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Length of Service as an Influence on Federal Bureaucratic Attitudes and Behavior

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The connection between socioeconomic factors and various measures of mass political attitudes and behavior is now fairly well established.¹ The present study builds upon previous research by determining if socioeconomic influences hold also for a specific group of governmental actors (federal bureaucrats), and also suggests the utility of an additional, job-related influence—length of government employment.

The data were extracted from *The Federal Civil Service Employees Study*, assembled by M. Kent Jennings.² The sampling frame was a list of approximately 167,000 federal employees obtained from the U. S. Civil Service Commission, of which there were 980 respondents in the self-weighted sample. Respondents were asked several questions which tapped various kinds of political attitudes and behavior. Below we discuss the findings for the responses dealing with general interest in politics, feelings of political efficacy, and frequency of voter turnout.

The relationships between the socioeconomic measures (education, income, social class perception) and the dependent variables are all statistically significant at the .05 level, which is consistent with previous findings pertaining to the citizenry generally. What is of perhaps greater interest is the fact that the levels of association for these relationships are weaker than might have been expected based upon a great deal of previous research. For example, education had the highest degree of association with the dependent variable of the "extent to which respondent follows public affairs," but the tau c value was only .143. Class percep-

¹ See, for example, Angus Campbell, et al, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960); Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964); Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, *Political Participation: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

² (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, 1969). The data and tabulations utilized in this study were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Neither the original source or the collectors of the data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

tion, the strongest variable for the political efficacy response set,³ had a tau c of .215, while the education variable produced a tau c of .133 on the frequency of voter turnout response.

There is ample reason to suggest, therefore, that factors other than socioeconomic ones have relevance to the political attitudes and behavior of federal public servants. We hypothesized that one such factor might be the length of time an individual has worked for the government. Our rationale is that the political nature of the bureaucratic work environment exposes workers to a host of political cues and stimuli which are conducive to and supportive of a greater interest in politics, as well as the fostering of perceptions of higher political efficacy.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that there is some support for this line of reasoning. The relationships between the government service measure and two of the three dependent variables (interest in politics and voter turnout), though not extremely strong, are statistically significant at the .05 level. Exposure to government work does seem to increase a person's interest in politics and encourage public servants to vote more frequently. It should be noted here that the length of government service variable does not serve merely as a surrogate for a simple measure of age, for the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two was only .592.⁴ The influence of the length of government service variable was therefore both significant and distinct.

These data have affirmed the importance of socioeconomic influences on political attitudes and behavior. More important, we have suggested and substantiated the claim that other potential influences on political attitudes and behavior should be examined. We believe that our understanding of government officials and public policy would be improved considerably if in the future an effort would be devoted to studying the actual effects that bureaucratic work has on the attitudes and performance of public servants.

³ This four response additive scale is discussed in Milbrath, *Political Participation*, pp. 156-157.

⁴ The existence of a Pearson correlation coefficient lower than .70 is generally acceptable to distinguish an independent contribution. See Hubert Blalock, *Social Statistics*, second edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

TABLE 1

*Cross Tabulations**A. Extent to Which Respondent Follows Government and Public Affairs*

<i>Number of Years in Government Service</i>	<i>Most of the time</i>	<i>Some of the time</i>	<i>Hardly at all</i>
1-5 years	43.9	51.8	4.4
6-10 years	56.7	41.8	1.5
11-20 years	57.5	38.7	3.8
Above 20 years	64.6	32.1	3.2
chi square = .009	tau c = .084		N=980

B. Frequency of Vote in Presidential Elections

<i>Number of Years in Government Service</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Most</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>None</i>
1-5 years	50.1	21.8	18.2	9.1
6-10 years	57.7	24.2	12.9	5.2
11-20 years	56.7	30.1	9.9	3.3
Above 20 years	64.3	26.4	8.7	0.7
chi square = .000	tau c = .079			N=976

C. Political Efficacy Scale

<i>Number of Years in Government Service</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>(lowest)</i>			<i>(highest)</i>
1-5 years	27.2	24.6	45.6	2.6
6-10 years	24.7	30.4	41.8	3.1
11-20 years	26.1	27.1	43.3	3.5
Above 20 years	29.6	26.7	40.1	3.6
chi square = .953	tau c = .019			N=980