

# A Critique of Public Administration and Policy Scholarship in Arab Countries

## The Benefits of Comparative Analysis and an Agenda for Future Research

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Public Policy

Public Administration

Arab World

Comparative Public Administration

The comparative approach to the study of public administration and policy has started to attract the attention of scholars and academic institutions during the past few decades.<sup>(2)</sup> Fred Riggs has argued that public administration scholars attempting to generate reliable administrative knowledge have to apply a comparative perspective. The forces of globalization should compel scholars to develop theories of public administration with an “ecological understanding” of government operations.<sup>(3)</sup> There is a growing consensus that “American exceptionalism” should not restrict the geographical focus and theoretical development of public administration and policy research.<sup>(4)</sup>

Future generations of public administrators and policy scholars and analysts thus need training that helps them address increasingly complex problems in scholarly analysis and development management, and draw lessons in implementation from different countries with an appreciation for culture and context.<sup>(5)</sup> As Zemrani, Trent, and Abutabanjeh note in this issue, modern organizations must work effectively with diverse populations and adapt to diverse needs. They need to design culturally competent policies

and practices that draw on global experiences with a sensitivity to variations in contexts and local needs.

International societies of public administration and policy, such as the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) and the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA), have shown attention to comparative studies in public administration and policy. ASPA has established the Section on International and Comparative Administration (SICA), Section on Effective and Sound Administration in the Middle East (SESAME), Section on African Public Administration (SAPA), and many other regional sections, reflecting an awareness of the importance of dialogue among scholars and practitioners who work in different regions to sharing and comparing experiences.

Despite this attention, comparative public administration and policy still has a long way to go in order to establish its presence as a core subject in public administration and policy graduate programs.<sup>(6)</sup> Out of 296 NASPAA member schools reviewed by Manoharan and colleagues, only 34% offered at least one course in global/comparative public

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2 Jamil E. Jreisat. 2005. Comparative Public Administration Is Back in, Prudently. *Public Administration Review* 65(2): 231-242.

3 Fred W. Riggs. 1991. Public Administration: A Comparativist Framework. Guest Editorial: Public Administration: A Comparativist Framework. *Public Administration Review* 51(6): 473-477.

4 Ferrel Heady. 2001. *Public Administration: A Comparative Perspective*. New York: Marcel Decker Inc.

5 Aroon Manoharan, Wendel Mirbel, Tony J Carrizales. 2018. Global Comparative Public Administration: Are graduate programs responding to the call? *Teaching Public Administration* 36(1):34-49.

6 Jamil E. Jreisat. 2005. Comparative Public Administration Is Back in, Prudently. *Public Administration Review* 65(2): 231-242.

administration, and less than 45% of these schools listed the comparative course as a core requirement.<sup>(7)</sup>

Chinese public administration occupies center stage among the cases addressed in these courses. Other cases include Ghana, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland, and the UK.<sup>(8)</sup> Arab and MENA countries are almost entirely absent. As Rosenbloom and Abdel-Moneim point out in their article in this issue, one reason could be the absence of a concrete theory of public administration in the region. Despite the lessons that could be learned from the Arab World, Arab scholars remain largely focused on approaches from the management sciences, and as noted in Al-Mersheid's article, pay little attention to the relationship between research and practice. Another reason for this absence is the lack of rigorous peer review and limited attention to methodological issues.

This issue of *Almuntaqa* focuses on highlighting the general trends in public administration and policy research in Arab countries, particularly in terms of its relationship to the study and teaching of these fields in the US. It draws attention to gaps in analysis and the need to utilize a perspective that understands the diversity and conflicts in these fields of research, while understanding the importance of context to both teaching and research.

Although research in public administration and policy in Arab countries builds on Western sources, it does not pay as much attention to the value conflicts and dynamics that characterize how these fields developed in the West. As such, Arab scholars often present a rather stark, and possibly simplistic, dividing line between politics and administration, with a view of

the former as the source of law and the second as the tool of implementation. Another characteristic of this research is the perception of administration as focusing on individual organizations while policy as a field that focuses on analyzing the outcome of political institutions. Little attention is paid to the dialectical relationship between the two fields.

Furthermore, Arab studies tend to perceive the development of public administration and policy as representing a linear path mirroring economic and social changes in the West. As such, little attention is given to the effects of context and culture. Arab scholars and academic institutions therefore need to become more open to learning from comparator countries and engaging in comparative research with colleagues from non-Arab institutions to advance the region's contributions to the fields of public administration and policy and enhance their contributions to addressing real issues.

I begin this article with an overview of the development of the fields of public administration and policy, followed by an overview of Arab scholars' approaches to the development of both fields as well as the main topics under study. Following this overview, I recommend a number of issues that Arab scholars and academics in public administration and policy can focus on in their comparative studies in order to contribute to some of the real needs of reform in the region. I conclude with stressing the importance of understanding context and culture in research and teaching of public administration and policy, and then comment on the main contributions to this issue.

## I: Public Administration Studies and the Search for Identity

Public administration, as a discipline with clear boundaries, predates public policy. In the US, interest in the field began to emerge in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular with Woodrow Wilson's famous 1887 article, which advocated a separation of politics from

administration and the establishment of an independent discipline for the study of public administration as a branch of public sector management studies.<sup>(9)</sup>

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study of public administration had a difficult time positioning

7 Aroon Manoharan, Wendel Mirbel, Tony J Carrizales. 2018. Global comparative public administration: Are graduate programs responding to the call? *Teaching Public Administration* 36(1):34-49.

8 Aroon Manoharan, Wendel Mirbel, Tony J Carrizales. 2018. Global comparative public administration: Are graduate programs responding to the call? *Teaching Public Administration* 36(1):34-49.

9 Salwa Sha'rawi Jum'a, "Ḥālat 'Ilm al-Idāra al-Āmma fi'l-Qarn al-'Ishrīn: Ru'ya Naqdiyya", *an-Nahḍa*, Cairo University Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Issue 1 (October 1999), p. 66.

itself among other social science disciplines. It faced a series of existential crises that cast doubt on the usefulness of its work, particularly with regard to its units of analysis and methodological approaches.

In the early years of the century, particularly in the US with the Reform Movement, public administration had concentrated all its efforts on producing a science of government administration that aims at achieving efficiency and effectiveness. During this period, it had enjoyed a stable position as a subdiscipline of political science, and was recognized as such by the American Political Science Association (APSA) on its founding in 1903.<sup>(10)</sup> But by mid-century, the central hypotheses that had previously underpinned the classical theory of public administration came under attack – in particular the notion of separating politics from administration, and the discipline's ability to produce generalizable knowledge with its focus on organizations and administrative principles.

The first serious criticisms directed at classical public administration appeared in the 1930s. The human relations movement, for example, criticized the emphasis on organizations as the units of analysis, and advocated focusing on the individual as the key actor, arguing that the excessive organizational focus produced a mechanistic and unrealistic conception of how administration works.<sup>(11)</sup>

While such criticisms were influential, they came from inside the field, remaining true to its general principles of promoting efficiency and effectiveness and the separation of administration from politics. Herbert Simon's suggestion in his *Administrative Behavior* that it is the *decision* and not the organization that is the most worthwhile unit of analysis, represented a more significant challenge to

the discipline.<sup>(12)</sup> In his famous 1946 article in *Public Administration Review*, Simon criticized the popular “proverbs” of public administration for being based on a set of contradictory principles that are not based on serious research.<sup>(13)</sup>

This was followed by Dwight Waldo's seminal 1948 work *The Administrative State*,<sup>(14)</sup> which brought about a veritable paradigm shift in the discipline.<sup>(15)</sup> Waldo highlighted central hypotheses underpinning Orthodox public administration, critiquing many of them as unrealistic – in particular the idea of a ‘neutral’ science of public administration, as he argued it ignored the fact that the discipline was governed by the values of the industrial revolution and closely tied to the development of the US from an agrarian to an industrial society. He also attacked the prevailing principle of the separation of politics and administration as unrealistic.<sup>(16)</sup> These arguments spawned a number of influential schools of research and practice within public administration, including research into representative bureaucracy, street level bureaucracy, political control of the bureaucracy, bureaucratic politics, and the dialectical relationship between democracy and bureaucracy.<sup>(17)</sup>

Simon and Waldo did not only put an end to the orthodox model's dominance. Their scholarship also raised questions about the utility of public administration research focusing on organizations and its limited epistemological capacity to produce generalizable conclusions. Simon's work, among others, redirected the attention of social scientists away from organizations towards the individual, the decision, and power relations as the units of analysis, in order to produce experimental studies with generalizable conclusions.<sup>(18)</sup> These developments

10 Donald F. Kettl, *The Transformation of Governance: Public Administration for Twenty-First Century America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 9.

11 David Rosenbloom & Howard McCurdy, "Introduction: Dwight Waldo's *The Administrative State*," in: David Rosenbloom & Howard McCurdy (eds.), *Revisiting Waldo's Administrative State: Constancy and Change in Public Administration* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), p. 2.

12 Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

13 Herbert A. Simon, "The Proverbs of Administration," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1946), pp. 53-67.

14 Dwight Waldo, *The Administrative State: A Study of the Political Theory of American Public Administration* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1948).

15 Paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense. See: Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012 "1962").

16 David H. Rosenbloom and Howard E. McCurdy (eds.) *Revisiting Waldo's Administrative State: Constancy and Change in Public Administration* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

17 For an overview of the prevailing theoretical approaches to public administration, see: H. George Fredrickson & Kevin B. Smith, *The Public Administration Theory Primer* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015).

18 Kettl, p. 10.

widened the gap between public administration and other social sciences. Political science, sociology and economics sought to create theoretical models based on large data sets (“large-N research”) in order to produce generalizable results with predictive utility. But public administration could not follow this path, because its classical unit of analysis, the organization, does not by its nature come in large numbers, which meant that the available datasets do not allow for statistical analysis.<sup>(19)</sup>

As a result of these criticisms, a growing conception argued that the field of public administration lacked any scientific basis and was largely impressionistic, public administration research thus began to lose the interest it once had even among practitioners. Indeed, the emergence of public policy as a discipline in the 1960s was part of an effort to create a more scientific field of public affairs, drawing on the principles of microeconomics and statistical analysis rather than the traditional emphasis on organization and workflow.<sup>(20)</sup>

Public policy formed part of the broader rejection of public administration’s epistemological framework, influenced by general epistemological trends present within the social sciences as a whole since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the specific criticisms of writers like Simon. As such, the presence of both disciplines in a given institute or faculty did not mean agreement on methodology or on the objects of research. Case studies and organization-focused research, and later the training of government employees, remained the drivers of research in public administration, while public policy focused on methodologies drawn from microeconomics, statistical analysis, and management sciences.

In approximately the same period, academics within public administration began to emphasize the practical dimension of administrative studies, particularly with regard to training new public sector employees for work in government. The founding of the American Society of Public Administration

(ASPA) in 1939 reflected the widening gap between public administration and political science, with the former seeking to carve out an independent niche for itself among the social sciences as a field interested above all in practical results and practical utility.<sup>(21)</sup>

With the intellectual developments of the 1970s and the rise of right wing governments in the USA and Europe, there was a marked reorientation towards market mechanisms as a solution to public sector problems, an idea which guided many studies and practical efforts at administrative reform during the final quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>(22)</sup> The importance of these efforts to the renewed interest in public administration studies notwithstanding, they also represented a real challenge to public administration as a distinct academic discipline. One of the field’s most influential books of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example –Osborne and Gaebler’s *Reinventing Government*<sup>(23)</sup> – was the work not of public administration academics, but of a journalist and a former county executive officer.<sup>(24)</sup>

Nonetheless, public administration scholarship contributed to the ideas and practical applications that drew on these new trends which topped the agendas of many Western governments (and, with regard to economic reform and structural adjustment, in many third world countries as well). At the same time, debate continues among academics, practitioners and international institutions over reforms based on private sector and business management models, which combine elements of institutional reform with efficiency raising based on neoclassical economics and managerialism. Many public administration academics have argued that such reforms are a return to the orthodox model of public administration, with some even referring to them as “Neo-Taylorism” in reference to Frederick Taylor, who laid the groundwork of the discipline in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>(25)</sup>

In sum, the political, economic, and social environment, as well as the values component, have

19 Ibid, pp. 10-11.

20 Ibid, p. 12.

21 Ibid.

22 Owen Hughes, *Public Management and Administration: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: McMillan Press Ltd, 2012), pp. 8-51.

23 David E. Osborne & Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1992).

24 Kettl, p. 21.

25 Frederick C. Thayer, "Productivity: Taylorism Revisited (Round Three)," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 32, no. 6 (1972), pp. 833-840.

been major determinants of the academic and practical work of the discipline of public administration. Efforts to produce global frameworks and models have remained closely connected to an understanding of environmental factors. The same applies to the field of public policy, despite its efforts to use statistical models to produce more generalizable results, a

more in-depth understanding of public policy issues, including the factors determining success or failure, and the ability to evaluate achievements, continues to require case studies assessing the reasons for adoption of particular policies in certain contexts and the results they have achieved.

## II: Methodological and Ontological Issues in Arab Public Administration

In the previous section, I gave a brief overview of the field of public administration, the academic sources it draws on, the disputes over normative claims and values that have characterized it, and its shifting relationship with political science and in particular with public policy. I noted that having begun as separate disciplines, public administration and public policy have at times overlapped, but methodological differences have continued to divide them. These differences have not received much attention in the Arabic public policy and public administration literature, although there are occasional references to them.

As noted above, there is a growing recognition that the uniqueness of public administration in the US should not define how research and training is conducted elsewhere in the world, and that reaching generalizable knowledge about public administration and policy requires attention to context and culture. However, many of the Arab studies that have dealt with the development of public administration have focused almost entirely on the development of the field in the US. Salwa Sha'rawi Jum'a's study,<sup>(26)</sup> for example, traces public administration from Wilson's separation of politics and administration to Simon and Waldo's contributions in the 1950s, concluding with new developments such as the new interest in quality and the expansive use of private sector tools in government work.

Such studies tend to present the development of the discipline in the US as a series of "waves" of research interest travelling in particular directions, each displacing what had come before in a near-linear fashion. The presentation thus focuses on major transformations in administrative thinking based on these waves, which are driven in turn by economic, social, and intellectual waves. The expansion in the role of the state, for example, is linked to the growth of the administrative apparatus and its acquisition of broad developmental and social functions, leading to administrative bloat and subsequently to the prioritization of the values of efficiency and effectiveness. The victory of the free economy, meanwhile, led to a "rolling-back" of the state and thus of its administrative apparatus and a shift towards a state that "steers" but does not "row", as Osborne and Gaebler put it.<sup>(27)</sup>

But given the dominance of the normative element and the ongoing disputes over values between different schools of thought within public administration, it seems difficult to argue about waves displacing one another. At the height of the "Government Reinvention" and "let the managers manage" boom of the 1990s,<sup>(28)</sup> David Rosenbloom, the editor of *Public Administration Review* at the time, wrote his "Don't Forget the Politics!" article, in which he considered the political consequences and the constitutional and value-laden issues that should not be forgotten when conducting administrative reform.<sup>(29)</sup> These

26 Jum'a.

27 Osborne and Gaebler.

28 Donald F. Kettl, "The Global Revolution in Public Management: Driving Themes, Missing Links," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1997), pp. 446-462.

29 David H. Rosenbloom, "Public Administrative Theory and the Separation of Powers," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 43, no. 3 (1983), pp. 219-227; David H. Rosenbloom, "Reflections on 'Public Administrative

Theory and the Separation of Powers,'" *The American Review of Public Administration*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2013), pp. 381-396.

ideas resonate with several theoretical and practical studies that have dealt with the new dispute between methodological and practical approaches to public administration in both advanced and developing countries.<sup>(30)</sup>

Alongside a lack of real effort to engage with the ideological debates underpinning public administration studies internationally, there is also little discussion of the development of the field within the Arab world itself and whether the field

has theories rooted in the Arab or Islamic reality. We even find a shortage of Arabic literature looking at the trends and methodologies that predominate in Arab public administration studies. And while Western journals like *Public Administration Review* are replete with studies on the “state of the art” with regard to methodological issues, points of focus and important conclusions,<sup>(31)</sup> such studies remain rare in the Arab World, restricted to a few articles and doctoral dissertations.<sup>(32)</sup>

### III: Arab Public Administration Research in Comparative Arab Perspective<sup>(33)</sup>

The values that predominate in the three disciplines that have influenced the field of public administration (political science, management, and law) had a direct impact on public administration studies. There has been an ongoing debate over which of these values should take priority – particularly the values of efficiency, effectiveness, due process and representation – because they can often conflict with one another: Sunshine Laws, for example, may slow down operations, undermining efficiency, while attempts to guarantee fair representation in the bureaucracy for all sections of a diverse society may contradict the principle of meritocracy. Therefore, public administration studies continue to be marked by an overlap of practical questions with normative considerations and disputes over values.

As noted earlier, many specialists in the fields of public administration and policy in the Arab world adopt a linear perspective to describe the relationship between these two fields. This perspective stipulates that public *administration* concerns itself with the functioning of the state’s administrative apparatus (government bodies and departments, administrative units, etc.) in order to implement *public policies* effectively and competently.<sup>(34)</sup> *Public policies* are thus a matter for governments, while the role of the administrative apparatus is limited to “achieving generalized goals by selecting the most appropriate means, making recommendations and proposals concerning how best to achieve those goals.”<sup>(35)</sup> This idea reflects the classical separation between policy and administration adopted by Orthodox Public

30 See also, for example: Derick W. Brinkerhoff & Jennifer Brinkerhoff, "Public Sector Management Reform in Developing Countries: Perspectives Beyond NPM Orthodoxy," *Public Administration and Development*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2015), pp. 222-237; Graham Harrison, "Economic Faith, Social Project and a Misreading of African Society: The Travails of Neoliberalism in Africa," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 8 (2005), pp. 1303-1320; Abu Elias Sarker, "New Public Management in Developing Countries: An Analysis of Success and Failure with Particular Reference to Singapore and Bangladesh," *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2006), pp. 180-203.

31 See for example: Krister Andersson, "Commentary - Responding to 'A New Look at Comparative Public Administration: Trends in Research and an Agenda for the Future'," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 71, no. 6 (2011), pp. 839-840; Richard D. Bingham & William Bowen, "'Mainstream' Public Administration over Time: A Topical Content Analysis of Public Administration Review," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 54, no. 2 (1994), pp. 204-208; Tony Carrizales & Tia Sherée Gaynor, "Diversity in Public Administration Research: A Review of Journal Publications," *Public Administration Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2013), pp. 306-330; Jody Fitzpatrick et al., "A New Look at Comparative Public Administration: Trends in Research and an Agenda for the Future," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 71, no. 6 (2011), pp. 821 -830; David J. Houston & Sybil Delevan, "Public Administration Research: An Assessment of Journal Publications," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 50, no. 6 (1990), p. 674; Hugh T. Miller & Cheedy Jaja, "Some Evidence of a Pluralistic Discipline: A Narrative Analysis of Public Administration Symposia," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 65, no. 6 (2005), pp. 728-738; Robert A. Stallings & James Ferris, "Public Administration Research: Work in PAR, 1940-1984," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 48, no. 1 (1988), pp. 580-587.

32 See for example: Muhammad Awadh Ali Al-Arabi, "Tawajjuhāt al-Bāhithīn al-‘Arab fī’d-Dirāsāt al-Manshūra bi-Dawriyyāt al-Idāra al-‘Āmma al-‘Arabiyya fī’l-Fatra 2000-2011: Tahlīl Kayfī wa-Kammī li’l-Majāl wa’l-Minhāj”, unpublished doctoral dissertation submitted to the Cairo University Faculty of Economics and Political Science, 2014.

33 This section is based on: Mohamed Alaa Abdel-Moneim. 2020. "Abhāth al-Idāra al-‘Āmma wa-‘Alāqatuhā bi’s-Siyāsāt al-‘Āmma fī’l-‘Ālam al-‘Arabī: Ru’ya Naqdiyya”, *Siyasat Arabiya* 42: 7-18.

34 Atiya Hussein Efendi, "Hāl al-Ma’rifā fī Majāl al-Idāra al-‘Āmma”, *Ahwāl Miṣriyya*, issue 2 (Autumn 1998), p. 13.

35 Ibid, p. 15.

Administration, which remained dominant from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

This is not to say that Arab public administration scholars have not paid attention to the dialectical relationship between politics, policy, and public administration,<sup>(36)</sup> or to the important insights of the three disciplines. They have recognized that the role of public administration is not limited to the implementation of public policy but extends to influencing policymaking and conflict resolution within the administrative apparatus or between different state authorities.

However, a simplified vision of the relationship between the two fields is still prevalent in much of the Arabic literature. It perceives public administration as the interface transforming policy set out by the government (in the form of laws, executive decrees, and regulations) into public products and services. It presents a specific vision for public administration that boils down to ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. It therefore provides a clear idea of what its methodology should be, drawing heavily on management and law (particularly administrative law) and emphasizing quantitative methods as those most capable of producing generalizable principles.

Muhammad Abdelfattah Yaghi has studied the values, topics and methodologies of Arab public administration research. His paper provides a description of various Arab periodicals in the fields of public administration and policy (publisher, study content, the academic background of article authors, etc). Yaghi concludes that public administration topics come third in terms of frequency after economics, and right before business management/law topics.<sup>(37)</sup> Adel Muhammad Riyan has likewise discussed the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in Arab public administration, drawing on a sample of 416 Arabic-language studies. Riyan concludes that most

studies use quantitative methods, with the majority covering business management.

Despite the importance of these efforts, they suffer from several methodological problems, not least a lack of clarity, particularly in explaining how they coded the literature – and the lack of a reliable criteria for data collection. More importantly, they lack an ontological starting point that identifies the units of analysis, an integrated vision of the values that should guide administration in the Arab world and how to measure them, and relationships between the administrative apparatus and the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.

This observation notwithstanding, several Arab studies and academics have presented case studies on public administration teaching and research in the region, either descriptive or prescriptive (prescribing requirements that academic institutions should meet). One trend has focused on assessing particular graduate programs. Zurayk, El-Fadel and Nuwayhid, for example, presented an evaluation of the environmental studies program at the American University of Beirut.<sup>(38)</sup> Other studies have looked at public administration or public policy programs in a particular country, such as Bremer and El-Baradei's comparison of four public administration and public policy courses at different Egyptian colleges,<sup>(39)</sup> Ahmad Rashid's study of public policy teaching in Egyptian universities,<sup>(40)</sup> and Zemrani's review of public policy courses in Morocco also fall within this category.<sup>(41)</sup>

Another trend has sought to present a broader vision of public policy and management sciences teaching in the Arab World. Ali and Camp, for example, conducted a study of graduate management science programs at eight Arab universities. They conclude that these programs rely on materials and theories that are borrowed or translated from the US – without

36 Salwa Sha'rawi Jum'a, "Ḥālāt 'Ilm al-Idāra al-Āmma fī'l-Qarn al-'Ishrīn: Ru'ya Naqdiyya", *an-Nahḍa*, Cairo University Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Issue 1 (October 1999), p. 84.

37 Muhammad Abdelfattah Yaghi, *Wāqī' ad-Dawriyyāt al-'Arabiyya al-Mutakhaṣṣa fī'l-'Ulūm al-Idāriyya* (Riyadh: KSU, 1984). Yaghi's data was collected by sending questionnaires to periodical staff, which raises questions about measurement reliability.

38 Rami Zurayk, Mutasem El-Fadel & Iman Nuwayhid, "The Interfaculty Graduate Environmental Sciences Program of the American University of Beirut: An ESD Initiative in the Arab World," *International Review of Education*, vol. 56, no. 2-3 (2010), pp. 299-314.

39 Jennifer Bremer & Laila El Baradei, "Developing Public Administration and Public Policy Master's Programs in Egypt," *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2008), pp. 439-462.

40 Ahmad Rashid, "al-Idāra al-Āmma fī'l-Jāmi'āt al-Miṣriyya", *an-Nahḍa*, Cairo University Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Issue 2 (2002), pp. 63-73.

41 Aziza Zemrani, "Teaching Public Administration: The Case of Morocco," *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, vol. 20, no. 4 (2014), pp. 515-528.

taking into account environmental differences or any real effort to come up with a vision as to how to develop or improve the quality of studies within the Arab context.<sup>(42)</sup>

In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings that began in 2010, many academics turned to studying the qualitative changes resulting from these developments. Zahra, for example, discussed the opportunities presented to public administration professors by transformations taking place in the region, which allow them to address issues such as entrepreneurship, attracting talent, capital, modern technology, and cutting-edge administrative systems from all over the world.<sup>(43)</sup>

Still other studies have turned their attention to the challenges that public administration research and teaching must confront given higher popular expectations of bureaucratic performance in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Dina Wafa, for example, suggests how professional public administration

programs could adapt to the events that followed the removal of former President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, including the need for greater crisis management training. She likewise discusses the need for a more efficient administrative apparatus in the post-Mubarak era, focusing on the role that the American University of Cairo's School of Global Affairs and Public Policy (GAAP) could play in bringing this about.<sup>(44)</sup>

These studies indisputably helped feed embryonic discussions and debates about the nature of the field, its ontological premises, its methodologies, values, trends and most important contributions. Whether the aim is to address the status of the field or to examine how administrative structures and policy decisions were affected by political developments, Arab scholarship will benefit from comparative analyses and collaboration with researchers from other regions in order to contribute to the region's problems. The following section suggests several areas where Arab scholars can benefit from a comparative perspective.

## IV: Comparative Public Administration in Arab countries: An Agenda for Research and Teaching

A comparative lens is indispensable if Arab public administration scholarship seeks to develop either theory or practice. As previously noted, Western textbooks are main resources for teaching public administration and policy in the Arab world, usually American textbooks in the eastern Arab world and French in the Maghreb.

There is a need to combine the study of Western and non-Western administrative models in a way that can better serve the Arab world's socioeconomic and political environments and developmental needs. Administrative systems in comparator countries can provide insights that could help understand administrative behaviors in the region and provide frameworks for analysis.

As previously noted, Western academic institutions are paying increasing attention to administrative

systems in countries such as China, Russia, South Africa, and South Korea. Scholars in the Arab world can explore administrative systems in these and other countries in search for successful reform stories and to prepare students for competition in a global job market and increasingly competitive global environments. They can also help with a better appreciation of the contexts where administration and policy making and implementation take place, hence helping to generate generalizable knowledge. Examples of areas where Arab scholarship and teaching in public administration and policy can benefit from are discussed below.

### 1. The Role of Technocrats

Politicians, legislators, political parties, and interest groups, among others, play central roles in public

42 Abbas J. Ali & Robert Camp, "Teaching Management in the Arab World: Confronting Illusions," *The International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1995), p. 10.

43 Shaker Zahra, "Doing Research in the (New) Middle East: Sailing with the Wind," *Academy of Management Perspectives*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2011), pp. 6-21.

44 Dina Wafa, "Egypt in Transition: Responding to Social and Political Changes in Executive Education," *Teaching Public Administration*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2013), pp. 174-185; Dina Wafa, "Capacity-building for the Transformation of Public Service: A Case of Managerial-level Public Servants in Egypt," *Teaching Public Administration*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2015), pp. 115-129.



affairs in the US and other Western countries. Values conflicts are therefore a key characteristic of the study of public affairs in these countries.

Bureaucracies arguably play a more central role in Arab countries than elsewhere.<sup>(45)</sup> The value of efficiency is therefore paramount in public administration research in Arab countries, as the article by Rosenbloom and Abdel-Moneim in this issue shows, and approaches from the management sciences are dominant. This reflects a belief that technocrats, or the state bureaucracy, are the key actors in the field. Arab scholars should ask whether this perception is an accurate representation of reality, and search for ways to improve the provision of goods and services, fight corruption, and increase popular participation within the context of a system where technocrats play a central role in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

China could represent an appealing case for Arab scholars and educators interested in examining and drawing lessons highlighting the role of technocrats in economic transformation and how to develop this role. In fact, and especially given its economic growth, global economic presence, and military power, China has already become a destination for public administration and policy students from developed and developing countries.<sup>(46)</sup>

The Coronavirus pandemic, however, has demonstrated the limitations of both the state-centered model of the US as well as the Chinese provincial model. Guided by the 1990s New Public Management (NPM) movement, the semi-independent states of the US have compiled a web of contract relations with not-for-profit and private actors that have complicated the country's ability to respond to the pandemic. These webs of relationships created incompatible databases and led to an overall fragmented healthcare system. Furthermore, reports of states competing for medical supplies in the open market became a source of serious concern and calls for central government intervention.

Despite its previously global appeal, the pandemic also put the Chinese administrative model to the test. The technocratic managerial elites, perceived as key to leading China's economic reforms,<sup>(47)</sup> were unable to provide the rapid response that was necessary to control the global pandemic. The failure of the Chinese and US models to present rapid responses to this global crisis is evidence to the fact that intergovernmental coordination and implementation models require a strong central state apparatus and high standards of administrative ethics. Furthermore, the crisis proved, especially in the Chinese case, that technocrats work within a political context and political considerations that interfere with their decisions and values' priorities.

Public administration research and teaching in Arab countries should draw lessons from these experiences, as well as others where technocrats backed by executive support seem to be the backbone of economic and social reforms. Furthermore, Arab scholars and students should address the relationships between technocrats, civil society organizations, and the business community. Given the rise of the role of the military establishment in managing the economy in countries such as Egypt, public administration scholars and students should address the facts and values surrounding this presence, the relationship between military and technocratic elites, and their effects on economic performance, the provision of public goods and services, and the functioning of the markets. Again, comparative analysis could prove very helpful in this area.

## 2. NPM Reforms

The widespread applications of New Public Management (NPM) reflect the global rise of neoliberal economic policies starting the 1980s. The theoretical foundations of NPM are neoclassical economics, with its belief in market mechanisms and competition, and managerialism, which a number of studies have described as "Neo-Taylorism." In developing countries, international organizations, contractors,

45 See for example Amr Adly's interesting analysis of the role of the Egyptian bureaucracy in constraining the country's potential for political transition: Amr Adly. 2015. *Triumph of the Bureaucracy: A Decade of Aborted Social and Political Change in Egypt*. Available through: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/01/31/triumph-of-bureaucracy-decade-of-aborted-social-and-political-change-in-egypt-pub-58924>.

46 Chen Jia and Ding Qingfen. 2010. Overseas officials head to Chinese classrooms. *China Daily*. Available through: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-08/05/content\\_11098280.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-08/05/content_11098280.htm).

47 Si Chen. 1998. Leadership Change in Shanghai: Toward the Dominance of Party Technocrats. *Asian Survey*. 38(7): 71-687.

and donor agencies have played important roles in the spread of NPM clones in areas such as education and healthcare, in addition to public sector reform.<sup>(48)</sup>

Many Arab countries have adopted NPM reforms, with varying degrees of success. The UAE for example, has established a public sector apparatus that is efficient by international standards, while deregulating the economy and expanding the role of free markets in providing public services. In Qatar, on the other hand, the government attempted to overhaul the education system by shifting to a school-based management (SBM) system. The government transformed all public schools into Charter-like schools dubbed “Independent Schools”. After 13 years starting 2004 and huge public investment, the lack of capacity and public opposition led to the termination of this reform program and a return to centralized control over schools.<sup>(49)</sup>

These examples show the need for learning from experiences across Arab countries. Given the similarities between clusters of regional countries, such as GCC countries, experiences in one country should be used as a learning laboratory for others. Policy learning and adoption between Arab countries has occurred since independence around the mid-twentieth century. More recently, the partnership agreement between Egypt and the UAE reflects the willingness to share experience and learn from successful cases in governance and public sector reform.

Many NPM applications have been tested by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the US, as mentioned above, the 1990s NPM reforms created a fragmented web of not-for-profit and private healthcare providers that complicated the response to the pandemic. Calls for the federal government to step in to assist individual states and avoid outbidding drew attention to the need for coordination among subnational entities and public agencies. They also drew attention to the central role of the federal government in this process. Several Arab countries witnessed similar events. In Egypt, for example, the government stressed the role

of the Egyptian Authority for Unified Procurement and Medical Supplies as the sole provider of medical equipment and drugs in order to avoid price speculation.

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic only highlighted the value conflicts that characterize public administration and policy research and teaching in the West. This has been especially the case given the rise of the role of the military in the economies of a number of regional countries, particularly Egypt and Algeria. While the executive branch stresses the ability of the military establishment to efficiently allocate resources and implement policies, the political opposition point to the importance of transparency and accountability, as well as adjudication through civilian rather than military courts. These debates are likely to continue in the foreseeable future. Therefore, Arab scholars and students of public administration and policy can learn a lot from these debates and associated empirical evidence from countries across the world.

### 3. Fighting Corruption

Arab countries have achieved varying degrees of success in fighting corruption and promoting high standards of ethical behavior within their bureaucracies. The UAE has made significant strides in fighting corruption. Its score on the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is 71/100, ranking 21 out of 180 countries, making it one of the “cleanest” countries in the region. Despite this achievement, the country’s efforts directed at anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist financing (CTF) are still far from lowering its ML and TF risks.<sup>(50)</sup>

In other countries, tribal customs, social norms, and sectarian politics have hindered efforts at fighting corruption.<sup>(51)</sup> The latter factor is particularly clear in the case of Lebanon, where a combination of bureaucratic incompetence and sectarian politics has undermined public trust in the government as well as the bureaucracy. This has manifested in public

48 Mohamed Alaa Abdel-Moneim. 2020. Between global and national prescriptions for education administration: the rocky road of neoliberal education reform in Qatar. *International Journal of Educational Development* 74(C): 1-16.

49 Ibid.

50 The Financial Action Task Force (FATF). 2020. Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures – United Arab Emirates, Fourth Round Mutual Evaluation Report. Paris: FATF. Available through: <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/mutualevaluations/documents/mer-uae-2020.html>.

51 John Dixon, Shahjahan Buhyar, and Yilmaz Üstüner. 2018. Public Administration in the Middle East and North Africa. *International Journal of Public Administration* 41(10): 759-764.

outrage against government ineptness as well as bureaucratic corruption – events that preceded the catastrophic 2020 explosion at the Port of Beirut.

There is a lot that Arab scholars and students of public administration and policy can learn from a study of comparative cases in fighting corruption from within and outside the region. Such studies should be guided by an understanding of the social and economic context in order to create paths to navigate these contextual limitations.

#### 4. The Role of E-Government

Investments in e-government have been widespread across the region. In Egypt, investments in e-government aim at providing better services, diversifying the channels of service delivery, and fighting corruption by separating service providers

from recipients. Inspired by, and in cooperation with, the UAE, Egypt has created a Government Excellence Award that provides individual and institutional rewards for public service excellence. The “Excellent Institution in Providing Smart Services Award” is one of three other institutional awards. Other countries, including Jordan and Lebanon, have achieved notable successes in providing e-government services.

Public administration and policy research can benefit from exploring the role of policy learning and transfer among Arab countries. Similarly, differences in culture as well as human and infrastructural resources among Arab countries can provide helpful lessons in terms of the arrangements and preparations needed for the success of e-government initiatives, especially in terms of increasing access to public services and the potential to fight corruption.

## Conclusion

Arab scholars of public administration and policy need to focus on comparative cases from within as well as outside the Arab region, with a focus on the field’s own diversity and value conflicts. This comparative research agenda will help guide theoretical development as well as practical contributions.

The study of public affairs requires an in-depth understanding of the nature of the societies under study. As discussed above, several public administration scholars have noted the absence of a theory of public administration in the Arab World. The teaching of public administration in Arab countries thus continues to rely on Western sources,<sup>(52)</sup> as the studies reviewed above show. This is one explanation for the limited practical applications of social science research to practical problems in the region, as Al-Mersheid notes in this issue. It also limits the ability to create generalizable knowledge about public administration and policy in the region.

Arab public administration research requires an understanding of how the field have developed in countries other than the US (or France in the Arab Maghreb region, where the French legal model has a clear influence on the study of public administration).

Internationally, countries like China, South Africa, and South Korea have established a presence on comparative public administration courses in Western countries given their global economic and political prominence, as well as their administrative models which present new paradigms to consider. For Arab countries, there is a need to include comparative courses that orient students to lessons that can be learned from comparator countries, especially where specific successes have been accomplished in fields such as education, health care, and economic governance.

This special issue of *Almuntaqa* sheds light on public administration and policy research and teaching in the Arab world. The articles included raise important questions and encourage academics and interested parties in the region to look more closely at the issues and the methodologies used in the study of public affairs, as well as to develop a research and teaching agenda that engages with the points of intellectual and methodological disagreement that characterize this field in the West, while understanding the unique context in the region. This will allow public administration and policy research and teaching make theoretical and practical contributions to the ongoing developments in Arab societies.

Guy Peters' paper on the academic roots and practical significance of public policy studies reviews the many forms that studies in the field take –both as an academic pursuit and a technical discipline that has a direct impact on people's lives, whether by influencing government policy or by providing information to citizens allowing for more active participation. He defines the sphere of public policy studies as the sum of all government activities, whether direct or via agents.

In keeping with the aim of looking at public administration and policy in the region from a comparative angle, Peters contends that public policy has a universal dimension that determines the underlying dimensions of analysis, primarily the emphasis on rooting decision-making in solid data and methodologies and the ability to examine the reasons behind adopting a specific policy alternative. However, he also highlights policy studies of a local nature influenced by the nature of society and its political and legal framework. The study lists eight basic characteristics shared by public policy studies, citing experiences and studies from the Arab World.

Meanwhile, David Rosenbloom and Mohamed Alaa Abdel-Moneim trace the intellectual development of public administration in the US. They focus on the common American administrative contention that to understand how public administration works, one must first understand the constitutional separation of powers and the inevitable conflict of values that it produces within the administrative apparatus, a conflict that reflects disagreements between the different ideas and currents animating each of the branches of government. They contend that this has made the boundaries of public administration

uniquely fuzzy, with the field drawing ideas and values from a range of different disciplines.

These fuzzy borders have allowed the field a remarkable ability to provide theoretical and practical contributions across different circumstances and different political and constitutional cultures in different countries. In the Arab World, Rosenbloom and Abdel-Moneim argue that it is the methodologies of business management and law that have prevailed, with effectiveness and efficiency held up as the ideals of administration; other values, such as representation and due process, have not received sufficient attention. The study calls for an urgent re-evaluation of the ontological premises of the field and for Arab academics to learn from the fuzzy and disputed boundaries of the field in the US so as to allow the field to contribute to the ongoing political, legal, and organizational transformations in the region.

Finally, a study by a group of North African academics evaluates Tunisian policymaking practice with regard to higher education quality assurance. This study is the product of a research project bringing together scholars from eight Arab countries with the aim of critically assessing public policymaking and practice in Arab countries and suggesting a broad research agenda for future Arab public policy and administration studies. The study deals with the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority (IEAQA), focusing on the role of local and international actors in the making and implementation of public policy. It identifies various weaknesses in the IEAQA's quality assurance policies, weaknesses which have impacted negatively on higher education and on other aspects of Tunisian public policy.

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