

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Critical Examination of the Use of Patronage in U.S. Public Administration

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This dissertation is an examination of the concept of patronage and how it has been used and understood in American Public Administration. The view of patronage is a negative one, widely associated with images of corruption, nepotism, favoritism and a lack of meritorious stands. This view stands in contrast to the way that patronage is viewed in other academic disciplines such as political science, anthropology and sociology. The current view of patronage as seen in Public Administration represents a biased view of patronage, one that has produced a negative valence towards the concept. This biased view influences American public policy, and precludes the formal adoption of administrative rules that would seek to increase the use of patronage.

Three distinct questions are addressed through this research. (1) Is there a biased view and understanding of patronage?; (2) How is patronage used and understood in American Public Administration?; (3) Why did this bias view of patronage emerge?

To respond the first question, two case studies were analyzed. The first case study reveals how the negative valence against patronage is used to create moral panics, with patronage being used as a “folk devil” by the mass media and political actors amongst the general public. The second case examines how patronage is used by political actors to mobilize political bias. The negative view of patronage is used as a tool in agenda setting by reshaping or altering the focus of the debate. Lastly, a content analysis of

contemporary newspaper coverage is used to explore the pervasiveness of the negative view of patronage.

The second question explores the intellectual history of patronage in American Public Administration. To do this a typology has been developed exploring the ways in which patronage has been used and understood. Developed through the use of primary and secondary sources, the typology reveals that there are four separate forms of patronage: Strategic, Democratic, Organizational and Reform. This way of viewing patronage is different than the traditional way in which Public Administration has understood the concept, which relied more on specific eras or time periods.

The final question focuses on the history of the idea of patronage. This question explores the Progressive Roots of the bias against patronage. The bias against patronage emerges from the ideas of reformers who saw the use of patronage as “evil.” This belief later became institutionalized, appearing in the research of many writers during Progressive Era. The theory of “New Institutionalism” is used to explore how this “evil” view of patronage was used to contribute to the current negative valence of the concept.

The findings presented here contribute to an improved understanding of the intellectual development of the field of Public Administration. The research also provides a means for considering alternative uses for patronage such as promoting democratization in administrative agencies, enhancing social mobility and increasing efficiency.