

Patterns of bureaucracy: Conceptualizing administrative traditions

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Abstract

Administrative traditions (AT) are a prominent approach to classify and compare administrative systems across countries, yet there is a lack of agreement on the definition and conceptual dimensions of AT. This article addresses this gap by synthesizing existing knowledge on AT and refining its conceptualization in three steps. First, a systematic review of 505 publications since 1998 elucidates the diverse understandings of AT and the study contexts in which the concept is used. Secondly, ten AT attributes that emerged from the review are operationalized with secondary data for 49 administrative systems from around the world. Using exploratory factor analysis, the study identifies two underlying dimensions of the AT concept: Citizen orientation and Structural concentration. In a third step, I propose two indices to measure AT along these two dimensions and apply it to map contemporary administrative systems from 49 diverse countries. The analysis uncovers important variation within assumed country families such as the Anglo-American or post-communist groups. The article's core contributions are the empirically grounded and parsimonious conceptualization of AT as the degree of Citizen orientation and Structural concentration in a country's public administration as well as the validated two-dimensional AT measure.

Abstract in German

Verwaltungstraditionen sind ein beliebter Ansatz, um Verwaltungssysteme unterschiedlicher Länder zu klassifizieren und zu vergleichen. Doch es besteht kein Einvernehmen über die Definition und die konzeptionellen Dimensionen von Verwaltungstraditionen. An dieser Lücke setzt der vorliegende Artikel in drei Schritten an, um bisheriges Wissen zusammenzufassen und eine verbesserte Konzeptualisierung von Verwaltungstraditionen zu entwickeln. Erstens beleuchtet eine systematische Literaturübersicht von 505 Publikationen seit 1998 die unterschiedlichen Begriffsverständnisse von Verwaltungstraditionen und die Kontexte, in denen das Konzept verwendet wird. Zweitens werden zehn Attribute von Verwaltungstraditionen, die sich aus der Literaturübersicht ergeben, mit Sekundärdaten für 49 Verwaltungssysteme aus aller Welt operationalisiert. Eine explorative Faktoranalyse identifiziert dabei zwei Dimensionen, die dem Konzept der Verwaltungstraditionen zugrunde liegen: Bürgerorientierung und strukturelle Konzentration. Im dritten Schritt werden zwei Indizes entwickelt, um Verwaltungstraditionen entlang dieser zwei Dimensionen zu messen, und diese dann auf die heutigen Verwaltungssysteme in 49 Ländern angewendet. Die Analyse zeigt wichtige Unterschiede innerhalb der bis dato angenommenen Länderfamilien wie der anglo-amerikanischen oder postkommunistischen auf. Der Artikel leistet wichtige Beiträge zur Literatur: einerseits eine empirisch-fundierte und minimalistische Konzeptualisierung von Verwaltungstraditionen als Grad von Bürgerorientierung und struktureller Konzentration in der Verwaltung eines Landes, andererseits ein validiertes zwei-dimensionales Messinstrument für Verwaltungstraditionen.

Key words: administrative tradition; comparative public administration; systematic review; exploratory factor analysis; national bureaucracies.

Introduction

Administrative traditions (AT) are a central concept to classify public administration across countries (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019; Painter and Peters 2010; Peters 2021). The distinction between, for example, Anglo-American, Napoleonic, and Scandinavian traditions is widely used in comparative research to justify case selection (Breugh, Rackwitz, and Hammerschmid 2023), or to explain variation in administrative practice (Bel 2022; Yesilkagit and Christensen 2010), the uptake and success of administrative reforms (Dahlström and Lapuente 2010; Hammerschmid, Meyer, and Demmke 2007) or, recently, differences in governments' responses to Covid-19 (Bouckaert et al. 2020; Jugl 2023). AT could also be useful to overcome Western bias in public administration by offering an analytical lens for comparison between public administration in the Global South and North and by highlighting the

influence of domestic and colonial legacies (Ohemeng and Anebo 2012; Salazar-Morales 2023).

Despite its prominent role in public administration research, the AT concept suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity and empirical foundation. Notably, scholars do not agree on a definition of AT or on the attributes and dimensions that constitute it. Peters' widely cited definition specifies AT as "an historically based set of values, structures, and relationships with other institutions that defines the nature of appropriate public administration within a society" (Peters 2021, p. 23). However, there is no agreement on which "values, structures, and relationships" form the core of the AT concept: While Painter and Peters (2010, pp. 6–8) develop the concept based on four attributes of administrative systems (relationships with society, relationships with political institutions, law vs. management, accountability), in his recent book, Peters (2021, pp. 26–47) adds

four additional “elements” to these previous four: administration and service, civil service careers, state and society II (participation of social actors), uniformity. Different again, another influential book on comparative public administration by Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2019) treats AT as the cultural-historical dimension of national “administrative profiles” besides, and distinct from, administrative structure. Moreover, authors disagree about the number and names of certain ‘traditions’ or country families and about the classification of certain countries, for example the Netherlands or Turkey (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2010).

The main reason for this lack of agreement is that the concept has been developed based on descriptive case studies of a few ‘paradigmatic cases’ such as France for the Napoleonic tradition and the UK and the US for the Anglo-American tradition, while other countries are classified under the same ‘tradition’ based on (often vague) family resemblance. This approach cannot determine which of the attributes of the paradigmatic cases are core attributes of the AT concept and useful as dimensions for comparison and classification. The focus on paradigmatic cases and the lack of conceptual agreement also undermine the potential of the AT concept for comparative research, that is, to classify larger sets of countries and administrative systems. With more conceptual clarification, the explanatory power of AT and its comparability across studies could be improved, and its country coverage considerably expanded.

This article addresses these concerns. It aims to synthesize existing knowledge about AT and enhance the conceptualization of AT in three steps. First, I present results from a systematic literature review of 505 publications since 1998 that use the AT concept. The review explores how the AT concept has been defined, operationalized, and in which contexts it has been used in public administration and management literature over the last 25 years. By identifying the shortcomings and ten core attributes of the AT concept, the review lays the foundation for the next step. In the second step, I operationalize these ten AT attributes for 49 countries from around the world, including Western countries, Latin American, and East and South Asian countries. I use exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to uncover the concept structure underlying these data. Robust results show that the ten attributes can be condensed into two central dimensions of administrative traditions: Citizen orientation and Structural concentration. In the third step, and based on these two dimensions, I propose and validate a continuous two-dimensional measure of AT. The analysis suggests that previous AT families (e.g., Napoleonic, Scandinavian) have some, but limited descriptive power, and the empirical and continuous indices reveal important variation within these families.

This article makes two contributions. The first contribution is conceptual. The study presents a synthesis and simplification of the AT concept. It advances the conceptual debate on AT by providing an overview of 25 years of literature and by proposing a conceptualization based on rigorous empirical analysis and conceptual parsimony. The second contribution is empirical and consists of a transparent and comprehensive mapping of ATs for an unprecedented number of countries that goes beyond ‘paradigmatic’ and Western countries. These contributions will be useful for scholars of comparative public administration who can apply this empirically-grounded and unprecedentedly nuanced classification of 49 administrative

systems in their studies, for instance, to justify case selection or as an explanatory factor.

Administrative traditions: conceptual foundations

This article starts from the premise that an administrative tradition is a coherent set of features of a country’s administrative system that are based on past decisions. This conceptualization contains three important aspects. First, it is focused on national-level administrative systems. While administrative structures and practices also vary at other, especially lower levels, a consideration of country-wide features is at the core of the AT concept as a tool for comparison across countries.

Second, the premise focuses on features or core attributes of administrative systems that have some internal consistency. This point is at the core of this study and its research aims. As outlined above, the literature does not agree on which attributes are central for the AT concept; therefore, it is the goal of the systematic review to identify the most widely used attributes. Following this, the empirical analysis in this article explores whether there is internal consistency in the form of one or more underlying dimensions. The result of these analyses will be a conceptualization of AT that is refined in terms of attributes and underlying dimension(s).

The third aspect relates to temporality. Scholars broadly agree that administrative features that form AT are “historically based” (Peters 2021, p. 23), but there is no discussion of what qualifies as “historical.” Generally speaking, historical refers to aspects “representing things from the past” (Cambridge Dictionary). For my conceptualization, this means that the AT concept is also concerned with past decisions and trajectories that led to certain administrative features, which may lie in the more distant or more recent past.

The article’s approach builds on the analytical separation of two inherent aspects of the AT literature. By choosing the term administrative “tradition” rather than administrative “system” or others, scholars often aim to do two things at once (Hammerschmid, Meyer, and Demmke 2007): first, to describe important features of contemporary public administration in one or more countries (AT as description or classification or “way of doing public administration”), and second, to link them causally to historical factors (AT as theory). I argue that we need to disentangle these two things analytically and get the first step right before attempting the second. The article focuses on the first step, a rigorous conceptualization and mapping of the features of contemporary administrative systems at the country level and in a comparative perspective. Only once this is achieved can we explore the influence that various historical features had on determining these patterns (Mikkelsen 2018). I will end with suggestions for future research to address this second analytical step. The empirical analysis in this article is limited in terms of temporality because it focuses on the attributes in the AT concept and their coherence.

Systematic literature review: scoping the field

Aims and inclusion criteria

To take stock of the use and conceptualization of the AT concept in the literature, I conducted a systematic literature

review. The review addresses the following questions: In which study contexts is the AT concept used? Which attributes or understandings of AT are most prominent, and how are they operationalized? Further research questions were pursued but are beyond the scope of this article. Instead of taking any single definition of AT as a somewhat arbitrary starting point for the analyses in the later sections, with this review I aim to capture a variety of recurring definitions and understandings of AT for a more robust foundation. To present a systematic and reproducible review, this study followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al. 2021, see PRISMA checklist in the appendix). The protocol was peer reviewed in two steps. First, it was discussed with two scholars, one an expert on AT and one with significant experience in conducting systematic reviews in public management. Second, the protocol was presented at the IRSPM 2023 conference. After both steps, the protocol was adjusted.

The review includes publications going back to 1998, which results in a coverage of 25 years (up to April 2023). I set the start to 1998 because this was the year when a particularly influential article on AT by Knill and Lenschow (1998) was published. Before 1998, publications on AT were negligible. To be eligible for the review, publications must meet all of the following inclusion criteria.

General inclusion criteria

- Field: public administration and public management
- Publication type: books, book chapters, journal articles
- Year of publication: since 1998
- Language: only publications written in English

Specific inclusion criterion

- Topic: must include an explicit mention of “administrative tradition*”

This last criterion means that I exclude publications that mention AT only in the reference list or that refer only to related concepts such as “administrative culture,” “legacies,” or “state tradition.” While some authors may have AT in mind when they use such “partly overlapping and partly competing classifications” (Lægneid 2017, p. 80), these terms are often vague and sometimes used at lower or unclear levels of analysis. As this review focuses on the comparison of administrative systems at the country level, as described above, I searched only for publications that explicitly mention AT. While the focus on one specific search term may limit the search results, it allows for a more precise conceptualization and debate on AT and leaves the relationship with related concepts to future research.

Information sources

I started with a general search of two of the most comprehensive academic search bases that have been shown to be suitable for systematic reviews (Gusenbauer and Haddaway 2020):

1. *Scopus*
2. *Web of Science Core Collection*

Because the databases only allow searches in title, abstract, and keywords, further strategies were used to identify

publications that use AT but without mentioning it in the title, abstract, or keywords:

3. *Full-text search in journals via Ebsco*: I conducted a full-text search of 12 leading public administration journals. I selected ten highly reputed international journals at the frontier of public administration that regularly publish comparative studies or research from a variety of countries, which makes them appropriate and likely outlets for high-quality applications of AT: *Administration & Society*, *Governance*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Administration*, *Public Administration & Development*, *Public Administration Review*, *Public Management Review*. Subsequently, I consulted with expert scholars on the topic (see source 5 below) to ensure that all relevant journals that regularly publish on topics related to AT were included. Two journals were added based on repeated expert suggestions and fit: *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* and *Public Policy & Administration*. The full-text search was conducted through the Ebsco online platform.¹
4. *Forward citation search*: To identify further publications that may refer to AT outside their title, keywords, and abstract, I included publications that cite Painter and Peters (2010). This book is a highly cited standard reference for AT and among the most cited in the Scopus and Web of Science searches (sources 1 and 2). The forward search includes publications that cite the entire book or the introductory chapter 1 or the conceptual chapter 2 by the editors. The forward search was conducted on Scopus because it yielded more results than a similar forward search in Web of Science.
5. *Experts review of journal list and books*: Finally, I asked experts on comparative public administration and AT to review the proposed journal list (source 3) and to suggest any further books. I contacted eight experts based in seven countries and achieved a response rate of 100%.² Further suggestions were received after the presentation of the protocol at the IRSPM 2023 conference. As described above, two journals that were suggested by more than one expert were added to the journal list for full-text search. Furthermore, any books suggested by the experts, 14 books in total, were included.

Search, selection process, and coding

The PRISMA diagram in Figure 1 summarizes the search process. The search term was “administrative tradition*.” Where possible, I applied the following limits or filters in

¹Search results depend on institutional subscriptions that may vary in the coverage of journals and years (Gusenbauer and Haddaway 2020). To allow for reproducibility, I limited the full-text search in Ebsco to journals to which I had access through my university’s institutional subscription. Three journals were only covered from 1999 onwards: *Administration & Society*, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *Public Policy & Administration*. Because my institutional subscription did not cover the *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, I conducted the full-text search through the journal website and accessed relevant articles through other libraries.

²Last email received on 16 April 2023.

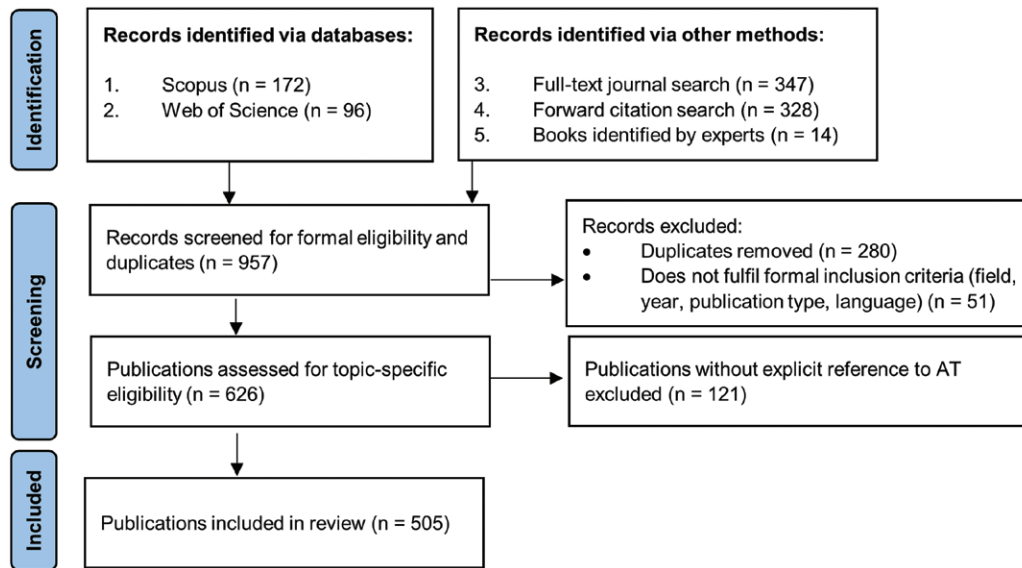


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

the searches based on the inclusion criteria: year, language, publication type, field (“Social Sciences” in Scopus, “Public Administration” in Web of Science). All searches were last conducted in April 2023 and with an institutional subscription from Bocconi University. The records identified through searches via the five information sources were downloaded into Excel and organized alphabetically by author. In the next step, records (title and abstract) were screened for general eligibility criteria and to remove duplicates. The remaining publications (electronic full texts) were screened using the search function to check the specific inclusion criterion.

The 505 publications that fulfill all inclusion criteria are included in the review and coded. Besides bibliographic information (author, title, year, publication type, journal) and information about the publication (type of study, topic, geographic context), coded items include the attribute(s) or understanding(s) of AT and the operationalization of AT. Further items were coded but are not reported in this article. The author coded all 505 included publications, which maximizes internal consistency of the coding, and where necessary added or refined coding categories (e.g., additional AT attributes, see below). To assess the intersubjectivity of the coding, the resulting codebook (see appendix) was used to train a graduate research assistant. After several weeks of in-depth training and several in-person meetings to discuss the coding of a training set, the research assistant independently coded a random sample of approximately 20% of publications ($N = 104$). The inter-rater reliability reached a satisfactory 82% overall and 86% for the AT attributes.

Review results

Study context and geographic context

The large number of included publications reflects considerable interest in the AT concept. The search strategy identified not only publications with AT as their main topic but also publications from a range of subfields: the most prominent topic (104 publications) is public administration and public management reform. Publications on this topic often refer to AT as a causal factor to explain variation in reform adoption or success or to explain path dependency. The second most

prominent topic area (103) is public policy, which includes publications that refer to policy preferences, policy design, the policy-making process, or the implementation of a specific policy. Other topics with substantial frequency are public personnel and politicization (75), Europeanization and EU studies (51), and the comparison of administrative systems (52) which includes publications focusing primarily on the concept of administrative traditions. 21% of the reviewed studies (106) were theoretical or conceptual and 79% were empirical studies, including qualitative and case studies (213), quantitative (119), experimental (7), mixed methods studies (23), and reviews or meta-analyses (26).

In terms of geographic context, the review confirms that the use of the AT concept has a strong Western and especially European bias. More than half of all reviewed publications focus on European countries (271), fewer on North America and the Antipodes (18), some compare Western countries across these two groups (40), and others include some more OECD countries (22). In total, 70% of the reviewed publications have an explicit Western outlook. Much fewer publications focus on countries in Africa (10), Asia (39), or Latin America (8), or include non-Western countries in their comparisons (20). The few publications with a focus on African countries problematize the absence of local ATs (Hyden 2010; Ohemeng and Anebo 2012), which may explain why the concept is in little use there. Truly global studies that compare countries from several continents (beyond the OECD group) and that use AT are scarce (20 publications). The distribution of single-country studies is also insightful, and is topped by Canada and the UK (with 7 each), Germany (15) and Italy with a spectacular 17 publications (about 3% of all reviewed publications). This country list differs somewhat from those that dominate public administration and management research and underlines that academic literature on AT is Eurocentric. Although the Western bias is clear in the reviewed literature, it is weaker than in recent systematic reviews of other topics in public administration. The reason may be that the AT concept is inherently comparative and has the potential to contextualize and bridge insights from different continents.

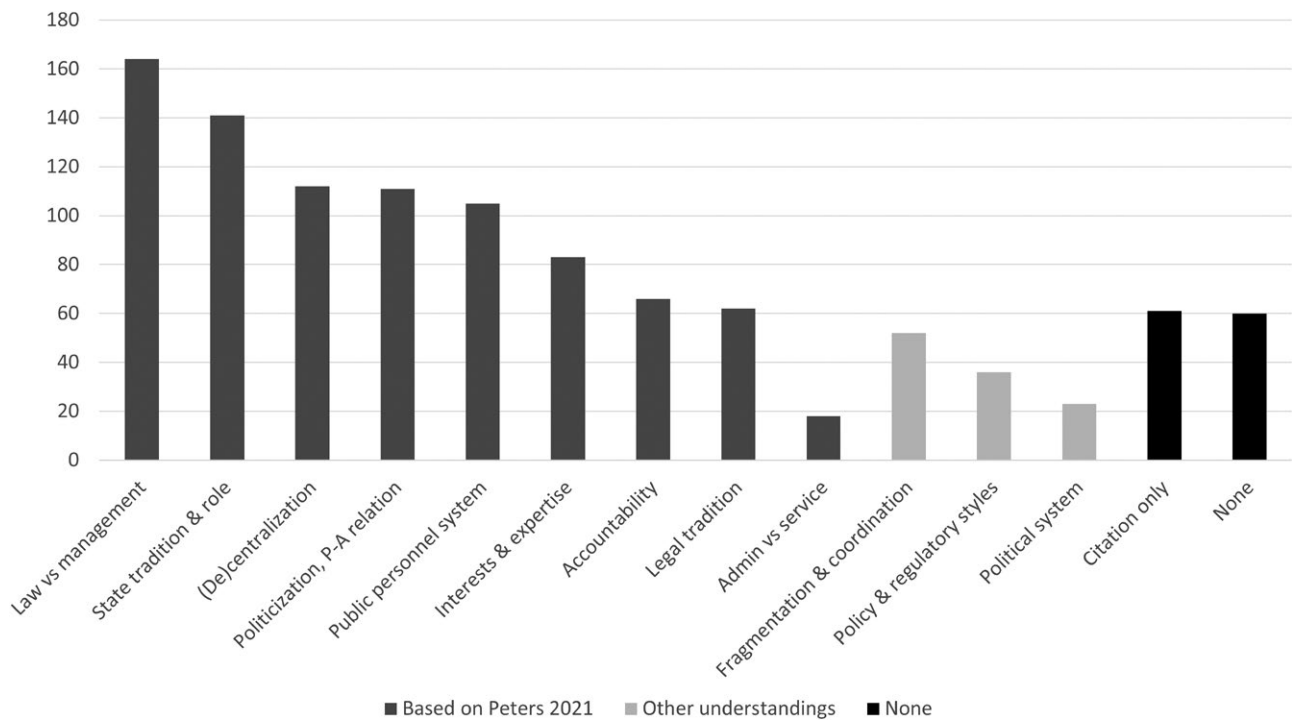


Figure 2 : Publications mentioning AT attributes. Multiple attributes per publication possible.

Attributes of administrative traditions

Attributes are the building blocks of each concept and as described in the introduction, many scholars refer to several attributes to define or conceptualize AT. The search for AT attributes (elements, dimensions, aspects, etc.) in the reviewed publications started from those described in [Painter and Peters \(2010\)](#) and [Peters \(2021\)](#), but remained open for other attributes that emerged from the review. An AT attribute or understanding was coded as present if the publication under review explicitly includes this attribute in its definition of AT or if the publication includes it implicitly in its understanding, use, or operationalization of the AT concept. [Figure 2](#) presents the different AT attributes and how many publications mentioned them. The attributes shown in dark grey are the ones discussed in [Peters \(2021\)](#)³, albeit sometimes with slightly different names, while those in light grey were not included in Peters' conceptualization but emerged from the review. Multiple mentions per publication, in other words, a multidimensional conceptualization of AT, are possible and common. On average, each publication mentions 1.9 AT attributes. When publications that provide neither an explicit nor an implicit conceptualization or definition of AT (shown in black) are excluded, the average number of attributes per publication increases to 2.8.

In the following, I briefly summarize the core of each AT attribute in a guiding question and provide examples of its operationalization, based on the review. The guiding questions and review of data sources provide the groundwork for the empirical analysis that follows in the next sections. The most cited attribute is the distinction of *Law vs management* (164 publications), in other words, whether the expected role of public administration or public administrators is primarily

about following and implementing laws or rather about managing programs efficiently and effectively and achieving results. The dominance of this specific understanding of AT, found in almost one third of the publications, might be explained with its immediate practical relevance for public administration outcomes: authors can more easily develop a causal argument starting from administrative practices that are guided either by a logic of law or by a logic of management than from other more abstract dimensions. In an exemplary study, [Steinebach \(2022\)](#) employs the distinction between a managerialist and legalistic role of civil servants in policy implementation and service delivery as a core explanatory variable, operationalized with data from the Quality of Government (QoG) Expert survey. The second most cited understanding is AT as *State tradition* (141). This attribute is somewhat less straightforward than the first one because it comprises the relationship between the state on the one hand and society and economy on the other, ranging from hierarchical to horizontal, from organic to contractarian and confrontational, as well as the conceptualization and intellectual foundations of the state and the role it can legitimately play. These aspects can be condensed into the following guiding question: How important or imposing is the state vis-à-vis society and economy? If at all, this attribute is typically operationalized via the public expenditure share or the employment share of the public sector ([Aulich and Wettenhall 2019](#); [Rugge 2003](#)).

Three attributes follow with fairly similar frequency. The third attribute is *(De-)centralization* (112 publications) that captures aspects of vertical centralization, decentralization, federalism, or regional and local governance. The straightforward guiding question is how much administrative authority and practice is uniform/centralized or dispersed/decentralized across the territory. [Peters \(2021, p. 89\)](#) refers to this as uniformity and operationalizes it via financial autonomy of subnational governments; also most other

³These include (sometimes with slightly different names) the eight attributes that [Peters \(2021\)](#) introduces in chapter 2 plus legal tradition to which he refers repeatedly (see below).

operationalizations refer to budgetary aspects. The fourth AT attribute refers to *Politicization* and the relations between politics and administration (111). While authors capture such relationships at different levels, from individual-level perceptions of administrative autonomy (Lægreid 2017) to dichotomous classifications of politicization at the country-level (Mikkelsen 2018), all these aspects can be summarized in one question: How much influence do politicians have over the inner working of the public administration (recruitment and administrative decisions)? The fifth attribute is the *Public personnel system* (105). This includes various aspects of civil service systems such as recruitment, tenure, progression and promotion, pay, or legal status, which can be summarized as: How much does a public service career differ from other employment? Most comparative studies operationalize this attribute with QoG Expert Survey data on recruitment systems (e.g., Stensöta, Wängnerud, and Svensson 2015).

In decreasing frequency, the sixth AT attribute is *Interests & expertise* (83 publications) that captures patterns of interest representation and citizen participation in public administration as well as the provision of expertise and advice by various actors. This can be reduced to the question of which role “societal actors can legitimately play in making and implementing public policies” (Peters 2021, p. 39). Typical operationalization includes union density (Peters 2021, p. 65) or corporatism (Steinebach 2022). The seventh attribute is *Accountability* (66), where authors distinguish political from legal and ex ante from ex post mechanisms and sometimes accountability to the public. This can be summarized as: In which way (how much and by whom) is public administration held accountable? Assessments of the accountability attribute are often vague and the review did not detect any quantitative operationalization. The seventh AT attribute is *Legal tradition* (62). While Peters (2021) does not use a country’s specific legal tradition and system as a separate AT element, he refers to this aspect repeatedly, and other studies do so as well, referring, for example, to common vs public law principles or a specific legal tradition imported by colonial powers. In essence: What is the dominant logic of the current legal system? This attribute has been operationalized with categorical variables following the classification of legal origins in La Porta et al. (1999), and often this variable is used as a proxy for the broader AT concept (Bel 2022; Jugl 2023). The attribute of *Administration vs service* (18) considers how far public administrators understand their role as one of administering laws and programs in the interest of those in power, or rather as serving the public, in short: Whom does the public administration serve? This dimension, operationalized via average public service motivation, is a new addition in Peters 2021 book compared to the Painter and Peters edited volume (2010), and it does not resonate much (yet) in the broader literature. Overall, the majority of reviewed publications conceptualize AT at the national level. Many of the reviewed publications build either implicitly or explicitly on the influential works by Painter and Peters (2010) and Peters (2021), and a majority of the publications refer to the multiple attributes of AT described therein. However, it should be noted that the inclusion of the forward-search strategy reinforces the dominance of Painter and Peters’ (2010) conceptualization of AT in the review.

The systematic review has identified three other understandings of AT. First, about one in ten publications

mention *Fragmentation & coordination* (52 publications) of the internal structure of the central-level administration, including the number and fragmentation of ministries or agencies, degrees and mechanisms of coordination between them, and internal hierarchy. The summarizing question is: How fragmented or coordinated is the central government? Operationalization with detailed country data, for example, the number of line sections in each ministry (Zubek and Staroňová 2012), is rare. Second, a small but discernable group of publications uses the term AT to refer to specific *Policy & regulatory styles* (36), which can include the specific institutional setup and responsibilities in a policy sector or established policy tools and practices following influential articles by Knill (1998) and Knill and Lenschow (1998). A third distinct understanding of AT includes attributes of the *Political system* (23), such as electoral rules, political regime, government, and party constellations. While these aspects are certainly relevant for explaining many outcomes of interest, including administrative reforms, I argue that they should be analytically separated from AT and from core aspects of administrative systems, so as not to blur the boundaries of the AT concept.

Finally, more than a fifth of the reviewed publications (121, shown in black in Figure 2) include no definition nor even an implicit description of AT at all. While some of these cite influential works to support the concept (61 publications), this seems insufficient in light of the various and diverging understandings of AT in the literature. The lack of conceptual clarity is particularly problematic for publications that do not discuss AT only briefly but use it in a substantial way, for example, for case selection or as a causal explanation. Confusion may also arise when authors use AT (seemingly) interchangeably with related concepts such as administrative culture or political systems.

While many authors refer to several AT attributes and thus adopt a multidimensional concept of AT, they differ considerably with regard to the specific attributes considered. Even the most widely cited attributes were only mentioned by a minority of publications. In empirical terms, the examples of operationalization of specific AT attributes cited above are the exception rather than the rule. The most common operationalization of AT, found in 34 publications, is via ‘country families’ or dummies for specific traditions. Sometimes these are based explicitly on the literature (e.g., on the classification of legal origins by La Porta et al. 1999), but in other instances the classification of countries is not transparent. Qualitative studies that focus on a smaller number of countries vary equally in the clarity and transparency of their conceptualization and operationalization of AT. The review also reveals that many authors are aware and critical of the conceptual ambiguity, of the fact that the conceptualization and conceptual dimensions of AT are unclear, and that it overlaps with neighboring concepts. Two further criticisms are raised repeatedly: First, that AT tends to conflate present and past (historical) features of administrative systems rather than distinguish them analytically (Hammerschmid, Meyer, and Demmke 2007; Mikkelsen 2018). The second criticism is that the classification of countries into ‘country families’ lacks a systematic empirical foundation, that it is “circular” (Perri 2004), “based on a stereotype” (Mathisen Nyhagen 2015) or “tautological [...] where the existence of national traditions is more presupposed than demonstrated” (Mavrot et al. 2021).

Table 1. Variables and data sources. Varying years 2015–2019.

<i>AT attribute</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Source</i>
Law vs. management	Ratio “Public sector employees strive to be efficient.”/ “Public sector employees strive to follow rules.”	QoG Expert survey wave II
State tradition & role	Total public expenditure as % GDP	World Bank
(De-) centralization	Self-rule sub-index: subnational autonomy	Regional Authority Index RAI
Politicization	Additive index of: Professionalism index (formal politicization) + Political Interference (administrative politicization), scales adjusted	QoG Expert survey wave III
Public personnel system	Closedness index	QoG Expert survey wave III
Interests & expertise	Civil society consultation: “Are major civil society organizations routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members?”	Varieties of Democracy
Accountability	Horizontal accountability index: government accountability to legislature, judiciary, oversight bodies	Varieties of Democracy
Legal tradition	Civil law system indicator: 0 no civil law, 0.5 mixed system with civil law, 1 pure civil law system	Juriglobe
Administration vs. service	Public service orientation: “Public sector employees strive to help citizens.”	QoG Expert survey wave II
Fragmentation & coordination	Number of government ministers	WhoGov

Exploratory factor analysis: determining concept structure

Data and methods

The following empirical analysis addresses several shortcomings of the AT concept: the ambiguity and complexity that surround the concept’s attributes, the lack of empirical foundation for country classification, and its analytical Eurocentrism. In particular, the analysis aims to uncover the latent concept structure underlying the various AT attributes. I test the assumption, mostly implicit in the literature, that these attributes co-vary in a meaningful way or, more explicit in my preliminary conceptualization, that they form a coherent set of features. To do so, I conduct an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) following [Julnes \(1999\)](#) and [Watkins \(2021\)](#). The selection of variables is based on the systematic literature review. While the review identified 12 specific understandings of AT, I exclude two of them: I exclude AT as aspects of the *Political system* because it goes beyond the premise outlined above that AT should focus on public administration systems. I exclude *Policy & regulatory styles* because these are understood here as policy-sector specific, while my conceptualization of AT is at the country level (in line with the overwhelming majority of reviewed publications). This reflects [Knill’s \(1998, p. 6\)](#) distinction between sector-specific policy styles and AT as “national administrative traditions.” Sector-specific policy and regulatory styles may follow from national AT but also from other policy-specific factors, rendering them distinct from national-level AT. This leaves ten attributes. To operationalize them, I follow the guiding questions that distilled the essence of each attribute from the review and then identify appropriate data sources with the maximum possible country coverage and a recent time period (between 2015 and 2019). The attributes, selected variables, and data sources are reported in [Table 1](#).

First, for the AT attribute ‘Law vs management’, I follow [Steinebach’s \(2022\)](#) operationalization that captures this attribute convincingly through a ratio of two expert-rated items from the QoG expert survey, wave II ([Dahlström et al. 2015](#)). Second, while ‘state tradition’ or ‘role of the state’ is hard to quantify, I rely on a simple proxy for the importance of the state vis-à-vis society and economy with large

country coverage: public expenditure as % of GDP. Third, many indicators are available for (de-)centralization and I select the self-rule sub-index from the Regional Authority Index dataset (RAI, [Hooghe et al. 2016](#)) that measures subnational policy and financial autonomy, and thus captures diversity or uniformity of administrative action at the subnational level. Fourth, most available indicators for politicization focus only on one aspect, namely politicization of recruitment. To capture political influence on public administration in a more holistic manner, I create an additive index of two important items from the QoG expert survey, wave III ([Nistotskaya et al. 2020](#)): formal politicization of bureaucratic recruitment (QoG professionalism index) and administrative politicization, that is, political interference in administrative decision making. Fifth, the same dataset serves to operationalize the essence of the public personnel system via the QoG Closedness index, which captures how much a public service career differs from other employment. Sixth, for the attribute ‘interests & expertise’ I rely on an indicator from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem, [Coppedge et al. 2023](#)) that is very close to the attribute’s guiding question: Are major civil society organizations routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members? Besides this conceptual fit, this indicator has broader country coverage than other indices of corporatism or civil society. Seventh, I also use V-Dem to operationalize accountability, through a novel index of horizontal accountability (see [Lührmann, Marquardt, and Mechkova 2020](#)) that captures the extent to which government is held accountable by the legislature, judiciary, and oversight bodies, thus capturing political and legal accountability as discussed in the AT literature. Eighth, for legal tradition, the AT literature regularly refers to the classification by [La Porta et al. \(1999\)](#). However, this is deemed inadequate from a comparative law perspective (see e.g., [Husa 2016](#)) because it is outdated (especially the category of socialist law) and because it refers to private law, whereas public law is more relevant for public administration. Instead, I rely on the JuriGlobe online database⁴ for classification of legal systems, and from there I

⁴<http://www.juriglobe.ca/eng/sys-juri/index.php> last accessed May 6, 2024.

Table 2. Correlation matrix for 10 variables. $N = 49$.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Managerialist orientation (vs. legalist)	1									
2. Public expenditure share (state tradition)	-0.2003	1								
3. Decentralization: subnational autonomy	-0.1668	-0.2224	1							
4. Politicization	-0.4109	0.0915	-0.0588	1						
5. Closed public personnel system	-0.3783	-0.0041	0.2952	0.4082	1					
6. Civil society consultation	0.2667	0.0424	0.0369	-0.6439	-0.3573	1				
7. Horizontal accountability	0.1731	0.2496	-0.0705	-0.5587	-0.2554	0.6830	1			
8. Legal system: civil law	-0.2858	0.5498	-0.1704	0.3609	0.0218	-0.0550	0.0185	1		
9. Public service orientation	0.4706	0.0174	-0.1073	-0.7933	-0.4073	0.6001	0.5591	-0.2897	1	
10. Fragmentation: N government ministers	-0.0968	-0.2766	0.3107	0.0537	0.2423	-0.2971	-0.3065	-0.4552	-0.1675	1

construct an ordinal variable of civil law (none, some/mixed, pure civil law). Civil law systems are considered to be more rigid and leave less room to administrators than common law systems, which are more adaptive. Civil law also tends to go hand in hand with dedicated administrative law and administrative courts, and thus detailed judicial review of administrative action. Ninth, because comparative data on public service motivation are difficult to find and compare for many countries, I operationalize the attribute ‘administration vs service’ with agreement with another QoG expert survey item, wave II: “Public sector employees strive to help citizens.” Tenth, for ‘fragmentation & coordination’ I use the number of government *ministers* from the WhoGov database (Nyrup and Bramwell 2020) as a proxy for the number of government *ministries*. While the number of ministries is available from the OECD for OECD member states, the WhoGov variable has much broader country coverage and correlates very strongly ($r = .8$) with the more precise OECD measure, confirming its validity. The selected measure focuses on only one aspect of fragmentation and coordination, but this is a central aspect that is easier to quantify than, for example, the number of central-level agencies (notoriously hard to count and compare) or the more qualitative assessment of the modes and degrees of coordination. Using the number of ministers from WhoGov rather than the OECD data on the number of ministries maximizes country coverage and contributes to overcoming the literature’s Western/OECD bias. In summary, most selected indicators are based on assessments by country experts (QoG and V-Dem) or coding by scholars (Juriglobe and RAI). QoG, V-Dem, and RAI also employ complex procedures to ensure comparability of assessments and codings and to minimize biases. Two variables are more factual quantitative data: the public expenditure share from World Bank and the number of ministers from WhoGov.

There is no a priori expectation about the appropriate number of factors, and hence no necessary number of variables; rather, the variables are a comprehensive collection of attributes associated with the AT concept. After exclusion of countries with missing data, the final dataset includes 49 countries, representing various world regions and cultural and socio-economic contexts. However, because of data availability, there are no (complete) observations from Africa. To assess restriction of range, summary statistics for the 49-country sample were compared to those for the full sample for each variable. For most variables, the 49 countries

cover the maximum range of the larger sample (4) or approximate the full range in the larger sample (2). Slightly restricted ranges are noted for 4 variables; the differences are largely due to countries with authoritarian regimes, which are underrepresented among the 49 countries. Overall, the sample is fairly representative of the global population of countries, with some exceptions, especially regarding authoritarian regimes and Africa. Thus, the EFA findings may not travel to these contexts.

Data screening showed that there is no linear dependency among these variables and that there are no problems with multicollinearity, non-normal distributions, or outliers. Several measures indicate that the correlation matrix is appropriate for EFA: the correlation matrix in Table 2 shows several coefficients with absolute values above .3 but none exceeding .8, Bartlett’s test of sphericity rejects the hypothesis that the correlation matrix was an identity matrix (chi-square of 192.8 with 45 degrees of freedom), and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy is acceptable with an overall value of .754. I apply a principal factor extraction method because of its sensitivity to weak factors—given that many correlation coefficients are not strong.

EFA results and interpretation

Since there is no theoretical expectation about dimensionality, I rely on empirical indicators to decide how many factors to retain. Inspection of the scree plot (see appendix) suggests retaining between two and three factors, while the minimum average partial method and parallel analysis both suggest two factors. Based on this and the trade-off between conceptual parsimony and comprehensiveness, I retain two factors. Because I had no clear expectations about the intercorrelation between factors, I started with oblique rotation to allow for the factors to be correlated. Results from oblique rotation (promax) show only a minor correlation (.09) between the two factors. This suggests that factors are largely independent and orthogonal rotation can be used for easier interpretation. Hence, I opted for a varimax rotation, and the resulting factor loadings and communality are reported in Table 3.

For all ten variables, the two-factor solution exhibits salient loadings, assuming a cut-off of $>.3$, and simple loadings, that is, no variable loads on more than one factor. Six variables load on Factor 1 and four variables load on Factor 2. The loadings are meaningful, except for decentralization, which reaches only .35 and has the lowest communality

Table 3. Factor analysis results. Principal factors method, orthogonal varimax rotation.

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	<i>b</i> ²
Public service orientation	0.8534		0.7337
Politicization	-0.8526		0.7714
Civil society consultation	0.7613		0.5955
Horizontal accountability	0.6866		0.5449
Closed public personnel system	-0.5081		0.2712
Managerialist orientation (vs legalist)	0.4918		0.2751
Legal system: civil law		0.7611	0.6354
Public expenditure share (state tradition)		0.6410	0.4109
Fragmentation: N government ministers		-0.5898	0.4153
Decentralization: subnational autonomy		-0.3449	0.1319

Blanks represent absolute loadings <.3. *N* = 49.

(*b*²). The two-factor model explains 47.9% of total variance, leaving about 52% of unique variance. There are no signs of overfactoring (factors with only one or two salient loadings, high interfactor correlation) or underfactoring (e.g., many complex loadings). The two-factor model was robust to different extraction and rotation methods, as fairly similar results were obtained when iterated principal factor extraction and promax and oblimax rotation were employed (full results reported in the appendix).

What do the results reveal about the concept structure? The EFA indicates that the ten variables can be meaningfully condensed to two factors that represent two underlying dimensions. The absence of a strong correlation between the factors suggests that there is not one coherent logic underlying the AT attributes but at least two. The first factor loads highest on public service orientation and (with a negative sign) politicization. I label this first factor *Citizen orientation* (F1). It captures which actors influence public administration and whom the public administration serves. It can be defined as the degree to which public administration is oriented towards what citizens want or towards what politicians and bureaucrats want. Higher degrees of Citizen orientation mean that public administration is open and oriented toward citizens; they influence public administration through their representatives in the legislature (accountability), through civil society participation, as clients (in a managerialist perspective) or as the public (as in public service orientation). Lower degrees of Citizen orientation mean that public administration is influenced primarily by politicians (through direct influence on administrative actions and indirectly through recruitment and focus on rules) and career bureaucrats (closed career, low accountability, low public service orientation). I had no a priori expectation about how the politicization variable would load, as, in theory, politicians could use their influence over the bureaucracy also in the interest of citizens or voters; in that case, orientation towards politicians and orientation towards citizens would be on the same end of the continuum. However, factor loadings as well as bivariate correlations suggest that politicization is negatively related to most other variables in F1, including horizontal accountability and except for a closed public personnel system. Empirically, more politicization does not go together with more public service orientation, consultation, etc. A reason might be that the analysis also includes countries that are not full pluralist

democracies, including Russia and Hungary, with less than free and fair elections, where politicization does not necessarily mean an orientation towards citizens and voters but certainly towards executive politicians. The variable with the strongest loading on this first factor 'public service orientation,' thus, epitomizes this dimension and the contrast between serving the public (citizens) on the one hand or those in power on the other.

The second factor combines four variables and can be called *Structural concentration* (F2). It can be defined as the degree to which public administration and governance are concentrated (uniform) or dispersed at the macro level. High values of concentration result from strong vertical centralization, a small number of ministers/ministries, a strong state, and high share of public expenditure relative to GDP, and a legal system characterized by civil law rigidity and uniform rules. In this case, public governance is concentrated in a tight central government under a uniform legal framework. Low values on this factor mean that public administration is dispersed vertically (decentralized) and horizontally (fragmentation at the central level), the state plays a relatively small role vis-à-vis the economy and other actors in governance, and the legal system leaves more room to bureaucrats and others for pragmatism and variation. Interestingly, the two most frequent AT attributes from the literature review (law vs management and state tradition) are each associated with a different underlying factor. As a result of this analysis, I conceptualize administrative tradition as the degree of Citizen orientation and Structural concentration in a country's public administration that are based on past decisions.

Two indices of administrative tradition: classifying countries

Measurement

Next, I locate the 49 countries on these two dimensions. I propose a measurement of Citizen orientation and one for Structural concentration in order to classify empirical cases along these conceptual dimensions. To do so, I construct an index based on each factor (Julnes 1999, p. 577). I standardize all variables, adjust their signs according to the EFA results, and then take the average of the first six variables for the Citizen orientation index (based on F1) and the average of the remaining four variables for the Structural concentration

index (based on F2). These indices are a useful summary of the ten variables that represent ten AT attributes. The indices and all underlying data are available in a [Supplementary File](#). Figure 3 plots the 49 countries according to their scores for both indices in standard deviation units. All combinations of values (from high to low) on the two indices occur empirically, which means that the two indices are largely independent from each other, as already suggested by the weak correlation between the two factors (see above). In other words, high degrees of Citizen orientation can go together with high or low degrees of Structural concentration and vice versa. The four corners of the map represent ideal types, that is, extreme and theoretically pure types, and empirical cases can be more or less close to these ideal types. The top-right corner represents a country with a *Providing public administration* that is structurally concentrated with the (central) state as core player to deliver public services in line with citizens' needs. Countries closest to this ideal type are Denmark, Iceland, and the Netherlands. The bottom-right corner represents a type of *Liberal public administration*, which is equally oriented towards citizens' needs but much more dispersed structurally to allow for more diversity within administrative and governance practices. Canada and New Zealand approximate this ideal type. The bottom-left corner symbolizes a *Detached public administration*, an administrative system that is dispersed horizontally and vertically and revolves around itself and the preferences of politicians and bureaucrats. Countries closest to this ideal type are Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and India. Finally, the top-left corner stands for a *Dominant public administration* that gives those in power vast control over a centralized and influential bureaucracy allowing them to force the will of the governing on citizens. Empirical cases closest to this ideal type are Hungary, Serbia, and Turkey. An alternative approach to the additive indices is the use of factor scores extracted directly from the EFA model. I report these alternative scores in

the appendix. They correlate very strongly with the additive indices (at .98 for Citizen orientation and .95 for Structural concentration) and the location of countries on the scatter-plot remains largely the same. The main difference is that the factor score, based on the EFA results, gives less weight to the decentralization variable in Structural concentration.

Validation

To validate the proposed two-dimensional measure, I explore content, criterion, and construct validity (DeVellis and Thorpe 2021). Table 4 provides an overview of the validation results. Content validity refers to the coherence between the measure and the underlying theoretical concept. This has been ensured by including all ten relevant AT attributes in the measure that were identified in the literature review. Criterion validity refers to the extent to which the new measure correlates with other indicators of the same or related concepts. As identified in the review, the most prominent measures of AT in previous literature are country families based on Painter and Peters' (2010) classification as well as legal origins (based on La Porta et al. 1999). First, in figure 4 I visually compare the location of countries on my two-dimensional map with Painter and Peters' nine AT categories. Reassuringly, countries that are expected to belong to the same AT family are located somewhat close to each other on the map. The relative location of AT families is also plausible: For example, the Scandinavian countries score particularly high on Citizen orientation, followed by the Anglo-American and Germanic countries; Napoleonic and East Asian systems known for their influential bureaucratic class have medium scores on this index, and Latin American and postcolonial Asian administrations characterized by stronger politicization and bureaucratic dominance, respectively, score lowest on Citizen orientation. On the Structural concentration index, Scandinavian, Napoleonic, and post-communist/Soviet countries score highest, while common-law countries, including

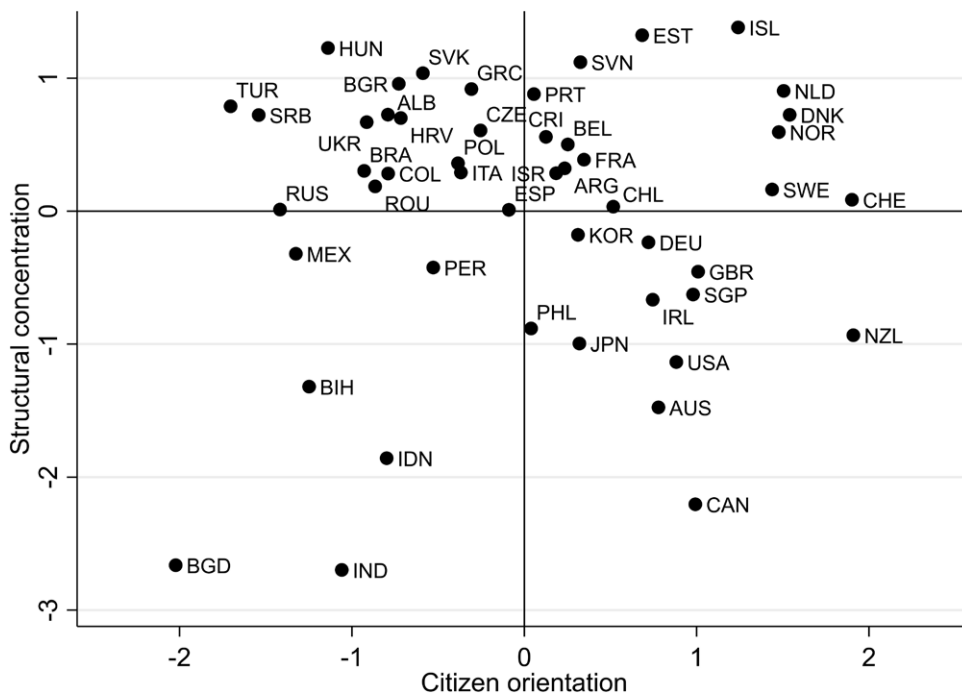


Figure 3. The 49 countries on the two-dimensional map of administrative traditions. Indices based on EFA results with data for 2015–2019.

Table 4. Measurement validity. For all tests $N = 49$, unless specified.

Validity	Validation variable	Test method	Test result
Content validity	AT definition and AT attributes	Agreement with attributes from systematic review	Includes all attributes identified in review
Criterion validity	Administrative traditions, Painter and Peters 2010 , 9 categories, see Fig.4 Legal origin, La Porta et al. 1999 , 5 categories: English, French, Socialist, German, Scandinavian	Visual inspection	Groupings in Figure 4
		Multivariate ANOVA	$F(16,78) = 13.01, p < .001$
		Multivariate ANOVA	$F(8,86) = 11.33, p < .001$
		ANOVA (citizen orient.)	$F(4,44) = 7.91, p < .001$
		ANOVA (structural con.)	$F(4,44) = 10.71, p < .001$
Construct validity	Online services 2020, from UN E-Government Development Index Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International 2020 Days btw first Covid case and first binding national anti-Covid measure 2020, OxCGRT, $N = 47$	Correlation (citizen orient.)	$r = .54, p < .001$
		Correlation (structural con.)	$r = .07, p = .657$
		Correlation (citizen orient.)	$r = .93, p < .001$
		Correlation (structural con.)	$r = .07, p = .616$
		Correlation (citizen orient.)	$r = .26, p = .072$
		Correlation (structural con.)	$r = -.44, p = .002$

Anglo-American and Postcolonial Asian countries, score lowest, indicating more structural dispersion. The systematic correlation between my measure and the nine AT categories is also supported by multivariate ANOVA (multivariate because my measure consists of two indices), which is statistically significant. Nevertheless, my continuous indices also uncover important variations within the supposed AT families, thus highlighting their limited descriptive power: For instance, the Anglo-American and Scandinavian countries vary considerably on the dimension of Structural concentration (reflecting the distinction between an East and West Scandinavian tradition, see [Læg Reid 2017](#)), while variation within the Latin American and postcolonial Asian groups is stronger on the Citizen orientation scale. Finally, the very different scores for countries such as Russia, Hungary, and Estonia question the usefulness of very broad groupings such as (post)Soviet or post-communist. My continuous indices capture more empirical nuances than previous categorical measures of AT. I conducted another multivariate ANOVA using La Porta et al.'s five legal origins categories for validation, and it turned out statistically significant. Also, when I compare each of my two indices separately with the legal origins categories in a traditional ANOVA, each of them is statistically significant.

The third step of validation, construct validity, refers to the degree to which the measure relates to measures of other concepts for which theory expects a relationship. The review revealed that one prominent application of AT in the literature is to explain variation in reforms (e.g., [Dahlström and Lapuente 2010](#); [Hammerschmid, Meyer, and Demmke 2007](#)). As one potential indicator of public management reform adoption, with recent data covering all 49 countries, I use the Online Services sub-index (OSI) of the UN E-Government Development Index⁵, which captures the scope and quality of online services provided by governments. Correlation analysis reveals that this measure of reform adoption correlates moderately with Citizen orientation but not at all with Structural concentration. This is plausible in that how much public administrations care about citizens' needs is linked to the provision of online services, while this does not vary by the structural setup of the administrative system. Another area where to expect an effect of AT is administrative behavior in the implementation of public policies and service delivery, including corruption ([Bel 2022](#)). An overarching measure that

is available for all 49 countries is Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. Again, the first index of Citizen orientation correlates significantly, and this time very strongly, with corruption perception, while Structural concentration has no systematic relationship. This suggests that public administration systems oriented towards politicians' and administrators' preferences are associated with more corruption, regardless of Structural concentration. A third area where the literature expects AT effects is crisis management ([Bouckaert et al. 2020](#); [Jugl 2023](#)) as a specific instance of policy decision making and implementation. Using data from the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker ([Hale et al. 2020](#)), I constructed a variable counting the days between the first domestic Covid-19 case in a country and the first binding national anti-COVID measure (e.g. school closures, restrictions on gatherings, travel bans) in the first half of 2020, thus capturing the speed of governments' initial reaction to the COVID-19 crisis. Correlation analysis reveals another differentiated relationship with the two AT indices: Citizen orientation is mildly positively correlated with days until crisis response, suggesting that systems with a stronger Citizen orientation were somewhat more hesitant to curtail basic freedoms. Structural concentration is more strongly and negatively correlated with days until crisis response, suggesting that stronger and more concentrated states and administrative systems were able to respond more quickly to the first COVID-19 outbreak. These correlations are in line with findings in [Jugl \(2023\)](#). Besides the correlation coefficients in [Table 4](#), the appendix shows bivariate scatter plots for all three outcome measures used for construct validity.

Discussion

[Figure 3](#) shows that the AT conceptualization and measure developed in this article can be meaningfully applied across continents and used to compare Western, non-Western, and Global-South countries along the same dimensions. In terms of comparability across world regions, it is important to note that the Citizen orientation index also captures variation in the degree (or lack) of democracy. While my aim was to

⁵<https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Data-Center> last accessed June 24, 2024.

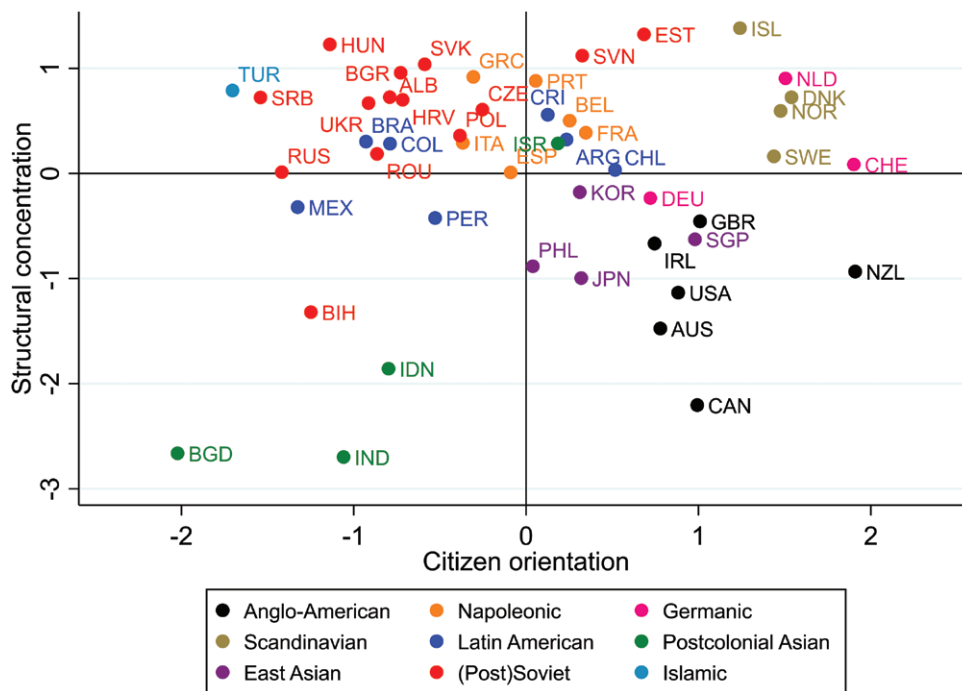


Figure 4. Validating the two indices against AT groupings based on Painter and Peters (2010, shown in color).

exclude political institutions from the AT concept to increase conceptual clarity and make it applicable to countries with different political regimes, the degree of Citizen orientation in public administration is likely correlated with levels of democracy. The distribution of countries in figure 3 from left to right supports this interpretation. That said, the analysis should be repeated, including more non-democratic countries if data are available.

In normative terms, there should be a preference for higher levels of Citizen orientation, for a public administration that first and foremost listens to and serves citizens. That said, no globally valid cut-off for desirable degrees of Citizen orientation can be identified here as the zero point (and all other values) depend on the sample distribution. The Structural concentration dimension is harder to assess normatively, as it appears to depend on the size and diversity of a country and the society served, and should thus vary to fit this macro context. It should be noted, though, that strong Structural concentration can be exploited by and is often fostered by authoritarian leaders, especially in contexts of democratic backsliding, as in Turkey and Hungary, for instance.

Future applications of the two indices

The two novel indices present a parsimonious and yet nuanced way to measure and describe public administration systems in 49 countries. Here, I briefly outline different ways in which scholars can use the indices in future research. First, the indices can be used as explanatory variables. As the validation results for construct validity illustrate, having two continuous indices of AT rather than the existing categorical AT groups allows for more precise estimation of AT effects and for a better identification of which dimension of AT is driving a certain effect, thus advancing the empirical and theoretical understanding of AT effects. In the construct validity examples, Online services and Corruption are clearly correlated with the Citizen orientation index, while COVID-19 crisis response is

more strongly linked to the Structural concentration index. Beyond these topic areas, the AT indices can be applied to explain, for example, variation in the design and adoption of specific policy tools such as climate policies or the transposition of EU legislation and other international agreements at the national level. For the adoption of innovative policy tools, I expect Citizen orientation to be decisive, because public administration systems that are more open in terms of open personnel systems and openness to citizen participation and consultation as well as more managerialist and outcome-oriented provide more opportunities for the introduction of new ideas. Expectations are less clear for the implementation or transposition of EU legislation, which is expected to depend on the overall fit with national administrative traditions (Knill 1998). Citizen orientation might play a role in terms of the fit of EU legislation with bureaucrats' leaning towards more managerialist or legalistic approaches or general practices of civil society consultation—if these are relevant for the specific policies under study (for examples see *ibid.*, pp. 9–11). On the other hand, Structural concentration could be decisive as it defines the role and flexibility the public administration has in addressing problems (state tradition and legal tradition). Additionally, horizontal fragmentation and vertical centralization might complicate or speed up the policy adoption and implementation process. In short, the two indices can help disentangle these effects, which has previously been approached primarily with qualitative case studies (according to the systematic review).

Second, comparative researchers, who used to employ the AT family groups for purposes of country selection or describing their study context, can now refer to the location of their case(s) on the two dimensions of Citizen orientation and Structural concentration. This will be more precise and meaningful than the previous AT families and encourage scholars to reflect immediately on causal implications of these contextual dimensions: for their specific study purpose, is it

important to select cases with variation on Citizen orientation and/or Structural concentration, and why so? Similarly, the two dimensions can help readers and practitioners to assess more carefully whether research findings will travel from one country to another. Third, the insights may also be employed in systematic reviews and meta-analyses that pay increasing attention to contextualizing findings; the proposed dimensions provide an empirically grounded and conceptually sound comparative lens to integrate findings across contexts or to identify scope conditions. For such research purposes, it may suffice to identify if country A scores higher or lower on Structural concentration or Citizen orientation than country B. In other cases, in which scholars need more precise measures, for example, to use them as explanatory or control variables in quantitative analyses, I provide the two indices together with the underlying ten variables in the [supplementary material](#).

Limitations

Some limitations of this study must be noted. First, this study conceptualizes AT as an aggregate at the national level, so a note about methodological and conceptual nationalism is necessary: While a country-level indicator of AT may be useful for some research aims, I do not suggest that public administration only varies at the national level. Rather, scholars should ask which other factors, for example, at the level of individuals, professions, or organizations, can explain the phenomena they study. Several AT attributes do vary meaningfully within countries and, for instance, between organizations or policy fields. Therefore, the two indices developed here should be used only if theory demands an aggregate measure of administrative system characteristics, but scholars should opt for specific (disaggregated) variables if theoretical expectations are about a specific AT attribute (e.g., politicization, decentralization) or about specific units within a country. Second, the selected search strategy and inclusion criteria necessarily limit the studies included in the systematic review. In particular, by focusing on English-language publications, the review may miss alternative conceptualizations of AT in other intellectual environments, and the inclusion of the forward-search strategy reinforces the dominance of [Painter and Peters' \(2010\)](#) conceptualization of AT. Third, despite quality checks, the coding of the reviewed studies remains somewhat subjective. However, the main insight from the review is not about the exact number of mentions ([Figure 2](#)) but about the variety of AT understandings that was uncovered. Fourth, some of the variables used in the EFA are only proxies for the underlying AT attributes: for example, the number of ministers is only a loose proxy for horizontal fragmentation, and public expenditure as share of GDP only captures some aspects of 'state tradition.' This is due to limited data availability and to the inherent difficulty of reducing each AT attribute, comprising a bundle of aspects, into a single variable. Fifth, some variables are based on expert assessments, which may be biased by the AT family to which the country under assessment is associated and which the expert may have in mind. If this were the case, the differences in scores between countries within one AT family would likely be underestimated here. However, the fact that my indices uncover important variation within AT groups suggests that this bias is not decisive. Sixth, in the EFA results, more than half of the variance remains unexplained, and the factor loading for decentralization is suspiciously

low. One should not fall prey to the "nominalistic fallacy" ([Watkins 2021](#), p. 113): having named the two emerging indices Citizen orientation and Structural concentration does not necessarily mean that they perfectly capture these aspects or that the underlying variables form a coherent group or correlate very highly. In fact, I have considered several alternative labels, especially for the first factor, but none seems to better capture the variety of the included variables and attributes. Seventh and last, the data underlying the EFA are limited in time and space. On the one hand, they provide a snapshot of contemporary administrative systems at one point in time (2015–2019). On the other hand, while the country coverage is higher and more diverse than in previous publications on AT, it is still limited and excludes especially countries with authoritarian regimes and African countries.

Future research on AT and theory development

From the results and limitations of this study follow the suggestions for future research. One obvious way to advance this analysis is to expand its country coverage. This will require the collection or construction of new datasets. Expanding the mapping to non-democratic countries will allow researchers to explore how political regimes and "strategies of governing" ([Roberts 2018](#)) relate to public administrations' Citizen orientation and Structural concentration. Scholars from around the globe, especially those from non-English intellectual traditions, should critically assess the conceptualization and indices suggested here: Are they useful and comprehensive for comparing public administration also in their region, or should further variables be added? Also, do AT attributes co-vary in their countries as the EFA results suggest? Such a critical assessment will help to move towards a truly global and truly comparative study of public administration systems. With more quantitative data on a larger or different set of countries, the fit of the two-factor model could be explored through confirmatory factor analysis. As an alternative or complementary approach to factor analysis, future research might also apply latent class analysis to identify types.

Next, as anticipated at the beginning, the empirical mapping of contemporary administrative systems (AT as description), by identifying the core attributes and dimensions of administrative systems that are relevant for comparison, enables further research into the historical explanations behind the traditions (AT as theory). This is particularly promising for the less studied 'non-paradigmatic cases.' For example, which historical developments explain the considerable variation among Latin American countries? Which historical forces have led New Zealand to outplay other Anglo-American countries in terms of Citizen orientation? And why and how has Estonia moved away from other post-communist countries? By leaving the AT families as "presupposed" ([Mavrot et al. 2021](#)) traditions behind, we can design more open-ended research to study which historical periods and factors actually matter for explaining variation in contemporary administrative systems. Important explanations and forces of change might include socio-economic development, political and ideological changes, or fiscal pressures. Traditions are likely to be hybrid and more complex than what is suggested by the AT families and the previous focus on paradigmatic cases; and while hybridity is acknowledged in the theoretical discussion on AT ([Meyer-Sahling 2009](#); [Painter and Peters 2010](#)),

it has hardly been studied empirically in comparative public administration. Such systematic studies and longitudinal perspectives will also elucidate the causal mechanisms behind the AT concept, thus contributing to further theory development: which forces are responsible for the correlation of attributes along the two factors identified here? Is there some internal logic with certain attributes driving others? The core attributes and two dimensions of AT identified in this study can guide these future analyses and hopefully contribute to a more focused discussion. Different research designs could be employed for such a longitudinal perspective. On the one hand, the quantitative mapping of countries' ten administrative attributes can be expanded in time back to the development of modern bureaucracies in the 19th century, so that countries' trajectories and changes at critical junctures can be analyzed in detail. On the other hand, or as a complementary approach, in-depth qualitative studies of selected historical episodes are promising to understand the decision making at critical junctures that are consequential until today. Ultimately, the outlined avenues for future research on AT serve two goals: first, to reach a deeper empirical understanding of the historical determinants of macro-level administrative institutions and their stability or change, and second, to achieve a comprehensive theoretical understanding of AT that integrates present-day characteristics with historical determinants of administrative systems.

A different approach could be to link AT to individual-level data on public servants' attitudes and behavior. On the one hand, the two AT indices can be applied to better understand the variation of bureaucrats' attitudes and behavior across contexts. Citizen orientation should matter as it covers the selection (public personnel system and formal politicization) and socialization (in terms of public service orientation, managerialism vs legalism, administrative politicization) into administrative roles. On the other hand, such analyses can also advance our theoretical understanding of the micro foundations of AT itself: Do such attitudes differ systematically with the macro-level AT? Is selection or socialization more relevant for explaining the (persistent) variation in Citizen orientation across countries? Individual data could also be used to further explore the temporal dimension of AT and the persistence or development of Citizen orientation over time.

Conclusion

This study combined deductive and inductive approaches to (re)conceptualize AT as the degree of Citizen orientation and Structural concentration in a country's public administration. While previous literature uses AT as a descriptive tool based on varying core attributes of administrative systems as well as an explanation or theory (Hammerschmid, Meyer, and Demmke 2007; Painter and Peters 2010; Peters 2021), my approach focuses on AT as a description of contemporary administrative systems and uses a systematic literature review to identify ten core attributes. Subsequently, I used EFA to uncover two underlying dimensions: Citizen orientation and Structural concentration. On the one hand, the analysis confirms empirically what has long been assumed: that there are internal logics behind the various attributes. Yet, rather than one underlying dimension, the analysis identified two factors that are largely independent from each other. This is somewhat similar to

Kuhlmann and Wollmann's (2019) two-dimensional conceptualization of administrative profiles, but in contrast to these authors, I include administrative structure in the AT concept. The different value combinations on the two AT dimensions are described via four ideal types. On the other hand, I use these two dimensions and derive two validated indices to classify 49 countries empirically. Compared to previous, often Eurocentric conceptualizations, my approach is applicable to countries from various world regions. Going beyond categorical classifications, my continuous measures also uncover important nuances and differences between countries that are often assumed to belong to the same AT group, which might be useful depending on the research context. This questions deterministic and simplistic approaches to AT as a theory or catch-all explanation, and I outlined avenues for future research to apply the two-dimensional conceptualization of AT also back in time to study the impact of historical forces on administrative systems more systematically than before. The two indices introduced here can be used in future research in different ways that prompt researchers to think about which dimension of AT is relevant in their specific study context. I hope this article enables scholars to become more informed and thorough users of the AT concept.

Supplementary material

Supplementary data is available at the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* online.

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Data availability

The data and code underlying this article are available in its [Supplementary material](#).

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