Bureaucratic Politicization and Politicized Knowledge: Implications for the functioning of democracy

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Abstract

Scholars have become increasingly aware of the extent and mechanisms through which various aspects of state capacity affect the functioning of democracy. This research has tended to focus on how failures of the public administration to deliver public goods may breed dissatisfaction, encourage clientelistic electoral strategies, and limit politicians’ ability to formulate and make credible public goods promises in elections. This paper seeks to contribute to this line of investigation by exploring a distinct mechanism through which a specific aspect of state capacity – bureaucratic autonomy or, alternatively, politicization – may affect the functioning of democracy, namely the politicization of policy knowledge. In a two-stage argument, we posit that the politicization of bureaucratic appointments facilitates the politicization of data produced by governments related to outcomes and fiscal considerations of social and economic policies. This politicization of policy knowledge in turn is argued to have implications for citizens’ expectations of democracy, which by extension can have implications for how well the democratic system functions. A case study of Argentina’s statistical agency and multi-level analyses of survey data provide evidence for the two stages.
Deputy Commissioner Rawls: Felony rates will decline by 5 percent by the end of the year.

Police Commissioner Burl: … in addition, we will hold this year’s murders to 275, or less.

District Major Colvin: Ah, Deputy, as familiar as we all are with the urban crime environment, I think we all understand there are certain … um…uh…processes by which you can …uh…reduce the number of overall felonies. You can reclassify and agg assault¹ or you can unfound a robbery, but…um… how do you make a body disappear?

Police Commissioner Burl: There isn’t one of you in this room who isn’t here by appointment. If you want to continue wearing those oak leaf clusters² you will shut up and step up. Any of you who can’t bring the numbers we need will be replaced by someone who can (The Wire, season 3).

Introduction

Knowledge related to public sector policies is an important public good in any polity. Such knowledge is argued to be essential to the formulation of “evidence-based policy making” which responds to socio-economic needs, to sounder investment decisions by businesses, and to electoral accountability on the part of citizens, to name a few (Krätke and Byiers 2014; Williams 2010). Public sector organizations play a central role in the production of such knowledge, as private agents frequently lack the data access and above all the incentives to produce this non-rivalrous and non-excludable good (Serra 2014).

Yet, governments across the world differ dramatically in the extent to which they produce publicly available and reliable knowledge about policy, the economy and society. Consider, as a rough proxy to support this assertion, cross-country variation in the World Bank’s Statistical Capacity Indicator; the Indicator measures, among others, coverage, periodicity and timeliness of economic statistics produced by governments. Country scores range from 20 and 99, with a mean of 66 (Scale: 0-100) (World Bank 2014).

This paper develops a novel argument to explain the varying extent to which governments produce and publish accurate policy knowledge, and then derives and test implications of the lack of such policy knowledge for policy discourses and, subsequently, citizens’ expectations of democracy. In doing so, we identify a mechanism previously not discussed in the literature through which state capacity – and specifically the institutional arrangements that determine the degree to which politicians exert control over the bureaucracy – may have implications for the

¹ Aggravated assault.
² US Military insignia awarded to holders of certain military decorations to indicate a further distinction.
functioning of democracy. Politicization of the bureaucracy has been linked theoretically and empirically to a number of factors relevant to the functioning of democracy, including the ability of the public administration to deliver public goods, economic growth, the prevalence of clientelism in electoral competition, and politicians’ ability to make credible public goods promises in elections (Cingolani and Nistotskaya 2014; Cornell and Grimes 2015a, b; Geddes 1994; Keefer 2007; Shefter 1994). We add to this line of investigation by exploring the effect on policy knowledge.

The fictional quote in the epigraph illustrates the first stage of this argument: the politicization of bureaucratic appointments facilitates the politicization of policy knowledge made public by the government. A politicized bureaucracy enhances the ability of politicians to demand from bureaucrats – and incentives for bureaucrats to supply – public policy knowledge which is strategically biased and incomplete in a manner which benefits the incumbent.

This politicization of policy knowledge in turn is argued to have implications for citizens’ expectations of democracy. Absent credible policy knowledge, citizen knowledge of a country’s state of affairs, and therefore ability to assess politicians' claims regarding past accomplishments as well as pledges related to future endeavors, are severely undermined. Policy knowledge acts as a constraint on political discourse, and when absent or lacking, citizen expectations of what democracy can deliver are likely to become inflated, as electoral promises become less checked by policy knowledge. A statement made by Argentina’s first president after the democratic transition during the electoral campaign 1983, Raúl Alfonsín, exemplifies such promises: “With democracy you eat, with democracy you get educated, with democracy you heal.”

In short, bureaucratic politicization is argued to lead to inflated expectations among citizens regarding what democracy can deliver. The first two sections of this paper introduce the concept of policy knowledge, discuss the role of bureaucrats in its production and review the literature on bias and errors in the production of policy knowledge. Section three develops the first stage of the theoretical argument and presents case study evidence that the politicization of bureaucracy intensifies bias and error in the production and publication of policy knowledge by governments. A
vignette of Argentina’s national statistical agency Indec (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de la República Argentina) provides empirical evidence for this stage of the argument. The paper then develops the second stage of the theoretical argument and presents evidence from multi-level analyses of survey data consistent with the argument: citizens’ expectations are more inflated in countries with a higher degree of politicization of the bureaucracy.

**Bureaucrats and the Production of Policy Knowledge**

Often understood as a “justifiable belief,” knowledge can come in many forms, be these scientific, practical or local, for instance (Van Kerkhoff and Lebel, 2006, 447). In this paper, we narrow in on one, arguably particularly important form of knowledge in a polity: evaluations and statistics produced by government agencies related to the costs and impacts of past policies, or estimates of anticipated costs or impacts of proposed future policies (henceforth in short: policy knowledge).

As noted at the outset, public sector organizations are central in the production of knowledge in a polity. Bureaucrats in turn are central within these organizations to produce such knowledge. They are the “principal actors in charge of the production of official statistics” (Krätke and Byiers 2014, 28). To gather, sort, compile and/or report such knowledge is a staple job duty in many positions in the state. Bureaucrats thus not only “speak truth to power,” as Wildavsky (1979) famously remarked. They also are central to speaking truth to the public.

The notion of truth in statistics is, of course, a contested one. While symbolizing objectivity, accuracy and precision, statistics involve judgment and discretion (Deborah Stone 2012). All counting requires categorization, that is, whom to include and exclude in a statistic; a decision that a phenomenon is measurable; and a decision to count in the first place, to name a few. The latter is inevitable as collecting and disseminating policy knowledge is costly (Repo 1989). “Rationalistic assumptions about knowledge as a neutral input to decision-making processes” thus do not hold (Casula Vifell and Sjögren 2011, 89).

Invariable discretion in whether, what and how to count and publish, however, does not implicate the absence of “a perception of what constitutes ‘good data’ and ‘good statistics’” (Krätke and Byiers, 2014, 29). In fact, international guidelines on what
and how to count frequently set quality standards for statistics, standards which emphasize transparency and replicability on what and how to count.

Statistics very often have implications for policy, as when agency performance indicators or population estimates affect budget allocations. As a result, incentives to massage numbers are present in many if not most government settings (Deborah Stone 2012, 199). At the most general level, the absence of an issue on the policy agenda may lead to a failure to collect data and conversely, “political commitment is often mirrored in the type of data that is available” (Jerven 2013, 85). Data may also be collected but not, or only partially, reported by “strategically selecting one measure from the vast range of possibilities” (Deborah Stone, 2012, 202).

As central “agents of knowledge” production (Diane Stone 2012, 339), bureaucrats potentially play a central role in biasing the coverage and accuracy of policy knowledge. Why would bureaucrats introduce such biases in the production and/or publication of policy knowledge? A disparate set of works identifies several rationales. To begin with, bureaucrats may lack the ability to produce accurate policy knowledge. In developing countries, for instance, “statistical literacy is still in its infancy even in government circles” (Jerven 2013, 105).

Moreover, bureaucrats may face incentives to exaggerate statistics, which report their own performance and are tied to funding allocations. As Wildavsky (1980, 235-236) put it, “[t]he desire to pass on only good news eliminates information that might put the conveyer in a bad light.” This type of conflict of interest is prevalent: “line ministries require [self-reported] data on thousands of schools, clinics, police stations, water points, and road maintenance activities across the country” (Sandefur and Glassman 2014, 16). Bureaucrats may also face incentives to self-censor. In the UK, for example, Stevens (2011) showcases how career concerns incentivize bureaucrats to downplay methodological uncertainty underlying policy choices and suppress evidence about policy failures.3 Similarly, in the African context, “statisticians often self-censor. If the data do not show anything controversial, the statistical officer will not have to answer difficult questions” (Jerven 2013, 105).

3 Next to incentives and ability, values of bureaucrats may also bias knowledge production. Where bureaucrats are “issue advocates, … they focus on values inherent in policy outcomes rather than on values like analytical integrity” (Weimer and Vining 2011, 43). This issue does not substantially affect the main argument at hand, and is therefore not developed further here.
In sum, both bureaucratic ability and incentive structures may introduce bias in the disclosure and production of accurate policy knowledge. The introduction of such bias has important repercussions for the availability of accurate policy knowledge in a polity: as noted, bureaucrats are central among “agents of knowledge” production (Diane Stone 2012, 339). In light of the variation of the availability of such knowledge across countries (cf. Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland, 2011; World Bank, 2014), we may thus also expect the concomitant incentives and ability of bureaucrats to vary dramatically across countries. The next section develops a novel argument regarding what may account for this variation, and posits that politicization of the bureaucracy aggravates all of the sources of bias pointed to in the research on policy knowledge and adds a few additional sources of bias, both with respect to ability and incentives.

Bureaucratic Politicization and Politicized Policy Knowledge

In view of the centrality of bureaucratic incentives and ability in coverage and bias in policy knowledge, the structural and institutional factors shaping these incentives and ability may be expected to play a central role in accounting for unbiased policy knowledge. In this paper, we focus on one such institutional feature argued to be crucial: bureaucratic politicization. We define politicization of the bureaucracy as the degree to which politicians have control of the bureaucracy. The principal means through which politicians gain control over the bureaucracy is to appoint personal allies and party affiliates to positions in agencies (Geddes 1994; Wood and Waterman 1991). A politicized bureaucracy is thus a bureaucracy in which the employees are recruited to a high degree on political grounds as opposed to a bureaucracy where the employees are recruited primarily on the basis of skills and merits.

Narrowing in on bureaucratic politicization to account for bureaucratic incentives and ability to produce unbiased policy knowledge takes cues from prior research. Evidence suggests that the relationship between the political and the administrative spheres of the state constitutes a key element of the incentive structure that informs

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4 A fledgling literature on the political economy of government statistics has tentatively identified several additional determinants (see Krätke and Byiers 2014).
the logic of action primarily of bureaucrats, but also of politicians and political parties as well. In this context, scholars have underscored the implications of bureaucratic politicization for, among other things, public services provision, the prevalence of corruption, parties’ inclination to woo voters with private goods or, alternatively, develop programmatic politics, as well as for economic growth and the stability of democracy (see, among others, Cingolani, Thomsson, & de Crombrugghe 2013; Cornell and Grimes 2015a,b; Cornell & Lapuente 2014; Dahlström, Lapuente, & Teorell 2012).

We build on these insights and argue that bureaucratic politicization will, analogously, shape the incentives and ability of bureaucrats to supply – and politicians to demand from bureaucrats – unbiased policy knowledge. Four mechanisms may account for how bureaucratic politicization affects the ability and incentives of bureaucracies to produce reliable policy knowledge: bureaucratic capacity to produce reliable policy knowledge; bureaucrats’ fear of career punishment when resisting political pressure for biased knowledge; incentives to bias statistics upwards to keep their political patrons – and thus themselves – in office; and lower propensity to whistle-blow in response to false performance claims or unfeasible pledges of future policy endeavors.

To begin with, bureaucratic politicization may reduce bureaucratic capacity, which in turn impairs the coverage and accuracy of policy knowledge. According to Krätke and Byiers (2014, 6), for instance, “lack of technical skills (most critically in national statistics offices) are often … the reason for poor (i.e. incomplete, low-quality) statistics.” Bureaucratic politicization impairs bureaucratic skills in two ways. First, political appointees count on fewer relevant skills: political criteria typically take precedence over merit in appointments. Second, bureaucrats have weaker incentives to develop their own expertise in agencies where turnover is high, which is likely to be greater in politicized bureaucracies (but see Schuster 2015). This creates a situation in which the bureaucracy is composed to a larger extent of inexperienced officials and in which the scope of invaluable organizational and policy knowledge fails to accumulate (Cornell 2014). At the individual level bureaucrats have weaker incentives to build expertise if they anticipate that they will not stay in the position for an extended period (Gailmard and Patty 2007). In a public administration in which a large proportion of the personnel are appointed on political grounds, the
initial skillset and incentives to develop skills are thus more limited than in an administration where a large portion are recruited in a meritocratic process. Unsurprisingly, studies associate bureaucratic politicization with weaker bureaucratic capacity, particularly where appointments target former campaign workers, i.e. appointments most clearly granted as rewards for past loyalty and support (Gallo and Lewis 2011; Lewis 2007).

Beyond a reduced ability to produce unbiased policy knowledge, bureaucrats in politicized states may also be expected to face lower or negative incentives to do so. Bureaucrats as political appointees are more vulnerable in their public employment to political pressure. Where politicization of appointment coincides with politicization of promotions and dismissal (c.f. Schuster 2015), bureaucratic job stability and career prospects are at the discretion of incumbents. When bureaucrats are dependent on politicians for their employment and career progression, the ability of politicians to pressure bureaucrats into producing and releasing biased policy knowledge is greatly enhanced. Fear of punishment may also intensify the inclination for bureaucrats to self-censor. Disclosing sobering information about the current state of affairs, or about the ineffectiveness of politicians’ policy programs, could entail personal career costs for bureaucrats, resulting in skewed evaluation and reporting.

Beyond fear of punishment, bureaucrats may also bias policy knowledge as their career fates are – absent job security – tied to the electoral fates of their political patrons (see Oliveros 2013; Robinson & Verdier 2013 for an analogous arguments about patronage contracts and public service delivery). In bureaucracies in which recruitment and dismissal are politicized, the continued employment of bureaucrats is dependent on their party winning the next election, giving them a strong incentive to join the politicians in their effort to secure the necessary votes. Politically appointed bureaucrats thus face greater incentives to overstate the incumbent’s accomplishments to strengthen the incumbent’s chances of reelection, and disregard information that could undermine the incumbent’s campaign.

Vice versa, bureaucrats in professional bureaucracies face career incentives – and cultural predispositions – to speak truth to the public. A strong, professional *esprit de corps* may enhance bureaucratic dispositions to act as whistle blowers to the public
when politicians seek to distort the collection or disclosure of official statistics. With a greater risk of bureaucratic whistleblowing, politicians are less likely to bias policy knowledge in the first place. Professional bureaucrats also face additional career incentives to speak truth to the public about their agencies. Biased official statistics which boost the incumbent’s electoral fortunes in the short-run are likely to undermine an agency’s prestige – and, concomitantly, agency funding – in the long-run. Lower funding reduces career opportunities inside the agency; lower prestige also affects career opportunities outside the agency. To illustrate, in statistics offices, “professional bureaucrats … want to avoid reputational risks, partly in order to retain their current position as well as chances of finding gainful employment elsewhere as professional statisticians” (Krätke and Byiers 2014, 6). In sum, bureaucratic politicization may be expected to bias policy knowledge in a polity in a range of ways.

The Relationship between Politicized Bureaucracy and Politicized Knowledge: An empirical illustration

A brief vignette of the politicization of Argentina’s statistical agency Indec illustrates these mechanisms and substantiates the underlying argument. The rationale for the case selection is simple and of practical nature: politicization of bureaucracies and government statistics frequently falls into the realm of covert politics, which is by definition challenging to shed empirical light on. In contrast, Indec’s politicization was highly publicized in the media and provoked several judicial investigations (see, for instance, La Nación 2015; The Economist 2013; Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007a). Secondary data can thus credibly serve to substantiate the argument. Indec was created in 1968 as an administrative dependency of the Ministry of the Economy and Production, albeit with functional independence for the collection and dissemination of official statistics (Congreso de la Nación Argentina 1968). As Argentina’s public sector at-large, Indec features a mixed public service system in which merit and politicization co-exist for personnel decisions (cf. Echebarria & Cortazar 2007). In the Department responsible for calculating the Consumer Price Index (CPI), for instance, only roughly a third of 114 public servants held permanent positions. The absence of tenure notwithstanding, higher echelons in particular in the organization were frequently staffed with professional personnel (Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007a).
In the years preceding the 2007 onset of politicization, Indec’s official statistics, including the consumer price index (CPI) and gross domestic product (GDP), followed standard international practices in their calculations and methodology; they were thus largely considered credible. Starting in January 2007, the accuracy and coverage of statistics began to decline dramatically. As The Economist (2013) put it, “Since the government seized control of the statistics institute in 2007 the discrepancy between the official inflation number and that reported by independent economists has been up to 15 percentage points.” “Blatantly inaccurate inflation statistics” were complemented by the distortion of other figures linked to inflation, including a possible overestimation of GDP growth by two percentage points per year (The Economist 2013). In 2014, the country, moreover, stopped publishing poverty rates altogether (El País 2015). The manipulation of statistics led to formal IMF warnings to take “remedial measures” to report statistics according to IMF’s rules or else risk not being able to secure additional loans, or, at the extreme, being expelled from the IMF (IMF 2013).

The political rationale for statistical manipulation is congruent with theoretical expectations. Officially, the government sought to curb official inflation rates to reduce foreign debt payments. According to one estimate, underestimating inflation rates saved the governments roughly US$2.5bn in service payments of index-linked debt (The Economist 2013). The government, in fact, accused Indec officials of colluding with creditors to increase interest payments through higher inflation indices, albeit without presenting any supporting evidence (La Nación 2015). Reports from a range of observers and the timing of the onset of politicization – the beginning of an electoral year and a rapid rise in inflation – suggest an electoral motive, however: to distort public policy knowledge which could negatively affect the incumbent’s electoral fortunes (see, among many, La Nación 2015).

Bureaucratic politicization was central in the politicization of policy knowledge. In 2006, political actors sought, unsuccessfully, to politicize Indec statistics without politicizing Indec’s bureaucracy. Starting in mid-2006, a high-level politician in the Ministry of the Economy and Production repeatedly sought access to the list of entities, which Indec surveyed to calculate inflation rates. The list was by law protected as a statistical secret to protect the neutrality of reporting entities and thus integrity of their reports (Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007a). Politicians sought
to undermine just that, seeking access to “visit these firms and look at the prices that you are disclosing” (Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007b). High-level bureaucrats, however, consistently refused to share the list, pointing to statistical secrecy and international statistical standards. In response, political requests, often accompanied by political intimidation, narrowed in on changes to the CPI methodology. Bureaucrats similarly rejected these, expressing their “concern with the danger of losing the CPI’s credibility … as well as the credibility of … Indec.” (Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007a, 33). The high-level politician in turn started imposing heavy, detailed and frequent CPI data reporting requirements on Indec over the subsequent months. While responding to them, bureaucrats were careful not to heed disaggregated data requests which could have undermined confidentiality.

In short, professional bureaucrats protected the integrity of public policy knowledge even in the face of strong political pressure to permit manipulation. As hypothesized, technical capacity to maintain international standards, a concern with the credibility of their agency and a commitment to reliable statistics all added to the incentives and ability of Indec’s professional bureaucrats to resist the politicization of statistics. To politicize official statistics, politicians thus had to politicize Indec’s bureaucracy. Exploiting the formal discretion in Argentina’s ‘mixed’ public service system, politicians did just that.

In early 2007, the Director of the CPI was replaced with a political appointee; tellingly, the new Director announced herself as the “minister’s delegate” (Clarín, 2007). In close succession, other high- and mid-level personnel in key positions – including several other departmental directors and the Director of Indec at-large – either resigned voluntarily or were “invited” to resign (Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007a). They were replaced with loyal – and often non-professional – personnel. To illustrate, the new supervisor for the recollection of consumer prices had previously been a security guard, most recently of the new CPI Director. The political appointees quickly moved to distort the method for calculating the CPI and to share the list of firms surveyed in the CPI with political authorities; professional bureaucrats had previously protected this statistical secret. Distortions in the CPI calculation were blatant. To cite one example: new “ceilings” in the IT system to calculate the CPI, for instance, precluded price increases of goods beyond certain
levels – independent of whether or not these occurred in practice (La Nación 2015; Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007a).

Part of the remaining professional bureaucrats resisted statistical manipulations. A minority union of public servants in Indec (ATE-INDEC) publicly protested against it, for instance (La Nación, 2015). This bureaucratic ‘whistle-blowing’ raised the government’s reputational costs of politicizing government statistics. Bureaucrats also resisted statistical manipulation inside Indec. Mid-level bureaucrats frequently rejected requests to arbitrarily alter data collection or indicator calculation methods on technical grounds, for instance (Ministerio Público de la Nación 2007a). Their ability to do so was limited, however. Public protests were met with violence from the governing party union. Resistance inside Indec in turn was reportedly dealt with by redundancies, early retirements and transfers to positions without functions. Cooperation with requests for statistical manipulation, by contrast, could be rewarded with salary increases and promotions (La Nación 2015).

In sum, professional bureaucrats resisted the politicization of official statistics by refusing to cooperate in its production and by alerting the public as whistle-blowers. Congruent with the theorized causal mechanisms, technical capacity, a concern with the reputation of their agency and a commitment to quality statistics all contributed to bureaucratic incentives and ability to resist politicized policy knowledge. Once political actors utilized their discretion to politicize Indec’s bureaucracy, however, bureaucratic incentives and ability changed. Career incentives to maintain and advance employment, low technical capacity and loyalty to appointing politicians all tilted bureaucratic incentives and ability towards the production of biased policy knowledge.

In conclusion, this empirical illustration corroborates the first stage of our argument, that bureaucratic politicization adds to the politicization of policy knowledge. In the next section, we will deductively derive and present empirical evidence for the second stage: politicized policy knowledge may inflate citizens’ expectations of democracy.
**Politicized Knowledge and Inflated Expectations**

This paper argues that politicized knowledge may have important implications for public attitudes toward democracy. Knowledge, if it acts as a common frame of reference, can inform stated political goals, and in particular shape pledges made by candidates to the electorate by limiting policy options to a set of feasible alternatives (Weiss 1977). In this way, knowledge serves as a constraint on the political debate, and limits the ability of actors to posit claims lacking any form of evidential support. Consequently, in a polity in which politicians at least to some extent care about the feasibility of their proposals, a strong reaction from the bureaucracy could lead them to rethink their proposal before going public with it.

When policy knowledge is politicized, it is more likely that unrealistic reform proposals – ones which is fiscally untenable or which promise outcomes that are, based on the best available knowledge, implausible – will stand uncontested, and such proposals will therefore proliferate in the public debate. Relaxed knowledge constraints in policy debates and deliberations allow parties to make electoral pledges without needing to defend them against credible challenges regarding plausible effectiveness, or the costs and budgetary tradeoffs. In such a situation campaigning parties simply have to provide a description of reality that fits their claims, and argue that opponents are presenting a false description of reality. Once the political climate is such that unrealistic pledges constitute the norm, it may also be difficult for individual parties to win votes with more modest, albeit more feasible, pledges. In more extreme cases, the claims made by parties or candidates about policy relevant conditions may become decoupled from policy relevant knowledge altogether, and knowledge itself may diminish in status.

A campaign advertisement from the Yanukovich electoral campaign in Ukraine provides an illustrative example of such promises:

> The Regions Party and its leader Victor Yanukovich know your problems and know how to solve them. They will put your interests above everything by stabilizing the economy, increasing pensions, eliminating unemployment, guaranteeing adequate salaries, providing social protection throughout the whole country, professionalism, experience, and protection of interests of every Ukrainian by the state. The Regions Party and Victor Yanukovich: improvement of your life already today! (Youtube 2011)

Elsewhere in the campaign, Yanukovich promised “A radical change in quality of life and life expectancy,” and that “During the next 10 years, Ukraine should be

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5 We would like to thank Marina Povitkina for this example and for help with translation.
among the most developed countries in the world, and be a part of the G20.” At the same time, the Regions Party manifesto stated explicitly that no tax increases would occur.

Schedler (1998) points out that unrealistic pledges of the kind described above are illegitimate from a normative perspective since they violate the norm of realism and sincerity. Candidates “must not offer promises which are ex ante impossible to fulfill…Promising the impossible constitutes an act of false labeling, a request for credit without backing” (1998, 199). Schedler (1998) also discusses potential negative consequences of unrealistic promises: if election pledges do not acknowledge political constraints, this may feed “popular illusions of centralized power” (1998: 200). This is well in line with our argument that “unchecked” promises contribute to inflated expectations.

A counterexample helps to illustrate the point further. All parties in the Swedish parliament frequently use the Research Service of the Riksdag (Riksdagens utredningsstjänst). This is a meritocratic agency staffed with qualified researchers with various fields of expertise, including law, economics, political science and the natural sciences (Riksdagen 2015), which is described in the following way on the Swedish parliament’s webpage:

There are different reasons behind the assignments the Research Service receives. It may be that a party secretariat or member of the Riksdag wants to understand a particular development or occurrence better. Perhaps they need background material to develop their policies. Another common situation is that a party wants to substantiate a political proposal with facts. The research reports are used, among other things, in media debates, private member's motions, interpellations and debates in the Chamber… In its research reports, the Research Service provides an objective view and independently formulates the contents of its analysis and its conclusions (Riksdagen 2015, emphasis added).

Importantly, many of the Research Service’s investigations, in the end, do not result in policy proposals. This indicates that politicians, when confronted with information about actual costs or expected policy consequences, themselves elect not to move forward and present their proposals to the public. Moreover, not only parties’ own policy proposals, but also challenges to political opponents, are often based on reports from the Research Service (Dagens Nyheter 2010). This indicates that there is a knowledge constraint affecting which proposals are presented, as well as on how those proposals are handled in the debate.
Even if the credibility of all information diminishes when knowledge is routinely distorted to serve political ends, citizens may still turn to parties and the political elite for clues on what the state can provide. Classical democratic theory tends to assume that parties and government are responsive to (preexisting) preferences in the electorate (Dahl 1971; Pitkin 1967), but empirical research has shown that the representative process is much more dynamic and interactive. Representatives “orient themselves forward in a speculative mode toward what their constituency might want or be induced to want at the next election” and political representation can even be depicted as constitutive and not only reactive (Disch 2011; Lindgren and Naurin, forthcoming). Representatives may be active both in searching out and in creating preferences (Mansbridge 2003).

Consequently, citizens’ expectations echo and are nourished by politicians’ proclamations and electoral pledges, and when the latter become unrealistically grandiose, so may the former. After all, the choices voters have in a democracy are those that political parties offer:

Even when electoral competitors present clear policy orientations, “platforms,” the alternatives from which voters can choose are only those that are proposed in an election. Hence, although collective choice is a choice among alternatives, not all conceivable or even feasible alternatives become subject to choice (Przeworski 2009: 85).

Our only contention with Przeworski’s argument is, however, that not all alternatives presented to voters in electoral campaigns are, in fact, feasible.

In short, the politicization of policy knowledge may affect political parties’ strategies for connecting with and winning support among voters in electoral campaigns, the main channel of communication between political parties and the electorate. Thus, political actors will opt for a strategy of offering quick fixes and grandiose pledges – pledges that go beyond what can realistically be delivered. These pledges may affect voters’ overall expectations of what the government and democracy can deliver. Politicized knowledge is, therefore, likely to be related to inflated expectations among citizens.

Inflated expectations may even spill over into how citizens conceptualize democracy. The democracy concept is elastic and even among political theorists
subject to considerable conceptual plurality. What should be fairly uncontroversial, however, is that the concept of democracy is not infinitely elastic, and that some conceptualizations are impossible to reconcile with any established definitions. As a baseline conceptualization, one might draw the distinction between input and outcome, where the institutions related to preference aggregation and policy debate and formation clearly fit within the realm of any definition of democracy. Factors relating to outcomes (e.g. economic equality, public service provision, environmental protection) should be kept out of the definition of democracy, even if they may be preconditions to a well-functioning democracy, or hypothesized to be outcomes of democracy (Tilly 2007; Canache 2012).

It goes without saying that high expectations on formal democratic rights and liberties are not problematic; such expectations can even facilitate democratic deepening in young democracies by increasing the cost of repression (Lindberg 2009: 7). The potential problem arises when expectations go far beyond political rights and freedoms to include specific policy outcomes. While political rights and freedoms are inherent components of a democracy, immediate improvement in citizens’ material well-being is in no way guaranteed by the political system. Conflating the two, or expecting that one follows automatically from the other, is likely to induce disillusionment. Przeworski (2009, 90) has argued that it is important to acknowledge the limits of democracy in this regard, “so as not to criticize democracy for not achieving what no political arrangements can achieve…in the end, democracy is but a framework within which somewhat equal, somewhat effective, and somewhat free people can struggle peacefully to improve the world according to their different visions, values, and interests” (Przeworski 2009: 90).

Inflated Expectations – Data and Research Design

We examine the empirical validity of the hypothesized implication of a politicized bureaucracy, and subsequent politicization of policy knowledge, on public

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6 Tilly (2007, 7) provides a categorization of this plurality, identifying four principal definitions: constitutional (legal frameworks for political action), substantive (promotion of human welfare by the regime), procedural (free and fair elections), and process-oriented (procedures but with substantively meaningful protections of rights and freedoms to formulate, contest and express ideas). Where exactly to draw the line in this debate is beyond the scope of this paper.
expectations and conceptualizations of democracy with multilevel analysis using survey data from two different surveys combined with country level variables from various sources. These analyses examine whether a politicized bureaucracy is related to inflated expectations. Examining the impacts on public attitudes toward democracy provides a means to examine a phenomenon otherwise quite difficult to capture empirically. While capturing politicized knowledge in a reliable and comparable way presents challenges, its existence leaves observable traces in public opinion, which allows for an indirect empirical examination of the arguments presented above.

Since our argument presumes that politicians routinely engage with voters, it is necessary that the countries included in the study have a minimal level of democracy. We therefore only include countries with a score higher than 6 on a combined Freedom House/Polity IV index (Hadenius and Teorell 2005).

Operationalization of Politicization of the Bureaucracy

We measure politicization of the bureaucracy – our main independent variable – with data from the Quality of Government survey of public administration experts, conducted 2008–2012. We employ a question that asks to what extent political connections determine the selection of applicants to public sector employment. The question is answered on a scale from “hardly ever” (1) to “almost always” (7). The question is averaged across experts for each country (Teorell, Dahlström and Dahlberg 2011).

Dependent variables

The analyses employ two survey questions to capture different types of inflated expectations among the citizenry. As argued above, inflated expectations of what governments can deliver may even inform how citizens conceptualize democracy. Therefore, our first dependent variable captures expectations on democracy as a system of governance and whether these expectations go beyond political rights and freedoms to include specific outcomes. In the World Values Survey (WVS) (Wave 6, 2010–2012) respondents are asked about what constitutes “essential characteristics of democracy”. It should be noted that the question explicitly states that “Many

7 “How often would you say the following occurs today?: When recruiting public sector employees, the political connections of the applicants decide who gets the job?”
things are desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy”. The item used is “The state makes people’s incomes equal”. The vague and quite elevated expectation captured in this question differentiates it from questions that capture a view of democracy as a means for aggregating preferences (e.g. “People choose their leaders in free elections”), but also from questions that are very dependent on context (e.g. “Religious authorities ultimately interpret the law”) as well as questions with specific policy expectations (e.g. “People receive state aid for unemployment”). Notably, the question does not say more equal, which would be a more realistic expectation since it points in a desired direction rather than to a preferred end point.

Our second dependent variable captures a more specific expectation of what the government can be expected to deliver. The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) survey from 2006 includes a question about what the government’s responsibility should be. One of the items to evaluate is “provide a job for everyone who wants one.” The question is answered on a scale from “definitely should be” (1) to “definitely should not be” (4). It seems fairly uncontroversial that this expectation goes far beyond what any democratic government could realistically deliver, and in that sense is well suited for the purposes here. As this survey was conducted a few years prior to the QoG-survey from which we take the measure of politicized bureaucracy, it is conceivable that changes may have occurred in the bureaucracies, which would cause validity concerns. However, given the stickiness of bureaucratic structures and how slow moving reforms usually are, it is unlikely that the overall level of politicization of the bureaucracy in a country have changed appreciably between these years. There may have been changes in individual agencies but it is unlikely that there have been great changes on the average level of politicization of bureaucracy in the countries.

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8 Many things are desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy”

9 “On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to ... provide a job for everyone who wants one”
Alternative explanations and control variables

Several country level controls as well as individual level controls are included in the analyses. If not otherwise indicated, country level controls are measured in the first year of the respective surveys (for WVS 2010 and for ISSP 2006).

A number of authors emphasize the learning aspect of democratic development with respect to elections and parties, and that the development of parties with stable ideological platforms requires a prolonged iterative process in which voters gradually gain confidence in parties’ campaign promises, and parties incrementally come to understand that voters are willing to endorse larger policy programs (Kitschelt and Kselman 2012; Keefer 2007; Lindberg 2009). In a recent study, Building on WVS data, Cho (2014) finds that individuals residing in countries with a longer history of democracy tend to show a stronger association with a ‘correct’ understanding of democracy (elections and civil liberties, and not military or religious leadership), and satisfaction with democracy. The analyses in this paper therefore include a measure of democratic experience, measured as the number of years since 1930 the system had been democratic as of 2000, with democracy being defined as a 6 or higher on Beck et al.’s democracy scale (Teorell et al. 2013; Treisman 2007)

Others have pointed out that societal conditions in a country affect meanings ascribed to democracy. More specifically, the conditions most acutely lacking in a country might come to be associated with the promise of democracy, a phenomenon most likely to arise in young democracies. Bratton and Mattes (2001, 455) attribute the finding that South Africans in the mid-1990s tended to equate democracy with equal access to “housing, jobs and a decent income” to the history of total exclusion and unequal access to such basic goods and opportunities. In a more recent analysis of data from the European context, Ceka and Magalhães (2014, 20) show that lower levels of economic development increase the extent to which respondents emphasize that social justice is essential to democracy, even under control for the number of years the country has been a democracy.

With the exception of growth fueled by natural resources, economic growth constitutes a core component of societal modernization, and is linked with higher levels of education, urbanization, communication infrastructure have been shown to
help sustain democracies and prevent reversals to authoritarianism (Lipset 1959; Przeworski et al 2000; Teorell 2010). Economic growth, to the extent that it appreciably diminishes the prevalence of poverty, may also affect voters’ time horizons, parties’ and candidates’ inclination to make promises of short-term private goods in conjunction with electoral campaigns, and thereby also affect citizens’ expectations of democracy.

To take these factors into account, we control for economic development, measured with an estimate of the countries’ GDP per capita in the analysis; economic inequality, measured using an estimate of the Gini index of inequality in equivalized (square root scale) household disposable income, using Luxembourg Income Study data as the standard (Solt 2008; Teorell et al. 2013).

To capture countries’ level of democracy, we use the imputed Freedom house/Polity score (Freedom House; Marshall and Jaggers 2001; Teorell et al. 2011). The Freedom House index measures political rights and civil liberties with a number of items, including the fairness of the electoral process, the right of opposition parties to take part, freedom for media and organizations, the right of assembly, etc. Polity IV focuses on electoral matters – such as elements of competition and the role of popular participation in recruiting the executive – and the distribution of power, including constraints on the executive (for a critical discussion and comparison of the two indicators, see Hadenius and Teorell 2005). The scale ranges from 0 to 10 where 0 is least democratic and 10 most democratic (Hadenius & Teorell 2005; Teorell et al. 2011; 2013). We also add a variable showing the share of protestants as percentage of population in 1980. (La Porta et al. 1999; Teorell et al. 2013)

In addition to the factors mentioned above, which may correlate both with a politicized bureaucracy and with citizens’ expectations of democracy, the analyses seek to demonstrate that the theorized knowledge mechanism is distinct from a closely related causal pathway, namely the use of government resources for partisan ends, i.e. clientelism. Since bureaucrats themselves face electoral incentives, they may willingly assist candidates in funneling public resources to areas or constituencies that are strategically important from an electoral perspective, or

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10 Data come from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators, and are provided by the Quality of Government Institute (World Bank 2013; Teorell et al. 2011; 2013). For Taiwan, GDP data is missing in the WDI dataset so data from the World Economic Forum is used instead (Schwab 2012; Teorell et al. 2011; 2013).
support a general spending surge in a campaign season, even if it is fiscally unwise or goes against the stated aims of the agency.

For politicians, extensive control over the bureaucracy also allows much more extensive opportunities to engage in discretionary allocation of public goods and services to reward party supporters or curry favor with undecided voters (Cornell and Lapuente 2014; Geddes 1994; Gingerich 2013; Shefter 1994). Control of the bureaucracy thus expands parties’ and individual politicians’ opportunity not only to tweak information, but also to use public resources to reward voters in a material way. Access to social welfare programs such as subsidized housing or cash transfers may more easily be allocated along partisan lines if politicians have loyal appointees in offices administering public programs (see Stokes et al. 2013, 15-17). The existence of such practices could in all likelihood also contribute to inflation in citizens’ expectations on democracy.

We therefore include a measure of clientelism in the models. The measure employed here is an index built on data from the expert survey on political parties from the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project (Kitschelt 2014). The index sums the scores on four different questions that capture whether political parties or candidates of these parties give or promise to give four different types of rewards for votes; “citizens consumer goods”; “material advantages in public social policy schemes”; “preferential access to government contracts or procurement opportunities”; and special favors in the form of lenient application of regulatory rules in exchange for votes. The response scale runs from “a negligible effort” to “a major effort” (Kitschelt 2014). We weight the parties by party size to get a country score. It should be noted that we do not include forms of clientelism related to employment since that may be harder to distinguish from a politicized bureaucracy.

At the individual level, the models control for income group, educational level, left-right positioning, gender and age. In the ISSP survey, a question where the respondent is asked to place herself on a scale, from the bottom to the top of society, is used as a proxy for income group. Also in the ISSP survey, left-right placement is derived from party affiliation. The models examining respondents’ assessments that government should provide everyone a job control for unemployment at the individual level, as well as unemployment rate at the country level (World Bank 2013; Teorell et al. 2011; 2013).
Results: Politicized Bureaucracies and Inflated Expectations

Beginning with the results for the first dependent variable – the view that it is an essential characteristic of democracy that the state makes people’s incomes equal – the results are consistent with the theoretical contention outlined above: politicized bureaucracy exhibits a relationship with this inflated expectation, independent of other institutional, historical and economic factors, as well as individual factors. Figure 1 illustrates the bivariate relationship between politicized bureaucracy and the country means for this variable, where higher values indicate that people tend to agree with this proposition.

Figure 1. Politicized bureaucracy and expectations of state enforced income equality

Table 1 shows the results of multi-level models with citizens’ attitudes that the state should make people’s incomes equal as the dependent variable, controlling for alternative explanations. Beginning with the main results, Model 1 shows the bivariate relationship between politicization of the bureaucracy and the dependent variable. Model 2 shows the relationship under control for a number of factors, but excluding those control variables that are missing altogether for some countries, in this case the Gini data and Clientelism. Model 3 shows the model with the inclusion of the Gini index and Model 4 shows the full model including also the Clientelism variable. The association between politicized bureaucracy and inflated expectations
is positive and statistically significant even when relevant controls are included in the models.

Table 1. Politicized bureaucracy and expectations of democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Democracy: The state makes people's incomes equal</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicized bureaucracy</td>
<td>0.564***</td>
<td>0.420***</td>
<td>0.362***</td>
<td>0.361***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.131)</td>
<td>(0.150)</td>
<td>(0.138)</td>
<td>(0.133)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual level controls:**

- Income: -0.0389* -0.0718*** -0.0718*** (0.0218) (0.0208) (0.0208)
- Educational level: -0.101*** -0.118*** -0.118*** (0.0176) (0.0203) (0.0203)
- Left-right: -0.0309 -0.0665*** -0.0665*** (0.0228) (0.0222) (0.0221)
- Female: 0.108** 0.131** 0.131** (0.0476) (0.0542) (0.0542)
- Age: -0.00417 -0.00554** -0.00554** (0.00233) (0.00251) (0.00251)

**Country level controls:**

- Years of Democracy: -0.0229*** -0.0374*** -0.0377*** (0.00780) (0.00723) (0.00721)
- Ln(GDP/Cap): 0.292 0.698*** 0.691** (0.278) (0.267) (0.272)
- Democracy: -0.0586 -0.324 -0.335 (0.193) (0.234) (0.289)
- % Protestant: 0.00479 0.00856 0.00837 (0.00871) (0.00687) (0.00672)
- Gini: -0.00782 -0.00738 (0.0231) (0.0240)
- Clientelism: -0.00936 (0.124)
- Constant: 3.405*** 3.284 3.132 3.390 (0.564) (2.036) (2.792) (4.226)

**Random Part:**

- (sd) Country intercepts: 0.899 0.761 0.628 0.628 (0.097) (0.085) (0.074) (0.075)
- (sd) Residual: 2.783 2.758 2.762 2.762 (0.059) (0.061) (0.073) (0.073)

**Individuals:**

- Individuals: 43914 37845 28956 28956
- Countries: 31 31 25 25
- AIC: 214666.9 184343.7 141141.6 141143.6
- BIC: 214701.7 184454.7 141257.4 141267.7
- Log-Likelihood: -107329.4 -92158.8 -70556.8 -70556.8

Standard errors in parentheses (robust)

* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

All individual level controls are significantly related to the statement in all four models in Table 1. People with high incomes endorse this statement to a lesser
degree, as do those with higher education, older people, and people that are leaning to the right on the political scale. Men are less likely than women to think that state imposed income equality is an essential part of democracy. At the aggregate level, years of democracy has a negative effect, indicating that inflated expectations on democracy is more of an issue in younger democracies. GDP/capita is positively related to the statement in the models with the smaller sample (model 3 and 4). The other country level variables do not show any significant effects.

The second set of analyses explores variations in citizens’ expectations that the government should provide a job for everyone that wants one. The results are again consistent with the main theoretical contention outlined above. Politicized bureaucracy exhibits a relationship with this view, independent of other institutional, historical and economic factors, as well as individual factors. Figure 2 illustrates the bivariate relationship between politicized bureaucracy and the country means for this variable, where higher values on the Y-axis indicate that people, on average, do not agree with this proposition.

**Figure 2. Politicized bureaucracy and expectations of government job provision**

Model 1 in Table 2 shows the bivariate relationship between bureaucratic politicization and our dependent variable. Model 2 shows the relationship under
control for a number of factors, but excluding those control variables that are missing altogether for some countries. This means dropping the Gini variable and the clientelism measure, as in table 1, but in this case also the derived measure of left-right position, and self-placement on the top/bottom of society scale. Model 3 shows the model with the inclusion of the Gini data. Model 4 shows the full model with the inclusion of Clientelism. Notably, the inclusion of the additional controls does not only cause the exclusion of four countries, but also a huge loss of individual cases, particularly due to the derived left-right positioning variable. Still, the association between a politicized bureaucracy and expectations of government job provision is significant, albeit weaker, when these controls are included.

Moving to the individual level control variables, those with higher incomes tend to believe that this is not the government’s responsibility, as do people with higher education, men, and people that are leaning to the right on the political scale. Unemployed people ascribe more responsibility to the state in this matter. Age is only significant in model 1 and indicates that older people are inclined to think that it is not the government’s responsibility to provide job for everyone. In terms of the country level controls, a longer experience with democracy tends to lower the expectations on democracy in this respect, as does level of democracy and, perhaps surprisingly, inequality. The other country level controls are not significant.
Table 2. Politicized bureaucracy and expectations of government job provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV: Gov. responsibility: not provide job for everyone</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicized bureaucracy</td>
<td>-0.261***</td>
<td>-0.114***</td>
<td>-0.0821**</td>
<td>-0.0796**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0327)</td>
<td>(0.0410)</td>
<td>(0.0360)</td>
<td>(0.0372)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual level controls:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.123***</td>
<td>-0.135***</td>
<td>-0.135***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0168)</td>
<td>(0.0169)</td>
<td>(0.0169)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00109</td>
<td>0.000862</td>
<td>0.000861</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000569)</td>
<td>(0.000960)</td>
<td>(0.000961)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>0.101***</td>
<td>0.105***</td>
<td>0.105***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0108)</td>
<td>(0.0117)</td>
<td>(0.0117)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>-0.155***</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0222)</td>
<td>(0.0325)</td>
<td>(0.0325)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-right (derived)</td>
<td>0.117***</td>
<td>0.117***</td>
<td>0.117***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0230)</td>
<td>(0.0230)</td>
<td>(0.0230)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom/top of society</td>
<td>0.0287***</td>
<td>0.0287***</td>
<td>0.0287***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00845)</td>
<td>(0.00845)</td>
<td>(0.00845)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country level controls:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Democracy</td>
<td>0.00908***</td>
<td>0.00743***</td>
<td>0.00725***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00222)</td>
<td>(0.00196)</td>
<td>(0.00199)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ln(GDP/Cap)</td>
<td>-0.100</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.0938</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0867)</td>
<td>(0.0730)</td>
<td>(0.0778)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.189***</td>
<td>0.178***</td>
<td>0.164***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0522)</td>
<td>(0.0380)</td>
<td>(0.0457)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Protestant</td>
<td>-0.00290</td>
<td>-0.00203</td>
<td>-0.00223</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00201)</td>
<td>(0.00216)</td>
<td>(0.00233)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment (%)</td>
<td>-0.00971</td>
<td>-0.00891</td>
<td>-0.00891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00756)</td>
<td>(0.00742)</td>
<td>(0.00742)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini</td>
<td>0.0259***</td>
<td>0.0261***</td>
<td>0.0261***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00493)</td>
<td>(0.00500)</td>
<td>(0.00500)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clientelism</td>
<td>-0.0125</td>
<td>-0.0125</td>
<td>-0.0125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0232)</td>
<td>(0.0232)</td>
<td>(0.0232)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>2.942***</td>
<td>1.176</td>
<td>-2.044***</td>
<td>-1.655***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.137)</td>
<td>(0.763)</td>
<td>(0.605)</td>
<td>(0.915)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Random part:

| (sd) Country intercepts | 0.273 | 0.204 | 0.159 | 0.159 |
|                         | (0.033) | (0.021) | (0.030) | (0.029) |
| (sd) Residual           | 0.880 | 0.865 | 0.888 | 0.888 |
|                         | (0.022) | (0.020) | (0.017) | (0.017) |

| Individuals | 44528 | 43289 | 22536 | 22536 |
| Countries   | 32    | 32    | 28    | 28    |
| AIC         | 115174.3 | 110496.7 | 58729.2 | 58731.0 |
| BIC         | 115209.2 | 110600.8 | 58857.6 | 58867.4 |
| Log-Likelihood | -57583.2 | -55236.3 | -29348.6 | -29348.5 |

Standard errors in parentheses (robust)

* p < 0.10,  ** p < 0.05,  *** p < 0.01
Concluding remarks

Public administration scholars have long since established that meritocratic recruitment enhances the accumulation of expertise in bureaucratic organizations, and the positive implications this has for the performance of the public sector. This paper argues that the politicization of the bureaucracy may have much more profound consequences for the production of policy-relevant knowledge and its use both in policy debates and political discourse, including in electoral campaigns. A politicized bureaucracy seems to be an effective means of politicizing the policy knowledge published by governments, the primary source of such knowledge in a polity.

The empirical analyses suggest further that politicized knowledge may contribute to an inflation of citizens’ expectations of what democracy entails and can deliver. Regardless of the source, unrealistically high expectations on democracy, when the democracy concept is extended beyond the scope of being an arena for the aggregation, negotiation and/or deliberation of ideas and ideology and equated instead with a specific policy outcome, may sow the seeds for widespread popular disillusionment.

Moreover, citizens’ expectations of democracy will to some extent affect the demand-side of elections, and candidates and incumbents may adjust their strategies and rhetoric accordingly. To the extent that this dynamic is at play, it will certainly contribute to the perpetuation of parties issuing unrealistic campaign promises, even if those promises are entail fiscal profligacy. Citizens’ expectations, though mostly shaped by parties’ rhetoric and pledges in electoral campaigns, may in other words also contribute to a lock-in effect, making it rational for parties to continue to issue unrealistic promises during campaigns, and abstain from advancing and persuading voters of the merits of a more long-term programmatic agenda. Citizens’ expectations and parties’ choices of campaign strategies may, in this sense, be mutually reinforcing, hindering a transition of the political system from a contest for private and club goods, to a contest over ideologically founded policy programs. One important component in breaking this mutually reinforcing dynamic may therefore be depoliticizing of the bureaucracy, preventing incumbents from manipulating or silencing bureaucrats’ estimates of program costs and impacts, both in terms of past efforts and projections for the future.
To the extent that the inflated expectations of democracy examined in the empirical analyses in fact capture the politicization of knowledge as we argue, the implications of a politicized bureaucracy are yet more far-reaching than previously understood. That bias exists in policy knowledge is well-established, but that it varies systematically can help to understand the chronic underperformance of some democratic systems. Formulating appropriate and cost-effective policies is difficult under any circumstances but amounts to mere guesswork when relevant, context-specific knowledge is lacking. Even well-intentioned policy makers and bureaucrats will be ill-equipped under such circumstances.

Interesting avenues of research include exploring whether and if so how bureaucratic expertise serves to reduce the viability of unrealistic pledges, for example by finding evidence that parties in the electoral contest use available knowledge to challenge such promises, and that such a confrontation leads to reputational costs for those issuing unrealistic pledges. A second possible line of investigation might be to further examine the link between bureaucratic politicization and the accuracy of government statistics. The evidence regarding the politicization of knowledge presented in this paper is in some senses incomplete (the case of Indec in Argentina is telling, but only a single case) and circumstantial (covariance with expectations of democracy), but most certainly sufficient to warrant a call for continued exploration.

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