

Politicians and Bureaucrats: Reassessing the Power Potential of the Bureaucracy

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Abstract: A strong civil service is vital in democracies. However, as widely acknowledged in the public administration literature, bureaucratic expertise constitutes power that can be used to influence the political agenda. Although this insight paints a gloomy picture of democratic governance, we argue that this literature actually underestimates the power potential of the bureaucracy. Bureaucratic expertise can not only be used for agenda influence, but also to influence political preferences. We make this argument by applying insights from political psychology to the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians. To test the argument, we study almost 6,000 politicians in four countries: USA, Italy, Belgium and Denmark. We use experiments embedded in surveys to (i) assess the close interaction between bureaucrats and politicians; (ii) investigate the importance of bureaucrats as information providers; (iii) test whether bureaucrats can influence their politicians' preferences by manipulating the valence of information (equivalence framing); (iv) by strategically highlighting subsets of information (issue framing); and (v) by exploiting that politicians tend to prefer information sources with whom they ideologically agree (source cue effects). We find support for these manipulation tactics. Our findings suggest that scholarly thinking about the power of bureaucracy should be reassessed.

Paper prepared for presentation at the 2017 NORKOM Meeting, Reykjavík, Iceland, 1–2 December 2017

Introduction: Never rely on experts

At the height of the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy had to make one of the most important decisions in the post-World War II period: how to respond to the Soviet deployment of missiles in Cuba. As recounted in Allison's (1971) famous study of the crisis, Kennedy and his advisors discussed several options. Kennedy's preference was for a clean, surgical air strike. But the Air Force informed the President that an air strike could not be surgical. It would have to be a massive attack. This information made the President opt for the blockage that eventually succeeded in deterring the Soviets. However, as civilian experts afterwards discovered, the information from the Air Force was wrong. The surgical air strike option *was* realistic. As Allison (1971: 205) notes, the President had "learned the lesson of the Bay of Pigs, 'Never rely on experts,' less well than he supposed."

This example of bureaucratic influence on political decision-making is dramatic. But it is unusual only in its drama, not in the fact that a political decision was influenced by advice from government officials. For over one hundred years, the literature on bureaucracy has pointed to the dilemma between bureaucratic expertise and political control. It is a delicate balance, and the nagging question is whether non-expert politicians can control a specialized and permanent bureaucracy.

The literature on bureaucracy has provided no final answer to this question, but agrees, despite its otherwise heterogeneous and multifaceted nature, that bureaucrats hold a privileged information-providing role, occupy a key policy advising role and interact closely with politicians. Because they control the flow of information to politicians, bureaucrats control, or influence, the set of problems and solutions that politicians consider (Goodnow 1900; Meier and O'Toole 2006; Niskanen 1971; Olsen 2005; Simon 1976 [1945]: 45-60; Weber 1970 [1922]; Wilson 1887; Wilson 1989).

The key insight from the study of bureaucracy is that top bureaucrats are often in a position to influence, if not decide, the agenda for their presumed masters. This fact may seem disturbing from the perspective of democratic governance, but the situation may, in fact, be worse than suggested by existing literature. We think that the literature has underestimated the power potential of the bureaucracy, because it has failed to sufficiently theorize what the close interaction between politicians and top bureaucrats really entails. We therefore believe that the relationship between politicians and top bureaucrats deserves reassessment.

We argue that bureaucrats may have political influence beyond agenda control. The informational advantage of top bureaucrats can be used for more subtle, but less visible, purposes. By carefully designing the information available to politicians, bureaucrats may not only determine the political agenda, but also shape their political masters' preferences. This reassessment of the bureaucracy's power potential involves the important step of endogenizing politicians' preferences to the politico-bureaucratic interaction, a step the literature has so far refrained from taking. We take this step by applying insights from political psychology to theory on the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians about the impact of information on preference formation (Chong and Druckman 2007; Cohen 2003; Druckman 2001b; 2004; Goren et al. 2009; Nelson et al. 1997; Tversky and Kahneman 1981).

This paper makes two important contributions. First, we provide a theoretical reassessment of the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats and introduce a new understanding of this relationship that places top bureaucrats in a much more influential position than suggested by the literature so far. Second, we present results from a comprehensive empirical investigation of our argument involving almost 6,000 politicians from four countries: The USA, Denmark, Italy, and Belgium. Relying on a most-different-systems logic we aim to demonstrate the universalism of the psychological mechanisms underlying our argument. We collect data by surveys. Embedded experiments and measures of respondents' behavior during the completion of the surveys help increase the confidence that results are causal.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the literature on bureaucracy and argues that the power position of bureaucrats has been an enduring, but undertheorized, concern. Then follows the presentation of our argument. Building on insights from political psychology, we argue that top bureaucrats may not only be able to influence the political agenda, but also the preferences of their political masters. We then turn to our empirical investigation. First, we show that bureaucrats indeed do enjoy a privileged position as information providers to their political masters. We then demonstrate through a series of experiments how the preferences of real-world politicians in four countries are open to bureaucratic manipulation. Having established that politicians' preferences can be manipulated we discuss the real-world relevance of our findings. Our data does not allow for direct empirical investigations of the extent to which bureaucrats are actually using our proposed strategies, but quantitative as well as qualitative findings from our surveys are indicative of widespread concerns about bureaucrats' interest in

affecting political outcomes. We end the paper by discussing future directions for the scientific study of bureaucracy.

Political dilettantes vs. bureaucratic experts: An enduring concern in political science and public administration

The relationship between politicians and bureaucrats has been a constant focus in the study of bureaucracy since the late 19th century. Despite the multi-faceted and heterogeneous nature of this literature, an enduring concern can be identified over who is really in control. More specifically, the literature has been preoccupied with the intensity and exclusiveness of the interactions between politicians and bureaucrats, the importance of information from the bureaucracy for political decisions, and the political controllability of bureaucratic action. Common to the literature is the conception that politicians bring direction and policy goals, and that these preferences are exogenous to the interaction with the bureaucracy.

These questions have run as an undercurrent in almost all intellectual streams within this literature. They were present in the very earliest contributions. For example, in his pioneering essay on politics and administration Woodrow Wilson (1887) did not hide his fear of bureaucratic power. He worried that civil servants may develop into “an offensive official class, – a distinct, semi-corporate body with sympathies divorced from those of a progressive, free-spirited people” (Wilson 1887: 216). Likewise, across the Atlantic, Max Weber (1970 [1922]: 232), while praising the technical potential of modern bureaucracies, also famously worried that “(t)he 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’.”

The systematic study of bureaucracy started in the early 20th century with a series of works focusing on the politics-administration divide and management issues. Especially works of Goodnow (1900), Taylor (1916), Fayol (1930), and Gulick (1937) lay the foundation stone to the ‘scientific management school’. Undue influence of bureaucrats was not a central concern in this stream, but it ran as an undercurrent. Goodnow (1900: 5) discussed the relationship between politics and administration intensively and warned that “[t]he administrative system has, however, as great influence in giving its tone to the general governmental system as has the form of government set forth in the constitution”. He devoted a full chapter to balancing due political control against undue politicization of the administration (Goodnow 1900: 72-94). This theme was also treated in the

field's first textbook which emphasized the exclusive information-providing role of government officials for policy formulation (White 1955 [1926]: esp. 6-8). Most work in the scientific management school focused on private organizations. However, applying scientific management principles in the public sector was also considered; but not without concerns of the implications for democratic governance. "Caveamus expertum", Gulick (1937: 10) warned and went on to describe how much governments need expert advice from bureaucrats, but also how inclined bureaucrats are to abuse their privileged positions: "Every highly trained technician ... has a profound sense of omniscience and a great desire for complete independence."

The methods and recommendations of scientific management bred sceptics and paved the way for the behavioral revolution in the study of bureaucracy and the human relations school of management. Barnard's (1938) work was pioneering. He analyzed authority relations in organizations and maintained that all organizations are basically cooperative. Subordinates only obey orders if they are legitimate, that is, if they lie within the subordinates' so called zone of indifference. Barnard's work inspired a stream of literature on how organizations make decisions, but also generated a debate about how to control bureaucrats. If coercive control is an illusion, how can bureaucrats be controlled? A prominent debate between Friedrich (1940) and Finer (1941) set the scene. Friedrich (1940) found that political control of the bureaucracy was increasingly challenged by the growth of technical experts in the administration. It led to the danger that bureaucrats might advocate their own policy preferences disguised as expert advice. Friedrich's solution was to rely on professional norms, ethical standards and the inner check of bureaucrats. Finer (1941) argued that the inner check was insufficient to control bureaucrats. He feared that the monopoly position of bureaucrats represented too much of a temptation to be regulated by the inner check. "Sooner or later there is an abuse of power when external punitive controls are lacking" (Finer 1941: 337). He consequently advocated the imposition of strict external control mechanisms. Worries of power abuse by bureaucratic experts shone through much work in the human relations school. The perhaps most prominent example is Simon's (1976 [1945]: 45-61) analysis of fact and value in decision-making. According to Simon, all political decisions involve both fact and value, but the factual element is the responsibility of the bureaucrat. It is therefore important that the bureaucrat is neutral and compliant. However, this is far from certain since the administrator is likely to be motivated by "his own very definite set of personal values that he would like to see implemented by his administrative organization, and he may resist attempts by the legislature to assume completely the function of policy determination" (Simon (1976 [1945]: 58-59).

The distrust of the personal motivations of bureaucrats was placed at center stage by the next intellectual stream in the study of bureaucracy, public choice. Using analytical tools from the discipline of economics, it began with analyses of internal decision-making in bureaucracies. Tullock (1965) investigated how information is distorted inside and between bureaucratic hierarchies and painted a picture of politicians as utterly dependent on bureaucrats, but also utterly unable to control them. “The vast and unwieldy departments are almost beyond the control of their nominal chiefs” (Tullock 1965: 223). This negative evaluation was echoed by Downs (1967), who analyzed how information flows in bureaucracies are distorted due to the personal preferences of the bureaucrats. “A very significant portion of all the activity carried out is completely unrelated to the bureau’s formal goals” (Downs 1967: 136). With Niskanen’s (1971) influential work this stream of literature took a more direct focus on the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats. Niskanen analyzed this relationship as a bilateral monopoly, but one in which the bureaucratic side had an informational advantage which could be used to present politicians with a take-it-or-leave-it offer and pressure them into accepting larger budgets. Niskanen thus highlighted the privileged position of bureaucrats as information providers and demonstrated how this position could be used to manipulate the agenda of politicians.

Modern studies build on the insights reviewed thus far, but have taken the study of bureaucracy much further. Two lines of inquiry are especially pertinent. The first comprises studies using principal-agent theory. This theory was developed in the field of economics in the 1970s and was introduced to political science in the 1980s (Moe 1984; Weingast 1984). The core of the theory focuses on the relationship between a political principal and a bureaucratic agent. The principal needs the services of the agent, but cannot be sure of the agent’s good intentions because the agent may not share the principal’s preferences and may possess information not available to the principal (Miller 2005). This literature is preoccupied with the challenges facing the political principal in terms of selecting the bureaucratic agent (Bertelli and Feldmann 2006), designing an appropriate incentive structure (Miller 1992; Connolly 2017), and monitoring and sanctioning the agent (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984; McCubbins et al. 1987). This literature thus develops the concerns raised by Niskanen about bureaucrats’ informational advantage and means of influencing the politicians’ agendas. Principal-agent theory has been used to study politico-bureaucratic relations in a large number of settings, including the US Congress (Kiewit & McCubbins 1991), Western democracies (Strøm et al. 2003), and the European Union (Pollack 2003).

The second line of inquiry focuses more directly on the relationship between politicians and top bureaucrats. It gained momentum with Aberbach et al.'s (1981) comprehensive cross-national analysis of this relationship in the USA, UK, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden. They found that top bureaucrats increasingly engage in politics and that a "creative dialogue" appears to develop everywhere between top bureaucrats and politicians. Who has the upper hand, and who influences the public agenda the most, is difficult to determine. "Against the politician's zeal, bureaucrats counter with facts and caution" (Aberbach et al. 1981: 114). The authors speculated that the relationship might develop even further and lead to the virtual disappearance of the Weberian distinction between the roles of politician and bureaucrat. However, when two of the authors later looked at developments in the 1980s, this speculation proved unfounded (Aberbach and Rockman 1988). But the core result of the original inquiry stood: Top bureaucrats appear to be key advisors for politicians and to engage with them in constant and intense dialogue about policy formulation. Despite important country-specific nuances, this finding has been confirmed by many subsequent analyses – e.g. in the UK (Rhodes 2011), Germany (Derlien 2003), the USA (Aberbach 2003), Sweden (Premfors and Sundström 2007), the Netherlands (t'Hart and Wille 2006), and Denmark (Christensen 2004). In sum, it appears to be a general trait, at least in the Western world, that top bureaucrats operate in close contacts with politicians and actively engage in policy-making.

Before concluding this literature review, a brief look at the most recent contributions to the study of bureaucracy is warranted. Although the categorization of these contributions into separate schools is hampered by the lack of temporal distance, it is evident that concerns of bureaucratic power, the importance of bureaucratic information, and the political controllability of bureaucratic action continue to run as important currents. First, several scholars provide fresh analyses of the dilemma between bureaucratic expertise and political accountability. Gailmard and Patty (2013) argue that some political control is worth sacrificing in order to motivate bureaucratic agents to acquire expertise. Lewis (2008) shows how political appointments in the bureaucracy increase political responsiveness, but harm performance. Miller and Whitford (2016) argue that bureaucratic expertise should be kept at arm's length from politicians in order to guard against short-sighted political opportunism. Second, other scholars focus on the informational foundation of the problem-solving capacity of modern governments. Baumgartner and Jones (2015) argue that in order to deal with complex problems, the bureaucratic collection, processing and presentation of information should be done in an open process, an organized anarchy in which politicians need to

accept a loss of control. Likewise, Workman's (2015) dual dynamics theory stresses how crucial bureaucratic expertise is for Congressional attention to and prioritization of problems. Finally, a third set of researchers have put new efforts into investigating how bureaucratic information and the capacity to act on it can be used to pursue policies that are not politically directed, for instance to establish agency reputations (Carpenter 2010) or to engage in "strategic neutrality" (Huber 2007). What these recent studies have in common is a focus on the challenge which bureaucratic expertise poses for political control.

Summing up, the study of bureaucracy has for more than one hundred years been preoccupied with the power of bureaucrats vis-à-vis politicians. Information is key in the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians who depend on the bureaucracy to get information about the different options for decisions they can make, and their relative legality and prudence. The literature agrees that bureaucrats hold a privileged position as providers of information, occupy a key policy advising role, and interact closely with the politicians. Bureaucrats use their position to formulate proposals for policy and provide knowledge about their feasibility. Bureaucrats are, in short, in a position to influence, if not decide, the agenda for their presumed masters.

However, the literature also agrees that politicians bring something to the interaction, namely direction and policy goals. Even Aberbach et al. (1981: 113), who provide the perhaps most detailed and direct study of the politico-bureaucratic interaction, find that "[p]oliticians are inspired by goals and the advancement of interests; bureaucrats are forced to consider sobering possibilities." In other words, the literature considers political preferences exogenous to the politico-bureaucratic interaction. None of the accounts presented above are concerned with how the bureaucracy might shape the preferences of politicians. Hence, by relying on this assumption of exogenous preferences, the literature has failed to sufficiently theorize what the close interaction between politicians and bureaucrats entails. In the next section, we draw on well-established insights from Psychology to argue that politicians' preferences can be expected to be endogenous to the politico-bureaucratic interaction, and we argue how this theory suggests that existing literature has, in fact, underestimated the power potential of the bureaucracy.

How political preferences are endogenous to politico-bureaucratic interaction

In one sense it is unsurprising that existing literature has assumed politicians' preferences to be exogenous to politico-bureaucratic interaction. Assuming that people have exogenous preferences is

standard in rational choice theory. The assumption forms the theoretical basis of most literature in Economics (Frank 2010) and has been central to academic thought about human behavior in general (Chong 2013; Lupia et al. 2000).

However, it is today uncontroversial to claim that human behavior is rarely in complete line with assumptions of rationality (Achen & Bartels 2016). First, “unlike *homo economicus*, people are not omniscient calculators” (Lupia et al. 2000: 9) who are able to gather and take into account all relevant information when making choices. Instead, human cognition is limited and people have to make compromises between the (limited) effort they devote to decision-making and their desire to optimize decisions in terms of their preferences. Simon (1976 [1945]) used this insight to inform his idea about *bounded rationality* and theorized that decision-makers will often have to satisfice instead of maximize in light of their preferences when making decisions.

While the idea of bounded rationality questions peoples’ ability to make optimal decisions that are logically derived from their preferences, it does not question the exogenous nature of the preferences themselves. However, a rich psychological literature on attitude formation has questioned the assumption of exogenously given, consistent preferences by showing that not only do people tend to be unable to make optimal decisions based on their preferences; the preferences themselves are subject to manipulation, e.g. through the design of information. Below, we present three prominent ways of manipulating preferences, namely insights about *equivalence framing* effects, *issue framing* effects, and *source cue* effects on peoples’ preferences.

The relevance of these insights is not limited to the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians. In principle, anyone who is in the position of being a trusted information provider to politicians could use these strategies to influence the politicians’ preferences. However, compared to other actors in the political system, bureaucrats are in a privileged position as they serve as central information providers and have a lot of control over the political agenda. This is clear from the literature review above and it will be clear from our empirical investigation below. Thus, we argue that bureaucrats are in a privileged position to leverage these psychological insights to design information in ways that influence the preferences of their political principals. This again implies that bureaucrats have much more potential power over politicians than existing literature has acknowledged.

An *equivalence framing* effect occurs when “different, but logically equivalent, words or phrases (...) causes individuals to alter their preferences” (Druckman 2001: 228). Equivalence framing gained prominence with the work of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1981). They

developed prospect theory based on risk preferences: People tend to be risk seeking in the domain of losses and risk-averse in the domain of gains. A well-known example is the *Asian Disease Problem*, where respondents are asked to choose between different programs to combat the outbreak of a fictitious disease. The disease would kill 600 people if nothing was done and each program would have an expected value of 200 saved lives. However, one program was risk seeking (there was a 1/3 probability that 600 people would survive) while another was risk-averse (200 people would certainly survive). Tversky and Kahneman found that framing the two programs positively by presenting them in terms of saved lives (gains) led 72 % of the respondents to choose the risk-averse option, while framing the programs negatively by presenting them in terms of the expected number of dead people (losses) led 78 % to choose the risk seeking option (Tversky and Kahneman 1981, 453). The example shows the power of equivalence framing: Preferences fundamentally differ depending how logically equivalent information is framed.

More recent experiments show that equivalence framing applies in other settings and to other types of preferences than risk preferences. Quattrone's and Tversky (1988) showed that people generated less favorable attitudes towards an employment policy proposal if they were told that the proposal would lead to 10 % of the workforce being unemployed than if they were told that the proposal would lead to 90 % of the workforce being employed. Olsen (2015) showed that citizens tend to evaluate public organizations more negatively if they are told that 15 % of the organizations' users are dissatisfied with the organizations' services than if they are told that 85 % are satisfied. Thus, people tend to react more negatively on negatively framed information than on logically equivalent but positively framed information.

Equivalence framing effects result from seemingly uncontroversial changes in information where no information is left out and where no blatant manipulation is involved. This can happen because positive labelling of information automatically activates positive associations in memory and the negative labelling of (the same) information activates negative associations (Druckman 2004). We see no reason that politicians should not be susceptible to the same mechanisms, and this has important implications for the power potential of bureaucracy. We expect the valence of information to be clearly within bureaucrats' zone of discretion when designing and preparing information for their political principals. It would, for example, seem innocuous for a policy advisor to use negative-valence information to report the expected effects of a policy proposal instead of equivalent positive-valence information. However, such information design

choices would have the potential to lead to non-trivial changes in the politicians' preferences, affecting the chances of a policy proposal getting passed. We thus hypothesize that:

H1: Bureaucrats can affect preferences of politicians by presenting logically equivalent information by different words or phrases.

Issue framing effects occur when “by emphasizing a subset of potentially relevant considerations, a speaker leads individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions”, which in turn affects the opinions being formed (Druckman 2004, 672). Thus, issue framing differs from equivalence framing in focusing on qualitatively different aspects of an issue (Druckman 2004, 672). A prominent example of issue framing is the KKK study by Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997). They showed that people are more willing to accept a rally by hate groups like Ku Klux Klan if the question is framed as a question of free speech rather than as a question about risk for public order. Focusing on free speech increases support, but focusing on order reduces support. Similarly, studies have shown that “when government spending for the poor is framed as enhancing the chance that poor people can get ahead, individuals tend to support increased spending. On the other hand, when it is framed as resulting in higher taxes, individuals tend to oppose increased spending” (Druckman 2001b, 1043).

In contrast to equivalence framing, issue framing works through a quite deliberate process where the framing affects how people think about the relative importance of different considerations with relevance to an evaluation (Druckman 2001b; Druckman 2004). Thus, a preference can be viewed as a weighted sum of different considerations with relevance to a problem (Chong & Druckman 2007) and issue frames affect what considerations are considered relevant in peoples' overall evaluations. This leaves credible sources in a powerful position to influence which considerations are considered relevant and/or important when people form their political preferences. While existing literature has mainly focused on voters' preference formation, we would also expect these insights to be relevant to the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians. Thus, we expect that bureaucrats can use their privileged position as trusted information providers to frame information, thereby allowing them to affect the preferences of their political masters:

H2: Bureaucrats can affect preferences of politicians by emphasizing different attributes of issues.

Finally, *sources cues* may affect preferences. Bureaucrats may affect politicians' policy preferences by highlighting policy advocates that are either ideologically aligned or unaligned with the politicians. It is well-established that people tend to use signals from their social environment to inform judgements. The ability to judge objects in light of other peoples' reactions is learned in early childhood (Cohen 2003) and continues to help decision-making throughout life. Thus, social signals provide social meaning, helping people to determine what judgements and actions are compatible with socially shared values (Cohen 2003: 808).

Research in political psychology has drawn on these insights to show that party cues often guide voters' policy preferences. When forming a preference on a policy, people tend to rely on cues about which political parties support and oppose the policy, instead of analyzing the objective features of the policy in light of their own political values (Petersen et al. 2013; (Goren et al. 2009: 806). Party cues have proven influential to voters' preferences regarding a wide range of policies. This even holds for policies that are highly politicized, meaning that one could else expect attitudes to be quite crystalized. For instance, Cohen (2003) found that peoples' attitudes towards social welfare programs were meaningfully guided by the compatibility between actual policy content and ideological beliefs, whenever no party cue was present. However, once people were told that the policies were supported by either the Democrats or the Republicans, "the persuasive impact of the objective content was reduced to nil" (Ibid.: 811). Now, people evaluated the policies through the lens of their party identity instead. Similarly, Bolsen et al. (2014) found party cues to distort peoples' evaluations of an energy policy and Goren et al. (2009) even showed that peoples' support for fundamental political values like equal opportunity, self-reliance, moral traditionalism, and moral tolerance were subject to manipulation through party cues.

While existing literature in political psychology has been preoccupied with parties (and thus politicians) as cue senders, we switch the logic around and expect that the politicians will also be subject to source cue effects (as cue receivers) themselves when forming preferences on policies in their daily work as decision-makers. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H3: Politicians show greater support for a policy if they learn that the policy is advocated for by an ideologically aligned group, and less support if they learn that the policy is advocated for by an ideologically unaligned group.

Empirical setting

We face three important challenges in relation to testing our argument empirically. First, a starting point for our argument is the assumption that top bureaucrats are in a privileged position as information providers to their political principals. In order for our argument to have real-world relevance, we need to address this assumption directly. Before we turn to the test of our hypotheses, we therefore include self-reported survey measures as well as behavioral measures of the extent to which politicians consider the bureaucracy an important source of information.

Second, when testing the psychological basis for our argument, there is the issue of internal validity: We need to establish causal impacts of how bureaucrats present information. In order to do so, we rely on randomized survey experiments. Randomized survey experiments require quite large sample sizes. Local government is attractive from a design perspective, because of the large number of politicians, thus making a large-N test of our hypotheses possible. Hence, we focus on local government because the large number of elected politicians in local government allows us to collect a sufficient number of answers. By using local politicians we get a large number of respondents who are real-world elected politicians, responsible for decision-making of high importance for a large number of citizens, and who can be expected to rely on information from their respective administrative apparatus in the process of preparing decisions, monitoring policy implementation etc.

Third, there is the issue of generalizability. The extent to which politicians are subject to manipulation may vary with factors like political institutions and political culture. We address this challenge by using a most different systems logic where we conduct our study in four very different political systems. While being all Western democracies, these four countries are selected because they belong to four different types of local government. Loughlin, Hendriks and Lidström (2011) distinguish between the local government type of the Nordic states connected to the Scandinavian state tradition, the type of the Southern European States connected to the French state tradition, of the Rhinelandic States connected to the German tradition, and the British Isles connected with the Anglo-Saxon state tradition. Among the important differences in this typology are features such as the form of decentralization, the political culture (or policy style), the form of political organization, and the state-society relationships (Loughlin, Hendriks and Lidström, 2011: 11). From the Nordic type we focus on local government in Denmark, from the Southern European type on Italian local government, from the Rhinelandic states we choose municipalities in Flanders, Belgium, and from the Anglo-Saxon tradition we focus on local government in the U.S. Our

theoretical claim is general: We expect that bureaucrats can affect preferences of politicians in democracies, regardless of the type of the political system. The logic of the chosen most different system design is that, if we find similar effects across very different political systems, we can be confident that effects are general, and not peculiar to special circumstances.

We rely on survey data collected using email-based questionnaires among local politicians in the USA (884 responses), Denmark (1,025 responses), the Flanders region in Belgium (2,257 responses), and Italy (1,756 responses) in late 2016 / early 2017. An explanation of our data collection is provided in a separate background report (Blom-Hansen et al. 2017).

Are top bureaucrats an important source of information?

A starting point for our argument is the assumption that top bureaucrats are in a privileged position as information providers to their political principals. Our literature review provided a theoretical basis for assuming that this is the case. However, before turning to the experimental investigation of the psychological foundations of our argument, it is useful to investigate the assumption empirically as well. In order to do so, we rely on descriptive evidence collected in the surveys with the local politicians (see Blom-Hansen et al. (2017) for the actual survey questions used).

Figure 1-4 about here

Figure 1 shows the extent to which politicians report to be in contact with the local bureaucracy as compared to other actors. As much as 37% (in Flanders) and 74% (in Italy) respond that they are in contact with local administrative staff at least twice a week. This makes the local bureaucracy one of the two by far most heavily contacted actors, only surpassed slightly by respondents' own political party. Figure 2 furthermore shows the extent to which the local bureaucracy is considered an important source of information as compared to other sources. Again, the local administration comes out as one of the most important sources in all countries, though its importance is not very different from that of relevant ministries, local government associations and research institutions in Italy and Flanders. In addition to the self-reported measures in Figures 1 and 2, Figures 3 and 4 show evidence from a decision board exercise which was placed at the very end of the surveys. The decision board was made using MouselabWEB, an open source decision board tool (Willemsen & Johnson, n.d.). The method allows us to track the politicians' actual behavior while searching

through decision-relevant information and thus it provides us with behavioral measures of the importance of the bureaucracy. In the exercise, respondents were presented with a fictitious policy proposal. They could then consult various boxes (each representing different actors including the local bureaucracy) in order to obtain information about the recommendations of the actors. The decision board exercise is based on the assumption that actors, who are considered more relevant information providers, are consulted before less relevant actors and that more time is spent on information from relevant actors than on less relevant actors (see Blom-Hansen et al. (2017) for an explanation of the decision board exercise). As is evident from Figures 3 and 4, more time is generally spent on the information from the local bureaucracy than on other sources in Denmark and Flanders, while the picture is less clear in Italy. Similarly, the local bureaucracy box is generally one of the boxes first consulted in Denmark, Flanders, and the US but less so in Italy. In conclusion, our results across the four figures point to the local bureaucracy being an important source of information, though probably slightly less so in Italy than in the USA, Denmark and Flanders.

General design considerations

In order to test the psychological foundations of our argument, we ran three randomized survey experiments on each of the four samples. Each experiment was designed to test one of the psychological mechanisms discussed in the theory section above, and thus, the experiments test different strategies that bureaucrats can possibly use to influence politicians' preferences. In each of our experiments, respondents were presented with a policy proposal and asked to form a preference regarding the proposal as if it had been proposed in their own local council. Experiment 1 is an *equivalence framing* experiment where we test whether politicians' preferences on a policy vary with the valence of logically equivalent information about the policy. Experiment 2 is an *issue framing* experiment where we test whether respondents' preferences on a policy can be influenced by selectively highlighting subsets of potentially policy relevant considerations. Finally, experiment 3 is used to test whether respondents' preferences can be influenced by highlighting policy advocates with whom the respondents are ideologically aligned or unaligned (that is, the *source cue* part of our argument). In all three experiments information is – in different ways – presented by bureaucrats to politicians. We do not claim that similar effects cannot be obtained by other groups. On the contrary, the theoretical argument applies to anyone in the privileged position as information

provider to politicians. We focus on bureaucrats exactly because of their privileged position, and this is why we only use bureaucrats as information providers in the experiments.

The experiments were all using between-subjects randomization to one experimental condition in each experiment. Experiments were randomized independently of one another. In the survey, the experiments were placed right after the descriptive questions presented in the previous section. The order in which respondents were presented with the experiments was fixed across all respondents and all four countries.

Designing the experiments in ways that allow for cross-country comparisons of results is not a trivial task. Local politicians in the different countries are responsible for different policy portfolios, which makes it difficult to formulate experiments that make sense across countries. Moreover, even identical words and formulations may have different meanings in different countries with different cultural settings (Italian respondents may understand something else than Danish respondents when responding to identically formulated survey items) and this constitutes a threat to the comparability of the experimental results across countries (Jilke et al. 2017).

However, the purpose of running the experiments in different countries is not to formally compare effect sizes across countries (e.g. by testing whether one country's politicians are more affected by equivalence frames than politicians in other countries), but to test the basic psychological mechanisms behind our theoretical argument. Thus, we test the foundations of our argument in a broad range of political systems in order to address issues of generalizability. Therefore, primacy has been given to formulate experiments that are realistic in the empirical settings in which the experiments were run, while we consider it impossible to ensure full measurement equivalence.

In each experiment, respondents were asked about their preferences on policies for which they are actually responsible in their own city councils. This means that each experiment's policy proposal was not identical for all four countries (proposals were identical in Denmark, Flanders, and Italy, but alternative policy areas had to be used in the USA due to differences in policy portfolios for which local councils are responsible). To make experiments as realistic as possible, we collaborated with experts in local politics in all countries apart from Denmark who helped us formulate the experimental material (translate to local language and adjust wordings to make sense in the local empirical settings).

Experiment 1: Equivalence framing – Design

The purpose of our first experiment is to test H_1 according to which we expect the valence of information about a policy to matter for politicians' preferences on the policy. In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a classical equivalence framing experiment (Tversky and Kahneman 1981; Druckman 2004; Olsen 2015). Respondents in all countries were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a fictitious policy proposal. In Denmark, Flanders, and Italy, the policy proposal concerned a limitation in the number of weekly hours where the municipality's libraries would be manned by a librarian, whereas city councilors in the USA were presented with a proposal about limiting the walk-in hours at the local police station.

Respondents in two experimental groups were told that a neighboring municipality had made a similar change a year ago. One experimental group was given the information that 60 percent of the citizens had been satisfied with the change in the neighboring municipality (the valence of the information was positive) while another was given the logically equivalent information that 40 percent of the citizens had been dissatisfied with the change (the valence of the information was negative). Finally, a control group was added to the experiment, where the policy proposal was presented without information about other municipalities' experiences with similar proposals. An English translation of the wording of the Danish, Flemish and Italian version of the experiment is presented in Table 1, while the wording of the US version of the experiment can be found in Table A3 in the appendix.

Table 1 about here

H_1 finds support if the average member of group 1 agrees more with the policy proposal than the average member of group 2. The control group allows us to investigate whether experimental effects are primarily driven by members of group 2 being affected by the negative framing of information, or whether effects are primarily driven by members of group 1 being affected by the positive framing of information.

Experiment 1: Results

As shown in Figure 5, politicians in all countries report significantly different preferences for the policy proposal, depending on whether a positive, a neutral or a negative frame is used (see Table A1 in the appendix for formal tests of statistical significance). The hierarchy of preferences across

experimental groups is as expected with positive frames producing more support for the proposal than the neutral frame, which in turn is producing stronger support than the negative frame. In all countries, the effects are of substantial size bearing in mind that the dependent variable is measured on a scale running from 1-5 (DK: ~0.4; FL: ~0.2; IT: ~0.9; US: ~0.6). Thus, our hypothesis about the importance of the valence of the information is supported by data. Some cross-national differences should be noted, however: Notably, differences in preferences between the positive and the negative frame are of considerably different sizes across countries. Moreover, several previous equivalence framing studies have found evidence of negativity bias, where negative valence matters relatively more than positive valence (e.g, Olsen 2015). This pattern is only found in Denmark and the USA in our investigation, while we, on the other hand, detect stronger impacts of positive valence in Flanders and Italy. Thus, in sum the findings indicate that valence of information is more important under some conditions. However, this does not change the general impression from the experiments that politicians' preferences are susceptible to information valence.

Figure 5 about here

Experiment 2: Issue framing - design

The purpose of our second experiment is to test H₂ about issue framing effects on politicians' policy preferences. Issue frames (also known as "emphasis frames" (Druckman 2004, 672)) focus on "qualitatively different yet potentially relevant considerations" (Ibid.) in order to affect which considerations will guide information recipients' attitude formation. Thus, we expect that bureaucrats (and other providers of information) can influence politicians' policy preferences by highlighting selective subsets of policy relevant considerations, thereby leading the politicians to focus on these considerations when forming an opinion on the policy.

In order to test this hypothesis, we designed an experiment where respondents in three experimental groups were asked to form an opinion on a fictitious policy proposal. In Denmark, Flanders, and Italy, the policy proposal was an offer to users of the municipality's elderly care of an extra bath per week, whereas city councilors in the USA were presented with a proposal to renew and renovate public parks in their city. The policy proposal was identical in all experimental groups in terms of the content of the proposed policy change and the financial effects of making the

proposed change in policy. However, for one experimental group (the positive framing), the proposal was presented with a politically appealing title in an attempt to make respondents form an attitude in light of positive thoughts and considerations. Another experimental group (the negative framing) was explicitly reminded of the obvious fact that spending extra money on one policy area would necessarily mean that other policy areas would need to be given less priority, which may lead to protests from groups that do not benefit from the proposed policy changes. Finally, a control group was presented with the factual content and financial consequences of the policy proposal (without any issue framing). An English translation of the wording of the Danish, Flemish and Italian version of the experiment is presented in Table 2, while the wording of the US version of the experiment can be found in Table A4 in the appendix.

Table 2 about here

Following H₂ we expect that recipients of the negative frame will be less supportive of the policy proposal than recipients of the positive frame as they form their opinion in light of more negative considerations (they are led to think of the proposal as a conflict issue) even though the factual content of the proposal is identical. The control group allows us to investigate whether experimental effects are primarily driven by recipients of the negative or the positive frame.

Experiment 2: Results

The results from experiment 2 are presented in Figure 6, while formal tests of statistical significance can be found in Table A2 in the appendix. The results are largely consistent across countries with the positive issue framing having a statistically significantly more positive impact than the neutral frame, which in turn has a more positive and statistically significant impact than the negative issue frame. Results are substantially significant bearing in mind that a scale running from 1-5 is used with the average support for the proposal between the positive and negative issue frame running between around 0.5 in Denmark and around 0.8 in Italy and the USA. In sum, the findings support the proposition that politicians' preferences are susceptible to issue framing by the administration.

Figure 6 about here

Experiment 3: Source cues - design

The purpose of our third experiment is to test H₃ according to which we expect that bureaucrats can exploit insights about source cue effects by highlighting policy advocates that the politicians either like or dislike. Thus, we expect that politicians will tend to like a policy if they learn that the policy is advocated for by groups that they like or identify with, e.g. because they are ideologically aligned. Similarly, we expect that they will tend to dislike the same policy if they learn that the policy is advocated for by groups that they do not like or identify with.

In order to test our hypothesis, we designed an experiment where respondents in different experimental groups were asked to indicate their preferences on a fictitious policy proposal about outsourcing technical services. A control group was presented with the pure content of the policy proposal, whereas two other experimental groups were presented with the proposal and were additionally informed that a think tank (either a right-wing or a left-wing think tank) is advocating for policy proposals like the one to be evaluated. An English translation of the wording of the Danish, Flemish and Italian version of the experiment is presented in Table 3. The wording of the US version of the experiment can be found in Table A5 in the appendix.

Table 3 about here

In general, contracting out public services tends to be popular among ideological right-wings and less popular among ideological left-wings (Baekgaard et al. 2017). Therefore, we expect right-wings to be more supportive of the proposal than left-wings at the outset. However, when respondents learn that a think tank advocates for the policy, we expect the respondents' preferences to become distorted by the degree of ideological alignment between them and the think tank. For instance, in the experimental condition in which respondents learn that the policy proposal is supported by a left-wing think tank, right-wings are expected to become more skeptical towards the policy, even though the proposal is in line with their general ideological preferences. Similarly, left-wings in the same experimental group are expected to show more support for the proposal, thus beginning to support policies that are at odds with their underlying ideological preferences.

Experiment 3: Results

Figure 7 and Table 4 present the findings from experiment 3. We expected a positive impact of right-wing cues among right-wings and a negative impact among left-wings. Likewise, we expected

negative impacts of left-wing cues among right-wings and positive impacts among left-wings. The Danish case offers some evidence in support for these expectations. Left-wing politicians become more supportive of the policy proposal if it is supported by a left-wing think tank. However, the evidence is not consistently supporting the hypothesis, as the interaction term between ideology and the right-wing think tank condition in contrast to expectations is negative and statistically insignificant. The Flemish case provides no evidence in favor of the hypothesis whatsoever. It is noteworthy, however, that the left-wing think tank condition in itself has a positive impact on the support for the proposal. This may suggest that adding sources which are considered trustworthy across the political spectrum at large may have the potential to generally mold the preferences of politicians. The Italian case lends further support to this proposition since both source cue treatments exhibit positive main effects on the support for the proposal. As in the Flemish case, we do not find any evidence in support for hypothesis 3. In fact, the significant interaction between the left-wing source cue and ideology is positive, thus suggesting that right-wing politicians in contrast to expectations tend to respond more positively to left-wing sources than do left-wing politicians. Finally, the strong positive effect of right-wing source cues for right-wing politicians only in the US case is in accordance with hypothesis 3. However, the similarly strong positive effect of left-wing source cues for right-wing politicians is in outright opposition to our expectations.

Thus, in sum, the experiments produce only weak and inconsistent evidence in support of hypothesis 3 across the four countries. However, we also find that source cues appear to matter but in different ways than suggested by theory. The findings from in particular Italy and to some extent Flanders seem to suggest that source cues may have effects independent of the ideological viewpoints of recipients. One plausible explanation here is that these sources are generally considered reliable across the political spectrum. Likewise, one possible explanation of the stronger positive impact of left-wing sources among right-wing politicians in Italy and the USA may be that the addition of a source cue with an opposing ideological point of view in some cases lend additional credibility to the proposal for those supporting it. Thus, source cues appear to work in more complex ways than suggested by our theoretical framework.

Figure 7 about here

Table 4 about here

Discussion and real-world relevance

According to the classical study of politicians and bureaucrats in Western democracies by Aberbach, Rockman, and Putnam (1981), the bureaucracy is a central provider of relevant information to elected politicians. Our findings show that this picture prevails today almost 40 years later across four very different political systems, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, and the USA. This raises the questions of whether and in what ways the bureaucracy can exploit their central position to influence political decisions. We argue that they can potentially do so by strategically designing information to politicians, thereby pushing politicians' preferences in the directions desired by the bureaucracy. Experimental evidence indeed support this expectation. In all four countries examined, politicians' preferences are substantially susceptible to equivalence and issue framing. However, there are cross-country differences in the strength of such effects (with framing effects being more pronounced among Italian politicians) and in whether positive or negative framing creates the strongest deviations from the control condition.

In light of our findings, an obvious question is whether real-world bureaucrats do actually exploit the preference-shaping power we argue they have, or whether it is merely an unreleased potential? The main purpose of this paper has been to provide evidence of the underestimated power *potential* of the bureaucracy and thus, our data does not allow for a direct empirical investigation of the extent to which this power potential is realized. However, as was clear from this paper's introduction and literature review, it is far from outlandish to argue that bureaucrats do sometimes have policy preferences that differ from the preferences of their political principals. Furthermore, literature on performance management has shown how government agencies tend to use information strategically in their interactions with policymakers, in attempts to advocate for policies and defend and expand their budgets (Moynihan 2008). And while our data does not allow for a direct investigation of the extent to which real-world bureaucrats use equivalence framing, issue framing, and source cues in their interactions with politicians, we do have qualitative indications of our respondents being concerned with undue influence of bureaucrats. Thus, after the three experiments, the respondents were asked about when was the last time they had experienced that the bureaucracy had tried to influence political decisions and acting in a non-neutral manner. In all countries, more than 50 per cent of our respondents indicated that they had experienced such behavior from the bureaucracy within the last half year. This was moreover followed by an open-ended question in which the respondents were asked to describe what had happened. The respondents were asked to leave this question blank if they did not wish to

provide further information. Nevertheless, a substantial share of the respondents (more than one third of those for whom it is relevant) gave some kind of response to the open-ended question. The responses point in many different directions and are rather difficult to quantify. However, as shown in the display in Table A6 in the appendix, four – to some extent overlapping - themes are relevant in all countries. Importantly, several respondents provide examples or general statements about how the administration influence political decisions by framing, manipulating, withholding, or postponing important and relevant information to either some or all politicians. While these statements can be taken as evidence that the behaviors suggested by us are indeed occurring in reality, two reservations should be mentioned. First, the statements are based solely on how the politicians experienced the situation. However, some situations that are experienced as framing or manipulation may simply be a story of poor administrative work where not all relevant information has been included. Second, as mentioned by a Danish respondent, it is sometimes difficult to say whether a manipulation is made by the bureaucracy as such or whether the bureaucracy was ordered by the ruling coalition to present a case in a certain way. We believe that qualitative approaches will be promising when it comes to shed light on the extent to which bureaucrats are actually using the manipulative strategies in this article.

A second important question concerns whether the power potential described is limited to the bureaucracy or has relevance for other groups of actors as well. In this respect, it is important to note that the aim of our study is to examine the power potential of the bureaucracy; not to compare it with that of other groups. We by no means claim that the power potential uncovered here is limited to the bureaucracy. However, an important precondition for the power potential to unfold is a privileged position of the group under scrutiny. In that sense, the bureaucracy is particularly relevant to consider, bearing in mind their importance as information providers in all four countries examined and presumably in most modern democracies. We consider it likely, that other groups will have similar leverage over politicians if they are also able to assume privileged positions as trusted information providers. Such groups could be interest organizations, lobbyists, or party machines.

Conclusion

The question of the policy influence of the bureaucracy is at the heart of research on bureaucracy. Yet, little attention has been given to a potential main source of such influence: manipulation of

elected politicians' preferences through strategic presentation of information. The present study provides a framework for understanding how such manipulation could take place. Our analysis across four different systems reveals a considerable impact of equivalence and issue framing and to some extent also of source cues on politicians' preferences. Thus, our results may reshape scholarly thinking about the power of bureaucracy. For instance, classical literature argues that political principals can reduce agency problems by designing an appropriate incentive structure (Miller 1992; Connolly 2017) or by introducing proper monitoring and sanctioning systems (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984; McCubbins et al. 1987). However, such institutional solutions are doing little to prevent the bureaucracy from influencing political outcomes if they do so by shaping the very preferences of their political masters. In order to get at this question, we suggest a new research agenda on the influence of the bureaucracy.

Of primary importance to such an agenda would be to uncover to what extent and under what circumstances the power potential is unleashed in practice. While our qualitative evidence as well as the example outlined in the introduction provide support of the relevance of our perspective, future studies could use qualitative case studies to provide more solid evidence on the occurrence of this kind of behavior. Relatedly, future studies are well advised to consider moderating circumstances such as norms about appropriate bureaucratic behavior.

Another relevant step in such agenda would be to uncover under what conditions politicians are susceptible to manipulation from the bureaucracy. This may to some extent depend on both institutional, cultural, and situational variables. Factors, such as the general level of trust in the bureaucracy, the extent to which the bureaucracy has an explicit directional interest in the topic covered by information, whether the information has been demanded by the political assembly, the extent to which politicians are able to get second opinion advices, and whether politicians are part of the ruling coalition may all be important to the effect of information provided by the bureaucracy.

Finally, future research may also want to expand the perspective outlined to other groups than the bureaucracy. If the bureaucracy is able to mold the preferences of politicians, so should other groups who are important information providers to politicians be. Further research can clarify the extent to which political preferences are equally amenable to influence by actors outside the bureaucracy by experimentally manipulating the provider of the information.

Our study also provides a set of interesting findings relevant to the field of political psychology. In light of the prominent proposition about negativity bias in much of the literature, we

find it remarkable that positively framed information has a stronger influence than negatively framed information in two of the four countries in the equivalence framing study. Although we would be hesitant to compare findings directly across countries, this may suggest that the level of negativity bias to some extent is a culturally bound phenomenon. Thus, future research may want to develop comparable experiments across country borders to get at this question. Particularly promising seems to be experiments across, for instance, English-speaking countries to keep language constant. Likewise, it is interesting to note that source cues matter in a quite different way than expected, since such cues surprisingly sometimes matters for politicians who are ideologically unaligned with the sources and sometimes even more than for those whose ideological preferences are more in alignment with the ideological position of the sources. This finding calls for more research into how sources are understood and why adding a source matters under some conditions and not under others.

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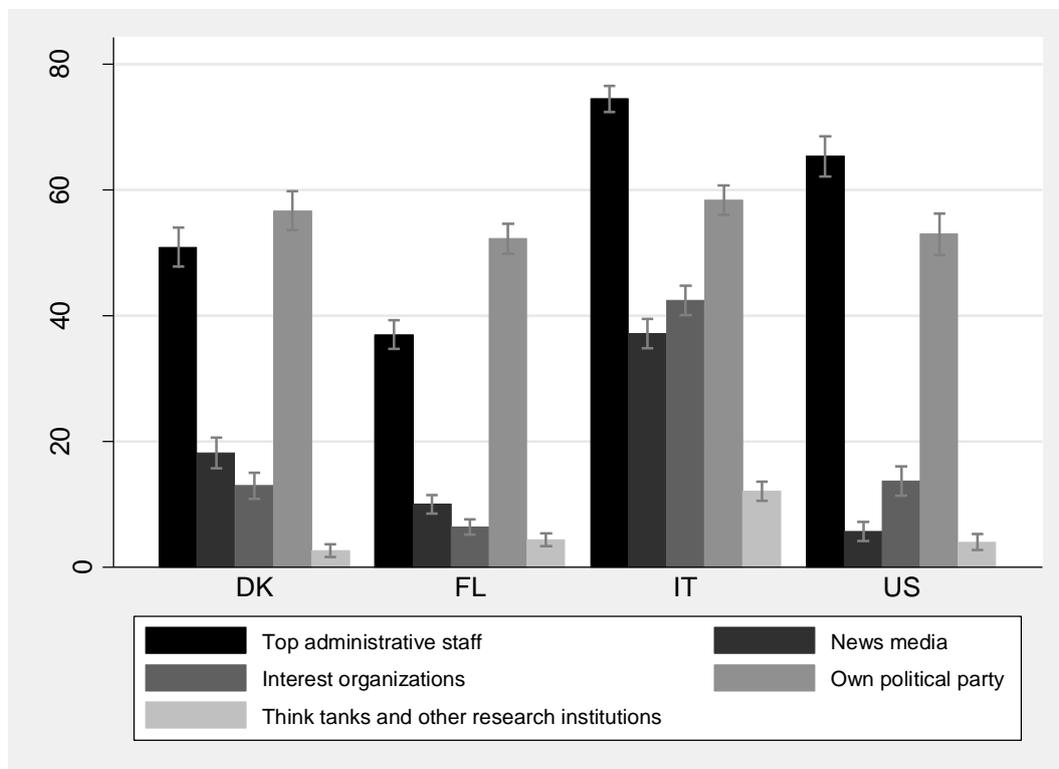
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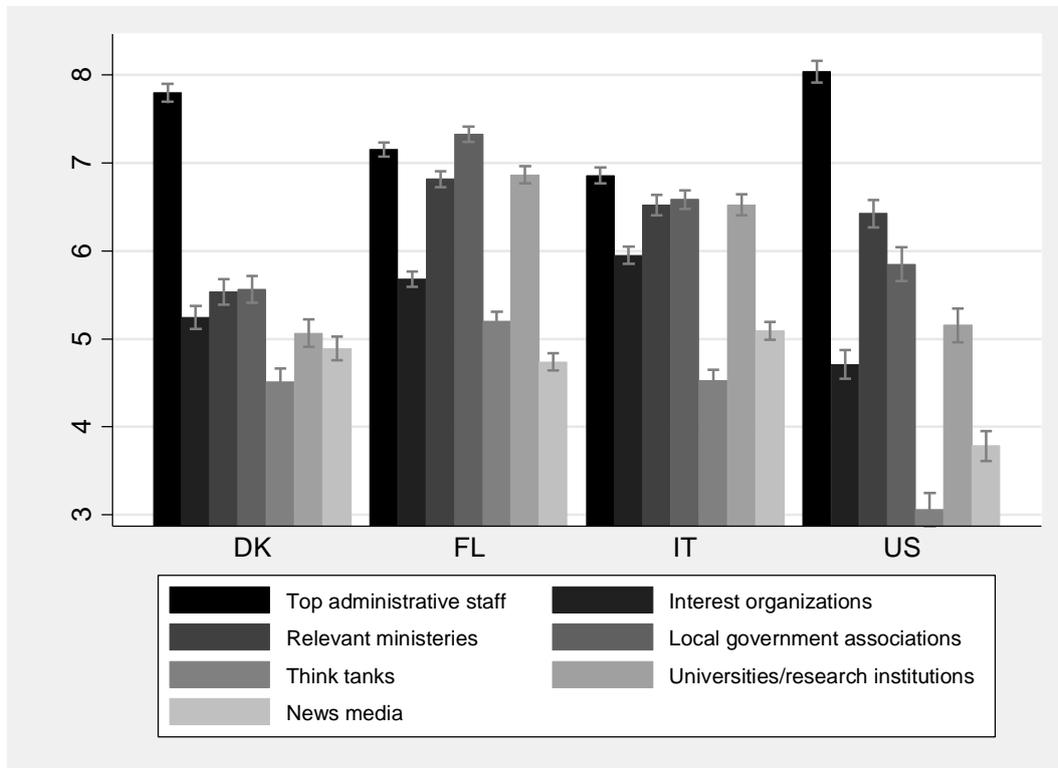
Tables and figures

Figure 1: “How often are you in contact with the following actors?”



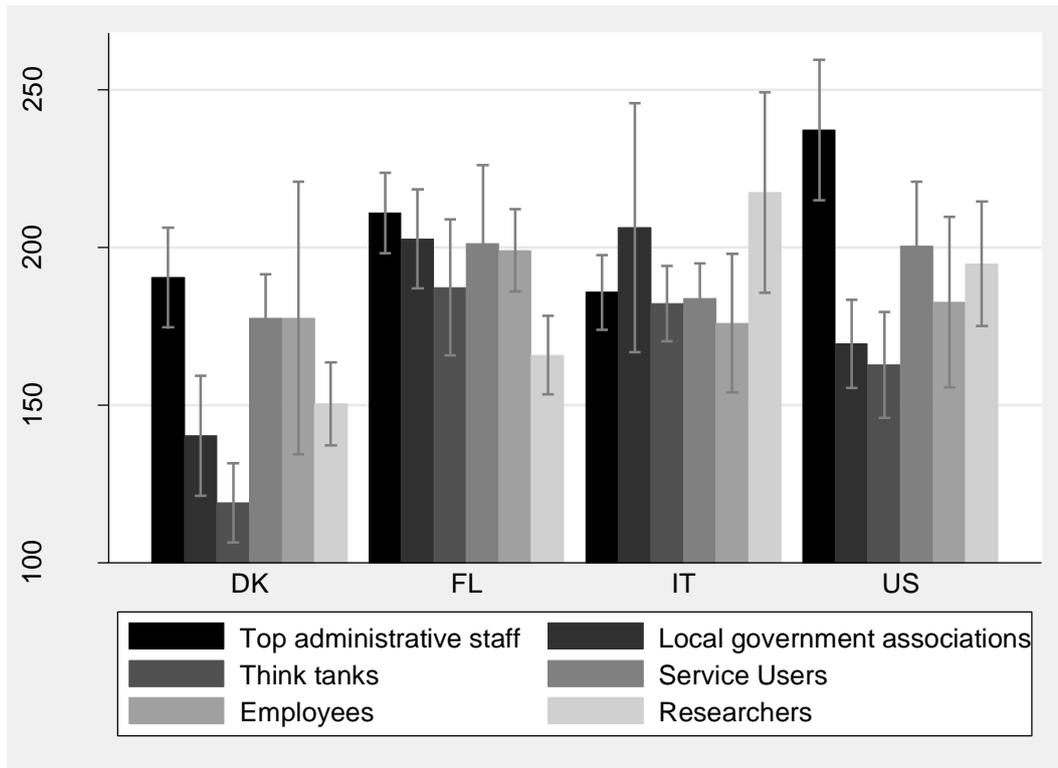
Notes: Response categories: daily; 2-4 times a week; once a week; 1-3 times a month; more rarely/never. The columns indicate the percent of respondents indicating that they have been in contact daily or 2-4 times a week.

Figure 2: “On a scale from 0-10, how much do you rely on the following types of information (assuming that they are available) when you make decisions?”



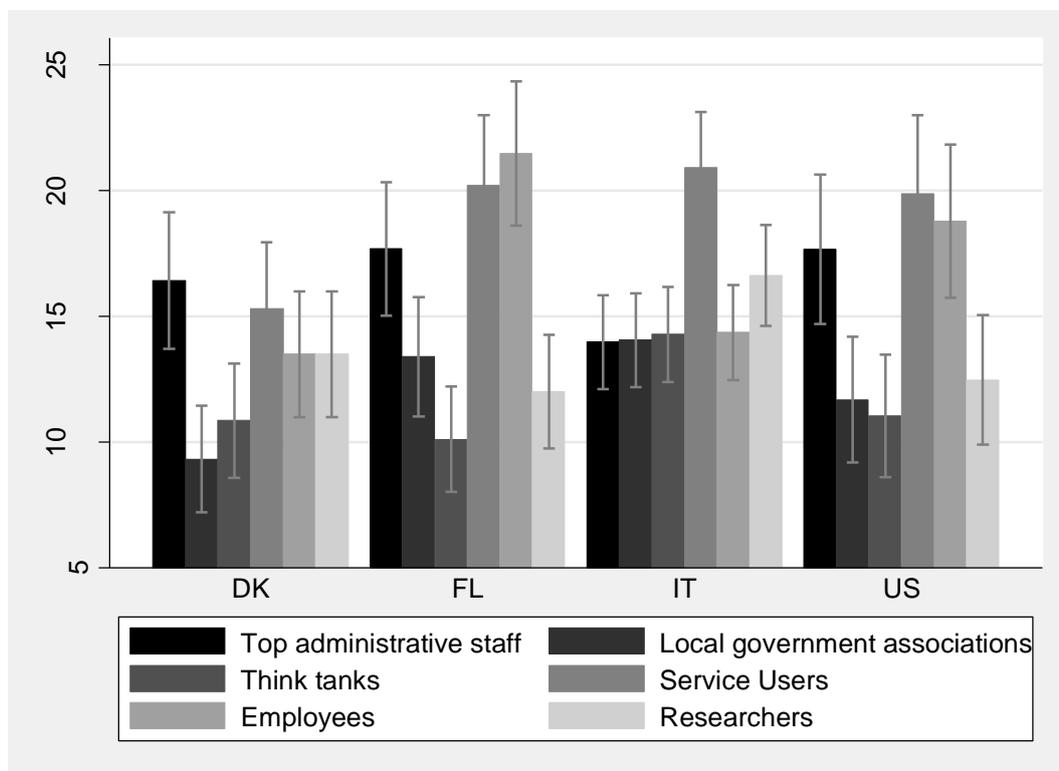
Notes: 0 = to a very low degree; 10 = to a very high degree. The columns indicate the average response for each source of information by country.

Figure 3: Decision board (mouse lab) evidence on information use



Note: The figure depicts the mean no. of milliseconds spent on each box in the decision board exercise divided by the no. of words in the box. 95 % confidence intervals. Using medians instead of means yields a similar picture.

Figure 4: Decision board (mouse lab) evidence on information use



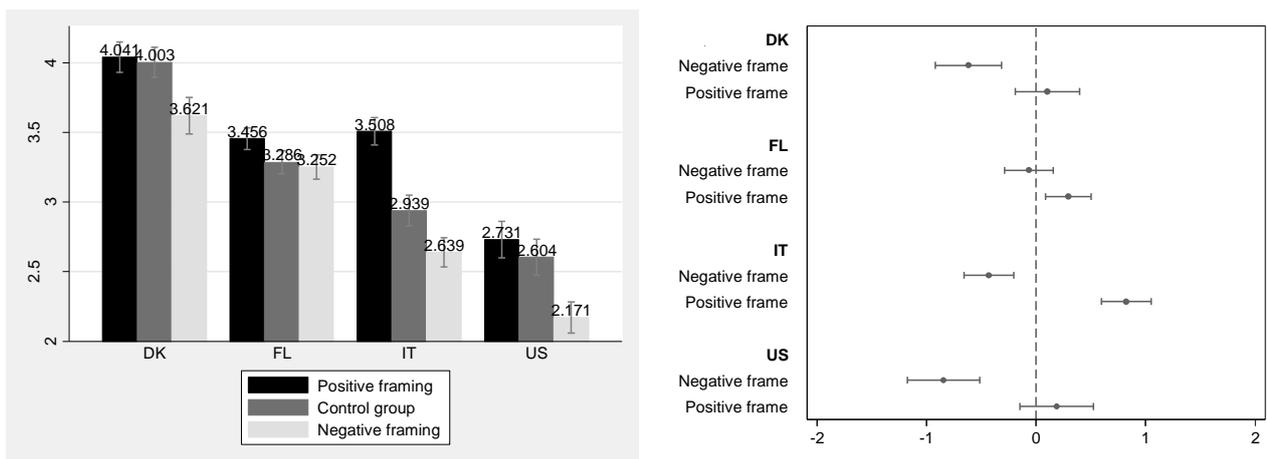
Note: The figure depicts the percentage of respondents for whom the box (the source) was opened as the first. 95 % confidence intervals.

Table 1: Experimental design of equivalence framing experiment (experiment 1)

Imagine that a party in your local council proposes to limit the number of weekly hours where the municipality’s libraries will be manned by a librarian while, as a compensation, giving citizens 24 hour access to self-service at the libraries. Municipal career officials inform that a neighboring municipality made a similar change one year ago [, and that no less than 60 % of the citizens have here been satisfied with the change/ , and that no less than 40 % of the citizens have here been dissatisfied with the change]. To what degree would you agree or disagree with this proposal?

Notes: Differences from the control group are highlighted here with bold letters (positive framing before the slash, negative framing after the slash). Response categories: Completely agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Completely disagree; Don’t know

Figure 5: Results from equivalence framing experiment (experiment 1).



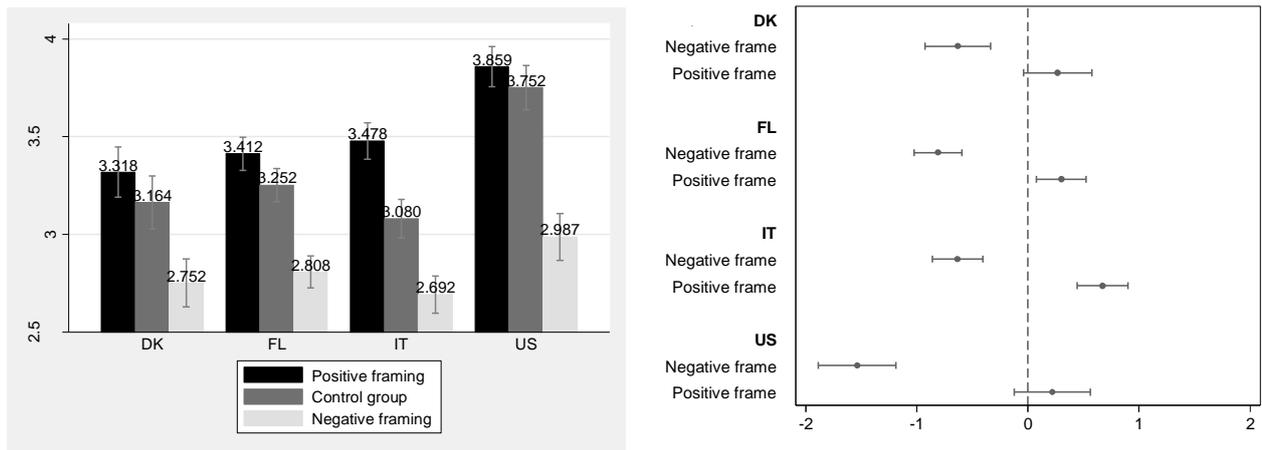
Notes: Leftmost panel: The dependent variable runs from 1-5. Rightmost panel: The effects of treatments are calculated as compared to the control group. 95% confidence intervals.

Table 2: Experimental design of issue framing experiment (experiment 2)

Imagine that your local council has asked municipal career officials to analyze possible ways of targeting the municipality’s public services in order to sharpen the municipality’s service profile compared to surrounding municipalities. The officials propose a political agreement [with the title “Dignified old age”]¹ offering users of the municipality’s elderly care an extra bath per week. [This initiative would accommodate the most urgent concern among the users of the municipality’s elderly care.]¹ It is estimated that such an agreement will lead to a yearly cost-increase of [SUM OF MONEY CORRESPONDING TO APPROXIMATELY USD 225] per user [and the civil servants point out that this should be financed via cut-backs on other services possibly leading to protests among users of these services]². To what degree would you agree or disagree with this proposal?

Notes: Differences from the control group are highlighted here with bold letters. ¹: Additions in these brackets is the positive frame. ²: Additions in this bracket is the negative frame. Response categories: Completely agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Completely disagree; Don’t know

Figure 6: Results from issue framing experiment (experiment 2).



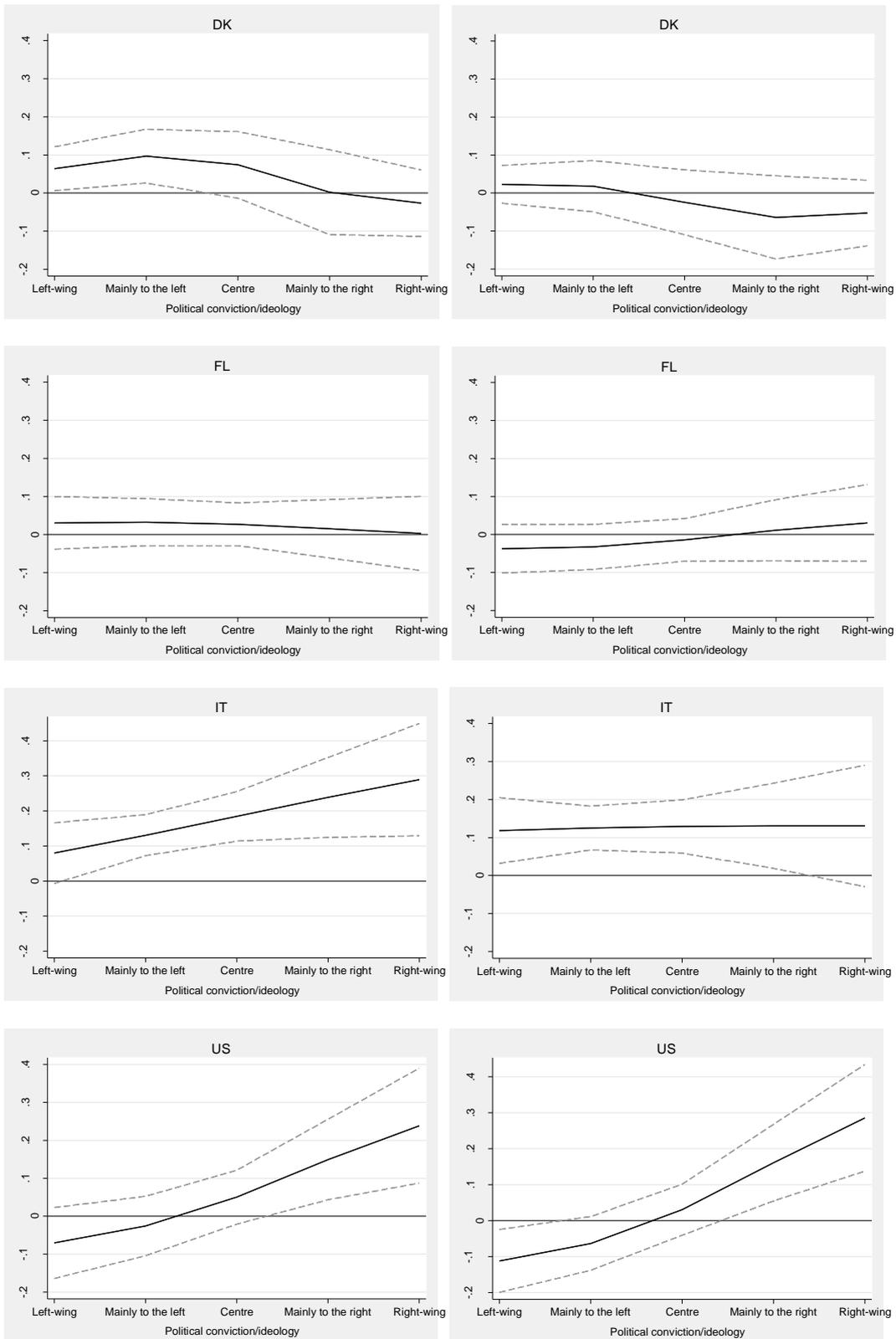
Notes: Leftmost panel: The dependent variable runs from 1-5. Rightmost panel: The effects of treatments are calculated as compared to the control group. 95% confidence intervals.

Table 3: Experimental design of source cue experiment (experiment 3)

Imagine that career officials in your municipality make a proposal that a larger share of the municipality's technical services should be contracted out. **[The officials explain that an analysis from [RIGHT-WING THINK TANK]¹/ [LEFT-WING THINK TANK]² has shown that contracting out of technical services has a positive effect on the economic situation of municipalities.** Would you agree with this proposal?

Notes: Differences from the control group are highlighted here with bold letters. Response categories: Completely agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Completely disagree; Don't know. ¹: The right-wing think tank was CEPOS in Denmark, denktank Liberales in Flanders, Fondazione Farefuturo in Italy, and the Heritage Foundation in the USA. ²: The left-wing think tank was Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd in Denmark, denktank Itinera in Flanders, Fondazione Italianieuropei in Italy, and Center for American Progress in the USA.

Figure 7: Results from source cue experiment (experiment 3).



Notes: Marginal effects of right-wing think tank source cue (rightmost panel) and left-wing think tank source cue (leftmost panel) on agreeing with the proposal. Calculations based on regressions reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Results from experiment 3

	DK	DK	FL	FL	IT	IT	US	US
Right-wing think tank	-0.020 (0.152)	0.408 (0.447)	-0.007 (0.109)	-0.374 (0.325)	0.505 (0.113)**	0.446 (0.320)	0.124 (0.167)	-1.489 (0.530)**
Left-wing think tank	0.136 (0.145)	1.071 (0.448)*	0.184 (0.107)+	0.257 (0.316)	0.648 (0.114)**	0.072 (0.325)	0.198 (0.161)	-0.890 (0.546)
Control group	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Ideology (degree of being right-wing)		1.306 (0.112)**		0.586 (0.072)**		0.010 (0.092)		0.064 (0.123)
Right-wing think tank X Ideology		-0.166 (0.140)		0.115 (0.102)		0.050 (0.132)		0.552 (0.166)**
Left-wing think tank X Ideology		-0.248 (0.145)+		-0.043 (0.097)		0.254 (0.132)+		0.376 (0.169)**
Pseudo R ²	0.00	0.15	0.00	0.05	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.03
N	885	835	1,672	1,561	1,531	1,203	719	660

** : p < 0.01; * : p < 0.05; + : p < 0.10; entries are ordered logit coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses. Ideology is measured on a self-reported five point scale (placed at the end of the survey) running from 1 (most left-wing) to 5 (most right-wing).

Appendix

1. Testing statistical significance of findings in experiment 1 and 2

Table A1: Ordered logit regression of experiment 1

	DK	FL	IT	US
Positive frame	0.104 (0.150)	0.294 (0.106)**	0.823 (0.116)**	0.188 (0.171)
Negative frame	-0.617 (0.154)**	-0.066 (0.113)	-0.432 (0.116)**	-0.844 (0.169)**
Neutral frame	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
N	876	1683	1538	738

** : $p < 0.01$; * : $p < 0.05$; + : $p < 0.10$; entries are ordered logit coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table A2: Ordered logit regression of experiment 2

	DK	FL	IT	US
Positive frame	0.266 (0.157)+	0.300 (0.114)**	0.672 (0.117)**	0.219 (0.175)
Negative frame	-0.632 (0.150)**	-0.810 (0.110)**	-0.634 (0.116)**	-1.539 (0.178)**
Neutral frame	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
N	856	1626	1492	728

** : $p < 0.01$; * : $p < 0.05$; + : $p < 0.10$; entries are ordered logit coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses.

2. US versions of experimental questions

Table A3: US version of equivalence framing experiment (experiment 1)

Imagine that a member of your city council proposes to limit the number of weekly hours during which the municipal police stations are open for walk-ins and to compensate by increasing the hours open for scheduled appointments. Top administrative staff inform you that a neighboring municipality made a similar change one year ago [, **and that 60 % of their citizens have been satisfied with the change/ , and that 40 % of their citizens have been dissatisfied with the change**]. To what degree would you agree or disagree with this proposal?

Notes: Differences from the control group are highlighted here with bold letters (positive framing before the slash, negative framing after the slash). Response categories: Completely agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Completely disagree; Don't know

Table A4: US version of issue framing experiment (experiment 2)

Imagine that your city council has asked top administrative staff to analyze possible ways to improve your municipality's services relative to neighboring municipalities. The proposal [**has the title "Attracting new citizens" and**]¹ is to renew and renovate the public parks. [**This initiative will improve access to green areas for current citizens and make the municipality more attractive to newcomers.**]¹ They estimate that such a proposal will lead to a 5 % increase in total annual spending on public parks [**and they point out that this should be financed via cut backs elsewhere in the budget. This may lead to protests from users of other services**].² To what degree would you agree or disagree with this proposal?

Notes: Differences from the control group are highlighted here with bold letters. ¹: Additions in these brackets is the positive frame. ²: Additions in this bracket is the negative frame. Response categories: Completely agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Completely disagree; Don't know

Table A5: US version of source cue experiment (experiment 3)

Imagine that top administrative staff in your municipality propose that the municipality should outsource more of its technical services (such as for example water, sewer, and road maintenance). [**They explain that an analysis from [the Heritage Foundation/ Center for American Progress] has shown that outsourcing technical services has a positive effect on the economic situation of municipalities.** Would you agree with this proposal?

Notes: Differences from the control group are highlighted here with bold letters. Response categories: Completely agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Completely disagree; Don't know

3. Display of qualitative statements

Table A6. Display containing qualitative statements

	Denmark	Flanders	Italy	USA
Framing and manipulation of information	<p>”The administration gave a wrong explanation of calculations which meant that we [the politicians] were misled to believe that a huge increase in user fees in day cares was in accordance with existing rules.</p> <p>Later on, it was revealed that a different calculation method was used than usual which was the very cause of the increase in fees”</p> <p>“The administration was asked to list advantages and disadvantages for introducing independent [selvejende] day care institutions. They couldn’t really see any advantages - only disadvantages for the municipality. This is because they do not take the perspective of citizens but focus on power and administrative advantages”</p> <p>“Calculations can be made to fit a certain agenda. Four years ago, a citizen service center was closed due to high expenditures. Now it has been reintroduced by the administration based on the argument that it is cost neutral”.</p> <p>“Most times, it is an attempt to shrink the room for political decisions. (...) For</p>	<p>“Maximizing the negatives of a given policy proposal”</p> <p>“Mentioning issues of a proposal which are not really issues”</p> <p>“Misuse of an advisory committee for a cultural centre to steer the decision of the college”</p> <p>“Blowing up the budgets to ensure that politicians think the projects are too expensive”</p> <p>“Presenting the financial situation more poorly than it actually is”</p> <p>“Some numbers were presented as being more positive than they were in reality”</p>	<p>“One official approved a convention, even if politicians highlighted that it had negative issues. The official presented just the positive perspectives of the convention”</p> <p>“Sometimes officials obstruct consultancy proposals or they follow the guidelines and not the ones from other assessors”</p> <p>“Officials tend to influence political decisions by reporting pseudo-technical facts”</p> <p>“Sometimes the administration highlight expenditures rather than other aspects”</p>	<p>“Data presented was skewed to favor a predetermined result, and was based on unreasonable, impractical assumptions”</p> <p>“Offering crime data that seemed to be cherry picked to justify an increase in police funding, when FBI crime data contradicted the assertion.”</p>

	instance, they [the administration] do so by not informing the political committee and hence they deprive the committee from taking political action (...) another way to shrink the room for political decisions is to refer to laws and technical details”			
Withholding relevant information and/or including irrelevant information	<p>“It sometimes happens that we are presented with material in support of a given agenda and not material in opposition to this agenda. It is difficult to assess whether this is intentional or the material has just been forgotten.”</p> <p>”Changing the suggestion of agenda point for the city council from public personnel (decentral administration). This entails withholding information from people with potentially smportant knowledge of the substance and is completely legal”</p>	<p>”Not providng a full dossier of an environmental issue even though we [the politicians] knew that much more information was available”</p> <p>“During a submission of a tender concerning infrastructure, an outdated dossier was submitted. Nonetheless the dossier was brought forward to the city council and approved to start the tender”</p>	<p>“Just some information was communicated, in order to direct one particular proposal. Discussion was limited because of the difference in technical knowledge between officials and politicians”</p> <p>“Officials claim that some technical and procedural obstacles hinder any attempt to implement a better service to citizens”</p>	<p>“Because we were not given the full impact, we magpie a decision that was recommended which we would probably not have made if we had full disclosure.”</p> <p>“City Administrator withheld pertinent documents to influence council to enter a conservation easement”</p> <p>“Former City Manager in 2005 was withholding significant information from the Council and the general public on important issues relating to a major city expenditure. We were considering in an election whether to issue \$36M in</p>

				<p>debt to build an events center, and the City Manager received a letter from the project architect telling him that the budget was too small and the center could not be built without additional funding. He never revealed that, and the voters approved the proposition. Several months after the election, the truth came out and the Council had to kill the project.”</p> <p>“In February the City Council gave clear direction that no future public housing contracts were to be brought forth without meeting certain conditions. Those conditions were not met, were completely ignored by staff and another public housing contract was brought to Council with no</p>
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				mention of the failures to follow direction. This was yesterday.”
Postponing/delaying information	<p>”One example: My group made a proposal that if 100 vote eligible citizens support a given proposal they can require that the city council discuss and vote about the proposal. It did not enter the agenda on the city council meeting in October due to vacation among the administrative personnel (it should be noted that the proposal was completely ready for the city council to discuss and was delivered 14 days in advance of the city council meeting). Now, the administration has looked at the proposal and they in their comments warn that it is going to cost a lot of administrative hours if our proposal is accepted...”</p>	<p>”Withholding important information on a construction dossier that needed approval as soon as possible”</p> <p>“Provision of information of a steering group very late and then demanding a fast political decision”</p>	<p>”In our complex society the public official does not need to ’play against’ but just ’not to play’ or ’play with delay’ in order to create damage”</p> <p>“Officials hide some information to politicians and they try to take certain decisions without consulting with the politicians. They basically try to lead the municipality according to their personal political opinions. When officials are in contrast with politicians’ decisions, they bring elements to the discussion in order to divert the political choices”</p> <p>“Officials give us data and acts at the same time they need to be approved. We can only say "yes", even if we have no time nor elements for a discussion.”</p>	<p>“Mayor (who is CEO) withheld School Impact Fee increase withheld from agenda until after a favored developer could "grandfather" existing lower fees.”</p>
Partial administration in support of the political majority	<p>“The administration withholds relevant information for the minority in the city council”</p>	<p>“Trying to avoid that necessary and relevant information is provided to the opposition”</p> <p>“We are an opposition party. It is not always clear to me whether the manager withholds information by himself or the majority wants him to withhold information”</p>	<p>“We discussed an issue in the local council. 10 days later, we found that the councilmen of the minority had been kept in ignorance of the existence of a letter that could have influenced the political decision”</p>	<p>“A senior official actively promoted her social agenda and also left policy initiatives of the republican elected officials off the agenda as much as she could. She left over a year ago and now we see none of that. Her biggest</p>

				offense was hiding a mandated low income housing project off until the last minute and then informed officials we had to act 3 days before a deadline all the while had her project for the housing in a wealthy neighborhood ready to go and presented it as the only option given the time constraints.”
# of responses to qualitative question/ Number of respondents who have experienced that the administration sought political influence within the last half year/ number of respondents total	161/516/875	346/891/1,686	293/807/1,477	192/265/759

Notes: The table contains examples of four themes which in the qualitative statements emerged as important across all four countries. The table is neither an exhaustive list of all themes raised about how the bureaucracy influences political decisions, nor is it containing all statements in support of the four themes. Priority has been given to presenting themes relevant to the topic of the paper (that is, with a focus on how information is provided), to themes that emerged as important in all countries, and to illustrative statements.