

Socioeconomic Shadows: Does Class Background Influence State Administrators' Attitudes and Motivations? *

Christopher Eddy[†], Sun Gue (Susan) Yang[‡], Neal D. Woods[§]

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Abstract

Theory derived from literatures on human development and motivation, socialization, and social capital suggests that the socioeconomic background of public administrators may have significant implications for their motivations, perceptions, and actions. Using multiple waves of survey data over 30 years, this study explores the class background of American state agency directors and analyzes its effect on their attitudes and behaviors. Our analyses reveal significant socioeconomic differences in administrators' public service motivations and engagement with external stakeholders, but we do not find strong evidence supporting our expectation that socioeconomic background influences respondents' positions on economic or class-based issues.

Key Words: representative bureaucracy, public service motivation, social equity, socioeconomic representation representative bureaucracy, public service motivation, social equity, socioeconomic representation

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[†]Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina: eddyc@email.sc.edu

[‡]Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina: sungue@email.sc.edu

[§]Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina: woodsn@mailbox.sc.edu

Introduction

Few topics in public administration have received more attention than representative bureaucracy, the idea that public administrators use their discretion in ways that reflect their demographic characteristics and background (Webeck and Lee 2022). Despite the by-now voluminous literature on the topic, however, the socioeconomic status (SES) background of bureaucrats and its implications for class representation have received relatively little attention, with researchers focusing predominantly on more easily observed characteristics such as race and gender. Yet SES background is a ubiquitous social identity existing across diverse cultural and political contexts and is widely recognized as an important determinant of human behavior (Berzofsky et al., 2014). Additionally, it provides a valuable framework for comprehending an individual's financial, social, cultural, and human capital resources (APA, 2007; NCHS, 2012; Shavers, 2007).

Building on concepts emerging from literatures on human development and motivation, socialization, and social capital, we argue that the SES background of public administrators may have significant implications for their perceptions and behaviors, both in ways concordant with traditional notions of representative bureaucracy and along adjacent behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, such as motivations for public service and relations with external actors. Our theoretical perspective suggests that SES background may have implications that cut across several important streams of public administration literature, including representative bureaucracy, public service motivation, and political-bureaucratic relations.

Using multiple waves of survey data over 30 years, in this study we seek to add to our knowledge of the role of SES background in public administration by pursuing two related goals. The first goal is to describe the SES background of state agency directors over states, agencies, and time, and to compare trends in SES background to those of race and gender. Second, we provide an empirical assessment of the relationship between SES background and

the attitudes and behaviors of state agency directors, focusing on three areas: motivations for public service, representative bureaucracy attitudes, and relations with external actors.

While our analyses reveal significant differences in public service motivations and engagement with external stakeholders, we do not find strong evidence supporting our expectation that socioeconomic background influences respondents' positions on economic or class-based issues. Our results suggest that socioeconomic background may indeed influence administrators' broader motivations, preferences, and behaviors. However, contrary to the expectations derived from the theory of representative bureaucracy, our findings indicate that the representational effects of class background may not necessarily be stronger for, or exclusive to, class-specific policy issues.

The Role of Socioeconomic Status in Public Administration

Socioeconomic Status (SES), generally described as the social standing or social class of an individual or a group of individuals (Berzofsky et al. 2014), plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' lives, opportunities, and access to resources. Measures of SES proxy an individual's access to financial, social, cultural, or human capital resources, typically by incorporating factors such as education, income, or occupational status. (APA 2007; NCHS 2012; Shavers 2007). These traditional measures of SES, or the "big three," are measurable at the individual, family, or household level.

Within the field of public administration, researchers utilize the socioeconomic status of both bureaucrats and citizens to investigate a range of topics, including government performance evaluation (Bertram et al. 2022; Nguyen and Le 2022), local governance (Uster et al. 2022), and life satisfaction of public employees (Lee 2021). Yet it is rarely examined as a driving force behind public service motivation, representative bureaucracy attitudes, or of the relationships that bureaucrats have with external actors. This, we argue, is an omission of the current literature, one which we attempt to rectify in our analysis. In the remainder

of this section we discuss the literature in each of those areas, and how they intersect with socioeconomic status to generate testable hypotheses about its impact on a wide variety of bureaucratic attitudes and behaviors.

Childhood Socialization and its Impact on Public Officials

While SES typically reflects the current status of individuals or groups, we focus specifically on SES *background*. We follow others in representing this using the SES of an individual's parents (Guo and Harris 2000; Mayer 1997; Brooks-Gunn et al. 1996). Centering on childhood socialization, our theory calls attention to the educational attainment of state administrators' parents.

Sociologists have extensively studied how social values influence individuals' attitudes and behaviors through various processes of social reproduction. Early work on "socialization," for example, describes a learning process by which individuals within a society acquire the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors that enable them to function effectively as members of that society (Simmel 1895; Durkheim [1925] 1973; Parsons 1951). From this perspective, an individual's behaviors, attitudes, and values are ingrained through exposure to others within their social environment.

Guhin, Calarco, and Miller-Idriss (2011) argue that, "For scholars studying systems of race, gender, class, migration, and sexuality, as well as those studying other powerful institutional identities, the term socialization usefully emphasizes how these identities are developed and rendered powerful in ways beyond any one actor's control" (p. 117). This is evident in work that explores how class distinction influences parental values or childhood socialization (Kohn 1969; Kohn and Schooler 1973,1982; Kohn et al. 1990; Kohn and Schoenbach 1993; Lareau 2003; Hitlin 2006). The central thesis of Kohn's (1969) influential work, *Class and Conformity: A Study in Values*, posits that a parent's level of self-direction in their workplace determines the importance they attribute to self-direction for their children. Subsequent re-

search by Kohn and Schooler (1973) emphasizes the significance of a parent's educational background in shaping these expectations. According to them, the influence of educational attainment, itself molded by family background, material resources, and social status, shapes the occupational opportunities at the heart of their argument.

Incorporating these insights into the realm of public services, we argue that childhood socialization, specifically SES background: 1) shapes an individual's adult identity; 2) influences the decision to pursue positions of public service; and 3) influences the attitudes and behaviors of administrators.

Socioeconomic Status and Public Service Motivation

Individuals may have different motivations for entering public service and for their actions in public sector organizations. One widely researched set of motivating factors is summarized in the concept of public service motivation (PSM). Although there are many different definitions of the concept, in general PSM can be described as the integration of beliefs, values, and attitudes that extend beyond self- and organizational interests, focusing on the greater political entity's interests and motivating individuals to act in accordance with those interests (Vandenabeele 2007). Researchers have generally found that individuals with higher PSM are more likely to work in public sectors due to the opportunities offered to provide meaningful public service, and to perform better in their governmental jobs due to the fact that they find such types of work intrinsically rewarding and satisfying (Wright 2008; Wright and Grant 2010).

Research underscores that the level of PSM varies systematically among individuals based on their backgrounds and experiences. Indeed, Kalantari (2012) highlights that "the role of childhood socialization ... has been emphasized as a major factor in affecting adults' occupational choices" (p. 251). Notably, gender differences play a significant role in this context (Bright 2005; Perry 1997, 2000). These differences seem to stem from a socialization

process wherein females are more inclined to exhibit compassion and nurturing behaviors toward others, reflecting society’s anticipation of higher “other-orientation” for females and higher self-orientation for males (Wood and Eagly 2010). Females are socialized to express PSM values of empathy, caring, and compassion, as well as to promote prosocial values of fairness and equalitarianism compared to males (Ricucci 2018). As a result, the social values transmitted through early socialization play an important role in driving occupational segregation (Korupp, Sanders, and Ganzeboom 2002; Kalantari 2012) and reinforcing the gendered characteristics observed in agencies across policy type (Kelly and Newman 2001; Keiser et al. 2002; Saidel and Loscocco 2005).

Although SES background has not been a significant focus of PSM research, there is reason to believe that it has similar effects on childhood socialization. Scholars of human development and behavior have found that parental practices and socialization differ across social classes (Bernstein 2003; Chin and Philips 2004; Jones et al. 2018; Lareau 2011; McKee et al. 2007). Middle-to-high income parents are more likely to depend on strategies that accelerate and reward behaviors that practice negotiation, assertiveness, and entitlement, while lower and working class parents tend to reinforce deference to authority and determination and self-reliance strategies to problem-solving.

The socioeconomic conditions that people grow up in have appear to have lasting effects on their personal and social identities, which ultimately influence their behavior. First, evidence suggests that lower- and working-class individuals tend to be more attuned to the influence of external events on others’ emotions, which fosters their ability to discern others’ emotions and ultimately leads to higher levels of empathy (Manstead 2018). Given the challenging or even hostile circumstances arising from a scarcity of resources, often linked to lower socioeconomic households, children in these environments may develop a heightened awareness of the needs of those around them. Supporting the notion that low SES environments may foster prosocial behaviors, Piff et al. (2010) find that lower- class

individuals tend to be more generous, charitable, trusting, and helpful compared to their upper class counterparts.

Taking into account the diverse motivations for entering public service, the array of factors shaping individuals' actions within public sector organizations, and the influence of SES background on childhood socialization experiences, we expect that, similar to gender, SES background plays a role in shaping state administrators' public service motivation and prosocial attitudes. In particular, individuals from low SES backgrounds will have motivations that are more empathetic and other regarding, leading to the following hypothesis:

H1: Administrators from low SES backgrounds are more motivated by public service, while state administrators from high SES background are more motivated by individual advancement and financial gain.

Socioeconomic Status and Representative Bureaucracy Attitudes

Early scholars of representative bureaucracy pioneered the argument that for an unelected “administrative state” to operate within a representative system of democratic governance, public servants should reflect the diverse characteristics of the broader society in which they serve (Kingsley 1944, Meier 1975). This representation may take at least two forms: passive representation, which occurs at the individual level when bureaucrats share the sociodemographic characteristics of their clients (Mosher 1968; Pitkin 1967), and active representation, which occurs when those bureaucrats “press[es] for the interests and desires of those whom he is presumed to represent (Mosher 1968, 11).”

Though these ideas have been further developed in an enormous body of subsequent scholarship, this literature often focuses on visible social characteristics, such as race or gender. And while numerous studies offer evidence that these more visible forms of sociodemographic representation can have substantial effects on policy and service outcomes for marginalized groups, there is less clarity as to whether and how the invisible form of class background may

impact a bureaucrats' motivations, attitudes, and actions, because SES as a social identity is largely neglected due to issues such as data availability (Meier 2019; Vinopal 2020).

There is reason to believe, however, that socioeconomic background can, at least in some circumstances, affect the attitudes and actions of public officials. Elected officials in the United States for instance, pursue different economic policies based on their socioeconomic status (Gilens 2009; Carnes 2013), Swedish elementary school principals tend to show more favoritism towards parents of high-SES professions (Taghizadeh 2023), and bureaucrats in Israel from different SES backgrounds have different attitudes toward government policy in the face of social protests (Gilad and Alon-Barkat 2018). As with race, gender, and other characteristics, socioeconomic background may influence individuals' preferences for particular policy outcomes in areas where SES is relevant. The theory of representative bureaucracy, then, would suggest that administrators from low SES backgrounds would have policy attitudes that may differ from their higher SES background colleagues, in policy areas where SES background is salient.

H2: Administrators from low SES backgrounds are more likely to oppose policies that may disproportionately harm low SES persons.

Socioeconomic Status and Relations with External Actors

One aspect of an agency director's duties involves relationships with external actors, including elected political officials, interest groups, and the public. These relationships have been the subject of a wide body of literature in public administration, but very little of it has focused on administrators' individual backgrounds. An administrator's SES background, however, can provide meaningful information regarding their accumulated social and cultural capital. Such capital, as described below, embodies access to elite networks and the acquisition of professional skills, which, in turn, may shape the administrator's approach and style in performing administrative duties.

Although still employed by scholars studying gender and race/ethnicity, the prominence of the term 'socialization' waned in sociology due to criticisms that its original conceptualization undervalues the role of individual agency, effectively relegating individuals to the role of passive sponges capable only of absorbing information. These concerns were reinforced by the Moynihan Report (Moynihan 1965) and subsequent works that utilized the lens of socialization to explain social and economic inequities, attributing them primarily to cultural issues perpetuated within disadvantaged communities and households. As a result, some scholars caution that strong theories of socialization may oversimplify the lived experiences of marginalized individuals (Valencia 2012), ignore their individual autonomy, or perpetuate victim-blaming narratives that divert attention from the role of systemic and structural forces that produce and reinforce racial and socioeconomic inequality (Small et al. 2010).

Considered a nuanced revision to strong sociological theories of socialization, the concepts of social and cultural capital have been widely used to explain a diverse range of social phenomena (Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2001; Woolcock 1998). Bourdieu's (1986) contribution to the study of social and cultural capital can be distinguished by his focus on the individual. Social capital, according to Bourdieu, generally refers to a network of relationships or interpersonal connections that provide opportunities to boost and maintain individual wealth or status, whereas cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility, such as education, intellect, style of speech, self-presentation, etc. Group membership in the form of social capital, then, conditions one's ability to access, gain, and utilize resources. Even more, early exposure to these resources likely to extend to the labor market as parents prepare children to navigate life by passing on "class-appropriate" skills stemming from their own experiences at work (Hochschild 1979).

Social, economic, and cultural forms of capital are closely related and often evolve into one another. For example, one can leverage cultural capital (education and professional self-presentation) to gain social capital (a high-status social network), which may ultimately lead

to economic capital (a good job). These exclusive processes could reinforce inequality by, for example, blocking historically excluded groups from access to opportunities. Research showing that class differences influence the types of environments individuals select into further support this notion. While parents from higher SES backgrounds cultivate occupational skills aligned with their own labor market experiences, such as individualism, autonomy, and choice, children raised in lower SES contexts may perceive the labor market through a lens of constraint. Indeed, Manstead (2018), finds that working-class individuals tend to be uncomfortable in high-status contexts due to the prevalence of middle-class values and practices in these settings. As a result, Manstead finds that they are less likely to seek out, be selected for, and remain in positions at prestigious universities and workplaces.

From these insights, then, an administrator from a higher SES background might possess more cultural and social capital in the form of existing access to elite networks or learned skills that could reduce the social costs or burden of interacting with elite political or policy actors, such as governors or legislators. Even more, they might also be less inclined to engage with citizens due to social or status distance. An administrator from a lower SES background, on the other hand, might find it more challenging to engage with the governor or legislators, but feel more connected to citizens, particularly those from similar backgrounds. Thus:

H3: Administrators from high SES background will have more frequent contact with elite political and policy actors more frequently than their low SES background counterparts, whereas administrators from low SES backgrounds will have more frequent contact with citizens and organizations representing clientele groups.

The Socioeconomic Status of American State Administrators

The data for this study come from the American State Administrators Project (ASAP), which surveyed state agency directors across all 50 American states and all agency types

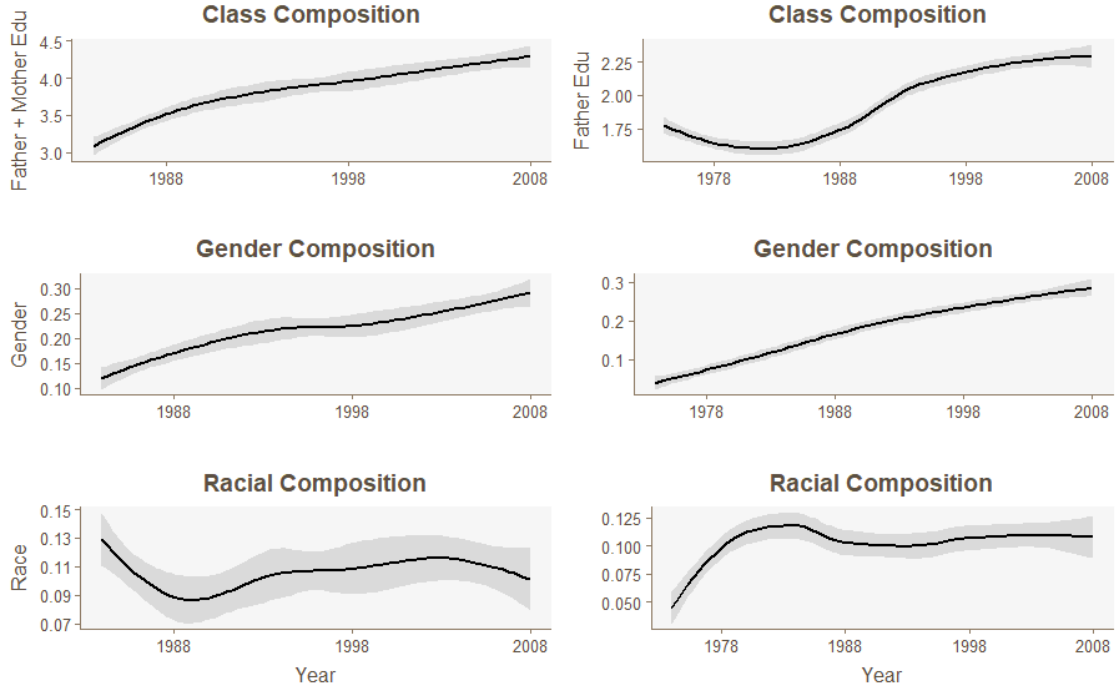
in ten waves from 1964 to 2008 (Yackee and Yackee 2021). The ASAP data include a broad array of information, including demographic characteristics, career and professional experience, and perceptions of programs, political relationships, federal aid, contracting, and so on, making it a valuable source of information on state agency leaders’ perceptions, informed opinions, and experiences (Yackee and Yackee 2021).

The ASAP surveys did not contain questions about parental salaries or occupations, but they did ask about parental education. From these data we construct two education-based measures of the SES background of state administrators. Our measure is limited by its reliance on only one of the “big three” indicators typically utilized to measure SES. Despite this limitation, however, there is reason to believe that it can be an effective measure of an administrator’s SES background. The three indicators tend to be reasonably well correlated. Moreover, observers have argued that education is the most critical indicator of SES (Berzofsky et al. 2014), as it conveys the information regarding earning potential across one’s lifespan, whereas income and occupation may only capture the individual’s socioeconomic situation at a point in time (Shavers 2007). This is particularly relevant for us, given the fact that we are interested in overall childhood SES background as it pertains to socialization experiences that affect administrator’s attitudes over the course of their lifetime.

Our primary measure is a simple additive index of the educational attainment of the respondents’ parents. The index is the sum of the father’s and mother’s level of education, where each parent’s educational level is reported on a 1-5 scale, with 1 being less than a high school degree and 5 being a graduate school degree. The possible outcomes thus range from 1-10. The earliest waves of the survey did not collect information on the mothers’ educational attainment, so we simply use the father’s educational attainment (ranging from 1-5) for these years.

Using both of these measures, figure 1 displays the SES background of state agency

Figure 1: Class, Gender, and Racial Composition of Agency Heads Over Time



Note: The lines represent the estimated average at a given point in time and were obtained using non-parametric Loess regressions, which provide a flexible fit to the data by locally weighting observations. The shaded confidence interval represents the uncertainty associated with the estimated curve.

heads over the more than 30 years covered by the survey data utilized for our analyses, along with the respondents' gender and race. The left side of the graph includes our SES background measure that combines both parents educational background and spans 1984 to 2008, or all the years for which this measure can capture. The right-hand incorporates only fathers' education and extends the time period back to 1974 accordingly. As the graph illustrates, the trend of SES background among agency heads are inconsistent with the other two sociodemographic characteristics. That is, for gender composition, the proportion of female agency heads has improved over the course of four decades and for racial composition, the proportion between Whites and non-Whites has plateaued, yet the proportion of low SES background representation has declined.

For class composition, the true range in the data is from 0-10 for the measure using both

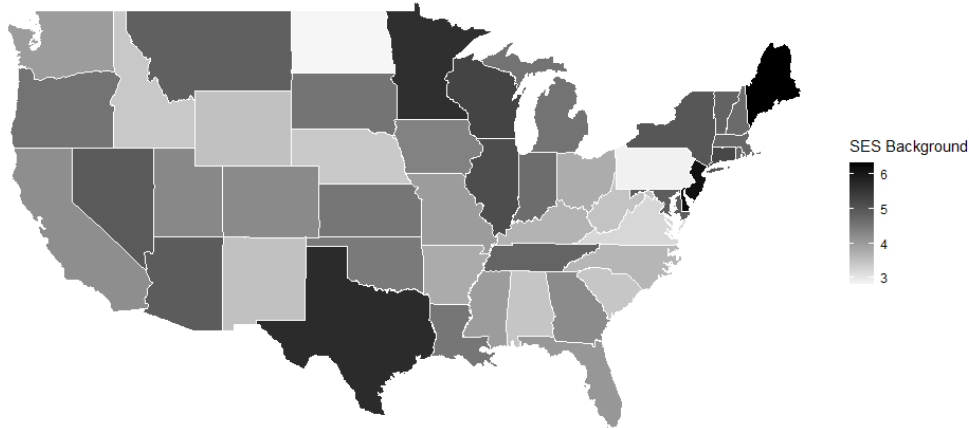
parents combined education, and 0-5 for the measure capturing just the fathers' education. For the combined SES background measure, the estimated average has increased from 3 to nearly 5, and the average fathers' education has similarly increased from 1.75 to 2.25 over the 34-year period. For gender and race, 0 represents male and white, while 1 represents female and non-white. In other words, female representation in the sample has increased from less than 10 percent to nearly 30 percent, while non-white representation has seen only a slight increase from 5 to around 10 percent of the total sample.

While the observed trends in class representation among state agency heads may be, in part, attributed to the increasing educational attainment of the general population during this time period, the descriptive patterns that we identify for gender, race, and class closely mirror the compositional shifts within electoral institutions. For instance, Carnes (2016) highlights that although women and racial minorities made modest gains in Congress during the postwar era, the underrepresentation of the working class remained unchanged. Similar trends can be observed across state legislatures from 1976 to 2006, where the representation of both women and minorities increased while the proportion of working-class legislators declined from 5% to 3% (Ibid., p. 100).

Figure 2 shows the SES background of agency heads across states in 2008. The scale of the SES background indicates that the higher the index, or darker the shade, the more proportion of the state heads from low SES background in the state. In other words, the darker the shade of the state is, the more balanced SES backgrounds are of the state agencies across the U.S, in 2008. The East coast states, including Delaware, New Jersey, and Maine, represent the darkest shade, indicating a relatively higher proportion of agency heads with low SES backgrounds are working in these states. On the contrary, states such as Idaho, North Dakota, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania are the lightest shades, which can be interpreted as more agency heads from high SES backgrounds compared to low SES backgrounds.

Figure 3 looks at the proportion of agency heads' SES backgrounds during 2008 yet

Figure 2: Average Agency Heads' SES Background by State in 2008



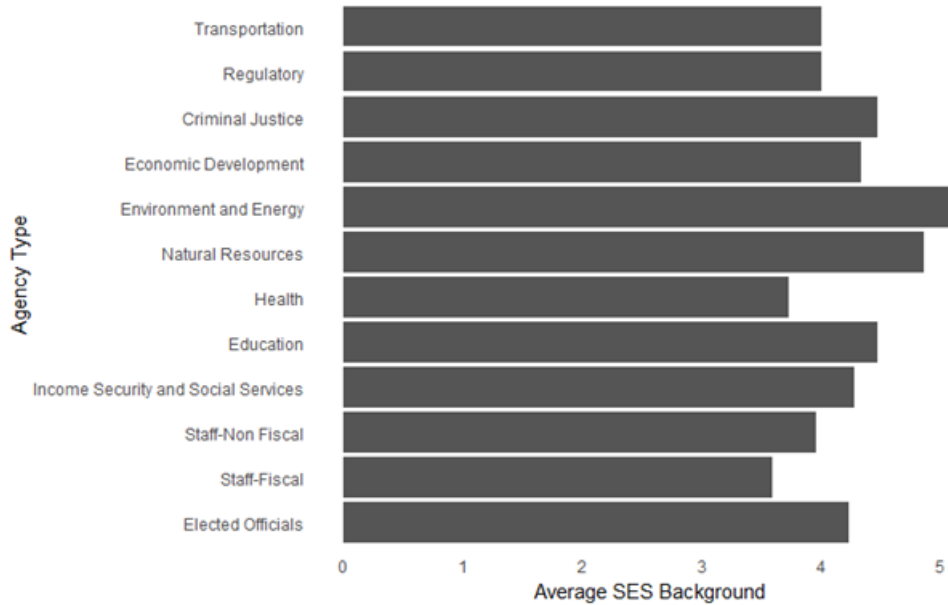
across agency types. It shows that Regulatory, Economic Development, Environment and Energy, and Elected Officials have higher proportions of low SES background agency heads, while Criminal Justice, Natural Resources, Income Security and Social Services, and Staff Non-Fiscal are less proportionate.

Overall, these figures illustrate that the SES background of US state administrators remains dominated by the high SES group. This finding stands out compared to the modest increases in gender and racial composition. Yet, it is worth emphasizing that the underrepresentation of each of these historically excluded groups is consistent across the data.

Empirical Analyses

In this section we examine the relationship between our education-based measures of state agency directors' SES background, as discussed above, on a variety of outcome measures extracted from various waves of the ASAP survey that are designed to test our hypotheses. In total, we present five sets of analyses: two that are designed to test hypothesis one, two that are designed to test hypotheses two, and one that is designed to test hypothesis three.

Figure 3: Average Agency Heads' SES by Agency Type in 2008



As discussed in more detail below, each set of analyses includes several dependent variables. These variables are typically ordinal, with between 4 and 13 response categories. For ease of presentation and interpretation we present the results of OLS regression model, but we also ran the models using ordered logit models, which provided comparable results. Because of our large number of analyses we summarize our results in the main text using coefficient plots of the coefficient estimates and standard errors for our SES background variable. Our full model results are presented in appendix two. Due to the availability of specific questions across panel waves, our study uses specific years according to each hypothesis (see table 1).

Independent Variables

The primary variable of interest is our measure of class background. Our primary measure of socioeconomic status background simply sums the educational attainment of the respondents' parents. Educational attainment for each parent was measured using a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with the following categories: (1) High school or less, (2) Some college, (3) Bachelor's

Table 1: Years Used for Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Years
H1: PSM 1 PSM 2	1984, 2008 1984
H2: Representative Bureaucracy Attitudes Representative Bureaucracy Budgets	1968 1984, 2004
H3: Relations to External Actors	1974, 1978, 1984, 1988, 1994, 1998, 2004, 2008

degree, (4) Graduate study, (5) Graduate degree. The possible outcomes thus range from 2-10. Because the earliest survey wave did not collect information on the mothers' education, we use only father's education to test hypothesis 2, with a possible range of 1-5.

In addition to our measure of SES background, we also include other sociodemographic characteristics, such as the administrators' gender (male; female), age (in years), race (non-white; Caucasian), and party identification (Democrat; Republican; Independent).¹ Lastly, all models include a number of agency and state feature controls, such as: the functional category of the respondents' agency, the length of time the respondent has been employed in their current position, and the total number of employees in a respondent's agency. For our multi-year analysis, we also include year fixed effects. These controls largely mirror other work using similar data (Jacobson et al. 2010; Uttermark 2022; Woods 2009).

Socioeconomic Status and Public Service Motivation

We ran two separate analyses to examine the impact of SES background on public service motivation. In the 1984 wave of the survey, respondents were asked to prioritize and rank 12 factors based on their perceived influence in accepting their current position. Factors include salary, security, prestige, political concerns, interesting work, low pressure position, congenial coworkers, fringe benefits, advancement opportunities, importance of work, and

¹Although we acknowledge that the coding for gender and race may not fully capture the desired level of nuance, these aspects of our analysis are constrained by the existing data limitations.

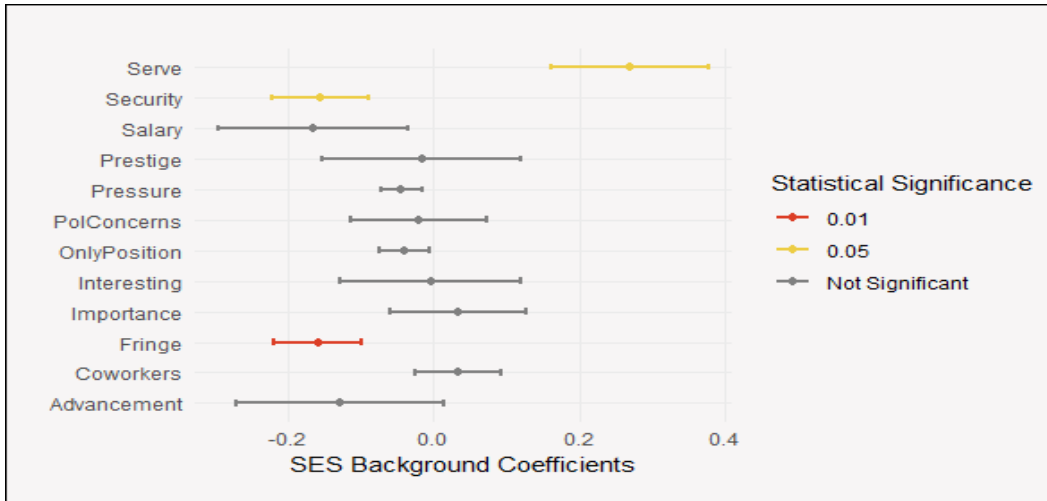
change to serve the public.

Our coding assumes that NA responses for elements of this question provide meaningful information and should thus be incorporated accordingly. To do so, we begin by dropping any case where all motivations are coded as NA. This is because administrators who were currently serving in their first governmental position were instructed to completely ignore the question. However, if respondents ranked some factors, and left others blank, we assume that, because there was no option for “not important,” the empty responses can reasonably be interpreted as “not an important factor.” Thus, after eliminating cases where all factors were left blank, we recoded NA’s as 13, or not an influential factor. This maintained the original most (1) to least important (13) priority scale, which we then inverted for ease of interpretation. As a result, higher values in our analysis indicates a stronger motivation.

The results of our multivariate analyses are presented in figure 4. Hypothesis one suggested that low SES background respondents would rank public service as a stronger motivating factor, whereas high SES background respondents will report factors related to individual advancement and financial gain as more important motivators. Our results, however, show a different trend. In contrast to our expectations, respondents from higher SES backgrounds rank “the chance to serve the public” as a strong motivating factor for accepting their current position, whereas administrators from lower SES background are more likely to list job security and fringe benefits as important motivators.

Despite being counter to our expectations, our results have implications for those interested in recruiting administrators from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Our findings suggest that while abstract appeals for pursuit of the greater good or the opportunity to serve the public interest may strongly motivate potential employees or leaders from privileged backgrounds, the inclusion of financial incentives may be a crucial component for achieving diversity in the upper echelons of public organizations. These implications underscore the importance of considering both intrinsic motivators and tangible rewards when

Figure 4: The Effect of SES Background on Position Acceptance Motivators



Note: Plot Includes OLS Coefficient Estimates with Clustered Standard Errors

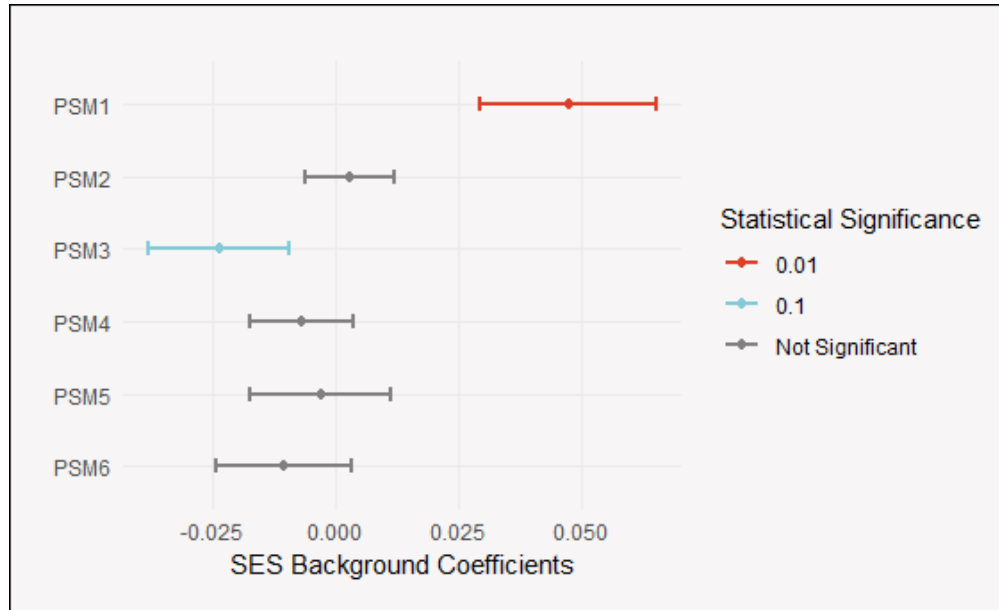
aiming to diversify the composition of administrative ranks. Future research could more thoroughly investigate the differential impacts of these motivators across SES groups.

Building on this, the second PSM analysis utilizes responses provided to statements about various views that individuals may hold regarding work in the public sector. In the 2008 survey wave, respondents ranked their level of (dis)agreement from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree on the following:

1. The give and take of public policymaking doesn't appeal to me.
2. Meaningful public service is important to me.
3. I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed.
4. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievement.
5. Ethical behavior of public officials is not as important as competence.
6. I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.

The response scales are coded so that higher values consistently indicate stronger public service motivation. In other words, statements 1 and 5 utilize an inverted scale. Again, we expect that administrators with a low SES background will demonstrate stronger support for public service.

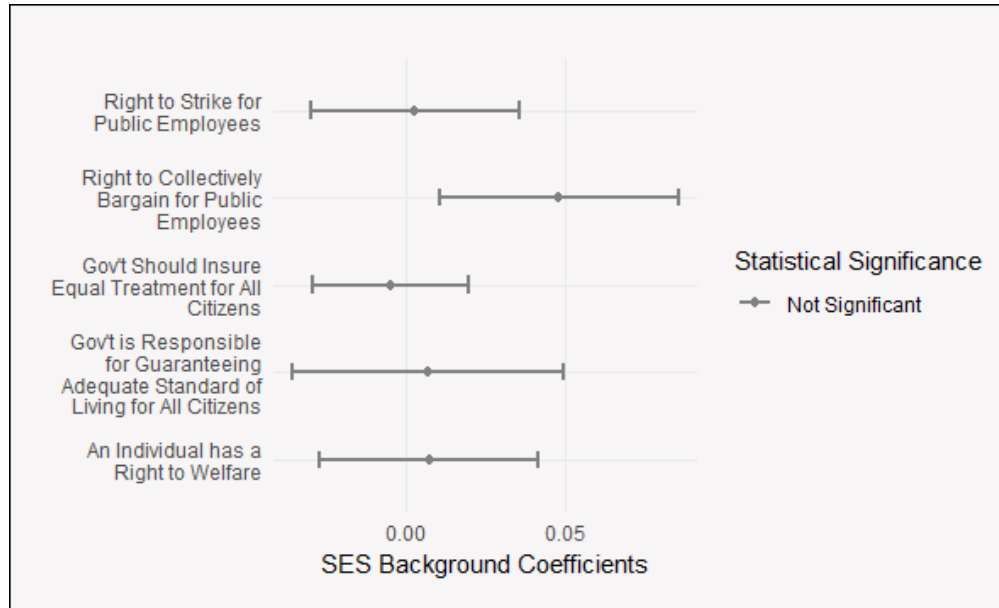
Figure 5: The Effect of SES Background on PSM Questions



Note: Plot Includes OLS Coefficient Estimates with Clustered Standard Errors

Yet, as the results presented in figure 5 illustrate, the relationship between SES background and public service motivation is mixed. Higher SES background respondents are more likely to disagree with the statement: “The give and take of public policymaking doesn’t appeal to me.” At the same time, however, administrators from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to agree with the statement: “I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed.” Although this question is an important indicator for public service motivation, its significance here also has implications for representative bureaucracy theory, given the frequently implied connection between passive and active representation. That is, if respondents from lower SES background are more likely to take risks for others, even in the face of potential ridicule, it might be an early indication that administrators from lower SES backgrounds will actively represent the interests of their social group.

Figure 6: The Effect of SES Background on Class Specific Issue Positions



Note: Plot Includes OLS Coefficient Estimates with Clustered Standard Errors

Socioeconomic Status and Representative Bureaucracy Attitudes

The 1968 survey wave included an interesting battery of questions that relate directly to socioeconomic issues. Respondents were asked to provide their level of (dis)agreement with statements concerning: the government’s responsibility for ensuring an adequate standard of living, equal protection, and welfare for citizens; and the right for public employees to strike and collectively bargain.² Response options for each question range from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). Hypothesis two states that administrators from low SES backgrounds will demonstrate stronger support for policies and initiatives that would promote the economic well-being of their employees and citizens.

Yet, contrary to our expectations, the results presented in figure 6 find no support for the effect of SES background on any of the class-centered policy positions asked in the 1968 survey. It is worth noting that, due to data limitations, we are only able to include father’s

²The full wording for each of these questions can be found in Appendix 1

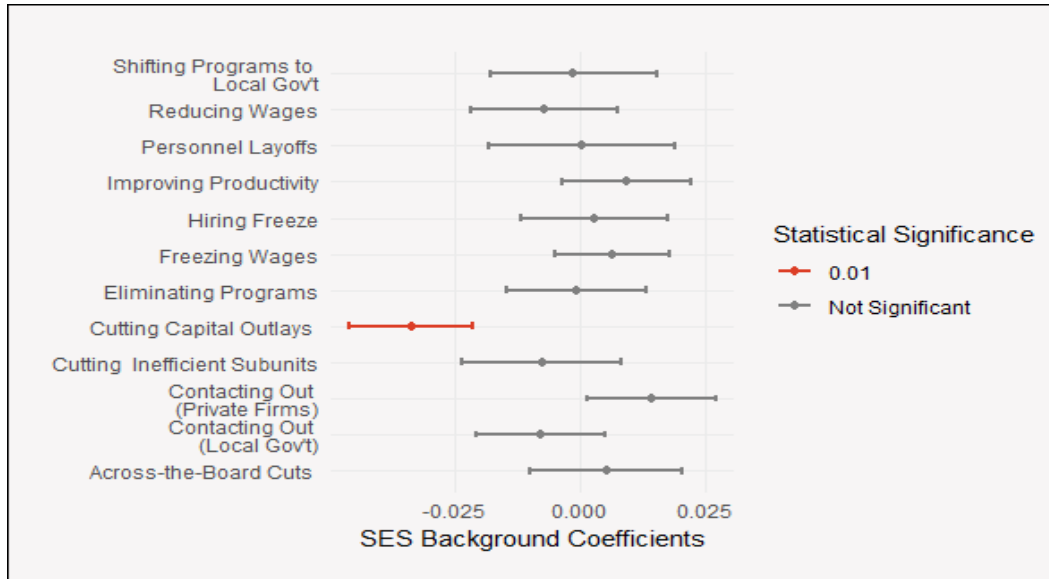
educational background as a proxy for the respondents SES background for this analysis. We acknowledge that this measure provides limited insight into the SES background of the respondent.

Another way that we test representative bureaucracy theory is by examining the fiscal and budgetary strategies of state administrators. Specifically, in 1984 and 2004 respondents were asked to rank “the relative importance in terms of dollars saved...” of numerous strategies “...for coping with fiscal austerity and expenditure reductions...”. Possible strategies included: across-the-board cuts, cutting least efficient subunits, hiring freeze(s), personnel layoffs, freezing salaries/wages, reducing salaries/wages, contracting out to private firms, contracting out to local governments, contracting out to nonprofit firms, shifting programs/functions to local governments, improving productivity, eliminating programs, and cutting capital outlays. Original rank options were provided using the following scale: (0) None, (1) Slight, (2) Moderate, (3) High, (4) Don’t Know, (6) Not Used. Our analysis, however, only includes responses ranging from 0-3. In other words, we drop “don’t know” and “not used” responses to focus specifically on the perceived effectiveness of coping strategies actually utilized by the administrator.³ We expect that low SES background administrators will be less likely to prioritize or use fiscal coping strategies that could negatively impact the financial well-being of employees and citizens.

As indicated in figure 7, our results do not accord with our expectations. The only significant effect we find is that higher SES background administrators are less likely to indicate that cutting capital outlays is an effective coping strategy for navigating budgetary constraints. As with our prior set of analyses, SES background has no significant effect on administrators’ views that cutting wages or laying off employees is an effective or preferable cost-cutting strategy.

³We also ran models that 1) included all response options and 2) dropped only “Don’t Know,” with no major differences.

Figure 7: The Effect of SES Background on Strategies to Cope with Fiscal Austerity



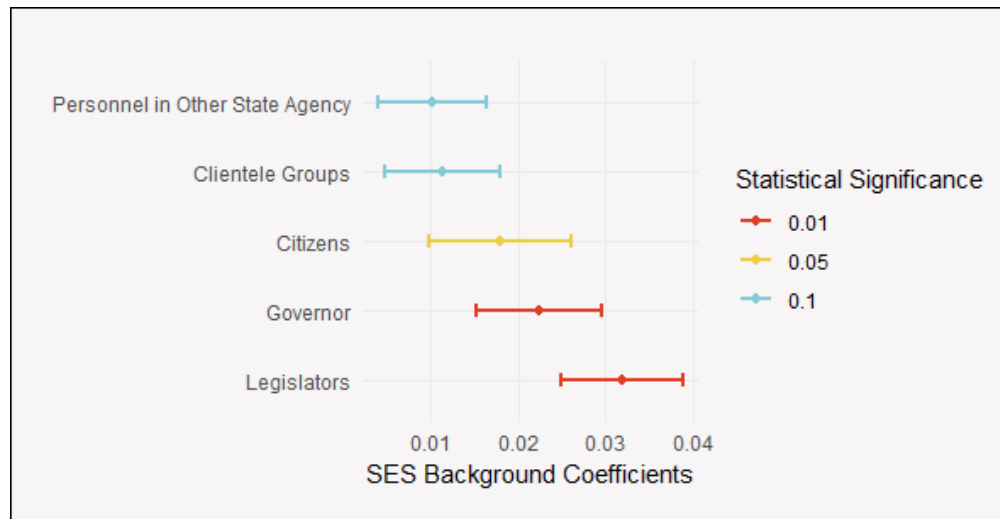
Note: Plot Includes OLS Coefficient Estimates with Clustered Standard Errors

Socioeconomic Status and Relations with External Actors

For our final analyses, we utilize a set of questions appearing across multiple waves of the survey in which respondents were asked how often they have phone or in-person contact with a variety of individuals when carrying out their official duties. The external stakeholders we consider include: the governor, legislators, other agency personnel, clientele groups, and citizens. Original response options included: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Less than Monthly or Never. For this set of analyses, we invert the scale so that higher values represent more frequent contact. Hypothesis three suggests that administrators with low SES background will be less likely to report frequent contact with political elites, such as governors or legislators, but more likely to contact citizens and clientele groups.

As indicated in figure 8, we find that SES background is positively associated with contact for all external stakeholders. That is, administrators from higher SES backgrounds make more frequent contact with all stakeholder, not just the governor or legislators. The overall positive effects, however, seem to comport with the expected role of SES upbringing

Figure 8: The Effect of SES Background on Contact with External Stakeholders



Note: Plot Includes OLS Coefficient Estimates with Clustered Standard Errors

in fostering cultural/social capital and the capacity for elite networking. It is also worth noting that the coefficients for governors and legislators are slightly higher and reach stronger significance thresholds than other stakeholder, but we cannot draw conclusive inferences or directly compare the effects across different models.

Conclusion

In this study we examined the role that SES background plays in the attitudes and behaviors of American state agency directors. Our data indicate that there have been significant shifts in this our educational-based measure of SES background over the forty-year period from 1968 to 2008, in ways that mirror the increasing educational attainment in the United States more generally. Nonetheless, our data suggest that there remain differences in SES background across both states and agency types.

Theory from literatures on human development and motivation, socialization, and social capital suggests that the SES background of public administrators may have significant implications for their perceptions and behaviors in terms of motivations for public service,

class-based policy preferences, and relations with external political and policy actors. However, our analyses of the ASAP survey data only partially supports these hypotheses. In particular, while our analyses reveal significant differences in public service motivations and engagement with external actors, we do not find evidence supporting our expectation that socioeconomic background influences respondents' positions on economic or class-based issues. Moreover, even in cases where our results do suggest significant differences due to SES background, they are only partially confirmatory of our expectations. Thus, the overall role that SES background plays in remains somewhat ambiguous.

In part, this ambiguity may come from limitations in our SES background measure, and in the survey data used to create our dependent variables. Future researchers may employ more refined measures of SES background and utilize surveys that are explicitly designed to assess its effects. They may also investigate the role of SES in a variety of other administrative and cultural contexts.

To date, SES background has not been a significant focus within public administration, but further investigation promises several benefits. First, by investigating “nonvisible” characteristics (Tsui and Gutek 1999), the applicability and generalizability of representative bureaucracy can be expanded within national and cultural contexts in which visible characteristics, such as gender or race, may not be applicable. For instance, much of the literature on bureaucratic representation examines cases within the American context, in which race is a salient individual characteristic. However, this literature's applicability to racially homogenous nations, such as South Korea, is questionable. Socioeconomic representation, on the other hand, is widely applicable in various national and cultural contexts, and therefore promises to expand the study of bureaucratic representation to many national contexts outside the United States. Second, social equity issues related to SES or social stratification have been historically one of the biggest concerns that need to be addressed by the government. Therefore, examining socioeconomic representation promises to illuminate its role in eco-

conomic and social policies designed to address this issue. Finally, theory suggests that SES background may have implications for a wide variety of bureaucratic behaviors that intersect with several significant streams of literature in public administration, including public service motivation and political-bureaucratic relations. These theoretical expectations are partially supported by our analyses. SES background, therefore may have significant implications for public administration researchers in areas well beyond traditional notions of representative bureaucracy.

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Appendix I: Representative Bureaucracy Questions

1. The summer of 1967 was a time of unrest in many large urban centers. A number of questions have arisen in the public press with regard to the cause and solutions of the civil unrest. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Government has the responsibility to guarantee an adequate standard of living for all citizens.
2. Public employees should have the right to organize and bargain collectively.
3. Public employees in non-essential service should have the right to strike.
4. State governments should move more quickly to insure equal treatment for all their citizens.
5. The summer of 1967 was a time of unrest in many large urban centers. A number of questions have arisen in the public press with regard to the cause and solutions of the civil unrest. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
An individual has a right to welfare