions. Even though shirking is not the norm in the public service (Pierre & Peters 2017), bureaucratic polarization and dissent behavior are likely to occur in a plethora of situations that involve, for instance, a deviation of the bureaucrats’ code of ethics (Hollibaugh Jr et al. 2020). That is, whereas democratic backsliding is the triggering factor considered in this chapter, this only illustrates the multiple possibilities that may lead to bureaucratic polarization and, ultimately, shirking and sabotage in government.

While in Chapter 6 I tested the exit hypothesis based on different observational studies conducted in the United States and Brazil, this chapter offers a more comprehensive and empirically robust approach to causally test the voice hypothesis. First, this includes a third country that is part of the same administrative tradition of the US: the United Kingdom. Second, it relies on the same questionnaire replicated in the three cases. Therefore, even though the data is not nationally representative, it is possible to at least speculate possible cross-country variations. And, third, this chapter considers an experimental approach that offers the possibility of stronger causal inference.

The results of my first list experiment provide robust support for the hypothesis that a

substantive number of bureaucrats will be willing to shirk if they are assigned to implement a policy that they consider to be undemocratic (H<sub>10</sub>). That is, when principals try to disrupt the organizational culture of a public department, 64.8% of the bureaucrats become willing to dissent-shirk.

This finding is confirmed in the US and the UK and, especially, in Brazil, where the treatment effect reached a rate of 84.4%. This is true that any cross-country comparison would be merely speculative. Still, these results are in line with the expectation that in a closed legalistic system bureaucrats will become more motivated to shirk—plausibly because they are more protected and have more legal mechanisms to do so. It is possible that, even though bureaucratic polarization appears to be a worldwide reality, its outcomes are more salient in systems with such administrative tradition.

The caveat here is that the results of the vignette experiment suggest an addendum to this proposition. The goal of the list experiment was to reduce any social desirability bias that could lead respondents to hide their true attitudes. Still, this could also have eliminated the social costs that bureaucrats face in real settings. Even though the vignette experiment does not completely replicate reality, it helps to increase the costs of dissent attitudes. Furthermore, the proposed design disentangles policies that are simply undesirable from those which are undesirable and undemocratic. Thus, it adds another layer that could reduce even more the treatment effects.

The finding is that even with such potential inhibitors, framing a policy as undemocratic increases the probability of shirking in 29.4%. These results are statistically significant in the American and the British samples. However, Brazilian subjects in both control and treatment conditions responded similarly to the possibility of shirking. Whereas this weakens the robustness of my theoretical proposition, this also confirms that, in legalistic and closed systems, shirking is more normalized. This is true because in both conditions, the probability of dissent behavior was way higher than those obtained in the Anglo-American samples. This could be an outcome of the reduced sample or the fact that, in Brazil, even an undesirable (yet democratic) policy is enough to trigger the outcomes of bureaucratic polarization. Following the results of the list experiment, the latter alternative seems to be more plausible.

The next result is that of sabotage. My findings support the expectation that, in face of

the same situation, bureaucrats will also be willing to sabotage their principals ( $H_{11}$ ). Here, the average treatment effect was even higher: 69.1%. This suggests that when bureaucratic polarization is considerably high, bureaucrats become more willing to engage in radical types of guerrilla behavior—to use the term proposed by O’Leary (2014). Again, Brazilians appear to be the most reactive group. Their treatment effect was not only higher than those from Anglo-American systems, but it seems that the inclusion of the fifth item in the list experiment triggered a spill-over effect resulting in sabotage reactions to additional conditions. Again, this is in line with the expectation that civil service protections create better conditions for bureaucrats to preserve their organizational culture through legalistic means.

Finally, my results also offer another proof of concept to the proposition that the driving force of these results is, indeed, bureaucratic polarization. I tested the hypothesis that those with a strong organizational identity would be less likely to shirk and sabotage under normal conditions but much more reactive in face of intergroup conflicts ( $H_{12}$ ). Consider the results presented in Table 7.1. While shirking was an expected reaction for 51.1% of those with a low commitment to their public departments, this increased to 64.8% as a reaction for intergroup conflict when organizational identity was high. The variation in the expectation of sabotage was even more striking, spiking from 39.6% to 73.9%. Once again, this confirms the previous findings of the literature that whereas shirking is an uncommon behavior (Pierre & Peters 2017), dissent becomes justifiable when it means preserving social norms (Hollibaugh Jr et al. 2020; Caillier 2017; Lavena 2016).

Overall, the bad news is that bureaucratic polarization has the potential to undermine the policy process through intra-government and even intra-agency deadlocks. This may reduce state capacity and slow down or completely disrupt the implementation of policies that are beneficial for the population. However, the good news is that bureaucratic polarization may also place civil servants as veto points in processes of democratic backsliding. The challenge for governments engaged in influencing organizational culture is to find a balance that allows bureaucratic polarization to be triggered only when institutional stability is at play.

## 7.6 Summary

I previously showed that bureaucratic polarization is especially high between tenured civil servants and political appointees, thus reflecting the historical conflict between administration and politics. This may motivate elected officials to absorb the bureaucracy or impose ideas that are unacceptable for bureaucrats. In Chapter 6, I use survey data collected in the United States and Brazil to demonstrate that many civil servants will intend to leave their public organizations when politicians try to absorb it. Now, I investigate what happens with the attitudes of those civil servants who decide to stay.

I fielded survey experiments in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Brazil to causally identify the consequences of political overstepping on bureaucratic resistance. The results show that most public employees of these three countries are willing to shirk and sabotage when they are asked to implement an illiberal policy (my proxy for political overstepping). This suggests that the administration does not become loyal to its out-group in cases of democratic backsliding. On the contrary, their polarization against politicians motivates them to engage in conflict especially when they highly identify with their organization.

## 8.0 Conclusion

Implementation processes most often involve coordination. This means that bureaucrats, politicians, and other actors must work together to get things done. They need to agree on the policy's operational details, put their expertise into practice, draft and sign documents, find political support for their actions, etc. This does not mean that all actors share the same interests, adhere to the same values, or even like each other. Throughout their careers, they become socialized with their organization's norms, engage in their goals, and develop rivalries against actors who are not aligned to these motivations.

Identity formation results in plural bureaucracies. Many public employees see their workgroup as in-groups and the members of other workgroups as out-groups. That is the same logic that social psychologists find when investigating other social groups and disputes, like those regarding race, gender, class, ethnicity, and partisanship. Thus, I propose that public administration may benefit from incorporating their concepts and measurements into the study of coordination problems in the bureaucracy.

Consider the case of David and Flavia, two civil servants involved in the implementation of VLT Parangaba-Mucuripe in Ceará, Brazil (see Chapter 3). Overall, their organizations held very different organizational cultures. David, an experienced engineer, helped to create the project that gave birth to the light rail transit. He loved it and wanted to transform the policy (a statement of intent) into reality. For David, the VLT was going to improve the lives of many *cearenses* (the citizens of Ceará). Indeed, I heard very similar narratives when interviewing his colleagues at the infrastructure department. It seemed that all of them had the same goal in mind.

Flavia disagreed. She had been a prosecutor at the State Public Ministry for many years and, on several occasions, fought side-by-side with the poorest residents of Ceará. She was convinced that the VLT served the interests of the state's elite. It was, for her, a project to remove the poor from the city center and to increase real estate prices. Again, I heard very similar perspectives when interviewing civil servants who worked at oversight organizations, like the Federal Public Ministry. For them, there was no problem in blocking



an implementation process if that meant helping the people.

The conflicts between implementers and overseers resulted in a considerable delay in the implementation of VLT Parangaba-Mucuripe and several modifications in the project. These opposing groups, however, spent most of the time engaging in conflict rather than sitting together to find solutions. They saw each other as enemies; in fact, there was little motivation to work together.

When it seemed like they would never be able to find adequate solutions, one coincidental event helped to mitigate the polarization between engineers and prosecutors. The state government made a partnership with the state university to offer a master's degree in public policy (MPP) aimed at improving the capacity of the bureaucracy. When the program started, Flavia and David found out they had become classmates. Day after day, they talked about public policy and administration in the classroom. Time passed and they started trusting each other. In the implementation of the light rail transit, they were on opposing sides. Still, they shared the identity of classmates at the MPP program.

The trust relationship between David and Flavia did not change the culture of their organizations. The infrastructure department still wanted to implement policies and the Public Ministry was still interested in making sure that everyone complied with the law. In fact, David and Flavia still held contrasting views when it came to the VLT. The change that trust caused, however, is that they learned that it was possible to cooperate. Time after time, they knew they could talk to each other whenever they found any problem.

This manuscript analyzes this and other intergroup relations in the public service. It is dedicated to creating a theoretical framework that helps explain how organizational identity shapes the way bureaucrats see each other and cooperate in implementation processes. In addition to that, how individuals (instead of groups) play a crucial role in the bureaucracy. Their subjective evaluations of the groups they identify with (their in-groups) and the groups they must work together (their out-groups) is essential to determine whether the government will be able to implement public policies and how bureaucrats will react when dealing with multiple actors, like elected officials, political appointees, oversight agencies, organizations with duplicated responsibilities, and even completely unrelated organizations.

In this concluding chapter, I briefly summarize the main findings of this dissertation.

I, then, speculate on how future studies could enhance our understanding of the social psychology of the civil service and close with the normative implications of bureaucratic polarization.

## 8.1 Summary of Findings

The social distance between actors in public administrations, which I call bureaucratic polarization, has been a central element in affecting policy and organizational change in the two cases analyzed in this book. First, in Chapter 3, I demonstrate that the theoretical construct of bureaucratic polarization helps to explain why bureaucrats tried to fast-track, delay, modify, and block the implementation of light rail transit in Ceará.

I show that these relationships are measurable and generalizable in Chapter 5. I adapt the estimation strategy that [Iyengar et al. \(2012\)](#) used to estimate affective polarization in the United States. That is, I designed a survey in which I ask bureaucrats to answer how much they identify with their workgroup and how close they are to different out-groups. Bureaucratic polarization is the absolute difference between these two variables. I fielded this survey with convenience samples in the United States and the United Kingdom. In both, the social distance was considerably high, especially against political appointees and bureaucrats working either in unrelated agencies or oversight organizations. This social distance was highly correlated to the expectation that coordination would be unsuccessful.

Bureaucratic polarization also affects organizations. In Chapter 4, I analyze the Tietê's clean-up in São Paulo. The coordination problems faced by the public utility and the state and local governments involved many cases of absorption. First, the political world tried to absorb the public utility. Then, the public utility absorbed the governor's taskforce and the local companies that used to be dominated by opposition mayors.

I consider the possibility of absorption in Chapters 6 and 7. In the former, I relied on massive surveys fielded with American and Brazilian bureaucrats. I assessed one of the consequences of cases when the political world tried to take over public agencies. The statistical analysis suggests that when bureaucrats perceive this to be the case, they become

much more willing to exit their agencies. This is especially problematic because it allows increased levels of political control over the public administration—a strategy that is often adopted by illiberal leaders.

I further test the problem of illiberal politics and bureaucratic polarization in Chapter 7. If not all bureaucrats leave, what happens with those who stay? I fielded survey experiments in Brazil, the United Kingdom, and the United States to find that the bureaucratic polarization between administration and politics will likely lead to bureaucratic resistance when politicians overstep their power. That is, when illiberal leaders try to force civil servants to implement policies that are considered unacceptable, the administrative world will shirk or sabotage the political world.

To summarize, public employees identify with their organizations and want to protect them from external intervention. They do that because these out-groups have goals and values that differ from those which they learned to pursue. The same logic works to explain the coordination problems they face when trying to implement policies. The more distant the out-groups are, the harder it is to find common ground when working together. This creates environments in which cooperation becomes unlikely.

Bureaucratic polarization, however, is not static and does not produce the same outcome in every case. Intergroup social distance changes throughout time reflecting the experiences that in-groups have when dealing with out-groups. In fact, these experiences need not be at the group level. In Chapter 3, I described the case of David (the engineer who created the VLT) and Flavia (the public prosecutor responsible for overseeing it). They belonged to highly polarized organizations but, after being classmates, they worked as a bridge between implementers and overseers. Their shared identity helped to mitigate bureaucratic polarization and facilitate polarization.

This experience shows that it is possible to reduce intergroup animosity based on shared experiences. The course offered by a state university for civil servants is one of the strategies for that. There are similar initiatives that may reach similar outcomes, for instance, the development of national (or subnational) schools of public administration. In France, Germany, and Brazil, to cite some examples, high-administration civil servants are trained together and then distributed across multiple agencies. Their shared experiences at the

national school may help them to find collaborators in different public organizations.

The same is true for governments that rotate civil servants across multiple organizations. This will not work for everyone. I suggest in 6 that rocket scientists, for instance, may find it harder to move to a different agency than other professionals. Furthermore, there is the risk that moving becomes a strategy of political control. Still, if properly implemented, this could be a tool to create a shared identity among bureaucrats of different organizations.

The second aspect of bureaucratic polarization is that its outcomes are bounded by institutional design. In Chapter 3, the bureaucrats from the infrastructure department and the environmental agency disliked the oversight agencies but were forced to comply with them when overseers threatened to fine implementers or sued them. There is additional evidence that this proposition is generalizable.

I show in Chapter 5 that bureaucrats find it easier to collaborate with overseers than other implementers even when they are highly polarized. This is likely to occur due to their legal obligation to do so. Of course, it is not ideal that bureaucrats coordinate solutions only because they are forced by law. Still, the continuous cooperation bounded by these institutional constraints may be helpful to create, at least in the long run, a culture of cooperation in the bureaucracy.

## 8.2 Future Research

There is a long road ahead toward better comprehending bureaucratic polarization, its roots, and consequences to coordination in public administration. We need to better understand cross-national and subnational differences. For instance, why is it that resistance, in Chapter 6, was more likely to exist in Brazil than in the United States or the United Kingdom? Which countries have greater levels of inter-agency bureaucratic polarization, or social distance between politics and administration? Or, is it plausible to believe that in poorer states, like Ceará, bureaucratic polarization will lead to worse consequences than in richer states like São Paulo?

Furthermore, the study of specific governments will also enlighten our understanding

of intergroup animosities. Are there specific agencies among implementers and overseers that tend to be the most disliked? Or, what are the specific workgroups (e.g., engineers, older agencies) that have the strongest in-group bonds? These questions are also relevant to understanding the formation of bureaucratic polarization and the conditions in which it becomes more likely to influence implementation processes.

This is comparable to the preoccupation with the role of oversight in public administration. In both face-to-face interviews and surveys, overseers were among the most disliked actors in government. Civil servants, however, often felt obliged to comply with them. They knew that non-compliance could lead to lawsuits, fines, and other punishments. Overseers, on the other side, were not afraid to intervene. One interview declared that his organization was “the guardian of the law” and that “we should not be afraid to block policies.” Of course, not all overseers are equally powerful or disliked. Thus, the dynamics influencing bureaucratic polarization against oversight agencies merits future studies. It is important to understand which factors lead to more compliance, fruitful exchanges, or even abuse of power. Overall, how does bureaucratic polarization influence or is influenced by each of these possibilities?

The main point here is that bureaucratic polarization offers many opportunities for scholars and practitioners of public administration. This integrative theory that combines public choice, bureaucratic resistance, normative institutionalism, and social psychology allows us to better understand (and potentially mitigate) coordination problems.

### **8.3 Normative Implications for Policy Implementation**

There are different accounts of bureaucratic behavior. In Chapter 2, I contrast the dominant views within the public choice and normative institutionalism traditions. For the first, bureaucrats seek utility maximization, which most often means more power and larger budgets. This tradition leaves plenty of room for individual action since authors assume that individuals will evaluate goods and goals based on their subjective perspective. It does not mean that bureaucrats act independently from their agency. However, compliance

with organizational goals only occurs because this may benefit career prospects and the individual's subjective evaluation of desirable outcomes.

If public choice focuses on individual agency, normative institutionalists emphasize the role of organizations in constraining (and sometimes determining) behavior. Individuals self-select into organizations, which makes them more prone to hold similar views as those held by other members. In fact, even if they do not self-select, they end up learning the social norms of the organization through a process of socialization. Overall, they absorb the organization's logic of appropriation, that is, the understanding of what is and what is not an appropriate action in face of different contexts. In sum, organizational identity sets the pace for individual behavior.

Like others, I assume that there is a balance between individual agency and organizational culture. Following social identity theory, individuals may become emotionally involved with the values of groups that they are members of. This is called social identity and is not an obligatory outcome of group membership. One may be born in a certain country or register as a member of a certain party, but still avoid any further identification with these organizations (*lato sensu*). The same occurs in the bureaucracy. Someone working at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may become emotionally involved with the organization's values and, thus, socially identify with that; still, it is also possible that this is only a job that allows the individuals to pay their bills. I argue that there is individual agency in determining which group memberships will become social identities. This is especially true because individuals belong to many groups at the same time. Consider the same fictional bureaucrat who works at the EPA. He may be a male engineer, born in Puerto Rico, who became a career bureaucrat during the Obama administration and never held any supervisory position. Each of these workgroups could become a social identity, the same way they could be totally forgotten.

[Akerlof & Kranton \(2010\)](#) are among the authors who discussed at length the logic of organizational identity. Here, I give one step ahead to say that social identity means not only identifying with an in-group but also antagonizing against out-groups. In public administration, this means that the EPA's career bureaucrat may hold a large social distance against, say, a lawyer from his own agency, those civil servants working at the Department of Commerce, or a political appointee selected by President Trump. The degree of social

distance between the bureaucrat and each of these workgroups will influence his ability to coordinate solutions in implementation processes that require cooperation.

From this perspective, it may appear that bureaucratic polarization is a bad thing. If coordination is desirable, we should expect that civil servants are always willing to cooperate to get things done. Thus, our main goal would be identifying strategies to reduce bureaucratic polarization. The reality, however, is more complex. Social distance is part of processes of identity formation and intergroup relations. Those who identify with a certain workgroup will naturally try to protect their logic of appropriateness or desirable goals. These need not be compatible in public administration.

The dichotomy of implementers and overseers adequately illustrates the need for conflicting values and goals. Implementers want to turn statements of intent into reality. To use some of the cases in this dissertation, they want to build the VLT in Ceará and to clean the Tietê in São Paulo. They are concerned with the law and good practices, but they may become frustrated with regulations that they deem to be irrelevant. Overseers, on the other hand, praise these regulations. They identify, like in Ceará, as the “guardians of the law.” They are not afraid to block an implementation process if this is not following due process. Tensions between implementers and overseers are natural and may, in certain cases, be desirable to assure that government can get things done at the same time it complies with the rule of law.

Bureaucratic polarization may be desirable or not, but it is always there. It may be high or low, and helpful or burdensome. This dissertation concludes that policymakers and scholars must be aware of its existence, and capable of identifying and measuring it. This will help them to design policies and institutions that are more suitable to allow coordinated solutions that fulfill the wishes of democratic governance.

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