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The Transhistorical Tension between Bureaucratic Autonomy and Political Control

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Abstract

Political decision-makers operate under a constant tension between bureaucratic autonomy on one hand and political control on the other. Extant scholarship rarely analyzes this tension beyond the context of modern states. However, three recent books show that it has a transhistorical relevance. Francis Fukuyama's two volumes on *The Origins of Political Order* and *Political Order and Political Decay* analyze the various ways the tension has been addressed in the period before and after the French Revolution. In *Democracy's Slaves*, Paulin Ismard documents that the tension was relevant even in the context of the direct democracy of Athens in the Classical period. Taking these three books as the point of departure, we show how politicians have attempted to balance autonomy and control in patrimonial, meritocratic, politicized, and neo-patrimonial types of administration.

Fukuyama F (2012) *The Origins of Political Order*, vol. 1. London: Profile Books.
Fukuyama F (2014) *Political Order and Political Decay*, vol. 2. London: Profile Books.
Ismard P (2017) *Democracy's Slaves: A Political History of Ancient Greece*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Introduction

A large body of research has argued that modern states face a persistent tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control. In a nutshell, politicians need to strike some sort of balance between degrees of autonomy and degrees of control to develop efficient administrations (Aberbach and Rockman, 1994; Etzioni-Halevy, 1985: Chs. 1–2; Mann,

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2012: Chs. 8, 13; Peters, 2010; Silberman, 1993: Ch. 4–5; Simon, 1976; Tilly, 1992: Ch. 3; Weber, 1978: 973). In *The Origins of Political Order* and *Political Order and Political Decay*, Francis Fukuyama (2014) emphasizes that this tension is a more general problem—indeed, something of a Gordian knot—of political development. According to Fukuyama (2014: 519), a key challenge of successful modernization is how to ensure that "democratic electorates grant their governments an appropriate degree of discretion and yet remain in firm control of the policies and goals that bureaucracies are meant to serve?" In other words, how to avoid that well-educated public officials promote their own agendas at the expense of the policies favored by the government?

Political Order and Political Decay probes this tension in several ways. The book dedicates a chapter to the concept of bureaucracy, it contains a thorough analysis of how Prussia built its bureaucracy, it analyzes how other nineteenth-century European and American state builders tried to rationalize bureaucracy in the context of a latent or direct pressure for democratization (and hence politicization), and it emphasizes that issues of corruption, patronage, clientelism, and stalled administrative reforms recur everywhere in today's world. Moreover, in *The Origins of Political Order*, Fukuyama shows that the tension was also present in administrations in Ancient China (Fukuyama, 2012: Ch. 6), the Ottoman Empire (Fukuyama, 2012: Ch. 13), and Egypt (Fukuyama, 2012: Ch. 14). For instance, the Ottomans used eunuchs as governors and recruited civil administrators among Christian youths in the Balkan Provinces. The young recruits received physical and educational training, were raised as Turkish-speaking Muslims from the age of 2 to 8, and were finally inspected with the prospect of serving the sultan in Istanbul. This institution of military slavery ensured, at least for a while, that the sultan was equipped with a relatively incorruptible and competent administration (Fukuyama, 2012: 189–191).

A new book on the political history of Ancient Greece, *Democracy's Slaves* by the historian Paulin Ismard (2017), further underlines the transhistorical relevance of the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control. The democracy of ancient Greece is normally defined by its direct exercise of power by citizens, shorn of any bureaucratic apparatus. Yet, Ismard shows that in the city-state of Athens, public slaves were stable forces in a bureaucracy of surprising proportions. The use of slaves as public servants was deliberate as slaves, being excluded from citizenship and thus democratic participation, could receive lifelong education in serving public administration while being relatively incorruptible and apolitical. This model provided a "professional" corpse of administrators who would loyally do the bidding of the Athenian city-state.

That the balancing act between bureaucratic autonomy and political control has a broader historical relevance is hardly surprising. Principal–agent theory tells us that agents (such as bureaucrats) and principals (such as their political superiors) have differing goals, that information asymmetries normally favor the agent, and that this in turn creates the risk of moral hazard. Bureaucrats have an incentive to slack and shirk, and, if interests collide, to sabotage the policy intentions of the politicians. This raises the general challenge of selecting and controlling the bureaucrat (Bendor et al., 2001; Mitnick, 1975).

It follows that the tension is relevant across different political regime types and across historical contexts. However, most applications of principal–agent theory to political problems have limited the analysis to modern-day states (see the empirical catalog in Laffont and Martimort, 2002). Likewise, analyses of the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control have to a large extent focused on the period after the

French Revolution in 1789 and typically on representative democracies (e.g. Aberbach and Rockman, 1994; Etzioni-Halevy, 1985: Chs. 1–2; Peters, 2010; Simon, 1976) or modern-type authoritarian regimes (e.g. Egorov and Sonin, 2011; Huber and McCarty, 2004; Silberman, 1993; Zakharov, 2016).[1] Fukuyama's and Ismard's work remind us that these are simply a few among many empirical contexts where the tension is to be encountered. That said, none of the three books engage in systematic comparisons of how the tension has manifested itself in different historical contexts and in different regime forms. In this review article, we use the three books as a stepping stone for carrying out such a historical mapping, necessarily in a somewhat tentative way. First, we review Ismard's evidence from Ancient Athens showing that the balancing act between bureaucratic autonomy and political control, *pace* the conventional wisdom on the character of the direct democracy of Antiquity, was already performed in Greece in the Classical period. Second, we take Fukuyama's books as the point of departure for mapping other prominent instances of this balancing act, inside and outside the West before and after the French Revolution. What this mapping indicates is that the tension takes different forms in different contexts. This reflects the variety of mechanisms through which politicians have attempted to balance autonomy and control.

Athenian Direct Democracy and the Use of Public Slaves

There is a fundamental dissimilarity between modern, representative democracy and the direct democracy that we find in Greece in the Classical Period—or more exactly in fifth- and fourth-century BC Athens, on which the bulk of our knowledge of Antique democracy is based (Hansen, 1999). Most scholarship singles out the difference between having the full body of citizens assembling to legislate—directly, as it were—and the indirect legislation that is produced by representative institutions in modern democracies.

However, an even more consequential difference had to do with the appointment of magistrates. In modern democracies, the equivalents of magistrates, that is, presidents and governments in parliamentary systems, are appointed via elections, whether directly or indirectly. The Athenians of the Classical period used a very different principle, namely, lot or sortition (Hansen, 1999; Manin, 1997). Magistrates were appointed by lot for certain periods, normally a year, and their tenure was customarily nonrenewable. The magistrates in a sense made up both the government and the administration, that is, they were both politicians and administrators. In modern, representative democracy, by contrast, there is a sharp divide between the government and the administration. Government officials are politicians but they are not administrators, rather they command an administrative apparatus. This, of course, is exactly what brings to the fore the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control.

Seen from this vantage point, the Athenians seem to have disposed of this very tension and hence the balancing act between autonomy and control. However, matters are not so simple. There were a number of both relatively complex and very menial public tasks that had to be carried out to make the Athenian body politics work. In fact, many administrative tasks demanded specialized competences. One of Ismard's examples is the public task of guaranteeing coins. This task was carried out by controllers in Athens itself and in the port of Piraeus who used a touchstone or *basanos* to confiscate coins where copper or bronze had been used to dilute the silver content. Coin control required expertise and long training. If left to a magistrate, it would have been difficult to use lot for appointment, as only a few citizens would have been competent to take charge of this task. Hence, in this

area—and there were many others—citizen appointment would have "violated the principle of the egalitarian distribution of the *archè* within the political community" (Ismard, 2017: 85).

As Ismard relates, Athenians devised a solution based on the economic organization of the day: slave society. So-called public slaves (*dèmosioi*) were stable forces in an administration of surprising proportions that existed on a permanent and regular basis and which had the technical competences needed to deal with relatively complex administrative problems (Ismard, 2017: 33). The numbers themselves are astounding: 1000 to 2000 public slaves serviced the 30,000 to 40,000 Athenian citizens (Ismard, 2017: 2). Among other tasks, public slaves assisted judges; handled public records; worked as public accountants; took charge of policing; guaranteed coins, weights, and measures; monitored the work of magistrates; organized assembly sessions; and helped tally votes (Ismard, 2017: 37–45). The public slaves were purchased on the slave market, typically as youths (Ismard, 2017: 51), and they could be educated—for example, by being apprenticed to older public slaves—to achieve the skills needed to carry out administrative tasks. In fact, being barred from citizenship and thus democratic participation, they could receive lifelong education in serving public administration.

Another advantage was that public slaves could take care of the same task for years (Ismard, 2017: 52–53). This ensured that "the civic administration would continue to function despite the regular rotation of magistrates" (Ismard, 2017: 106). By using persons bereft of political rights as public administrators, the citizens could have their cake and eat it: that is, they could avoid an independent state apparatus while retaining its functions. The public slaves therefore provided the core of an administrative body in a direct democracy "that claimed not to have one" (Ismard, 2017: 106).

Public slaves were also relatively incorruptible and apolitical. One very prosaic reason for this was that they had everything to lose: sanctions against misdemeanor by public slaves were harsh. They could be flogged and tortured, sanctions that could not be used against citizens (Ismard, 2017: 60). Moreover, the public slaves had important privileges compared with other slaves, which corrupt behavior would jeopardize. They could hold property, including private slaves, and their sons could become free men (Ismard, 2017: 62–73).[2] There was also an ideological dimension to the depoliticization of public slaves. Being slaves, they could not legitimate their own power in a way that threatened the body politics (Ismard, 2017: 3). As Ismard (2017: 13) puts it, the public slaves served as "third-party guarantor of the civic order."

The use of public slaves was therefore entirely in line with the guiding principle of Athenian direct democracy: to avoid professionals taking power. The worry here was that professionals would invariably transform democracy into an oligarchy or aristocracy (Hansen, 1999: 236, 308). By outsourcing tasks that required specific competences to slaves, the Athenians avoided a situation where an individual's expertise would give him public power (Ismard, 2017: 81). Hence, the use of public slaves involved—and secured— "the deliberate exclusion of expert knowledge from the political arena" (Ismard, 2017: 88). The *dèmosioi* were thus an intrinsic part of Athenian direct democracy.

Ismard arguably exaggerates or at least selectively describes the role of the public slaves in the Athenian city-state in order to give his book a sharper edge. After all, the *dèmosioi* mainly undertook menial tasks such as policing and other public works rather than the complicated tasks that Ismard mostly focuses on. Furthermore, all genuine magistrates (*archai*) in Athens were citizens and their secretaries were generally also citizens. Not until the third rung on the ladder—undersecretaries—do we occasionally find public

slaves (as well as free noncitizens, the so-called metics). Finally, some citizens would actually hold the same position as magistrates for years (Hansen, 1999: 123–124, 244–245). One should therefore be careful not to overemphasize the importance of public slaves in Athens, a city-state and direct democracy with a very limited suffrage confined to male citizens where government was relatively simple and limited in scope. That said, Ismard's book shows that even in this context, the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control did rear its head—and that Athenians took steps to balance these two concerns. This clearly shows that the tension is relevant in the period before the advent of modern states and modern representative democracy.

Mechanisms Used to Address the Tension Across Time and Space

There is a huge time gap between Ancient Athens and modern-day states. This gap can be bridged by considering how the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control plays out in different historical types of administration. Here, Fukuyama's books come in handy. He describes a number of different administrations, primarily in the first volume of his work on political order. This includes pre-modern forms of human organization such as kinship-based bands and families, which, according to Fukuyama (2012: Ch. 3), is the default order. It also includes early modern European estate-based patrimonialism and a variety of modern state administrations, including the European, clientelist offsprings in Latin America, the US spoils system, the neo-patrimonialism in African ex-colonies, and "Weberian" bureaucracy (Fukuyama, 2012: Chs. 8, 24, 2014: Chs. 4, 9–10, 14).

According to Fukuyama, there is a general tension inherent in the building of state administrations between what he terms "autonomy" and "subordination." Subordination is of obvious importance to a political leader since principals seek to control agents' behavior. Thus, bureaucratic autonomy, or what is conceived as discretion in decision making, may be overly strong. On the other hand, political moves to subordinate administrators may lead to micro-management that hampers technical competence and creates red-tape bureaucracy. Therefore, the political leader faces the complex task of trying to strike a balance between autonomy and subordination (Fukuyama, 2014: 514–517).[3] However, Fukuyama is not explicitly concerned with how different administrative systems strike this balance.

In what follows, we analyze four different types of administration as they have emerged over time: patrimonialism, meritocracy, politicization, and neo-patrimonialism. Classic work on bureaucracy from Max Weber (1978) to SN Eisenstadt (1958) and more recent studies from Thomas Ertman (1997) and scholars at the Quality of Government Institute (e.g. Dahlström et al., 2012) distinguish these types based on how administrators have been recruited. Patrimonial administrations base the distribution of administrative offices on inheritance or, more generally, social and personal connections; meritocracies recruit administrators on their educational background, experience, and knowledge of the subject matter; politicized administrations recruit party loyalists or ideologically like-minded; and neo-patrimonial systems combine de facto patrimonialism with mostly ineffective formal-legal rules of meritocratic recruitment.

These are of course ideal types, and despite their clear-cut conceptual differences, the traits they describe have rarely existed in their pure form, nor have they been mutually exclusive in administrations. Rather, the characteristics of one type have typically coexisted with the characteristics of one or more of the other types, and often we find mixed

characteristics—and hence mixed types—on the ground. However, our analysis focuses on the specific mechanisms that have been used to mitigate the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control in each of these ideal types of administration.

Patrimonialism characterized most polities, constitutional as well as absolutist, in medieval and early modern Europe. The backdrop of the development of this type of administration is to be found in the ninth- and tenth-century collapse of state power, which transformed West European kingdoms into what TN Bisson (2009: 34) terms "a fabric of lordships." The absence of state power created a political and administrative vacuum that strong estate groups such as the clergy and nobles could enter and colonize. Over centuries, elites managed to transform administrative offices into their own private property that passed on from father to son (Ertman, 1997: 8; Oakley, 2010: 192–193). Usually, the office gave access to rents as it privatized hitherto public functions of administration. For instance, in the area of tax extraction—a core public function—the king or prince could typically only demand a small share of the taxes that the officeholder extracted, while the officeholder often acquired tax payments illegally (Braun, 1975: 251–252).

The patrimonial system consisted of politicians (kings or princes) and administrators (proprietary officeholders) whose interests often collided. The proprietary officeholders wanted to secure their private goods and family prominence. The kings or princes sought to raise more money from taxes in a time of mounting governmental pressures, most notably due to the defense of the realm. However, rulers were highly dependent on the extractive efforts of parliaments and diets and so had to constantly bargain their way to please elite groups such as the nobility, the clergy, and townsmen (Tilly, 1992: 71–79). Tax grants functioned as bargaining power that allowed these elites to demand socioeconomic and political concessions from the monarchs (Braun, 1975: 253). Meanwhile, the nobility possessed exclusive knowledge of local agriculture, which in many areas was the main source of tax revenue. On top of that, years of privilege and power grabbing had institutionalized the principle of hereditary offices and thus shielded the elite groups from royal firing and interference. More often than not, royal reliance on noble tax extraction led to financial drains. However, the alternative would have been for the crown to raise an army to quell the estate groups (Schulze, 1996: 29). As Hagen Schulze (1996: 48) notes, "the power struggle between the monarchs and their estates" was one source of "profound uncertainty" that characterized medieval and early modern Europe.

Bureaucratic organizations, consisting of specialized and hierarchically organized offices, accelerated after the peace treaties in Osnabrück and Münster in 1648, which also marked the coming of absolutism across much of Europe (Schulze, 1996: 48). Thomas Ertman's *Birth of the Leviathan* takes stock of this development, showing how most of Eastern and Latin Europe (Spain, Portugal, France, and the Italian Principalities) only partly reformed, if at all, while a country such as Prussia developed a more genuine system of *meritocracy*.

In all of these states, we thus find a mix of patrimonial and meritocratic elements, with Prussia falling closer to latter pole and France, Spain, and Italian states falling closer to the former pole. Centralized state power and a pool of university-educated jurists enabled the successful implementation of meritocracy as a principle of recruitment in the state administration, including the royal household. The former made it affordable to undermine the system of proprietary officeholding; the latter provided a plausible alternative in the form of skilled administrators. However, meritocracy only genuinely made headway where wars (internal or external) stripped the estate officeholders of sociopolitical and

economic resources so that monarchs could credibly demand the acquisition of revenues from the officeholders and people within the territory.

The most clear-cut example of meritocracy emerged in an unexpected place, namely, hitherto backward Prussia. The Hohenzollern kings of Prussia established a strong royal authority vis-à-vis the *Junker* estates following the Thirty Years' War (Fischer and Lundgreen, 1975: 510–517; Gorski, 2003). They did so by effectively rooting out patrimonial tendencies at the central levels of administration. Instead, they began to recruit based on merit, which tended to disqualify uneducated *Junker* sons (Ertman, 1997: 248, 253–254). Merit recruitment was a means of eroding the local powers of a recalcitrant aristocracy and instead bringing in independent men from the higher bourgeoisie. However, the success of merit recruitment created new problems for the Prussian monarchs. Over a few decades in the late eighteenth century, an autonomous bureaucracy emerged that had outgrown the king's General Directory and become a diversified, professional group with a corporate identity based on recruitment of university candidates. Due to its expertise, the bureaucracy achieved considerable influence on politics, limiting the king's de facto ability to determine the direction and pace of Prussia's political development (Dorn, 1931: 405, 414; Sheehan, 1989: 142). This was the essence of the bureaucratic authoritarianism that dominated Prussia's political system during the nineteenth century under the sway of monarchs and chancellors alike (Rosenberg, 1958: Ch. 9). The tension between granting autonomy to the bureaucracy and making it loyal to a certain political course was never definitively solved in Prussia and remained an essential part of political conflict in Weimar and Nazi Germany (Mommsen, 1991: 79, 83–86, 90, 100, 111–112).

The Prussian system of meritocracy was not entirely new at the time but resembled—indeed, it was partly inspired by—the administrative system found in Ancient China. As early modern Europe's most prominent "other," the states of the Warring States Period (481–221 BC) had to a surprisingly large extent recruited on abilities rather than status (Fukuyama, 2012: 113; Hui, 2005; Lewis, 1999). Through wars between the competing states, extraordinary state building began in what is today Northern China, including the growth of bureaucracies to extract taxes and organize armies. Even more so than in Prussia, this process destroyed noble privileges and replaced their control of localities with administrative subunits ruled directly by an appointed official and subordinated to the rule of the center (Hui, 2004: 194; Lewis, 1999: 602–603; Von Falkenhausen, 2006). However, this Chinese model where meritocracy served as the handmaiden of an absolutist ruler came with its own deficits. The most important was that the bureaucracy had no autonomy to check royal policies. This sometimes had dire consequences. In one famous instance, albeit more than a millennium downstream, the Ming Emperors without much reasoning suddenly prohibited ocean-going shipping (Hall, 1985: 50).

Slave administrations such as the *dèmosioi* in the Athenian city-state or Egypt's Mamluks in the Middle Ages bear some resemblance to meritocracy, although of course the use of slaves takes the quest for bureaucratic autonomy and political control to an extreme that we do not find elsewhere. These are two different models where slaves were educated and used as administrators in much the same way (see Fukuyama, 2012: Ch. 13; Ismard, 2017: 79).

Major developments in administrative systems took place after the French Revolution signaled to the rest of Europe that the people could dispose of old aristocratic privileges. However, though the pace of bureaucratic reform across most of Europe heightened substantially after 1789, meritocracy only materialized slowly and selectively during the nineteenth century. Where patrimonial privileges had survived through fusion with

parliamentary powers such as in the Swedish Riksdag or the English House of Lords, the battle for establishing an autonomous bureaucracy was solved peacefully but in a prolonged process mired in uncertainties that revolved around the issue of creating a less corrupt and more impartial but also politically responsive administration (Silberman, 1993: 297, 350; Teorell and Rothstein, 2015).

We find a different route in many of the colonial offshoots. The United States and the Southern Cone countries of Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile all formed independent states based on the legitimate model of the eighteenth century, that is, constitutional, representative government. They very quickly faced pressure for mass suffrage forming from an institutional rock bottom. Accordingly, political parties organized before the push for bureaucracy came from Europe, with the typical consequence that administrative offices were staffed by party officials. Such an administrative system of *politicization* became most pronounced where parties could operate from center to periphery by organizing national-level parties and local branches, swaying voters, and controlling competing patrons. Machine politics, creating a mix of permanent staffs loyal to certain parties and temporary staffs coming in with a new government, was one result of this process (Kurtz, 2013: Chs. 3–4; Silberman, 1993: Ch. 8). In other words, politicization became most systematic and widespread where the push for mass suffrage extensions preceded bureaucratization (see Shefter, 1977) and where state power was relatively centralized.

State administrations run by political parties are cases of "politicization from above," which is today the most used and viable alternative to meritocracy (Dahlström et al., 2012). This should come as no surprise since politicization addresses the flaws of excessive bureaucratic autonomy that cases like nineteenth-century Prussia and Weimar Germany exemplify. The initial nineteenth century and later waves of politicization can in fact be seen as deliberate efforts to ensure political control in an age when the dual demands of rule by the people and rule of law were nearly impossible to dismiss (Silberman, 1993; see also Etzioni-Halevy, 1985: Chs. 1–2). However, politicization, like meritocracy, rarely completely dominates administrations. More often than not, there are "islands of excellence," such as independent national banks or finance ministries, where meritocracy reigns even in heavily politicized systems. Conversely, administrations dominated by a meritocratic civil service system often use political appointments for the top departmental levels to smoothen the link to the government and thus increase political control.

Finally, *neo-patrimonialism* emerged in African and Asian countries that had typically been colonized by Europeans during the nineteenth century. Neo-patrimonialism combined some elements of Weberian bureaucracy with traditional patrimonialism. Although a version of neo-patrimonialism has been widespread across countries during the initial phases of a bureaucratic buildup in what were basically still patrimonial systems, it was particularly pronounced where colonization was indirect. Here, the colonial master relied on existing administrative structures such as chieftaincies in Sub-Saharan Africa to make extraction more effective and, in some cases, to create local allies (Acemoglu et al., 2001). Neo-patrimonialism thus enlisted local yet strictly subordinate expertise. After independence was granted to the colonies, neo-patrimonialism tended to consolidate, reducing meritocracy to a mere formality while rule through local chiefs became the order of the day (Bayart, 2009). As a consequence of later pressures for democratization, neo-patrimonialism took on some traits of politicization as clientelism became an entrenched part of politics (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 61–65). Yet, most postcolonial states in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular have had major difficulties projecting power throughout

their territories, thus continuously hindering efforts of political leaders to build a strong and loyal party base and instead reinforcing neo-patrimonialism (Herbst, 2000).

In some postcolonial countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, prolonged civil conflict broke out over the control of resources and the political-administrative means to acquire them (Evans, 1995: 45)—much like in early modern Spain or France (see Fukuyama, 2012: 357–365). As this and many other Sub-Saharan African examples show, neo-patrimonialism neither establishes any meaningful bureaucratic autonomy nor sustainable political control. Everything, including administrative offices, is up for grabs when governments resign or dictators are ousted.

This transhistorical analysis of administrative types reveals three mechanisms that have been used to address the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control—balancing degrees of autonomy against degrees of control. First, patrimonial administrations work by the logic of "divide and rule." They provide areas of local autonomy within which the administrator enjoys extensive discretion in administrative decision making and access to rents, for example, from tax extraction. In exchange, the administrator must accept political control from the center. The politician may succeed in playing local administrators against each other. Yet, the administrator usually has the upper hand because the politician is dependent on local resources for finance. The balance tends to tip toward bureaucratic autonomy.

Second, meritocracy, to the extent that it manages to dominate most levels of administration, breaks with patrimonialism by filling the administrative apparatus with professional experts. This makes the politicians independent of resources from local patrons. However, it also creates a risk because it generates a symbolic and, oftentimes, legal sphere of autonomous bureaucratic decision making. Meritocratically recruited administrators may have the means and motives to circumvent the will of the politician. Nonetheless, if combined with sensible performance pay and monitoring, professionally educated administrators may preserve their autonomy, enabling them to make competent decisions, while ultimately answering to a politically preset task (see also Dahlström et al., 2012). In neo-patrimonial administrations, these two mechanisms coexist and often create conflict between central and local administrative levels, thus explaining much of their weak governance records.

Third, politicized administrations like patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism organize politician–bureaucrat relations through a chain of dependencies and may therefore combine through a more general patron–client logic of governance. Nevertheless, they handle the tension between autonomy and control differently. Politicized administrations mostly rely on their ability to hire, fire, and demote to achieve political control, but they often add a measure of control through ideological congruence. The politician hires political fellows and then demands full loyalty to his political cause. As a result, bureaucratic autonomy tends to be crowded out.

Conclusion

Fukuyama's (2012, 2014) and Ismard's (2017) three recent books suggest that the various administrative types we find in the literature—patrimonialism, meritocracy, politicization, and neo-patrimonialism—are best viewed as subtypes that address the same general tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control. In one sense, our analysis merely explicates what numerous analyses have already hinted at, namely that this tension is a constant concern in any political system, meaning that it is always necessary to

find some way to balance autonomy and control. Indeed, as shown, the tension is trans-historical and not just confined to the post-1789 period.

Our historical analysis has identified the most important mechanisms through which the tension has been addressed across the different administrative types, and how these mechanisms have tilted power either toward the politician or toward the administrators. In this way, our approach provides us with insights about how politicians balance bureaucratic autonomy and political control across time and space. Such an approach makes it possible to combine historical and contemporary knowledge of the type and quality of bureaucratic organizations and to study their causes and consequences. However, we have also noted that most empirical cases display characteristics of several of the pure types that we identified in the literature. This shows not only that reality on the ground is more messy than the typological constructs, it also underlines that attempts to handle the tension between bureaucratic autonomy and political control require a balancing act, which can be performed more or less skillfully in the context of each of the four types.

The dilemma between bureaucratic autonomy and political control continues to be a core concern for administrative reforms today. The books reviewed in this article indicate that students of bureaucratic politics would do well to go historical rather than solely analyzing it in the setting of modern states. The two books tap into a larger literature that compares the balancing of autonomy and control in several entities over time (e.g. Grindle, 2012; Schuster, 2016). However, our analysis encourages students of bureaucracy to go even further. For any political system, we should try to enlist historical data on how the tension has manifested itself, what solutions have been attempted, and to what extent these have been successful. This review is merely a first and very general attempt to quarry this material.

Funding

Notes

1. Weber's (1978) analysis of Prussia is a partial exception as it touches upon the situation before 1789. However, most of it is concerned with the bureaucratic-authoritarian period in the nineteenth century. Another exception is Grindle (2012) who compares patrimonialism in medieval Europe with the use of patronage in contemporary Latin America.
2. However, their children would not inherit their offices, and they would normally not be apprenticed to them either (Ismard, 2017: 79).
3. To achieve good governance more generally, Fukuyama (2014: 509) argues that countries need to achieve high levels on a second dimension of state capacity.

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