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**German Regional Administrative Elites,
New Public Management and the Role of
The State in the Economy**

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Résumé

– Les élites administratives régionales allemandes, le nouveau management public et le rôle de l'État dans l'économie – Y-a-t-il un lien entre l'intensité des réformes de type Nouveau Management Public (NPM) à l'échelle d'un système et les attitudes individuelles des élites administratives qui mettent en œuvre ces réformes dans leur vie professionnelle quotidienne ? Pour examiner cette question, cet article répertorie les préférences pour des solutions gouvernementales contre des solutions fondées sur le marché dans les politiques économiques des élites administratives allemandes au niveau régional (regio-crats). Il compare tout d'abord l'attitude des élites allemandes avec celle de leurs homologues dans dix autres États membres de l'Union européenne et analyse dans un deuxième temps leurs déterminants au niveau individuel. Nous trouvons que les regio-crats allemands occupent une position intermédiaire sur une échelle allant de l'interventionnisme étatique à des solutions favorables au libre jeu du marché. Nos comparaisons internationales suggèrent que lorsque l'économie se porte bien et que le chômage est au plus bas, les bureaucrates sont plus à même d'avoir une préférence pour le libre jeu du marché. Cependant, en période de crise économique et de chômage élevé, les fonctionnaires se tournent vers les solutions étatiques. Nous trouvons aussi qu'une fois que les réformes de type NPM ont été mises en œuvre, les regio-crats souhaitent que le gouvernement joue un rôle plus important mais lorsqu'ils doivent encore les mettre en œuvre, il semble qu'ils demandent plus de libre jeu du marché.

Mots-clefs

Réforme du secteur public, nouveau management public, élites administratives régionales, préférences de gouvernance, changement de comportement

Abstract

Is there any link between the intensity of NPM reform at the system level and individual attitudes among administrative elites implementing public management modernization in their daily professional lives? To investigate this question, the article maps the preferences for government versus market-based solutions in economic policy among German administrative elites at regional level (regio-crats) and 1) compares German elite attitudes with those of their counterparts in ten other EU member states and 2) analyses their determinants at the individual level. We find that German regio-crats occupy an intermediate position on a scale ranging from state interventionism to free-market solutions. Our cross-country comparisons suggest that when the economy is doing well and unemployment is down, bureaucrats are more likely to express a preference towards the free market. However, in times of economic crisis and high unemployment, civil servants turn back to the state. We also find that once NPM reforms have been implemented, regio-crats wish for a greater role for government, but when they yet have to implement NPM reforms, they seem to crave more free market.

Keywords

Public sector reform, new public management, regional administrative elites, governance preferences, attitudinal change

New public management (NPM) transformation rhetoric has inescapably impregnated our conceptualizations of administrative reforms. Their impact on public service structures has been the topic of heated debates and countless studies¹. Whether there is, however, a substantial link between NPM reforms, and in particular their quest for privatizing public services and getting the state out of the economy, on the one hand, and changing the values of the administrative elites on the other, has rarely – if at all – been investigated. The guiding research interest of this article is therefore whether any link can be detected between NPM and the question of what role the state should play in the economy, in the view of administrative elites. More concretely, we focus empirically on German administrative elites at the regional level (i.e., the state or “Länder” level) where considerably more NPM-induced change has been implemented than at the federal level. We analyse these elites’ preferences with respect to the state’s intervening role in the market. We ask two types of questions. What patterns do we detect if we compare German attitudes with those of other European administrative elites? And what explains the particular blend of German administrative elites’ preferences concerning the role of the state in the market?

While there may be many interesting images of modern governance held by administrative elites that are worthwhile exploring as indicators of their behaviour, we contend that elites’ attitudes towards the role of the state within the economy constitute a “crucial case” (Gerring, 2007). If a cultural change supposed to be brought about by the NPM movement does not affect bureaucrats’ preferences about government intervention within the economy (the latter being a, if not the essential element of the underlying NPM ideology of public sector reform), then any other link between the reform movement and individual attitudinal change among those implementing and enduring reform effects in their daily professional lives becomes even more implausible.

Starting from this background, the paper proceeds in the following way. In the next section we briefly review the existing literature on German administrative elites. We identify themes and report general findings, but, as we will show, until now no systematic study has analysed the regional administrative elites of the German Länder administrations. We then introduce the reader to our database, which provides not only the general frame but also the empirical basis for this article. The two main sections are devoted to German regional elite preferences: first, from an international comparative perspective and, second, with a view to tapping into four potential explanations of the individual beliefs of German regional bureaucrats (regio-crats). Among other things, we find evidence of a link between NPM and governance preferences of administrative elites for the free market. Surprisingly, however, in NPM forerunners, regio-crats are on average less keen on the free market than in NPM-

¹ See for further references Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011, Christensen and Laegreid, 2001, Rouban, 1999 and Hood, 1991.

laggard countries. Meanwhile, at the individual level, a post-communist past (i.e., stemming from East Germany) and certain educational pathways (in law and economics) increase preferences for free-market models.

Our conclusions are threefold. First, the impact of NPM reforms on bureaucrat preferences comes across as weaker than expected but also contrary to our expectations. Following the principle that “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”, lack of NPM reforms is – on average – associated with a greater desire for market-based solutions, while deeper NPM reforms tend to trigger preferences for state intervention. Second, economic-cycle indicators suggest that, in times of crisis, regio-crats display greater belief in the state than in the market. Finally, at the individual level, early life socialization seems to shape German regio-crat preferences. These are related to a post-communist past and to specific educational pathways. We find, however, no evidence supporting a generational effect hypothesis.

THE DEBATE ON THE GERMAN ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE: THEMES AND VARIATIONS

Today German authorities employ roughly 4.6 million public servants. Of these, 370,000 administer social security schemes in specialized agencies, 520,000 work for the federal ministries², and 1.3 million work for local administrations. The greatest fraction – 2.3 million – work for the sixteen German state administrations, reflecting the fact that most of the German legislation is implemented at this level³. In 2012 the ratio between 1,000 German denizens to public servants was 57.4 (down from 84.2 after the merging of a hugely overstuffed public service of the former German Democratic Republic with the “old” Federal Republics’ “öffentlicher Dienst” in 1990)⁴. Over time one finds that the German civil service has become ever more female, the share of part-time employment has constantly risen, and the number of blue collar staff is in decline, while the number of white collar staff is increasing (a phenomenon called “Veredelung” or “ennoblement” of the public service). Graduates from the legal profession still constitute the single largest group and the tenured career structure remains the “normal” path for professional advancement (public servants usually enter

² This number includes 220,000 army staff and 110,000 employees of the federal agency for the labour market (the biggest individual authority in Germany).

³ Schools, universities as well as police functions are the responsibility of the *Länder*.

⁴ These numbers are taken from Bogumil and Jann, 2009 ; Statistisches Jahrbuch 2013 (pages 350ff.) and the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013, under www.bpb.de.

right after they finish university and stay until retirement), while lateral recruitment is still relatively rare. Who counts as an “administrative elite” is a matter of definition. The notion of “administrative elite” usually refers to the top managers within ministries or within co-ordination or expert bodies, i.e., the upper layer of the senior civil service⁵. Considering how much German society has changed in the last decades makes the characteristics of the administrative elite – in contrast to the features of the public service as such – still look rather “conservative”. A member of the German administrative elite is more likely to be male, trained as a lawyer, and a descendent of a family with a tradition of working for the state, i.e., displaying precisely those features which still characterized the “normal” German public service as a whole one generation ago. Derlien thus sees the federal administrative elite characterized by great continuity (for example little inter-sectoral or even inter-agency mobility in advancement) and in a middle ground in terms of their professional “neutrality” between the services of United Kingdom and of the US (Derlien, 2003). In contrast, a more recent study (Ebinger and Jochheim, 2009) observes a trend towards greater (lateral) mobility and a decreasing allegiance to the professional standard of unconditional loyalty to the government of the day. In other words, the picture of continuity and conservatism appears to be changing at the margin.

At the centre of empirical studies about the German (read: federal) administrative elite lies the relationship between top bureaucrats and politicians (see Rouban, 2003). A main standard of this discussion has been set by Aberbach, Rockman and Putnam (1981) who investigated the “hybridization hypothesis”, i.e., that politicians and top bureaucrats increasingly converge in their role. Their research also covered a sample of top German bureaucrats. Replicating and developing the hybridization standard further, Renate Mayntz and Hans-Ulrich Derlien shaped the debate about the German administrative elite in a number of publications (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1975 ; Mayntz, 1978 ; Derlien and Mayntz, 1989, 1991 ; Derlien, 1990, 1991, 2000, 2003 ; Derlien and Peters, 1998). The blurring border between the self-perceived sphere of the bureaucracy and the sphere of politics, expected by the hybridization theory, has however never been observed in Germany to a meaningful extent. Until today (Schwanke and Ebinger, 2006 ; Ebinger and Jochheim, 2009) bureaucrats have always appeared to have a clear understanding that their role rests on expertise and management and not on value-based and re-distributive political decision-making, which is thought to be the prerogative of politicians. What oscillates over time – or more precisely between the few and unfortunately rather small samples of survey data collected among German top bureaucrats – is the spread of party affiliation (ever higher over the 1970s and 1980s, a drop after unification and an increase in the 2000s) on the one side ; and, on the other, the pattern of what has been defined as functional politicization (Mayntz and Derlien, 1989). Functional politicization, which could be also called professional politicization, should be understood as the degree of bottom-up

⁵ In Germany the status of political officials is clearly defined and it is possible by law to put them into “temporal retirement” without specifying particular reasons – see Kugele, 1978.

responsiveness of bureaucrats towards the political requirements of their job. The assumption is that officials attempt to anticipate the policy position of those whom they serve, mainly in order to enhance their personal career (see also Schwanke and Ebinger, 2006 ; Bauer and Ege, 2012). Mayntz and Derlien found persistent and strong patterns of functional politicization shaping the German administrative elite, while Ebinger and Jochheim (2009) detect a “disruption” in this fundamental role understanding of bureaucrats towards a new self-assured “mandarin” attitude of top bureaucrats. This appears to indicate that top bureaucrats’ commitment towards the policy stands of new governments weakens if the new policies go against their individual convictions (technical rather than normative) (Ebinger and Jochheim, 2009, 338).

Finally two things appear important to mention. First, the classical hybridization standard (and its variations) appears to have reached its limits in terms of its capacity (and appeal) to theoretically guide contemporary empirical research about administrative elites. After all, the theoretical concept behind the interview questions developed four decades ago – which tapped into the dualism between politics and administration sometimes wrongly attributed to Weber’s ideal-typical conceptualizations – looks somewhat outdated. There is an uneasy feeling that the hybridization standard is still in use mainly because individual survey research projects are in need of a benchmark in order to compare their results to “something.” The desire to re-connect empirical administrative elite research with current theoretical ideas has thus led scholars to develop different strategies – often designed or formulated as “images of governance” (see Hooghe, 2001 ; Kassim et al., 2013 ; Bauer and Ege, 2012). Secondly, and of equal importance for the present article, is the absence of studies on regional administrative elites, since the overwhelming majority of empirical studies focuses exclusively on the federal layer of government⁶. Although the ministerial officials of the Länder have an important role to play in the political system of the federal republic (Manow, 2005) and are directly involved in the preparation of federal legislation via the Bundesrat, they have so far remained basically ignored. It is this gap between importance in practice and dearth of knowledge about the German regional administrative elites that we set out to narrow in the remainder of this article.

⁶ Bogumil, Kuhlmann and Grohs’ project investigates local level perceptions (but it is not an elite study because it was the mayors, as heads of local institutions, who were asked to respond. The other exception we found is a study from the early 1980s that empirically focused on staff in the city of Cologne (Gau, 1983), Hamburg (Auf dem Hövel, 2003) or the new states Brandenburg and Sachsen (Damskis and Möller, 1997). For a newer project mixing state level and federal level elites see Hammerschmidt, et al. 2013.

Data Sources

We surveyed regional administrative elites in the EU to enquire about their governance preferences and socio-demographic background. More than 700 telephone interviews have been conducted with, on average, about twelve elite bureaucrats interviewed per region. Interviews were carried out by native speakers.

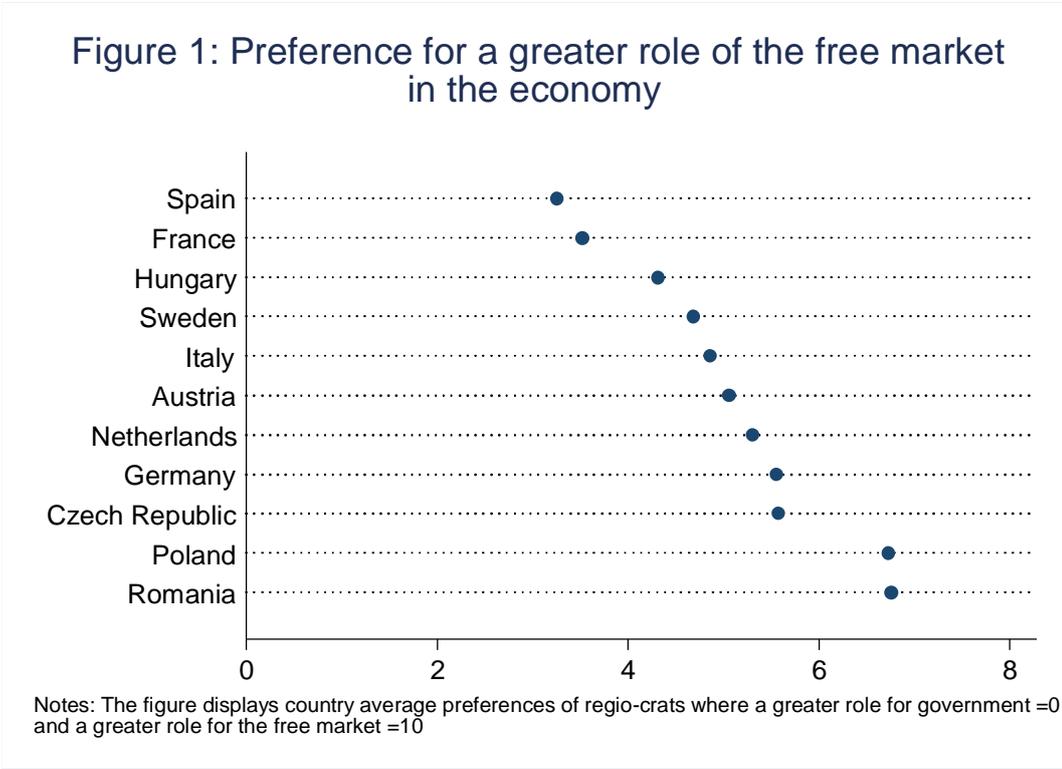
We selected Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Hungary so as to maximize variance in terms of the different waves of accession and geographical distribution. Regions were selected in each country to form a representative sample apart from Germany, where all *Länder* (except the city state of Hamburg) were surveyed⁷. Individuals were randomly sampled from a target population, which was defined as elite civil servants with policy responsibility. We use these data in two ways: first by aggregating them at the country level, so as to explore cross-national patterns ; second by focusing on Germany alone, so as to explore the individual-level determinants of regio-crat preferences.

ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE PREFERENCES FOR THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN THE ECONOMY – A CROSS-COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE

Mapping the attitudes, values and role understanding of administrative elites is a strategy that is widely used in analysing public administrations. The underlying assumption is that the convictions and ideas of public servants are predictors for their actual behaviour. At the aggregate level, attitudinal data can serve to characterize differences and similarities between units or civil service systems. The graph below shows such aggregated results. It indicates answers to the question: “Looking at

⁷ 63 regions were included in the dataset. Only “subnational” bureaucrats were surveyed, not “central state civil servants at regional level”. The breakdown is as follows. Germany: all *Länder* except Hamburg ; France: *Régions* included are Languedoc-Roussillon, Bretagne, Pays de la Loire, Aquitaine, Lorraine ; Italy: *Regioni* included are Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige ; Netherlands: *Provincies* included are Overijssel, Noord-Brabant, Noord-Holland ; Austria: *Bundesländer* included are Kärnten, Burgenland, Niederösterreich, Steiermark, Tirol, Vorarlberg ; Poland: *Województwo* included are Śląskie, Pomorskie, Wielkopolskie, Świętokrzyskie, Lubuskie ; Sweden: *län* included are Kalmar, Västra Götalands, Västernorrlands, Dalarnas, Skåne ; Spain: *Comunidades Autónomas* included are Andalucía, Aragón, La Rioja, Galicia, Cataluña, País Vasco, Principado de Asturias, Extremadura ; Czech Republic: *Kraje* included are Karlovarský, Středočeský, Liberecký ; Romania: *Județe* included are Sibiu, Galati, Arad, Timis ; Hungary: *Megyék* included are Pest, Baranya, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Bács-Kiskun, Vas.

economic policy, some would like governments to intervene actively on economic policy issues. Others would rather rely on free-market forces. Where would you place your own vision of economic policy on a range between 0 (greater role for government) and 10 (greater role for the market).”



There are important reasons for choosing this question as a central item for a comparison of differential political preferences of administrative elites in Europe. First, there is a long tradition in comparative elite studies investigating the beliefs of bureaucrats about the state’s relationship with the market. In the 1970s the buzzword during the period of the expansion of the welfare state used to be “policy planning”. Later, after the turn of the ideological tide from Keynesianism to Neoliberalism, “state interventionism” came to be regarded as a synonym for over-boarding and misrouted bureaucratic activity – how bureaucrats relate to these concepts has been intensively studied (Derlien, 2003: 411f.). In the latter sense, the attitude towards the state’s (and thus the bureaucracy’s) role in managing the economy became a crucial element of the NPM reform movement that in particular (though with different rigour across countries) wanted to “roll back the state” with the help of, among other things, privatization and outsourcing strategies. Market solutions were thought to be superior, and private management practice was seen as a model also for the public administration (Christiansen and Laegreid, 2001). Because of the value-loadedness of civil servants’ vision of the role of the state in the economy, few other possible items of governance preferences are as useful as a vantage point for comparison.

What does Figure 1 reveal? Three clusters appear. First, Spain and France with relatively low values (3.26 and 3.52, respectively), second, Poland and Romania with very high values (6.73 and 6.76) and, third, a middle group with intermediate values including Hungary at the lower end (4.32) and the Czech Republic at the upper end (5.58). This intermediate group oscillates around the group average (5.06), situated exactly in the centre of the 11-point scale (values ranging from 0 to 10) with Germany, scoring 5.56, located at the upper end of the intermediate group.

Overall, the regional administrative elites in the eleven countries that we surveyed tend to be in the centre of the government-intervention/free-market continuum, eager for a balanced mix of free market and government intervention. Hence, German regio-crats cluster within an intermediate group composed of Hungary, Sweden, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. Polish and Romanian regio-crats come across as more pro-market while Spanish and French administrative elites would prefer greater governmental intervention in the running of the economy. Although Poland and Romania are new EU member states from Eastern Europe with a communist legacy, and Spain and France belong to the western group of the EU 15, an obvious pattern is difficult to detect. Hungary and the Czech Republic clearly do not cluster with Poland and Romania (although all are post-communist states), and neither do Italy or Germany cluster with Spain and France (although they belong to the German-Napoleonic continental administrative tradition).

Indeed, as indicated by the correlation table below, we find no association between, on the one hand, bureaucrats' affiliation to a particular public administration tradition (Mayer and Hammerschmid, 2010), the "Weberianness" of their bureaucracy (Demmke and Moilanen, 2010) or the preferred academic discipline as a basis of their public administration education programs (i.e., whether public servants are traditionally trained as lawyers, economists or in philosophical academic disciplines, see György, 2003 ; Bogumil, Ebinger and Jochheim, 2012) and, on the other hand, regio-crats' preference for a greater role of their state in economic policy.

If regio-crats' preferences for the free market appear unrelated to administrative tradition, the Weberianness of the bureaucracy or the character of public administration education programs in their country, what other contextual factors may shape their preferences? Our data gives some tentative insights as a number of other factors seem to have a stronger effect than the above-mentioned features of the respective administrative systems (Bauer and Trondal, 2014). We present these relationships in Table 2.

We find that two contextual factors seem to increase bureaucrats' preference for greater free market. The first is the country being a New Public Management (NPM) laggard.

Table 1: Correlation between regio-crat preferences for free-market solutions, administrative tradition, Weberianness and public service education programmes

	Free Market	Administrati ve Tradition	Non Weberianness	Public Admin. Education
Free Market	1.00			
Administrative Tradition	-0.05 (0.89)	1.00		
Non Weberianness	0.11 (0.76)	-0.43 (0.18)	1.00	
Public Education	Admin. 0.17 (0.62)	-0.07 (0.83)	0.56* (0.07)	1.00

Notes: pairwise correlation coefficients between full model variables

p-value between parentheses

*** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.10$; † $p < 0.15$ (two-tailed)

Using data from a variety of sources (Bouckaert *et al.*, 2009 ; Ongaro, 2009 ; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, 2011) a typology classifying countries from NPM forerunners (0) to laggards (4) indicates that, on average, the more the country is a laggard in NPM reforms, the more its regio-crats favor a greater role for the free market. One can interpret this relationship in a number of ways. It may well be that in NPM forerunners, such as the Netherlands or Sweden, regio-crats perceive that the free-market ideology already plays a considerable enough role, hence weakening demands for it to play an even greater role. Meanwhile, regio-crats in laggard countries would desire greater free-market reforms so as to correct a bias towards too much statism. Another possible interpretation is that NPM forerunners, having first-hand experience, may be disillusioned by the free-market ideology while laggards may still harbour a positive prejudice towards such reforms. Following the saying that the neighbour's grass is always greener, it would seem that regio-crats express a preference for what they have less of: once NPM reforms have been implemented, they wish for a greater role for government, but when they yet have to implement NPM reforms, they seem to crave for more free market. The overall conclusion is, however, that if the implementation of NPM reforms has any effect on regio-crats' preferences, it tends to decrease their desires for the application of free-market-inspired principles.

The second contextual factor increasing regio-crats' preferences for greater free market is centralization, measured from federal/quasi-federal state structures (0) to fully unitary ones (2) (see Demmke and Moilanen, 2010). Greater centralization seems to encourage regio-crats to view the free market as desirable in economic policy-making, while those in more decentralized or even federal systems have a greater preference for government involvement. This may be a reflection of regio-crats' desires to counter centralization with the free market when in unitary states, while those in federal systems may come to view government involvement as less oppressive than their peers in more centralized systems.

Table 2: Correlation between regio-crats' preferences for free-market solutions, NPM reforms, governance structures and economic indicators

	Free Market	NPM laggard	Unitary state	Perm. Civil Servants	Gov. Employment	Gov. Effectiveness	Gov. debt	Unemployment rate
Free Market	1.00							
NPM laggard	0.49† (0.13)	1.00						
Unitary state	0.44 (0.17)	0.57* (0.07)	1.00					
Permanent Civil Servants (%)	-0.47† (0.14)	-0.53* (0.09)	-0.32 (0.34)	1.00				
Government Employment (% labour force)	-0.54† (0.11)	-0.29 (0.41)	0.30 (0.40)	-0.11 (0.76)	1.00			
Government Effectiveness	-0.40 (0.23)	-0.87*** (0.00)	-0.47 (0.15)	0.49† (0.12)	0.22 (0.53)	1.00		
Government debt	-0.5† (0.11)	-0.28 (0.40)	-0.56* (0.07)	0.39 (0.24)	-0.17 (0.64)	-0.01 (0.98)	1.00	
Unemployment rate	-0.59* (0.06)	0.01 (0.99)	-0.17 (0.62)	0.11 (0.74)	0.06 (0.87)	-0.16 (0.65)	0.31 (0.36)	1.00

Notes: pairwise correlation coefficients between full model variables
p-value between parentheses
*** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.10$; † $p < 0.15$ (two-tailed)

Five remaining factors decrease preferences for more free market. The first of these is the percentage of civil servants holding permanent positions as defined by Demmke (2006, 2012). It seems that in countries with a greater proportion of tenured civil servants, regio-crats put less faith in market-driven logics. Meanwhile in countries where civil servants do not typically hold permanent positions, regio-crats express a greater belief in the ability of the market as opposed to that of government. This may be a reflection of socialization processes. Unaccustomed to the statist model in the public administration itself, regio-crats may be similarly unfamiliar with the concept of greater government involvement. Similarly, a larger state sector in the active labour force (OECD, 2013) seems to inspire greater confidence in government involvement and greater scepticism of free-market logics. These preferences reflect well on state employment, since civil servants do not seem to have any allergic reaction to greater state involvement even when it already accounts for over twenty percent of the active labour force as is the case in Hungary, France or Sweden. Hence, while NPM reforms put civil servants off a greater emphasis on free-market logics, a stronger state

presence through a greater share of employment in the labour market triggers stronger preferences towards government involvement. It may well be that this reflects the belief that the state has the capacity to take on governance challenges (because of its size in the labour market). Governments employing a smaller proportion of the labour force may well be perceived as lacking the ability to govern effectively on complex economic issues, hence triggering a stronger preference for the application of free-market solutions.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, and following the same logic as the above, as government effectiveness increases (World Bank, 2013) so does the belief that government involvement is preferable to free-market logics. It does seem logical indeed, that regio-crats working in environments characterized by low government effectiveness may consider free-market forces as more appealing than governmental ones. Again, when government is effective, civil servants feel little attraction towards market-based solutions to governance challenges. Government debt, too, does not seem to deter regional bureaucrats from wanting less free market and more government involvement. On the contrary: the smaller the governmental debt, the greater the belief in market-based solutions. This may well reflect the polity's dominating ideology, where discourses in favor of lower levels of government indebtedness tend to go hand-in-hand with discourses advocating greater belief in market-inspired policies. Unemployment (Eurostat, 2012), however, is the strongest correlate of support for greater government involvement (and lack of belief in market-based solutions). When the economy is doing well and unemployment is down, bureaucrats are more likely to express a preference towards the free market. However, in times of economic crisis and high unemployment, civil servants display little faith in the free market.

Overall, it would seem that the implementation of NPM reforms mostly tends to weaken bureaucrat preferences for market-based solutions. It is interesting that the same can be said about government effectiveness. The more effective the government, the weaker is the preference for depending on free-market logics. While NPM reforms are slowly but surely spreading within EU countries, meaning that government effectiveness will hopefully rise too, one can expect regional bureaucrats to increasingly turn towards the government rather than the market to regulate the economy ; the more so as European countries continue to decentralize. However, the prevailing ideology on the shrinking of governmental debt, the fight against unemployment, the cutting-down on the size of the civil service and the length of its employment contracts all contribute to bureaucrats putting greater faith in the market than in government.

EXPLAINING THE GERMAN REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE'S PREFERENCE FOR THE FREE MARKET

The relationships analysed in the previous section are certainly instructive of how different circumstances seem to encourage regio-crats to turn either towards the market or towards the state to run the economy. However, such aggregate analysis can only inform us about the effect of the context on individual preferences. Beyond these contextual factors, we believe a series of individual factors may also play a role in determining regio-crats' preferences, with contextual factors constant. This is why, in a second step, we focus our analysis on the effect of individual-level characteristics which we hope will shed greater light on why some bureaucrats seem to display greater trust in market forces while others prefer to turn to government. To hold contextual variables constant, we focus our analysis on German regio-crats alone.

We have collected information on 205 German regio-crats. These elite regional civil servants are evenly distributed across fifteen of Germany's sixteen Länder with, on average, 13.7 interviews carried out per Land administration. A typical German regio-crat scores 5.56 on the government-intervention/free-market continuum, hence above the central value of 5. Hence, German regio-crats, rather than preferring a perfectly balanced mix between free-market and statist dynamics, have a very slight preference for the free market.

The typical German regio-crat was born around 1957, has a 75% chance of being a man rather than a woman and a 28% chance of having parents who have already worked in public administration. 38% of our interviewees are in East Germany. 14% have a degree in economics, 42% in law/administration, 23% in natural science/engineering and 21% in arts and social sciences. When deciding to join the regional administration, 54% were motivated by job security and 89% joined because of a "desire to participate in the development of the region". Unemployment in the civil servant's region ranged from 3.3% (Bavaria) to 11.9% (Berlin) with an average situated at 7%⁸.

Controlling for structural and economic differences in our single-country analysis, what kind of factors may explain individuals' preferences for free-market solutions in times of economic crises? A first set of factors is related to demographic characteristics. Gender has been hypothesized to play a role. Women are often considered to be more left-wing and less pro-competition (Hofstede, 1984). Several decades of public sector modernization efforts, might, however, have left their mark on generational cohorts of public servants. The generation that grew up in the golden

⁸ The theoretical models below control for unemployment, since unemployment was the strongest correlate in the above cross-country analysis.

years of the welfare state, and that therefore probably used to be sanguine about the capacity of the state to steer economic development, is now in retirement. Its direct followers lived through the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s and might be shaped by a neoliberal intellectual environment seeing solutions in the “rolling back of the state” and in particular rolling back the state bureaucracy as the panacea for many of the ills of society in general and sluggish economic growth in particular (Niskanen, 1971 ; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992 ; Hood, 1991). Newer generations – in particular in Germany – may have seen the devastating impact of “simple” liberal solutions to the economy of the former German Democratic Republic (Seibel, 2010), or they may interpret the recent financial crisis as a consequence of over-liberalized markets. One might thus expect a “generational effect,” the older a regio-crat, the greater his/her support for free-market solutions (hypothesis 1). However, women – on the basis of cultural theoretical considerations (Hofstede, 1998) – are more likely than men to hold the opposite view (hypothesis 2), as they are thought to value competitive and aggressive management strategies less than their male colleagues.

Another explanation for individual attitudes is usually seen in socialization or in-group dynamics (Van Maanen, Eastin, and Schein, 1977 ; Hooghe, 2001). One can distinguish between an early life environment and the self-chosen educational path that individuals take as young adults. For example, bureaucrats having parents who have worked or work in the public administration may have a higher esteem for the state as opposed to the market (hypothesis 3). Another obvious factor for our sample is whether the individual is from the former eastern part of Germany. Living in East Germany may instigate a desire for a greater dose of economic liberalism. Years spent on the eastern side of the iron curtain may have generated an aversion to statist ideology due to persistent post-communist legacies (hypothesis 4).

Professional training is another particular case of socialization for young adults (Hooghe, 2005). Graduates from academic disciplines such as law and the social sciences, especially if compared with graduates from economic disciplines, are supposedly more supportive of a strong state than of the free market (hypothesis 5). Finally there are particular features of the public service that are seen to attract individuals to seek a career as bureaucrats. Within this set of factors one finds utilitarian considerations (stable job) and altruistic considerations (Perry and Wise, 1990). For example, bureaucrats may have joined the regional administration because they wish to participate in the development of their region while others may have been motivated by more egoistic considerations such as the prospect of greater job security. One might expect that utilitarian individuals have a greater preference for the free market (hypothesis 6), while altruistic civil servants prefer more government involvement (hypothesis 7).

We run our analysis block-wise, testing each explanatory block separately and then concomitantly in a final model. Since we include two regional-level covariates (i.e., the region’s unemployment level and whether the individual is situated in East Germany) we construct a multi-level model where we define individuals as the lower level observations and regions as the upper level group. This allows us to control for

the regional clustering of bureaucrats and to include unemployment and an East/West dummy.

Regarding demographic characteristics, neither of our variables is significant. A later year of birth is actually associated with a higher preference for the free market, while female regio-crats display marginally stronger pro-government preferences than their male counterparts. However, these two variables have only a weak and insignificant effect on regio-crats' preferences and therefore the evidence of an association is too weak to draw any meaningful conclusions.

Regarding early life socialization, we see that having parents who have worked (or still work) in the public administration hardly affects regio-crats' preferences, but when it does, it tends to increase the preference for the free market. The effect, however, is weak and insignificant. Belonging to an East German Land, however, is strongly and significantly associated with a preference for free-market solutions. This may be driven by a desire to experience a greater dose of liberalism after years spent on the eastern side of the iron curtain and by an aversion to statist ideology due to persistent post-communist legacies. The effect is strong and stable across models and always significant.

Professional socialization in economics is – in line with our expectations – very strongly and highly significantly associated with a preference for free-market solutions to economic governance challenges (education in humanities/social sciences is here used as the reference category). Somewhat more remarkably, however, education in law and administration is also strongly and significantly associated with a preference for the free market. The stability and strength of this association – though less pronounced than in the case of economists – came as a surprise. As expected, an education in natural sciences/engineering does not display any significant association to the dependent variable.

The motivation for entering the regional administration (as a proxy for how utilitarianism relates to economic liberalism) does not seem to play a role. Neither variable seems to be related to preferences regarding the role of the free market as opposed to that of the government. Bureaucrats joining because of anticipated job security are in favor of government intervention but the association, though relatively strong, fails to reach traditionally accepted significance levels. Surprisingly, there is little association between preferences for a stronger involvement of government and joining the regional administration to make a difference to the development of the region. Though some regio-crats join the administration because of a desire to make a difference to their region, it seems they remain open-minded as to whether this will be achieved via greater government intervention or by relying on free-market logics. This suggests that though some bureaucrats have entered the profession for rather utilitarian motivations (i.e., job security) and others for more ideological ones (i.e., to make a difference), these motivations remain largely unrelated to economic liberalism.

Table 3: Hierarchical linear model of regio-crats' preference for a greater role of the free market in economic policy

	Model 1 Demographic characteristics		Model 2 Early life socialisation		Model 3 Early adulthood socialisation (university education)		Model 4 Motivation for entering the administration		Model 5 Full the	
	Estimate	(s.e.)	Estimate	(s.e.)	Estimate	(s.e.)	Estimate	(s.e.)	Estimate	(s.e.)
Constant	-26.33	(30.88)	6.35***	(0.51)	5.19***	(0.42)	5.44***	(0.69)	-21.95	(30.80)
Year of birth	0.02	(0.02)							0.01	(0.02)
Gender (1=female)	-0.21	(0.28)							-0.11	(0.28)
Parents worked in PA			0.04	(0.26)					0.12	(0.26)
East Germany			0.85*	(0.47)					0.87*	(0.47)
Economics degree					0.97***	(0.36)			1.06***	(0.37)
Law/administration degree					0.52*	(0.27)			0.54*	(0.28)
Nat.sciences/engineering d.					0.09	(0.31)			0.13	(0.32)
Humanities/social sciences					Omitted	(refence cat.)			Omitted	(refence cat.)
No interest in job security							0.24	(0.24)	0.37	(0.24)
No interest in dev. of region							-0.06	(0.39)	-0.02	(0.39)
Unemployment (region)	-0.02	(0.05)	-0.16*	(0.09)	0.00	(0.05)	-0.02	(0.05)	-0.13	(0.09)
$\sqrt{\theta}$ individual level	1.68***	(0.09)	1.68***	(0.09)	1.65***	(0.09)	1.68***	(0.09)	1.64***	(0.08)
$\sqrt{\psi}$ regional level	0.23	(0.23)	0.08	(0.53)	0.16	(0.30)	0.26	(0.22)	0.00	(0.00)
Log likelihood	-392.78		-397.13		-394.07		-391.45		-379.30	
Observations	202		205		205		201		198	

Notes: Two-level model of regio-crats' preference for a greater role of government (0) versus a greater role of the free market (10) in economic policy. Unstandardized maximum likelihood estimates. Standard errors between brackets. *** $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .05$; * $p \leq .10$ (two-tailed).

PA = Public Administration ; Nat.sciences = natural sciences ; engineering d. = engineering degree ; No interest in dev. of region = no interest in participating in the development of the region.

In sum, the factors which seem to best account for regio-crats' preferences for free-market solutions are context (living in East Germany) and professional socialization (in economics or law). No evidence of a "generational effect," i.e., that older regio-crats would oppose/promote free-market ideals, could be detected. In this sense, advocates of NPM have a receptive audience in German regio-crats, especially among those having received economics, law or public administration training or working in Eastern Germany – and this regardless of the age, gender or reason for which these bureaucrats joined the regional administration in the first place.

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In this article we analysed the visions of German regio-crats regarding economic policy and whether they prefer a greater role for government or for the market. In particular we wanted to find out whether there is a link between such a preference for government versus market solutions and the New Public Management reform movement which has transformed administrative systems worldwide over the last twenty-five years. To our knowledge, our data set covering 205 German and over 500 regio-crats from another ten European countries is the largest systematically collected at this level of government.

We find that, compared to the other European regional elites, German regio-crats take an intermediate position between state and market preferences, only slightly favoring market solutions. The linkage between aggregate preferences for market solutions on the one side and NPM reform intensity or other macro-level characteristics of the national administrative systems on the other is, however, weaker than expected. Our comparison between country groups suggests that when the economy is doing well and unemployment is down, bureaucrats are more likely to prefer free-market solutions over state intervention. However, in times of economic crisis and high unemployment, civil servants display little faith in the free market. In our view, the recent economic crisis is thus likely to reduce the belief of regio-crats in the benefits of the free market, the more so when their national economy is negatively affected by financial and fiscal turmoil. Beyond the effect of the economic situation, our data suggest that in NPM forerunners, such as the Netherlands or Sweden, regio-crats have a lower esteem for free-market solutions than their colleagues in NPM-laggard countries, such as Poland or Romania. This is what we called the "the grass is always greener on the other side" effect. In other words regio-crats express a preference for what they have less of: once NPM reforms have been implemented, they wish for a greater role for government, but when they yet have to implement NPM reforms, they

seem to crave for more free market. The overall conclusion is, however, that if the implementation of NPM reforms has any effect on regio-crats' preferences, it tends – on average – to decrease their desire for the application of free-market-inspired principles.

Analysing market preferences in the sample of German regio-crats and focusing on individual-level explanations, we found that context (East Germany) and choice of professional education (economics and law) – in other words, socialization factors – are able to explain free-market preferences. However, no generational effect – such as NPM reform fatigue of elder generations of civil servants – could be detected in Germany. The implication is that the ideological justifications of organizational transformations that change the working environment of a public servant – however professionally they are embraced and implemented – do not automatically trickle down to the bureaucrat's convictions as an individual.

It is interesting to see that these findings corroborate a hunch that Hans-Ulrich Derlien (2003) expressed more than a decade ago. In a seminal article on federal administrative elites he came, to the conclusion that the impact of NPM is “marginal”. With regard to the NPM ideology of “rolling back the state,” Derlien was convinced that the NPM administrative re-organization policy “was readily developed and has been carried out since 1995 as any substantive policy” (Derlien, 2003, 422). He implies that the German civil servants are professional managers and that they should only be expected to resist a new administration policy if “salary or career opportunities were affected by NPM recipes” (423). Other, more recent studies on the French (Rouban, 2007) and on the European administrative elites (Bauer, 2012) come to a similar conclusion. In other words, on the basis of survey data no strong argument can be made that the cultural change connected with NPM public sector reforms shapes the individual bureaucrats in ways which make them indoctrinated agents for further, intensified transformations of the same kind. One could put forward the hypothesis that precisely because regio-crats constitute a particular elite group of administrators, public sector reform arguments developed on the basis of ideological justifications are considered with professional distance. Reforms are followed if they have the political backing, but can be disposed of if this backing fades. In their role understanding top bureaucrats remain pragmatic managers, unlikely to connect their professional advancement with a fashionable reform movement.

On the basis of such reflections other potential implications of our study come to the fore. What we have described above, the standard of surveying administrative elites, i.e., questions developed in the 1970s to tap into role perceptions of top bureaucrats, appears to be in need of reconsideration⁹. What we need is a theoretically

⁹ Aberbach *et al.* (1981) (and their followers) ask, for example, whether top bureaucrats see their job as “Solving technical policy problems and applying specialized knowledge”, “fighting for or representing the interests of social group, class or cause, or protesting injustice”, “focusing on legal processes or legalistic definitions of one’s responsibilities”, “mediating or resolving conflicts of interests

derived reflection of what roles contemporary elite bureaucrats play or ought to play in our political systems and processes which are to an ever greater extent expertise driven, shaped by internationalization, stretching loosely over ever more political layers of government and becoming regularly challenged by citizens (and their lobby groups) who demand democratically justified participation rights. In the presented study about European regional administrative elites, instead of the established standard questions we thus followed another approach (Hooghe, 2001 ; Bauer 2012 ; Kassim *et al.*, 2013). We used policy focal items – perceptions of governance preferences – as a stimulus and basis for comparison within and across country samples. While we do not suggest giving up the traditional survey standard – especially since, in the area of the measurement of politicization, contemporary results appear to produce solid insights and still fruitful debates – we call for its theoretical overhaul. Meanwhile we leave it to the reader and active scholars in the field to assess whether the policy content approaches as used in this article (focusing on generalizable governance images) should become a complement in the necessary recalibration of administrative elite research.

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and political conflicts", "representative of the national interest or of the federal government", "protecting the interests of specific clientele groups or constituents" and on the basis of the self-assessment categorize individuals as facilitator, trustee, partisan, broker, legalist and advocate.

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Annex: Variables and coding

Variable	Data Source	Coding
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Free Market	Survey question: Looking at economic policy, some would like government to intervene actively on economic policy issues. Others would rather rely on free market forces. Where would you place your own vision of economic policy	continuum 0 = greater role for government 10 = greater role for the free market
Administrative Tradition	Meyer and Hammerschmid 2010	0 = Anglo Saxon 1 = Scandinavian 2 = continental european 3 = eastern european 4 = southern European
Non Weberianness	Demmke and Moilanen 2010	Continuum 0% = traditional bureaucracy 100% = post bureaucracy
Public Admin. Education	Hajnal 2003	0 = legal, public cluster 1 = corporate cluster
NPM laggard	Pollit and Bouckaert 2004 ; Bouckaert et al. 2008 ; Ongaro 2009	0 = forerunner 1 = rather forerunner 2 = in-between-er 3 = rather laggard 4 = laggard
Unitary state	Demmke and Moilanen 2010	0 = federal or quasi-federal 1 = decentralised unitary state 2 = unitary state
Permanent Civil Servants (%)	Demmke 2006, 2012	Civil servants as percentage of public employees in total
Government Employment (% labour force)	OECD 2011	Employment in general government as a percentage of the labour force
Government Effectiveness	The Governance Worldwide Indicators 2012	Continuum -2,5 = weak gov. performance

		2,5 = strong gov. performance
Government debt	Eurostat 2012	Government debt (brutto) as percentage of GDP
Unemployment rate	Eurostat 2012	Unemployment rate as percentage of the economically active population
Year of birth	Survey	Year
Gender	Survey	0 = male 1 = female
Parents worked in PA	Survey	0 = no 1 = yes
East Germany	Survey	0 = West Germany 1 = East Germany
Economics degree	Survey	0 = else 1 = economics degree
Law/administration degree	Survey	0 = else 1 = law/administration
Natural sciences/engineering degree	Survey	0 = else 1 = natural sciences/engineering
Humanities/social sciences degree	Survey	0 = else 1 = humanities/social sciences
Job security	Survey (what factors has motivated you to work in the regional administration?)	2 = else 1 = job security
Participate in dev. of region	Survey (what factors has motivated you to work in the regional administration?)	2 = else 1 = desire to participate in the development of the region
Unemployment (region)	Eurostata 2012	Unemployment rate as percentage of the economically active population