



## **International SOG Workshop 2024**

**Research Committee 27 of the International Political Science Association**

**„Structure and Organization of Government“**

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### **Call for Papers**

**What does democratic resilience mean for public sector organizations?**

**Perspectives from public administration, management, and policy**

**October 17-18, 2024**

**to be held in Münster, Germany**

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#### **Thematic focus and rationale of the workshop**

Against the backdrop of the academic and political discourse on democratic backsliding and retrenchment (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, Moffitt 2020, Lührmann and Merkel 2022, van Beek 2022), the workshop highlights – through theoretical and empirical analyses – the organizational response to challenges of the public sector in a wide array of political systems emerging from populist movements, autocratic tendencies, and the raise of political radicalism, if not extremism (Bauer and Becker 2020, Bauer et al. 2021, Green 2019, Lotta et al. 2023, Peters and Pierre 2022, Rockman 2019, Story et al. 2023)). In doing so, the workshop focuses on a key issue of comparative public administration: the conflict-prone relationship between bureaucratic autonomy and professionalism on the one hand as well as democratic responsiveness and politicization on the other hand (Bertelli and Schwartz 2022, Heath 2020). In times of political turbulence, this recurrent theme gains particularly high currency, because the normative principle of political control of bureaucracy in liberal democracies bears also the risk of political attacks on the administrative state, including threats to the rule of law, thus dismantling the capacity of public sector organizations and dismissing bureaucratic expertise

(Bauer et al. 2021, Peters and Pierre 2019 and 2022, Saxlund Bischoff 2022). On top of that political stressors for government bureaucracies may not only emerge from anti-democratic office-holders. Rather, public sector organizations are increasingly confronted by segments of society who call the legitimacy and authority of government officials and their actions into question. What is more, public administration itself may become the battle ground of polarized political views with negative consequences for professional integrity, service quality, and public trust. While (party-)political strategies to stem the tide of populist and anti-democratic movements are frequent topics of widespread and often heated debates in academic circles and among policy-makers and representatives of civil society, the specific challenges to government bureaucracies and the range of available *administrative* options to address those problems have been unduly neglected.

Against this background, workshop discussions, in a nutshell, are meant to revolve around the question of how public administration can and should respond to democratic backsliding, populist movements and polarized societies (for this discussion Stoker 2021, see also Roberts 2020) in order to strengthen the democratic resilience of public bureaucracies. In doing so, the workshop pursues a distinctly organizational perspective, searching – in theory and practice – for proprieties and capacities of government organizations to anticipate, cope, and adapt to stressful political environments while maintaining democratic values, the rule of law and high standards of professional integrity. In this context, the reference to “democratic resilience” may serve as an umbrella term to denote a certain level of preparedness for public administration to operate successfully in times of political turbulence.

From a theoretical and conceptual point of view, the workshop is geared to explore the manifold meanings of the concept of “resilience” (Berkes 2023, Chandler 2014, see also Boin and van Eeten 2013, Dalgaard-Nielsen 2017, Kayes 2015) when applied to public sector organizations which operate in increasingly complex policy environments and often fragmented and polarized political habitats. Resilience has morphed to become one of the most fashionable as well as contested terms in contemporary social science discourse (Rifkin 2022). What is more, it has also made inroads into political debates and colloquial use, often denoting plans of action to increase the capacity of individuals, corporate actors and systems as a whole to cope with a multitude of crises (Hollnagel et al. 2006, Powley et al. 2020). Much of the attraction of the concept of resilience, however, seems to be owed to its blurred boundaries and ill-defined character. As a consequence, the ubiquitous reference to resilient actors, institutions, and systems calls for a theoretical and conceptual exposition of “resilience-thinking” in the public administration, management, and policy community, thus clarifying how “democratic resilience” relates to other organizational values and concepts of governance. For the sake of clarity, again, the workshop focuses primarily on the analysis of democratic resilience of increasingly contested public sector organizations.

Taking an organizational perspective, democratic resilience may impact on a range of managerial and/or policy-related functions, which cover both internal and external relations and tasks of government bureaucracies. Externally, for example, democratic resilience may refer to

strategies of how to engage with (or disengage from) political actors and institutions, clientele groups and the wider public or specific parts thereof. More specifically, this dimension of democratic resilience also relates to the way how and what public bureaucracies communicate – and through which means – with their constituencies and the public at large. Internally, the degree of organizational resilience – democratic or otherwise – has consequences for the way how structures and processes for the generation of knowledge, decision-making, service delivery as well as internal control mechanisms and procedures for seeking redress for maladministration are designed and applied. Also, inside bureaucracies the recruitment, selection, training, and further development of personnel is of central concern for questions of democratic resilience.

Those dimensions of resilient public bureaucracies do not only identify areas of potential problems, they also offer a list of possible levers of change and for administrative reform to furnish public organizations better against the risks of illiberal and authoritarian tendencies. Sketched in a broad-brushed manner, possible reform measures tend to fall in different categories of policy instruments: While some approaches primarily rely on government authority and rule-setting (exemplified by regulatory and disciplinary measures that govern the selection of public personnel or sanction administrative behavior), others build upon the power of persuasion (such as communicative strategies, information campaigns as well as training and education programs often designed as preventive measures) and still others prefer structural and procedural responses as their reform instrument of choice (illustrated by networked approaches of collaborative arrangements with partners inside and outside of public bureaucracies or cases of capacity building for strategy development, administrative control, scrutiny, and self-reflection). Arguably, these reform steps towards improved democratic resilience of public sector organizations do not fall into the jurisdiction of public administrators. Rather, they require the active involvement of executive and legislative politicians, cooperation of target groups and constituencies, and support from organizational partners from public, private, and non-profit sectors.

The workshop is designed to bring together an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars from a broadly-defined political science-driven community of students of public administration, public management and public policy. In pursuit of this inclusive approach, the organizers aim at facilitating discussions along genuinely comparative dimensions across national borders, types of public bureaucracies, and policy fields. Presumably, the terms of “democratic resilience” or “administrative state” may mean different things in different countries reflecting differences in regime types, administrative traditions, social cleavages, and lines of (party-)political conflict. Similarly, democratic retrenchment and populist movements tend to impact differently on different organizations (such as government departments at the apex of the politico-administrative hierarchy as opposed to service delivery organizations at “street level”). As for fields of public policies and related service areas, significant differences are also to be expected between various types of public services. In particular, public organizations that provide services, which carry a strong element of state authority and, given the circumstances, can be forced upon service recipients – as in the case of law enforcement

agencies, but also schools and public health institutions among others – are inclined to be particularly heavily impacted by trends of democratic backsliding and share a particularly high responsibility to prepare themselves for those risks.

### **Workshop format and call for papers**

The workshop provides a collegial forum conducive to in-depth discussions among peers, allowing ample time for exchanges among panelists and workshop participants. For this reason, the capacity of the workshop is limited to some 20 through 30 participants in their active roles as panelists or chairs and discussants. No conference fee will be charged for workshop participation. Ground expenses (including meals during the conference as well as up to two nights of accommodation) will be covered for all paper givers and active participants.

We are inviting a wide range of papers in relation to issues of democratic resilience of public administration in the modern state – in both its theoretical or ideal forms and its practical manifestations. The proposed SOG workshop is committed to a plurality of theories and methods, welcoming papers that are theoretical or empirical, descriptive or explanatory. Submissions with a sound conceptual and/or theoretical background and an appropriate methodological approach are particularly appreciated. Comparative papers that pursue research questions in the field across time, national boundaries, types of public sector organizations or areas of public policy are particularly encouraged.

Submissions, based on an abstract of no more than 300 words, should be made directly to the workshop convener at [eckhard.schroeter@dhpol.de](mailto:eckhard.schroeter@dhpol.de).

Paper presentations will be organized into appropriate panels with designated discussants for each paper. When you submit an abstract, you also indicate your willingness to be a discussant of another paper. Proposal authors will be notified by the organizing committee's decision by May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Please submit your paper abstract including the following information:

1. Personal details
  - a. Name(s) of author(s)
  - b. Institutional affiliation
  - c. Contact details of author(s)
2. Paper abstract (300 words max.): Please provide details of your proposed paper, including title, research questions, conceptual/theoretical approach and methodological orientation as well as expected contribution to the thematic focus of the workshop.

#### *Important dates:*

- Deadline for submission of abstracts: May 8th, 2024
- Notification of authors about the result of the call for papers: May 15th, 2024
- Submission of full papers: September 20th, 2024
- SOG Workshop: October 17-18th, 2024

## **Organizational matters and practicalities**

### *Host institution*

The German University of the Police (*Deutsche Hochschule der Polizei*) is a postgraduate institution of higher learning specializing on policing research, degree programs, including doctoral degrees, and continuing education. Its signature two-year full-time master program “Public Administration & Police Management” serves as the gateway to senior management positions in police forces nationwide. The spring semester of 2024 marks the launch of the newly-designed master’s program on “Public Governance and Democratic Resilience” offered by an interdisciplinary faculty.

### *Location and workshop venue*

The city of Münster serves as a regional center in the Northwest of Germany and is conveniently linked to national and international destinations by train and air travel. A traditional university town with a student population of more than 50,000, Münster prides itself with an outstanding quality of life and a pioneering role in sustainable city development. For the workshop, we will have use of the conference facilities of the Professional School of the University of Münster, housed in an historic landmark building, designed for medium-sized seminars and workshops, and easily accessible in the historic inner-city area.

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