Is Political Public Administration a Threat to Legislative Supremacy?

Tansu Demir
Department of Public Administration, University of Illinois at Springfield, Springfield, Illinois, USA

Abstract: The power that public administrators possess has been one of the most important concerns in the field’s discourse for many decades. The widely shared acknowledgement that public administration is a powerful instrument was followed by the question of how to control that power to ensure legislative supremacy in a democratic polity. The traditional response to this question advanced three specific propositions to ensure legislative supremacy:

1. administrative neutrality,
2. policy leadership by elected officials,
3. and legislative oversight.

This study first articulates and then evaluates the traditional model using survey data collected from a national sample of city managers in council-manager local governments. The results of structural equation modeling show that the traditional model provides insufficient explanation to understand the relationship between elected leadership and administrative officials. The study then discusses implications of the findings and concludes with some suggestions for future research.

Keywords: politics, administration, dichotomy, legislative supremacy, policy leadership, administrative neutrality, legislative oversight

INTRODUCTION

The power that public administrators possess has been one of the most important concerns in the field’s discourse for many decades. Political scientists and
public administration scholars alike have acknowledged the fact that public administrators are powerful players in the policy process because they participate in critical decisions that virtually affect every aspect of citizens’ life. With this acknowledgement, however, came a number of important questions regarding the proper role of public administration in a democratic government, at the center of which lies the premise that only those officials elected by citizens through democratic elections should make policies. Of many questions raised, particularly important was the one related to controlling the power that public administrators exercise in the course of their jobs. Beginning in the early 1940s with the Frederick-Finer debate and continuing until more recent times, numerous scholars have proposed a multitude of models with the hope that the tension between bureaucracy and democracy could be eased.

**THE TRADITIONAL MODEL**

The traditional model, also known as the politics-administration dichotomy or orthodoxy in public administration, attempted to ease the tension between democracy and bureaucracy by making a clear division of labor and authority between elected officials and public administrators. According to this model, elected officials engage in political activities. Specifically, elected officials are responsible for framing and responding to value-laden questions and making policies, while public administrators are charged with implementing those policies formulated by elected officials. The sole criterion that guides administrative decisions, according to the traditional model, is efficiency. Public administration is accepted as the neutral arm of government with primary focus on policy implementation.

A variant of the functional-structural view of government, the orthodoxy in public administration envisions two basic functions, that is, political guidance and neutral competence, with each one being performed by separate government bodies. Politics provides guidance to administration and involves activities that lead to formulation and clarification of public’s preferences. This process of politics ends with laws through legislation. Public administration, on the other hand, is primarily charged with processing political choices into concrete accomplishments with the application of specialized knowledge, skills, and tools that constitute what is called bureaucratic expertise. The traditional model treats public administration as a self-contained world of its own, with values, rules, and methods divorced from politics. Within the confines of their instrumental role, public administrators must implement policies in conformity with legislative intentions and instructions.

The traditional model denies public administrators any independent authority to take actions that might change the range and object of the legislated policies. As neutral and loyal agents of elected leadership, public administrators are required to avoid decisions and actions that may alter the
legislated policies without specific grants of authority from their political supervisors. Unauthorized deviations from legislated policies in the course of policy implementation are seen as violations of the principle of legislative supremacy. The traditional model of public administration envisions a vigilant legislative body that monitors bureaucratic behavior and ensures that policies are implemented in accordance with legislative instructions.

The traditional model is based upon a governance model called representative democracy. This model of democracy places public administration under the direction and supervision of elected leadership. In a well-functioning representative democracy, people elect officials for legislative positions from among competing entrepreneurs that offer various policy packages. Having been elected, these policy entrepreneurs pass laws that address the needs and wants of citizens. On the other side, as neutral and competent officials of government, public administrators begin implementing the laws. The vigilant populace monitors performance of elected officials, and if unsatisfied with the results, replaces the incumbents with those who offer more promise in meeting various demands of the electorate.[7]

Although the traditional model offers a simplified understanding and vision concerning the relationship between elected leadership and administrative officials, it, indeed, raises more questions than it actually answers. First of all, the fact that laws are not very specific and clear provides public administrators with much discretion to decide which courses of action to take. According to Davis (1969), a public administrator has discretion whenever the effective limits set upon his behavior leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action or inaction.[8]

Lipsky (1980), in Street Level Bureaucracy, contended that due to wide discretion that public administrators exercise they should be seen as policy makers rather than policy implementers.[9] According to Lipsky, the fact that the goal expectations for the agencies tend to be ambiguous, vague or conflicting provides public administrators with substantial discretion. The acknowledgement that it is nearly impossible and even undesirable to deprive public administrators of discretionary power led to an important question: how to make sure that public administrators exercise their discretion responsibly and in conformity with legislative intentions and instructions. A multitude of answers were provided.

THE FRIEDRICH-FINER DEBATE

One of the earliest debates in public administration related to the question of administrative responsibility. The argumentative exchange between Carl Friedrich and Herman Finer is important because each scholar represents one polar side on the question of administrative responsibility. According to Finer (1940), the central guarantor of democracy is external control of
bureaucracy by elective institutions. Emphasizing the predominant role of elective institutions in policy making process Finer believed that loyalty to legitimate political authority is the sole criterion of administrative responsibility. Finer (1940) stated, “administration begins where the legislature says it shall begin. It begins where the administrator begins, and the legislature decides that.” On the other side of the argument, Friedrich (1940) brought to the fore the important role of professional values of public administrators, and further contended that administrative responsibility lies in public administrators’ active participation in understanding and responding to public needs. The Friedrich-Finer debate did not provide a conclusive answer to the question of how to secure administrative responsibility in a democratic government that has a powerful bureaucratic instrument; it nonetheless has generated a lasting impact on the field’s discourse. Contemporary scholars that supported Finer’s position advanced three specific propositions to ensure administrative responsibility.

Proposition 1: Administrative Neutrality

The traditional model proposed administrative neutrality as a prescription to minimize the power that public administrators can accumulate by engaging in political activities. Weberian theory of bureaucracy reinforced a particular image for public administrators as they are emotionally detached and rigorously professional experts. Administrative neutrality requires public managers to stay out of politics, maintain a neutral stand on issues that divide the community, be non-partisan, and void of any particular policy agenda. Public administrators, in this traditional understanding, provide neutral competence to policy process, but only in their capacity as advisors to elected officials. As Kaufman (1956) defined it, neutral competence is “the ability to do the work of government expertly, and to do it according to explicit, objective standards rather than to personal or party or other obligations and loyalties.” Neutral competence prescribes that public administrators work as the hired hand of elected officials.

Closely related to the principle of neutral competence is the presumption that administrative instruments are neutral, they are selected according to rational-technical criteria and without regard to any political concerns. Public administrators are assumed to be exercising values in their own closed world by using methods divorced from politics. For example, the library department allocates resources to neighborhood branches on the basis of reader levels, while police officers are assigned on the basis of crime rates and calls for service.

The main concern of public administrators is and should be to implement policies efficiently and with optimal use of public resources to accomplish policy goals, without any concern for the gains and losess of particular interest groups. According to Cooke (1915):
For the proper exercise of the functions of the director, it is essential that he be disinterested; that is, be free from any conflicting interest. But it is also essential that he have knowledge. Facts, facts, facts are the only basis on which he can properly exercise his judgment.\textsuperscript{[18]}

There are two major arguments used to encourage public administrators to abstain from activities that characterize politics: practical and democratic arguments. The practical argument assumes that public administration, because of its rational structure, is less effective in fulfilling the political function, that is, resolving conflicts in matters of public importance.\textsuperscript{[19]} Numerous observations in local governments, for example, led to the argument that public administrators lack important political skills. When public administrators engage in political activities (e.g., community leadership), they either perform the role poorly or conflict sharply with dominant political forces.\textsuperscript{[20]} Substantiating this practical argument, for example, Daniel and Rose (1992) measured the correlation between professionalism and political acuity, and found weak associations between the two.\textsuperscript{[21]}

The democratic argument, however, focuses on the proper role of public administration in a democratic government, and perceives political public administration as a threat to legislative supremacy. Obvious in Weber’s (1946) early note:

Under normal conditions, the power position of a fully developed bureaucracy is always overtowering. The political master finds himself in the position of the dilettante who stands opposite the expert, facing the trained official who stands within the management of administration.\textsuperscript{[22]}

In sum, the traditional model puts forth administrative neutrality in order to minimize the power of public administrators, and therefore, to increase the capacity of elected officials to perform policy leadership, another important proposition of the traditional model to which I turn in the following section.

**Proposition 2: Policy Leadership by Elected Officials**

The traditional model charges elected officials with policy leadership tasks.\textsuperscript{[23]} Policy leadership involves “the strategic functions of setting goals and priorities, mobilizing and allocating resources, and providing guidance for the development and implementation of policies, strategies, and programs, all on an integrated cross-cutting basis.”\textsuperscript{[24]} For a local elected official, in particular, policy leadership means community leadership and involves the ability to move community forces together and simultaneously toward a desirable objective.\textsuperscript{[25]}
To accomplish a strict division of labor in the form of policymaking and policy implementation, assigned to elected officials and administrative officials respectively, the traditional model offered a government structure called council-manager form. In municipalities with council-manager form for local governments there is an elected body of government, usually a city council, responsible for policymaking. This policymaking body hires a professional administrator, commonly called city manager, to implement its policies.

Finally, the traditional model places a significant emphasis on formality of policymaking, and urges that policymaking take place through legitimate avenues of formal government.[26] Formulating specific policy goals based on supremacy of law marks the primary policymaking responsibility of elected leadership.[27]

Normatively, the proposition of policy leadership by elected officials prescribes that political leaders should not delegate policymaking responsibilities to public administrators. Ostrom (1973) long ago critiqued concentrating the power in the hands of the executive branch and dis-empowering the other branches:

The Executive offices of the President would then become the ‘efficient’ part of the government; the Congress, the courts, the statehouses, and the other centers of authority would become the ‘dignified’ parts of government relieved of their other burdens of work so that they can devote themselves largely to the ceremonial functions of government.[28]

Contemporary local government scholar Svara (1990) also cautioned that “there are cases of cities controlled by an appointed manager who cannot be challenged because of longevity or community support.” In his words, “The manager has become the master to whom the board defers out of respect and dependency.”[29] Both Ostrom and Svara, although focusing on policymaking at different levels of government, point to the importance of policy leadership exercised by elected officials. This second proposition is important because it is related to the power of elected officials to exercise legislative oversight, the third proposition that I turn to in what follows.

Proposition 3: Legislative Oversight

In the traditional model, elected officials are given the task of exercising oversight over public administration in order to ensure that policy implementation proceeds, as it should and in conformity with legislative intentions and instructions. Bureaucratic drift in the form of unauthorized deviations from legislated policies is prevented through legislative oversight.

There is an ample literature devoted to legislative oversight in public administration. Public administration scholars draw attention to the importance of legislative oversight to ensure that policy implementation is in conformity with legislative instructions. In case of deviations, public
administrators should be given timely feedback, and they in turn should adjust administrative decisions and processes in order to meet legislative expectations. According to Ogul (1976), “legislative oversight is behavior by legislators and their staffs, individually or collectively, which results in an impact, intended or not, on bureaucratic behavior.” The minimal functions of legislative oversight are “to legitimize policy initiatives, help allocate resources, exercise some form of popular accountability on non-elected administrators.”

Common in many studies on legislative oversight is the fear from bureaucratic power. Political control of public administration by elected officials is given prime importance on the assumption that administration that cannot be inspected and controlled tends to become a law unto itself. Although there is an agreement in the literature that bureaucratic behavior is influenced by hierarchical controls and legislative oversight, the extent of this influence is in dispute. Public administration scholars that emphasize the traditional model tend to associate administrative responsibility with strong guidance from an authority center, in the form of legislative oversight.

Based on 13 years of participant observation, Lee (2001), who was a state senator in Wisconsin from 1977 to 1989, argues that the relationship between elected officials and public administrators is not much different from what the traditional model prescribes. Lee’s (2001) experience shows that:

Legislators have an expansive view of their role in the politics-administration dichotomy. Administrators were perceived in a subordinate role vis-à-vis the legislature and were expected to yield to legislative suggestion for audits, to the audits themselves, and the implementation of recommendations coming out of the concluded audits without serious argument. This is far from the axiomatic theme of public administration that politicians and administrators are equal partners in the politics-administration dichotomy since they both engage in creating policy.

Goodnow (1900) supported the necessity of this legislative control and supremacy but cautioned, “This control should not, however, extend further than is necessary to insure the execution of the state will.” Legislative oversight is considered critically important because it is related to the proposition of legislative supremacy, which I explain in the following section.

**LEGISLATIVE SUPREMACY**

The traditional model assigns public administration a narrow policy role: implementation of policies as authorized and communicated by elected leadership. Legislative supremacy requires that public administrators discharge
their implementation tasks in conformity with legislative instructions and intention. As Finer (1940) noted, an administrator “cannot himself determine the range or object of that policy. He has authority, but it is a conditioned, derived authority.”[39] The litmus test of legislative supremacy is whether public administrators are taking actions which may change the range and object of legislated policies, without specific grants of authority from their political supervisors.[40] Let alone making any changes to the policy in the implementation phase, public administrators are not even allowed to directly communicate with clientele or interest groups, according to the traditional model. This kind of interactions would not only have the potential to violate the principle of legislative supremacy but also would lead public administrators to be captured by strong and organized interest groups.[41] Ostrom (1973) reminded the self-fulfilling prophecy of Rousseau: “One who believes himself the master of others is nonetheless a greater slave than they.”[42]

THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on literature review, our theoretical interests, and the practical need to work with a parsimonious model, we specified four theoretical constructs:

1. administrative neutrality,
2. policy leadership by elected officials,
3. legislative oversight, and
4. legislative supremacy.

Each construct is measured by a number of variables that we culled from our readings of the literature. The conceptual model specifies three hypothesized associations among the constructs. That is, administrative neutrality is associated with policy leadership, which is associated with legislative oversight, which is associated with legislative supremacy.

Our model is based on a series of hypotheses. The theoretical logic of the model states that loss of administrative neutrality undermines elected officials’ capacity to lead the policy process. In other words, the model views political public administration and policy leadership of elected officials as a zero-sum game (the less administrative neutrality the less policy leadership by elected officials). The second hypothesis states that weak policy leadership by elected officials lead to weak legislative oversight. In other words, it says elected officials that cannot lead the policy process cannot control public administrators. [43] Finally, the third hypothesis states that as a result of weak legislative oversight public administrators are more likely to take independent actions that may change the range and object of legislated policies. The conceptual model is shown as Figure 1.
METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION, AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

To test and evaluate our theoretical model, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. SEM is a multivariate quantitative technique that allows researchers to analyze hypothesized associations in theoretical models. It is a confirmatory statistical technique that helps evaluate the fit between theoretical models and empirical data.

Unlike basic statistical techniques that allow researchers to utilize only a limited number of variables, SEM provides researchers with a capability to use multiple variables to better understand their area of research.\(^\text{[44]}\) This quantitative technique enables researchers to test two or more relationships among directly observable and/or latent variables. The latent variables are what a researcher ultimately wishes to capture, but which cannot be assessed directly through any one form of observation.\(^\text{[45]}\) Manifest or observed variables, however, can be measured by the researcher. Not only the concern of researchers to specify and test sophisticated theories, but also the concern with reliability and validity issues encourages researchers to utilize this technique because SEM explicitly takes into account measurement errors when analyzing the data.\(^\text{[46]}\)

SEM uses numerous absolute and comparative fit indices to evaluate the extent to which the theoretical model fits empirical data. Absolute fit indices compare the model with itself. If the observed covariance matrix is not significantly different from the covariance matrix implied by the model, the conclusion drawn is that the model fits the data. Comparative fit indices,
however, compare the model with an alternative model (mostly, a null model in which all variables are assumed to be uncorrelated). Values of fit indices range from 0 to 1. As a rule of thumb, values greater than 0.9 are taken as indicative of good fit of the model to the data. [47] The fit is interpreted as support to the theory underlying the specified model. In this paper, we use Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fitness Index (AGFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). We used AMOS software program to test the model and interpret the results.

To tap the model constructs, we developed a survey instrument (see Table 1). We specified twelve (12) statements to tap the theoretical constructs. That is, three statements for administrative neutrality (items 1, 2, 3), four statements for policy leadership by elected officials (items 4, 5, 6, 7), three statements for legislative oversight (items 8, 9, 10), and finally, two statements for legislative supremacy construct (items 11, 12).

We pretested survey instrument with some former city managers and practicing public administrators to ensure content validity. We measured the survey items on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strong disagreement) to 7 (strong agreement). In the beginning of the survey instrument, the city managers were instructed to respond to the statements by keeping in mind what happens in the formulation and implementation of economic policies (zoning, rezoning, planning, taxing, etc.). Our purpose in using economic policies as mental reference is based on the belief that economic policies attract more politics [48] and hence provide a good means to test the hypotheses of the traditional model that separates policy making from policy implementation. Also, by this way we sought to minimize the problem of variation in responses due to differences among policy areas.

A random sample of 1000 city managers was drawn from the list provided by International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The surveys were mailed in March 2005 and resulted in 357 responses. A second mailing to non-respondent managers with a follow-up reminder letter received an additional 158 responses. The total number of responses was 515, which makes up a very high 51.5 percent response rate. Of 515 managers in our dataset, 52 (10.1 percent) are from large municipalities (with populations greater than 50,000), 212 (42.4 percent) from medium-sized municipalities (with populations greater than 10,000), and 244 (47.5 percent) from small-sized municipalities (with populations less than 10,000). In terms of population, proportional distribution of municipalities in our dataset approximates each category’s actual proportion in the ICMA dataset, that is, 11.7, 41.7, and 46.6 percent, for large, medium, and small municipalities respectively. Of 515 respondents, 458 (88.9 percent) were male, while 57 (11.1 percent) were female. Of 515 respondents, 48.8 percent (251) hold at least a bachelor’s degree. Five major regions of the United States (Northeast, Southeast, Midwest,
West Coast, and Mountain Plains) were represented in our dataset. In sum, the survey achieved an inclusive national representation.

We screened the data and deleted all responses with missing values. After this deletion, our sample size declined to 481. In order to test construct reliability we used Cronbach’s Alpha as well as inter-item correlations. Cronbach’s Alpha values are 0.72 for administrative neutrality, 0.64 for policy leadership, 0.52 for legislative oversight, and 0.62 for legislative supremacy. So, all these values show an acceptable internal consistency among variables within their respective theoretical constructs. We also

**Table 1. Study variables and descriptive statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no</th>
<th>Manifest variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Stand. deviation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I maintain a neutral stand on any policy issues that divide the council.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Before approval by the council, I do not advocate policies in public.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I maintain a neutral stand on any policy issues that divide the community.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The council plays the leading role in mobilizing support from the community groups for adoption of policy.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The council plays the leading role in resolving conflicts among community groups that disagree on policy.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The council plays the leading role in policy initiation.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Directives from the council regarding policy come in the form of official policy.</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The council provides me with timely feedback about whether or not policy has been implemented the way intended.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The council monitors policy implementation closely.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I (or a staff member with my authorization) frequently prepare and present formal reports to the council regarding the progress of policy implementation.</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>If organized interest groups seek to change “policy” in the implementation phase, I advise them to convince the council first, not me.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>If interest groups seek “exceptions” to policy in the implementation phase, I direct them to the council to get permission for exceptions.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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reviewed inter-item correlations to see whether within-construct items correlate and whether these correlations are statistically significant. For broadly defined constructs, it is suggested that inter-item correlations be greater than 0.15. In our dataset, almost all within-construct inter-item correlations are greater than 0.15 and statistically significant at 0.01 level. We also reviewed skewness and kurtosis values of each variable to see whether or not there are serious deviations from normality assumption. This review revealed no serious problem regarding normality. Finally, using the Mahalanobis distance, we dropped a number of outliers from the dataset.

Having satisfied necessary assumptions regarding data, we tested the theoretical model using Maximum Likelihood estimation method. After 11 iterations, the model successfully converged (Chi-square: 138.976, df: 51). Review of fit indices values shows that the specified model fits the empirical data reasonably well. The fit indices values are greater than the minimum suggested 0.9. Tables 2 and 3 report fit indices values and regression weights of hypothesized associations.

In order to validate the theoretical model we reviewed standardized residual covariances. With a correct model, most of them should be lower than two in absolute value. Review of the residuals reveals that except a couple of them, all are less than two. We also checked factor loadings to see whether or not

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2. Fit indices values</th>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum GFI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suggested Achieved</td>
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<th>Table 3. Standardized regression estimates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesized association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Neutrality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Leadership by Elected Officials</td>
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<td>Legislative Oversight</td>
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\(^1\)1.10
\(^2\)2.75
\(^3\)1.16
not all manifest variables have significant loadings on their respective constructs. Indeed, all loadings were statistically significant, and all variables achieved a loading score of 0.30, at least, in their respective constructs. In the following section, we discuss our findings and provide some tentative explanations in light of the contemporary public administration literature.

**EVALUATION OF THE MODEL AND DISCUSSION**

Our statistical test in the form of a series of hypotheses provided some empirical support to the theory that underlies our theoretical model. We found a strong association between policy leadership by elected officials and legislative oversight ($r: 0.87, p < 0.01$). Policy leadership by elected officials explains 75 percent of variance in legislative oversight. This finding can be interpreted to indicate the importance of policy leadership practiced by elected officials and to provide empirical support to Weber’s early writings and contemporary public administration scholars’ observations, both of which point to the importance of policy leadership exercised by elected officials. That is, it is likely that when relieved of their policy leadership roles, elected officials lose their legislative oversight capacity.

The question that follows is what causes elected officials to lose their weight in policy leadership. Is it because public administrators take this policy leadership role away from elected officials? Svara (1990), for example, cautioned that “there are cases of cities controlled by an appointed manager who cannot be challenged because of longevity or community support. The manager has become the master to whom the board defers out of respect and dependency.”[50] His finding raises an important question: elected officials play a diminished role in policymaking because public administrators overstep into the realm of policymaking? In order to answer this question, we need to focus on and interpret other findings in our research.

Particularly interesting is the weak association we found between administrative neutrality and policy leadership by elected officials. The association between administrative neutrality and policy leadership was $0.32 (p < 0.01)$. Although the association is statistically significant, political engagement of public administrators (measured with the degree of administrative neutrality) provides insufficient explanation for the role of policy leadership exercised by elected officials. Administrative neutrality explains only 10 percent of the variance in policy leadership by elected officials. Public administration scholars have consistently reported that elected officials become less effective (more reluctant) to lead the policy process. Explanations for this are numerous ranging from lack of staff support available to elected officials, to excessive time spent for casework, and to the complexity of problems that face elected officials. Our findings show that political activities of public administrators have little impact on the policy
leadership role of elected officials. This finding can be taken as supportive to public administration scholars who call for a more active role for public administrators in the policy process.

Contemporary public administration scholars point to the increasing role of active citizens, interest groups and community organizations in the policy process. Excerpting from a city manager, Nalbandian (1999) notes, “hierarchy is of little use in handling those problems that require independence, creativity and innovation, connectedness, communication, and cooperation.”[51] Nalbandian (1994) states that complex political environment in which elected officials are trying to make decisions and exercise leadership is getting more complicated.[52] This complex environment requires public administrators, elected officials, and citizens come together and join their efforts to find solutions to pressing policy problems. As a response to the challenges that this complex political, social, and economic environment creates, Nalbandian (1994) promotes the idea of sharing governmental functions and responsibilities rather than dividing them among officials.[53]

Svara (1999), for example, proposes a dichotomy-duality model. According to the model, public administrators and elected officials cooperate with respect to policy and administration. In the model, however, public administrators are committed to political accountability, while elected officials respect administrative competence. Close interaction between public administrators and elected officials play a restraining effect, and helps contribute to both administrative competence and political accountability.[54]

Also, our statistical analysis produced a significant association between legislative oversight and legislative supremacy ($r: 0.40, p < 0.01$). However, the association is weak in that legislative oversight explains only 16 percent of the variance in legislative supremacy. The traditional model that views the political-administrative relations as in continuous tension and proposes legislative oversight to check administrative discretion fails to provide a satisfactory explanation for ensuring legislative supremacy.

Our empirical findings show that legislative oversight alone may not provide a strong explanation for public administrators’ actions in regard to their relationships with interest groups. Public administration scholars that challenge the traditional model, however, emphasize a complementarity relationship between elected leadership and administrative officials. In this relationship, public administrators are committed to political accountability, not only because political supervisors force them to do so but also public administrators believe political accountability is an important aspect of their professionalism.

Many scholars believe that public administrators play this role faithfully, and maintain a delicate balance between active policy engagement and political accountability to their elected supervisors. This might be the reason why legislative oversight fails to explain sufficiently public administrators’ reactions to interest group pressures that aim at changing or creating exceptions to
legislated policies in policy implementation phase. This finding supports some public administration scholars who point out that professional values of public administrators play a significant strong role for responsible use of administrative discretion.\textsuperscript{[55]} It might be this responsibility that prevents public administrators from engaging in activities that may subvert the legitimate political processes. Although “the rise of professionalism in government has stirred some measure of fear and discomfort in the souls of those who reflect upon the relationship between public administration and American democracy,”\textsuperscript{[56]} we could not find strong empirical evidence to show that this professionalism and the power that comes with it works against legislative supremacy.

**CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Although our statistical analysis confirmed the specified theoretical model, it also indicates the lack of explanatory power of the traditional model. Except one strong association between policy leadership and legislative oversight, other two hypothesized associations are weak. To close the gaps of the traditional model, public administration scholars continue to propose alternative models. However, these models have not been subjected to rigorous theory-driven and data-based evaluations. In the future, alternative models can achieve more conceptual clarity and become ready for rigorous empirical test and evaluations. As noted by Svara (1985), “the heart of the problem in understanding the relationship between politics and administration has been our inability to conceptualize it.”\textsuperscript{[57]} In the future, more efforts can be taken to develop conceptualizations regarding the relationship between politics and administration, and these efforts, needless to say, may prove quite useful in answering one of the most fundamental questions in the field of public administration.

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