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Emerald**Handbooks**

The Emerald Handbook
of Public Administration in
Latin America

Edited by
B. Guy Peters
Carlos Alba Tercedor
Conrado Ramos

The Emerald Handbook of Public Administration in Latin America

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The Emerald Handbook of Public Administration in Latin America

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Preface

This *Handbook* is the culmination of many – too many – years of work attempting to bring together a collection of studies of public administration in Latin America. The project began approximately a decade ago and was motivated by the belief that there was inadequate knowledge about public administration in Latin America. There was a great deal of legalistic discussion on the ways administration *should* function, but much less about how public administration in these countries functioned in practice. A number of scholars had been publishing interesting material, but these needed to be brought together and made more accessible to a wider public, especially for an English-speaking readership. The project was started by Carlos Alba and Guy Peters; when additional energy was needed to complete the project, Conrado Ramos joined the editorial team.

The concept behind this *Handbook* was to have some chapters that covered the administrative systems of individual countries, as well as some that covered important topics in public administration across the region. We could not cover all Latin American countries with individual chapters, so attempted to include chapters that provided information about the largest systems, as well as those with distinctive features. Those choices were, of course, also constrained by the availability of authors interested in participating in the project. Likewise, the comparative chapters were intended to cover several important aspects of public administration in these countries; however, there is a big emphasis on issues of accountability, reflecting the history of corruption and clientelism in Latin American administrations.

In addition to those of us with chapters included in this volume, several other people and organizations have helped make this project a reality. We received funding from the Ministry of Public Administration in Spain for an initial conference. The United Nations Development Fund supplied additional resources for cooperation among authors. In addition, the Latin American Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh provided additional resources.

This book has benefited greatly from the excellent editing and management by Morgan Fairless at the London School of Economics. We would also like to acknowledge the patience and professionalism displayed by Hazel Goodes and her colleagues at Emerald Publishing. They have endured endless delays in the completion of the manuscript with grace and have continued to support the

project regardless. They, like us, are thankful that the project is now complete. We hope the readers of this *Handbook* are equally as happy.

B. Guy Peters
Conrado Ramos
Carlos Alba

Introduction: Focus and Book Outline

Conrado Ramos and B. Guy Peters

Public administration is a crucial element of governance. The legislature, presidents and other political executives, courts, and even social actors such as unions may very well be involved in governance, but the day-to-day work of delivering public policies to citizens and advising political leaders is done by the public administration. Despite their central role in governance, there is still inadequate knowledge about these institutions in Latin America.

Although there have been individual studies over different aspects of public administration in Latin American countries, a comprehensive analysis aimed at understanding historical trends, similarities, and differences among countries is not available. From an academic perspective, this deficiency in the literature has also undermined the capacity to place Latin American cases within the broader comparative perspective. Having a comparative perspective will of course facilitate learning across systems and further understanding of public administration reform worldwide.

From a more practical view, there has been an extensive discussion both in professional and political circles regarding the effect of public management (or mismanagement) in social and economic development. Public bureaucracy is essential in all aspects of governance but is perhaps especially important for promoting development. The cases and the dimensions treated in this book will hopefully help to contribute to that discussion.

After the mid-2000 commodities boom, Latin America experienced economic growth for more than a decade, which has brought extraordinary socioeconomic gains ([OECD/CAF/ECLAC, 2018](#)). In this context, the region has experienced a pandemic of administrative reforms designed to answer growing demands for better public services and effective public institutions. These reforms took place in several countries and included measures such as changing fiscal policies, budgeting practices and processes, improving policy evaluation mechanisms, efforts at coordinating from the center, human resource management, digital agenda, and open government strategies as well as anticorruption institutions and practices (see *Panorama de las Administraciones Públicas en América Latina y el Caribe*, [OCDE, 2016](#)).

Even after this economic growth, Latin America is still the most unequal region in the world. Some of these state failures in income distribution have been

blamed on a public administration that has been characterized by some scholars as having certain traditional features. Three of these are especially relevant: *formalism and legalism, turbulence, and politicization* (Nef, 2003).

- *Formalism and legalism*: Public administration in Latin America has been built on a strong legalistic foundation. The bulk of scholarship on these administrative systems has been legalistic. Some degree of formalism has been associated with this legalism: if the law has been passed, then reality will soon follow. This formalistic assumption pattern may result in law after law being passed with little actual change occurring. This focus on legalism has tended to reduce attention on the actual practice of public administration and any of its failures in implementation.
- *Turbulence*: Public administration in Latin America is practiced in a context of turbulence and volatility. Some of the turbulence is a function of political and economic change, and some other is a result of changing fashions in public administration. The turbulence, combined with the formalism above, produces numerous managerial changes with little actual implementation of reforms. While turbulence does create serious political and managerial problems, it also opens possibilities for change. A new wave of populism is also opening a round of turbulence in politics and government in the region.
- *Politicization*: Civil service systems in Latin America are substantially more politicized than those in Western European countries and, in this way, are more similar to the “in and out” system for the upper level of the federal administration in the United States. We will explore the nature of this political involvement and its implications for governance. While there may be some benefits from politicization, these must be weighed against the threats that excessive political involvement poses to professionalism in the public sector.

These traditional features make up the analytical and research framework for this Handbook; we will study them in more detail through the following chapters. We expect them to shape the performance and achievements of the aforementioned administrative reforms for meeting citizen expectations and promoting sustainable development.

Chapter 1 will constitute a substantive introduction to the *Handbook*; in this chapter Conrado Ramos and Alejandro Milanesi provide a brief historical description of different public management models in Latin America. They claim that the colonial legacy, with a ritualistic adaptation of classic bureaucratic rules, in conjunction with patrimonialism and patronage, has always obstructed the continuing efforts to modernize the public sector management. That includes the latest New Public Management (NPM) type reforms, promoted by international organizations, or some variants associated with agendas of “new public service.”

The remaining chapters of the *Handbook* are divided in two broad groups: country cases and cross-cutting issues. Through the country cases we want to map existing structures of national public administrations and civil service patterns, using quantitative and qualitative information. The intention, however, is for the authors not to rely on legalistic texts but rather to focus on assessing the performance of governments and their personnel systems. We are much more interested in how public administration actually functions than legal statements about administration.

With this purpose in each country chapter, we analyze the following:

- (1) Basic structural features: Core government organization, degree of fragmentation due to decentralized services and public enterprises, and other organizations at the fringes of government.
- (2) Public sector personnel: Percentage of public employees in total employment, nature of the public employment (types of public employment), recruiting policies, compensation policies, legal protections against dismissal, etc.
- (3) Politics of bureaucracy: Links with political parties or individual politicians through politicization measures and patronage practices (as a special subtype of politicization). We also study the interaction between the bureaucracy and actors within the political system and civil society. Thus, we try to capture the political environment of administrative decision-making, whether formal or informal, internal or external.
- (4) Accountability: The institutional mechanisms (legal and political) that public administrations have developed to render accounts of their actions to independent organizations. We also consider the concept of responsibility, particularly how bureaucracies have to follow their own internal compasses based on ethical standards and their training as part of the public service.
- (5) Reform and change: Initiatives that governments have been promoting in order to improve their efficiency and effectiveness: which ideas have motivated reforms during the last decades; the style of the reforms (incremental or radical); the capacity to implement them; and their sustainability.

Taken together these characteristics of public administration can provide an understanding of how it functions and how it relates to the remainder of the political system. While each country chapter will cover all these points, the authors have had the latitude to demonstrate the important factors that distinguish each country from the rest.

The Country Chapters

In Chapter 2, Mercedes Iacoviello and Diego Pando discuss the vicissitudes of the administrative system in Argentina under the complexities of its federalism and the enduring consequences of the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s that hollowed out the capacities of the central government. They argue that the administrative efforts to reverse this situation, in the context of a fragmented and denationalized party system, have faced difficulties in generating the necessary political

coordination for producing substantial changes. In addition, the weakness in institutions of horizontal accountability contributes to the persistence of strong patronage practices and clientelistic networks.

Next, Francisco Gaetani, Roberto Pires, and Pablo Pedro Palotti examine the case of Brazil (Chapter 3). They suggest that although patronage and clientelism are still very present at the subnational level, the administrative reforms of the last two decades have substantially strengthened the Federal administrative machine. The authors consider Brazil as a model for many core government reforms, but they argue that a strong disparity between central agencies, core Ministries, and the rest of the administration still persists. They also claim that many reforms face corporatist capture, affecting their implementation capacity.

The case of Colombia is analyzed by María Victoria Whittingham (Chapter 4). The author suggests that in order to understand the achievements and restrictions of the administrative reforms of the last three decades, they should be considered within the context of an economic boom, the pacification process, and the great expectations—and later disappointment—of the constitutional reform of 1991. Since 1991, every President has made efforts to modernize the public sector in line with NPM principles with mixed results. The Colombian state has adopted legal innovations and enhanced the capacity of many public institutions, but corruption ranks as the first political problem and the country is below the regional average in its citizens' trust in democratic institutions.

In Chapter 5, Susan Alberts discusses the case of public sector reforms in Chile since the democratization process during the 90s, led by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry Secretary General of the Presidency. Reforms were inspired by the NPM paradigm, but with a strong emphasis in measuring and evaluating the performance of public programs and personnel. According to the author, the country's institutional strength and consolidated democratic system collaborated to the successful implementation of the public sector modernization efforts.

In Chapter 6, Victoria Palaviccini highlights that Costa Rica is at a transitional stage between the paradigms of the traditional public administration and NPM. Reforms in the country have been incremental and have faced barriers presented by many veto points, slowing the transition to a culture of monitoring and the modernization of human resource management.

María del Carmen Pardo examines the administrative reforms in Mexico during the twenty-first century (Chapter 7), conducted during a period of strong democratization of the political system and progressive economic liberalization. The federal public administration, under the influence of the NPM paradigm, has adopted a new practice, albeit in a fragmented and conflicted way, without a clear political consensus. According to the author, this is the consequence of reform being more a reaction to the recurrent fiscal crisis than the product of a long-term strategic plan for change in governance.

In Chapter 8, Christian Schuster attempts to explain why in spite of the recent waves of administrative reform, Paraguay is still a case of "neopatrimonialist" State. Reforms are not comprehensive, but instead have occurred in enclaves generally related to the Finance Ministry, which have been able to produce changes in the pattern of administration.

Finally, in Chapter 9, Conrado Ramos, Diego Gonnet, and Alejandro Milanesi examine administrative reforms in Uruguay, identifying the coexistence of the managerial and neo-Weberian paradigms. Although the country ranks ahead of the region in almost every good governance indicator, they point out that the public sector in Uruguay faces some obstacles to improve performance management and the professionalization of its human resource management. They state that the consociational and pluralist traits of Uruguayan democracy, which gives the country an inclusive development path, are at the same time an obstacle in the road of modernization.

Cross-cutting Issues

For the cross-cutting chapters, we selected a set of issues based on the importance that governments and international organizations have attached to them as pillars for improving good governance. These chapters also cover the principal topics that scholars and practitioners of public administration tend to emphasize when comparing administrative systems.

In Chapter 10, José Luis Méndez reflects on the difficulties that Latin America experienced to build what he calls a “modern professional civil service” (MPCS), balancing classic Weberian principles with some NPM attributes. He considers that albeit most countries are far from reaching such a model, the region shows some diversity. A first group of countries are characterized by the predominance of a spoils system and discretionary human resource management, while a second group has made important efforts to approach an MPCS, especially at the middle level of the bureaucracy and in central government organizations.

Next, Martín Alessandro and Mariano Lafuente address the study of the Center of Government (CoG) in Latin America, both from functional and structural approaches (Chapter 11). Under the former they examine the technical and political functions of CoG, and under the latter they identify certain units that are always present. The authors argue that country-specific political considerations and dynamics, including the relationships between the President and their Ministers, probably affect the incentives that Presidents face to empower the institutions of the center. In general terms, Alessandro and Lafuente find that Latin American countries show a weak performance in these functions, which could be reversed through recent innovative experiences.

In Chapter 12, in an effort to bridge the gap between administrative and political science studies, Juan Negri explores the relationship between bureaucratic performance and enduring conditions of Statehood in Latin America. The author uses historical institutionalist research to demonstrate how historical decisions shaped patterns of clientelistic utilization of the State in some countries but not others. Central to his argument is the clientelistic party type or state-centered mass incorporation to political life, the latter allowing for professionalization of state structures, including a professional bureaucracy.

In Chapter 13, Ignacio Criado examines the complexities of Digital Governance in LA from an integrated approach, showing data on the Information Society in Latin America, the diffusion of ICT and Internet in the region, and finally on Digital

Government efforts. He first identifies the positive side of the story: high rates of penetration of Internet (above the World mean), societies familiar with social media, with mobile phones as digital access gates to the Internet. On the negative side he mentions that broadband connections experience low rates of penetration and that the region is highly uneven in Internet literacy. Finally, he describes key developments in e-government, arguing that they are a consequence of a technocratic NPM style rather than a citizen-oriented or post-NPM approach.

Next, in Chapter 14, Cristina Zurbriggen discusses the transformation of governance in Latin America. In particular, she is concerned with the shift away from state-centric governance toward more collaborative formats involving actors from the private sector. These reforms began with extensive privatization, much of which proved to be dysfunctional. A second stage of reform involved more nonprofits and community organizations and has been more successful, albeit with some problems. She examines these changes in governance in both the provision of water and anti-poverty programs in several countries.

In Chapter 15, Manuel Villoria focuses on corruption and good governance. He points out that in spite of formal concerns for promoting integrity and many attempts to combat corruption in several countries, reforms have not produced the desired results because of poor implementation and also because, when success stories do appear, they are connected to setbacks in other areas. Villoria suggests that it's important to be conscious of the political and societal traps resulting from the existence of strong clientelistic networks.

Sonia Ospina, Nuria Cunill-Grau, and Claudia Maldonado attempt to link results-oriented national Public Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PPME) systems, which are slowly emerging in most Latin American countries, to public accountability and governmental performance (Chapter 16). They argue that despite remarkable advances to consolidate a results-oriented management culture, there still are shortcomings in public accountability. Namely, these shortcomings amount to fragmented information, low coherence in different performance management systems, and the absence of citizens and Parliament in the conversation. According to the authors, Open Government Partnership and the Global Parliamentarian Forum for Evaluation and National Evaluation Capacities could be adequate instruments to move forward on this issue.

The final chapter by Ramos and Peters returns to some of the themes raised here and in the following individual chapters but is more concerned with future developments in public administration. While under strong legacies of the past, public administration in Latin America has also responded to global trends in administration and continues to do so. In addition, the changing political climate in Latin America, and in other parts of the world, presents new challenges. This chapter will discuss those challenges and the future of public bureaucracy in the region.

In summary, this is a comprehensive examination of public administration in Latin America. It covers a wide range of Latin American public administrations as well as key issues for their governance. There doubtless will be other topics that some readers might like to have covered; regardless, this volume should give scholars and practitioners alike a thorough and timely account of how governments function in these many diverse—yet similar—countries.

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