RESEARCH NOTE

THE STATE OF BUREAUCRACY: PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN ISRAEL

Eran Vigoda-Gadot and Fany Yuval

In recent years we have witnessed a growing interest in the development of new avenues for improving public sector performance. The need to create reliable performance indicators for the administrative state that are based on numerous expectations of public functions and on multiple-stakeholders’ assessments has become an essential construct of the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine. A substantial bank of knowledge has already been accumulated in this area (e.g. Berman, 2002; Bouckaert & Peters, 2002; Halachmi, 2002; Wright-Muldrow, 2002). These dynamics have intensified and expanded, and have been applied across North America, Europe, and in other parts of the globe. They have created a much more demanding environment for evolving bureaucracies, stressing the clear need for improved measurement tools, scales, and methodologies as well as a comprehensive analysis of governmental outputs and outcomes. With the development of economic, financial, legal, and behavioral performance indicators, several formats for objective evaluations, especially from the point of view of citizens as clients or customers, have taken root in public administration literature and practice.

The main goal of this paper is to offer an attitudinal–behavioral platform for the measurement of public sector performance, a format that is based on a recent two-year survey of Israeli citizens. The paper also focuses on several socioeconomic and demographic variations that may impact citizens’ evaluations of public sector activities. The meaning and implications of these variations in the Israeli context are also discussed. The paper begins with the basic assumption that there is no ‘one voice’ of public opinion and that demographic and socioeconomic differences do make a difference in evaluating the services of the public sector. It goes on to identify possible variations in citizens’ attitudes towards services in one modern state in the hope of generalizing this knowledge to other advanced bureaucracies of the modern world.

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CITIZENS’ VIEWS OF GOVERNMENTAL AND PUBLIC-SECTOR PERFORMANCE

THE NEED FOR PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The study of outputs, outcomes, and performance is a fundamental tool for the continuous development and improvement of any organization. In many ways it is an even greater challenge for public administration and public sector systems.\(^1\) Public sector performance deserves our scholarly attention as it affects the daily life of each citizen and has an impact that transcends temporal, cultural, political, and geographic boundaries. The public sector provides services in areas in which the private sector is disinterested or is unable to operate. It functions continually and reaches places where the private sector sometimes chooses not to act. It is required to respond to the needs of populations who are much more diverse and scattered than those with which the private sector chooses to interact (Kettl, 2000). Furthermore, the public sector faces many barriers to enhanced performance. It operates in an environment that, for the most part, does not apply differential compensation criteria to employees and where decisions are made within a political system that has its own code of conduct and game rules. These barriers, as well as others, contrast sharply with the rules of the marketplace, the liberal views of a free economy, the culture of open business systems, and the competitive compensation system for both employees and customers according to which successful private organizations operate.

The rationale for our study is also based on a politically oriented approach to the study of public opinion regarding government performance. It is frequently argued that a healthy public sector is fundamental to the existence of modern and strong democracies (Thompson, 1983; Vigoda, 2002). While most free democracies handle public demands for improved services quite well, most non-democratic regimes lumber along with an outdated and poorly performing public sector that in the long run makes governing more difficult and unstable. The political-economy approach that creates an equation between nations’ political and economic status firmly supports this idea. Hence, a strong public sector is essential for the existence of a democratic culture and for the functioning of the political system (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Richardson, 1997; Thompson, 1983). In order to strengthen the foundations of democracies one must consider public opinion as a highly valuable tool for information, learning, and feedback. Nonetheless, systematic empirical data are scarce in this field, as are valid and reliable measures and methodologies.

PUBLIC OPINIONS ON GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE

Various aspects of public opinion about government services are mentioned in the literature. A partial list includes topics such as (1) the scope of services offered to the citizen;

\(^1\) This study makes parallel use of the terms public sector, public administration, and public organizations, all referring to non-profit and non-privatized organizations. This definition includes, for example, public education and health services, local authorities’ services, government offices and their branches, public not-for-profit firms and government companies, and bodies in whose financing and budgeting the country participates directly.
their quality and the public’s satisfaction with them; (3) the degree to which public services comply with reasonable economic criteria regarding effectiveness and efficiency; (4) a fair distribution of public resources as citizens see it; (5) response and responsiveness to the needs and demands of the citizens; (6) sensitivity to the needs of special populations; (7) citizens’ trust in the public system and those who lead it; (8) opinions about the management style and quality of human resources in the public services’ systems (for more detailed examples see: Balk, 1985; Bozeman, 1993; Carter, 1989; Hart & Grant, 1989; Local Government Training Board, 1987; National Consumer Council, 1986; Smith, 1993; Thomas & Palfrey, 1996; Vigoda, 2000; Winkler, 1987).

These variables have been used extensively throughout the world as accurate indicators of how well bureaucracies operate. With the evolution of the NPM reform (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) such measures have become even more popular and applicable in research and in practice. The NPM reform encourages the accumulation of data regarding citizens’ opinions about the quality of the services they have received from the public sector. Similarly, Kelly (2002) has mentioned the close relationship between the need to ‘be reformed’ and the wish to ‘look reformed’ in the eyes of citizens. Today a consensus exists among scholars that public opinions about public sector outcomes should be studied and analyzed in light of clear-cut performance indicators. Such indicators may then be used to improve bureaucratic processes. Furthermore, the use of performance indicators reflects the increased desire of public administration to learn from private sector experiences with an eye to improving sensitivity, flexibility, and the ability to respond to changes in citizens’ demands (Pollitt, 1988, 1990). The use of performance indicators, especially those provided by citizens in their capacity as clients, reinforces the idea that at least a minimal level of government responsiveness is essential for the existence and sustainability of democracy in modern societies (Poister & Henry, 1994; Vigoda, 2000).

WORLD EXPERIENCES AND THE ISRAELI SETTING

Over the years several initiatives for the study of public performance measurements have been launched. Among these are the American Customer Satisfaction Index (University of Michigan Business School, et al., n.d.) the Georgia State Poll, the Public Confidence in Government and Government Service Delivery (Sims, 2001), the Client Satisfaction Survey in Canada (Schmidt & Strickland, 1998), the Satisfaction with Public Services project in the UK (Donovan, Brown, & Bellulo, 2001), the European Customer Satisfaction Index (European Organisation for Quality, n.d.), and others. These projects have used multiple methodologies and approaches to evaluate citizens’ needs, satisfaction, and trust in government and in the public sector. However, they all fall short of suggesting a comprehensive strategy that is based on multiple scales and measures of performance on the micro and macro levels. Another shortcoming of these reports is their tendency to treat the public as one integral unit. In reality ‘the public’ is made up of various groups and sectors with individual preferences and needs that should be carefully considered. Although the general voice of the public is politically and socially meaningful, much can be learned, both politically and administratively, from a closer examination of the particular preferences of smaller socioeconomic and demographic groups.
Israeli society is an ideal habitat for a study that looks more deeply into the relationships between socioeconomic and demographic divisions and public sector performance. Israeli society is characterized by clear divisions within a highly heterogeneous population. With a substantial base of veteran residents, the country has many immigrants and newcomers, Jews and non-Jews, secular and religious communities, along with the conventional dissimilarities in age, education, urban and rural residency, and employment. Israel is also a typical case of a stable democracy with a modern bureaucratic system struggling for better governmental performance (Peled, 2002). During the last two decades it has participated in the continuing debate on the integration of NPM principles into governmental bodies and on the inclusion of performance indicators for service improvements. Using this background and the theoretical foundations that were presented above, we will try to analyze the views of Israeli citizens towards public sector performance and to explore several socioeconomic and demographic variables that are meaningful in this context.

**METHOD**

**SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE**

The study was based on a two-year national survey of Israeli citizens who were asked to evaluate the performance of public administration and state agencies in a variety of fields and according to multiple criteria. The survey was first conducted during 2001 when 345 individuals were randomly selected to complete a questionnaire with various performance indicators. In 2002 a similar but slightly revised version of this questionnaire was completed by another randomly selected sample of 502 citizens. The surveys were documented according to the AAPOR *Standard Definitions* for disposition codes.

The strategy of data collection was based on a selective sampling of citizens scattered across the regions, cities and towns of Israel. Random citizens were first contacted by interviewers, generally by phone, through personal contacts, or through the workplace. Meetings were then arranged only with those who showed a significant interest in and willingness to take part in the study. These meetings were held in private homes and in other convenient locations and settings such as workplaces, universities, and social gatherings. Participation in both surveys was voluntary, and we used a direct return method (all questionnaires were returned to the interviewers immediately after completion or in a subsequent meeting that was set up especially for this purpose; only when there seemed to be no other alternative were participants given the option of submitting the questionnaire via regular mail). This direct distribution and return method set the overall return rate at a relatively high ratio of 88.2 percent (91 percent in 2001 and 87 percent in 2002).² A total of 847 cases were then used as an input for the statistical analysis. Fifty-three percent

² This figure is based on the number of successful face-to-face interactions between interviewers and respondents relative to the overall number of scheduled meetings (after the respondent had the chance to actually look at the questionnaire and reconsider if he/she wished to complete it). Naturally, a higher number of preliminary contacts were needed to obtain the resulting set of willing participants. According to this more conservative calculation, the return rate was 67 percent in 2001 and 63 percent in 2002. Note also that in general, this study tried to follow the Standard Definition for response rates as suggested in the AAPOR (2000). The in-person household survey was used and the response rate was calculated according to RR2.
of the sample were male and 47 percent female, and 43 percent were married. The average age was 32.1 years (s.d. = 10.9), and the average number of years lived in Israel was 21.3 (s.d. = 14.7); 39.5 percent defined themselves as ‘Ashkenazim,’ 28.6 percent as ‘Sefaradim,’ and 31.9 percent as ‘native Israelis.’ In the area of education, 67.1 percent had an elementary or a high-school education, and 32.9 percent had a post-secondary degree. Politically speaking, 37.2 percent of the participants defined themselves as supporters of the political right in Israel, 23.8 percent supported the center parties, and 39.3 percent supported left-wing parties. Demographically, 70.5 percent were Jews, 76.9 percent secular; 62.3 percent came from cities, and 36.1 percent from rural regions. Finally, 30 percent had a job in the public sector, and a breakdown by income showed that 38 percent had a low monthly net income (up to NIS 4000/$900), 45.9 percent had an average income (NIS 4000–7000/$900–1600), and 16.1 percent had a high income (above NIS 7000/$1600). These characteristics accurately reflect the Israeli population as reported in the official Statistical Yearbook for 2000. Furthermore, the profiles of the participants in the 2001 and 2002 surveys were very similar, allowing us to make a comparison of public opinion at two points in time.

MEASURES

In line with previous studies 15 different measures of public sector performance were applied (i.e. Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Mason, House, & Martin, 1985; Oswald, 1966; Schussler, 1982; Smith, 1981; Thomas & Palfrey, 1996; Vigoda, 2000). However, we made alterations as necessary to conform to the Israeli public system.3 Altogether 118 items were used to represent the variables that were measured on 5-point scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, or similar scales, see Appendix). The following variables were applied:

1. **Satisfaction**: 18-item scale of citizens’ satisfaction with various public services.
2. **Trust in institutions**: 21-item scale of citizens’ trust in administrative and governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Health, Central Bank, State Comptroller, etc.
3. **Trust in individuals**: 33-item scale of citizens’ trust in individuals/civil servants such as medical doctors in the public health system, policemen, reporters, members of the Parliament, etc.
4. **Public sector image**: 6-item scale about the reputation and prestige of public bureaucracies in the eyes of citizens.
5. **Professionalism**: 3-item scale about the quality and skills of public personnel as perceived by citizens.
6. **Leadership**: 3-item scale about the quality, skills, and vision of senior managers in the public service as perceived by citizens.
7. **Accountability**: 5-item scale of perceived openness to criticism, transparency, and willingness to report to the public about bureaucratic decisions.
8. **Responsiveness**: 4-item scale of the speed and quality of service delivery as perceived by citizens.

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3 Additional detailed information on the measures is available directly from the authors.
9. Morality: 3-item scale of citizens’ view of the level of ethics and integrity of public personnel.
10. Innovation: 3-item scale of the level of entrepreneurship and incorporation of new ideas in bureaucracies as perceived by citizens.
11. Internal politics: 6-item scale of citizens’ attitudes towards the level of political considerations in administrative work and decision-making.
12. Business orientation: 2-item scale of the centrality of economic considerations in bureaucratic decision-making as perceived by citizens.
13. Social orientation: 5-item scale of the centrality of social considerations in bureaucratic decision-making as perceived by citizens.
14. Stress: 3-item scale of citizens’ reported level of tension and strain when contacting public authorities.
15. Communication: 3-item scale about accessibility to public officials and to administrative decision-makers as reported by citizens.

As noted earlier, we have examined a variety of socioeconomic and other demographic variables such as: age (continuous variable), gender, marital status (0 = married; 1 = not married), years lived in Israel (continuous variable, for non-Israeli born citizens only), religion (0 = Jewish; 1 = not Jewish), level of religious observance (1 = secular, 2 = traditional, 3 = conservative, 4 = orthodox), ethnicity (Ashkenazi, Sefaradi, Israeli, Other), education (a 5-point scale from elementary to graduate degree), place of residence (name of town), income (a 5-point scale), employment (0 = job in the public sector; 1 = job in non-public sector).

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the general assessments of public sector performance by variables and across time. Values ranged between 2.21 (for social orientation) and 3.67 (for internal politics). A comparison of the years 2001 and 2002 shows a decrease in most of the ‘positive measures’ (i.e., satisfaction, trust, responsiveness, etc.). The t-test analysis demonstrates that Israeli citizens were more critical towards public sector performance in 2002 than in 2001. This finding is consistent in most of the categories except those of business orientation and the two ‘negative measures’ of internal politics and stress in contacting public officials.

Note also that in the 2002 survey we examined the possibility that citizens’ experiences with a given service or product might have influenced their evaluations in this area. However, no support was found for this hypothesis, and thus we concluded that there was no difference between citizens who had used a particular service or product and those who had not. A further breakdown of the satisfaction and trust measures, which is not presented here for reasons of brevity, shows that citizens were especially critical of welfare services, labor and employment services, and local government services. They were, however, more positive about transportation, telecommunications, and security services.4

4 Additional detailed information about the satisfaction and trust findings is available directly from the authors.
Table 1  Descriptive statistics for the research variables and an independent sample t-test for the comparison of performance in the years 2001 and 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001 (N = 345)</th>
<th>2002 (N = 501)</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>Overall (N = 846)</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (S.D.)</td>
<td>Mean (S.D.)</td>
<td>Mean (S.D.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.11 (.51)</td>
<td>2.99 (.49)</td>
<td>3.22***</td>
<td>3.05 (.51)</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trust in institutions</td>
<td>2.91 (.54)</td>
<td>2.74 (.57)</td>
<td>4.22***</td>
<td>2.81 (.57)</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Trust in individuals</td>
<td>2.99 (.57)</td>
<td>2.85 (.58)</td>
<td>3.32***</td>
<td>2.91 (.58)</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Internal politics</td>
<td>3.67 (.74)</td>
<td>3.76 (.70)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>3.72 (.72)</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>2.93 (.82)</td>
<td>2.66 (.80)</td>
<td>4.71***</td>
<td>2.78 (.81)</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>2.98 (1.02)</td>
<td>3.10 (1.01)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>3.05 (1.02)</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>2.81 (.80)</td>
<td>2.56 (.78)</td>
<td>4.41***</td>
<td>2.66 (.80)</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2.61 (.80)</td>
<td>2.35 (.80)</td>
<td>4.54***</td>
<td>2.46 (.81)</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>2.71 (.78)</td>
<td>2.42 (.77)</td>
<td>5.34***</td>
<td>2.54 (.79)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>2.40 (.81)</td>
<td>2.14 (.72)</td>
<td>4.68***</td>
<td>2.25 (.77)</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>2.70 (.82)</td>
<td>2.53 (.79)</td>
<td>3.06**</td>
<td>2.60 (.81)</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>2.64 (.86)</td>
<td>2.39 (.80)</td>
<td>4.28***</td>
<td>2.50 (.77)</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Social orientation</td>
<td>2.21 (.72)</td>
<td>2.05 (.70)</td>
<td>3.26***</td>
<td>2.12 (.71)</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Business orientation</td>
<td>3.16 (.93)</td>
<td>3.13 (.95)</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>3.14 (.94)</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2.71 (.84)</td>
<td>2.51 (.82)</td>
<td>3.27***</td>
<td>2.59 (.83)</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; ns = Not significant.
Table 2 illustrates the main relationships between the socioeconomic and demographic variables and the public evaluations of the performance of government agencies. As is evident, the most influential factors in terms of the number of significant relationships are religion and employment (each with 9 significant paths), followed by education (6 significant paths), age, level of religious observance, and marital status (each with 4 significant paths), and finally gender and years lived in Israel (each with 3 significant paths). All other relationships between socioeconomic and demographic variables and performance variables were not significant. Of the performance variables, the most affected were citizens’ satisfaction, trust in individuals, and leadership (5 significant paths) followed by image and trust in institutions (4 significant paths).

Intercorrelations between aspects of public sector performance and a set of ordinal and interval variables such as age, education, years in Israel, and level of religious observance provide some additional useful information. As age and years in Israel were both continuous variables, we have used Pearson’s correlations, while for the ordinal variables such as gender, marital status, religion, and employment we have applied an independent sample t-test. According to this analysis religion and employment were highly relevant for the evaluation of performance. Non-Jewish citizens had a significantly lower level of trust in public sector institutions and in public officials, believed that the activities of the public sector were more business oriented and reported more stress in dealing with bureaucracies (r = −0.15, p < 0.01; r = −0.11, p < 0.01; r = −0.13, p < 0.01; r = −0.09, p < 0.05; r = −0.11, p < 0.01; and r = −0.07, p < 0.05 respectively). Newcomers had a significantly lower level of trust in public officials, believed that the activities of the public sector were more business oriented and reported more stress in dealing with bureaucracies (r = −0.22, p < 0.01; and r = −0.17, p < 0.05; r = −0.18, p < 0.05 respectively). Finally, citizens who were more religious were more satisfied with public services, had more positive attitudes towards the administrative leadership, and evaluated the responsiveness and social orientation of bureaucracies more favorably (r = −0.13, p < 0.05; r = −0.13, p < 0.05; r = −0.11, p < 0.05; and r = −0.12, p < 0.05 respectively).

In addition, to test the relationship between public sector performance and a set of dichotomous variables such as gender, marital status, religion, and employment we have applied an independent sample t-test. According to this analysis religion and employment were highly relevant for the evaluation of performance. Non-Jewish citizens had a significantly lower level of trust in public sector institutions and in public officials in comparison with Jewish citizens. Non-Jewish citizens were also more critical than Jewish citizens of the level of morality in the public sector (M = 3.02 vs. M = 3.25, t = −3.59, p < 0.01; M = 2.66 vs. M = 3.00, t = −7.82, p < 0.01; and M = 2.32 vs. M = 2.56, t = −3.72, p < 0.001). However, quite surprisingly non-Jewish citizens had more favorable evaluations of the public sector’s image, leadership, innovation, internal politics, accountability, and communication channels (M = 2.97 vs. M = 2.69, t = 4.39, p < 0.001; M = 2.59 vs. M = 2.39, t = 3.13, p < 0.01; M = 2.74 vs. M = 2.54, t = 3.34, p < 0.001; M = 3.61 vs. M = 3.77, t = −2.83, p < 0.01; M = 2.64 vs. M = 2.50, t = 2.37, p < 0.05; and M = 2.69 vs. M = 2.55, t = 2.16, p < 0.05 respectively).

5 Additional findings on intercorrelations among the research variables and on relevant t-tests can be found in two supplementary tables (numbers 2 and 3) that are available directly from the authors or can be downloaded at http://poli.haifa.ac.il/~eranv/material_vigoda/publications.html.
## Table 2. The relationship between public sector performance, socioeconomic and demographic variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Years in Israel</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Level of religious observance</th>
<th>Number of relationships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust in institutions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Trust in individuals</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Responsiveness</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Social orientation</td>
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X indicates a significant path from socioeconomic and demographic to the public sector performance variable.
DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Many years ago Dwight Waldo (1948) suggested the term ‘administrative state’ to describe the strong influence that governmental agencies have on political, economic, and social relations within the modern nation. In his stimulating book *Democracy, Bureaucracy, and Character* Richardson (1997) argues that this influence and the authority of the state and its bureaucratic system is currently under severe attack. The attack comes from those parties who believe that too strong an administrative state endangers the basic values and virtues of our societies. In light of such attacks many democracies of our era have had to struggle to make reforms in the public sector and to bring the state closer to its citizens. NPM and the reliance on citizens’ views of public sector performance have become an essential part of these reforms, allowing people an ongoing and equitable opportunity to evaluate and critique the services they receive from government agencies with an eye to changing and improving them.

This exploratory study has tried to promote our understanding of how to interpret the voice of the people with regard to its views on the performance of government agencies. The study’s main findings are twofold. First, a comprehensive platform was suggested for the measurement of public opinions about state bureaucracies and other governmental services. Despite the fact that studies conducted in other countries over the past few years have provided us with various scales and measures, we believe that our study is still unique because (1) it integrates previous work and measures from other countries, and (2) it points to the need to create a more general (perhaps even a global measure) of performance in the public sector, one that can be re-applied in various countries, cultures, and organizational systems. Moreover, the study has shown that the ‘public voice’ regarding governmental performance is not univocal, and various socioeconomic and demographic variables need to be taken seriously when interpreting those voices. While the relevancy of socioeconomic and demographic variables is universally recognized in the fields of the social and political sciences (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995), to the best of our knowledge it has received less attention in studies on citizens’ attitudes towards public administration activities.

Moreover, the findings of this study are highly relevant for the NPM approach that has emerged as one of the most influential reforms in public administration in recent times. Among its various impacts NPM has encouraged reassessments of performance in state agencies, this time from the perspective of citizens-as-customers. Over time the attitudes and perceptions of citizens have become an essential tool in the hands of public officials and state leaders who seek the reorganization, revitalization, and improvement of services, and better effectiveness and efficiency in bureaucracies. Our study demonstrated one way in which a multi scale of performance indicators can be applied in a national sample and as part of an NPM reform. Naturally, our tools and method are not a stand-alone strategy, and they will definitely benefit from additional assessments of government activity either by economic, financial, legal, or other behavioral indicators that all improve our integrative understanding of the state of bureaucracy.

Another contribution of the paper is its examination of the impact of several socioeconomic and demographic factors on the performance evaluations. The two-year national study found that evaluations of performance are related to a set of variables such as age, education, employment, religion, level of religious observance, and years lived in Israel.
Older, more religious, and less educated citizens, as well as citizens with more years in Israel, were more positive about public sector performance. More positive attitudes were also expressed by females rather than males, by married rather than by non-married citizens, and by citizens who were public sector employees. Jews and non-Jews diverged in their attitudes. Jews had more trust both in institutions and in public officials and had better impressions of morality in the public sector. Non-Jews, however, had more positive attitudes regarding the public sector’s image, leadership, innovation, internal politics, accountability, and communication channels with the public.

The interpretations of these findings, in terms of public sector performance, are that religion and education are the most significant socioeconomic influences on citizens’ attitudes towards government and public administration. These two factors play an important role in determining people’s views and together with other variables such as age, gender, years in one’s country, and level of religious observance, should be taken more seriously in future performance evaluations on the federal, state, or even local level.

In the Israeli context these findings are quite unsurprising, as studies have previously demonstrated the powerful role that national and socioeconomic divisions play in public opinion (Arian, 1998; Shamir & Arian, 1999). Referring to the Israeli context, one should also keep in mind Israel's special situation in the socio-political arena during the years 2001–2002 when the data were collected. During these years Israel was experiencing a bloody confrontation with terrorists that resulted in a decline in its economic status. It is likely that this situation had a significant impact on the public’s opinion towards governmental services, as we believe our data clearly show. Therefore we believe that more effort needs to be spent in the coming years to enrich this data set and to allow for longitudinal studies and follow-ups to our findings.

Like many studies in the field of public opinion this study has its own limitations. First, one should note that a uniform instrument was used to assess public services and goods that are quite different from one another. The use of such an instrument may result in a lack of nuance that deprives us of any detailed information beyond simple measures of trust and satisfaction. Second, while the validity of our scales has been previously tested in other studies (e.g., Vigoda, 2000) and reconfirmed here, both in terms of structural and content validity, we are aware of the fact that mixing the scales in the questionnaire might bias the respondents’ answers. However, this is a common problem in public administration studies that suffer from a lack of established measures in a variety of fields, among them the field of citizens’ opinions about public sector outcomes. In addition, the paper is based on common-source data and on a long questionnaire with ambitious goals that did not always make a clear-cut distinction among particular services. Another limitation of the study is its reliance on data collected at only two points in time. Perhaps future data will buttress the relationships we have found between demographic and socioeconomic variables and performance indicators in the public sector.

Finally, we believe that the prime merit of this study is in its innovative contribution to the field of public sector performance evaluation from the point of view of citizens as clients. While initiatives are frequently undertaken in various state agencies to assess citizens’ attitudes on an ad-hoc, limited, and provincial basis, our study and tools offer a much more inclusive and comprehensive methodology. This methodology can be
applied as a national seismograph for public administration’s performance and with additional improvement and tweaking can be applied in various countries as well. The continuous accumulation of evaluations about the outcomes of state agencies may also serve as a useful tool for managerial improvement, a feedback mechanism for policy makers and politicians, and an instrument for encouraging those who serve the people. In addition, such data shows promise as a tool for helping us understand how socioeconomic and demographic variations within a country affect the way in which various social groups evaluate the outcomes of government activity. The findings have implications that are both political and administrative. From the political point of view they imply that social groups that vary on the basis of religion, employment, and educational status may view the performance of public agencies differently. From the administrative perspective the findings may imply that various social groups deserve special care and attention by the administrative state, a strategy that may eventually enhance the trust in government and safeguard democracy.

APPENDIX: THE RESEARCH TOOL

SATISFACTION

Question wording: ‘Below is a list of public institutions and organizations that deliver various services to citizens. Please circle the number from 1 to 5 that best reflects your satisfaction with their services. If you have not used a certain service recently, please try to express a general impression that most closely reflects your opinion.’ Scale: Very dissatisfied; Somewhat dissatisfied; Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; Somewhat satisfied; Very satisfied.

Items: (1) Hospitals and public clinics; (2) Public schools; (3) Courts; (4) Ministry of Interior; (5) Labor ministry and employment services; (6) Police; (7) Transportation ministry; (8) Buses; (9) Rail; (10) El-Al (Israel Airlines); (11) Airport authority; (12) Public postal system; (13) Local municipality; (14) Electricity company; (15) Ministry of Religions; (16) Welfare system and national security; (17) Bezeq (Israel telecommunication services); (18) Income tax system.

TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Question wording: ‘In the following section you will find a list of various agencies and organizations, most of which belong to the Israeli public sector. Please circle the number from 1 to 5 that best reflects the level of trust you have in each of them.’ Scale: Very low trust; Low trust; Neither trust or distrust; High trust; Very high trust.

Items: (19) Ministry of Health; (20) Public hospitals; (21) Public clinics; (22) Kindergartens and schools; (23) Higher education (colleges & universities); (24) Judiciary system; (25) Israel Defense Forces; (26) Secret security services; (27) Police and prisons; (28) Public broadcasting system in general; (29) Public broadcasting in Arabic; (30) Israeli newspapers; (31) Ministry of Transportation; (32) Ministry of National Infrastructures (management of water system and national lands); (33) Ministry of Environment; (34) State comptroller’s office; (35) Religious services system; (36) State treasury and tax system; (37) The Central Bank (Bank of Israel); (38) Israeli political parties; (39) The Knesset (parliament).
TRUST IN INDIVIDUALS/PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Question wording: ‘In the following section you will find a list of various public servants by field of occupation. Please circle the number from 1 to 5 that best reflects the level of trust you have towards each of the groups.’ Scale: as above.

Items: (40) Medical doctors; (41) Managers and supervisors of the health system; (42) Public teachers; (43) Lecturers and researchers at universities; (44) Judges; (45) State attorneys; (46) Other lawyers; (47) IDF soldiers; (48) IDF officers and commandants; (49) Military judges; (50) IDF spokesmen; (51) IDF radio; (52) Operatives of the general security service; (53) Operatives of the ‘Mossad’; (54) Policemen; (55) Prison wardens; (56) Reporters of TV Channel 1 and the Voice of Israel; (57) Reporters of TV Channel 2; (58) Newspaper reporters; (59) Administrators of the water resources; (60) Employees of local municipalities; (61) Elected officials in local government; (62) State comptroller; (63) General ombudsman; (64) Chief rabbis; (65) City rabbis; (66) Employees of the religion ministry; (67) Employees of the welfare system; (68) Employees of the treasury system; (69) Employees of the tax system; (70) Employees of the Bank of Israel; (71) Members of Knesset; (72) Cabinet members.

INTERNAL POLITICS

Question wording: ‘The next items refer to your evaluation of various aspects of the Israeli public sector. Please circle the number from 1 to 5 that best indicates your personal agreement with the following sentences.’ Scale: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Agree; Strongly agree.

Items: (73) Favoritism rather than merit determines who gets ahead in the public sector. (74) There have always been influential groups in the public sector environment that no one ever crosses. (75) Public sector employees usually don’t speak up for fear of retaliation by others. (76) Many public sector employees attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down. (77) The actions of public administration serve the purposes of only a few individuals, not the public system or the public interest. (78) Generally speaking, public administration operates appropriately and is not affected by political pressures.

IMAGE

Continuation of question above with items: (79) If I had the right opportunity, I would be interested in joining public service. (80) Many of my acquaintances think that a job in the public sector is a respectable and good one. (81) I would advise my friends and family members to look for a job in public service. (82) The image of Israeli public administration has improved in recent years. (83) I think that Israeli public administration has a positive image. (84) Compared with other countries, Israel’s public administration has a good reputation.

STRESS

Continuation of question above with items: (85) Whenever I go to government offices or other public institutions for some purpose, I feel tense and anxious. (86) For me,
contacting public agencies is an irritating chore. (87) When I need to talk to a public officer I generally feel ill at ease.

**Professionalism**

Continuation of question above with *items*: (88) Employees in public service are professionals and highly qualified. (89) Employees in public service show understanding, care, and willingness to serve the citizens. (90) The Israeli public service employs only high quality individuals.

**Leadership**

Continuation of question above with *items*: (91) Public leadership and senior management in the Israeli public service are well qualified and have high professional standards. (92) The Israeli public service is managed appropriately and is in good order. (93) The leaders of the Israeli public service have a clear vision and a long-range view as to where we are going.

**Accountability**

Continuation of question above with *items*: (94) Israeli public administration takes public criticism and suggestions for improvement seriously. (95) Today, more than ever before, the public system is willing to be exposed to the public and to the media. (96) Public administration treats shortcomings found by the state comptroller seriously. (97) Public administration sees criticism as an important tool for future service improvement. (98) Israeli public administration encourages public employees to accept criticism and use it to improve services for citizens.

**Responsiveness**

Continuation of question above with *items*: (99) Israeli public administration responds to public requests quickly. (100) Israeli public administration is efficient and provides quality solutions for public needs. (101) Israeli public administration is sensitive to public opinions and makes a sincere effort to support those citizens who need help. (102) Citizens’ appeals to public agencies are treated properly, effectively, and within a reasonable period of time.

**Innovation**

Continuation of question above with *items*: (103) Israeli public administration formulates promising new ideas that improve citizens’ quality of life. (104) Compared with other countries, Israel occupies a leading position in developing useful projects for the public. (105) Advanced technology is involved in improving quality of service in this country.
MORALITY

Continuation of question above with *items: (106) In Israeli public administration, most civil servants are impartial and honest. (107) Citizens of this country receive equal and fair treatment from public officials. (108) In Israeli public administration, deviations from moral norms are rare.

SOCIAL ORIENTATION

Continuation of question above with *items: (109) Israeli government ministries really try to help the weak and the unfortunate. (110) The state invests more in areas that need development and promotion than in other, stronger areas. (111) The state shares taxes equally between the rich and the poor. (112) The burden of reserve military duty is shared equally by all citizens. (113) Generally speaking, social justice considerations are more important for the public administration than financial and economic considerations.

BUSINESS ORIENTATION

Continuation of question above with *items: (114) Israeli public administration is more concerned about financial matters than about helping the less fortunate. (115) For the Israeli public administration, economic efficiency is the most important goal, while the citizens are those who must pay the price.

COMMUNICATION

Continuation of question above with *items: (116) When a problem arises that must be dealt with by the public sector, I know exactly whom to turn to. (117) I think that the Israeli public administration develops reasonable ways to keep in touch with the public. (118) If you really want to find a solution to a problem you can always turn to the public administrator who is in charge and ask for his/her help.

REFERENCES


**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

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