

# Technocracy within Representative Democracy

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Technocratic Reasoning and Justification among Bureaucrats and Politicians

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*To endless encouragement and some courage*





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I must have pictured myself a million times (let's see: divided by nine years and 365 days/year equals 304 times a day), OK, well over a thousand times, writing the acknowledgements for my thesis. Whilst pregnant with my first child, the midwife told me it is important to have an 'image' to think about when the going gets tough during delivery. As I translated this very good piece of advice into working on this thesis, this very moment of writing the acknowledgements has been my 'image' over the past few years. Having thought about this for such a long time, I have thought of a lot of people to thank and a lot of things to say. So, I am pleased to know that this section has no word limit. And yes, Maria, my soulmate as 'Billy bookshelf' (according to a highly scientific test named 'If you were a piece of IKEA furniture, what would you be?'), I have kept a file over the years of people to remember to thank. Having said this, I apologize even more deeply if I forget to thank you in person and would like to start by saying a collective thank you to all those fantastic and kind people I have met over this time, for all your help and encouragement and for your friendship!

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Once upon a time, on the remote island of Stora Karlsö around midsummer time, the dusk is just about to fall. The air is filled with excitement as hundreds of guillemot chicks, not yet able to fly, are about to throw themselves with great courage from the cliff ledges down to the stony beach 30-40 metres below them. Their mothers, standing right next to them on the ledges, providing them with shelter from lurking dangers, cheer the chicks on. For months the parents have fed their little chicks, preparing them for this event, providing the small ones with a rather fat tummy that functions as an 'airbag' on impact with the hard ground. The sound of skulking seagulls, cheering

mothers, enticing fathers and anxious chicks has been building up for a while and is by now ear-deafening. Suddenly the chicks start to jump. At first only a few jump, but after a couple of minutes and with accelerating intensity many more follow (a little like popping popcorn). Some of the chicks pass out as they hit the ground, but they soon come round only to start running down to their father, energetically enticing them out at sea. The father's calls help the chicks find their way in the dark as they race over the beach in what can best be described as a veritable gauntlet, as they have to escape the hungry gulls circling above them before joining their fathers in the safe haven of the waves.

As an observer of this natural drama, I remember thinking, don't jump you must be crazy to think you will survive! For a long time no-one jumped, but then suddenly I heard the first smack against the ground, there – the little chick lay painfully still on the hard, stony beach. Just as I thought she hadn't made it, the chick came round. That evening on Stora Karlsö, watching the small guillemot chicks jumping, made a strong impression on me. As a recently accepted PhD student, I remember thinking the journey I was about to embark on in some ways was going to be similar to that of the guillemot chick I had just witnessed. The PhD student obviously playing the part of the little chick and the supervisors the parts of the parents.

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Working on my thesis has not been a drive down the fast lane, nor a walk in the park, but rather a ride on a bumpy roller coaster with a few goes on merry-go-rounds along the way. For those who know me well, it is no secret that I have struggled a bit over the years, especially since my research project became something other than I had imagined at the outset. So last but not least I would like to thank myself! Thank you Nina for not quitting, even if you have at times dreamt of alternative career paths, perhaps as a midwife,

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Nyköping, 12 February 2013

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# 1

## Introduction

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How can you possibly have ‘Technocracy *within* Representative Democracy’, as suggested in the title of this thesis? Shouldn’t the correct title be ‘Technocracy *or* Representative Democracy’, the sceptic might ask? Well, if technocracy is strictly defined, as rule by an elite of (technical) experts, the sceptic obviously has a point<sup>1</sup>. Democracy means rule by the people (demos) and not rule by (technical) experts<sup>2</sup>. However, in tune with Laird (1990; see also Fischer 2000), I argue that merely establishing the absence of a simple technocratic ruling class is only half the story; instead a more subtle interpretation of technocracy is needed.

Laird (1990, p. 51) continues his story by stating that: ‘The problem of technocracy is the problem of power relations and how those relations are affected by the importance of esoteric knowledge in modern society. The idea that such knowledge is important is correct. The idea that it is important because it leads to the rise of a technically skilled ruling class is mistaken. The crucial issue is not who gains power but who loses it. Technocracy is not the rise of experts, it is the decline of citizens’. Or as formulated by Fischer (2000), ‘One of the most important contemporary functions of technocratic politics, it can be argued, rests not so much on its *ascent* to power (in the traditional sense of the term) as on the fact that its growing influence shields the

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, technocracy means the ‘rule or control by technical experts’. The origin of Technocracy is from the Greek word *technè*, meaning ‘art or craft’ (‘technocracy *noun*’ *Oxford Dictionary of English. Oxford Reference Online*).

<sup>2</sup> Representative democracy is one way to realize the rule of people through their representatives. Hypothetically we could imagine a situation where the people choose (technical) experts as their representatives, but would this then be technocracy (if defined in a more strict fashion as rule by (technical) experts)? I would say no, the crucial point here is that the people’s representatives are not appointed by merit. They might be chosen by the people for their merits, but the people are free to choose according to the merits they deem to be the most important. Further, as I argue throughout the thesis, merely looking at the question of who governs is not enough, we also need to consider the mode of governance.

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elites from political pressure from below'. The crucial issue for the definition of technocracy then is not who governs, rather it lies in the mode of politics. As argued by Fischer (2000), too often writers have dismissed the technocratic thesis on the grounds that experts remain subordinate to top-level economic and political elites. A consequence of this, he continues, is that this argument 'overlooks the less visible discursive politics of technocratic expertise. Not only does the argument fail to appreciate the way this technical, instrumental mode of inquiry has come to shape our thinking about public problems, but it neglects the ways these modes of thought have become implicitly embedded in our institutional discourses and practices' (p. 17). Thus, technocracy here should not be understood as 'rule by experts', but rather 'government by technique' focusing on the procedures and content of politics, suggesting that technocratic reasoning and justification has gained ground and dominates the making of public policy (Boswell, 2009; Fischer, 1990; Meynaud, 1969; Radaelli, 1999b;). To be sure, indirectly this will have consequences as to who will win or lose power. A policy issue or process that is technocratically framed is likely to disempower those lacking information and expertise within the area (Fischer, 1990; Laird, 1990<sup>3</sup>), while supplying those with information and expertise with a 'technocratic key' (Uhrwing, 2001) leading to the door of political power<sup>4</sup>.

The overall theme in this thesis is the tension between technocracy and (representative) democracy. While related to the discussion on the tension of experts and lay people as well as the tension of knowledge and politics, the concepts are not to be seen as interchangeable. As previously discussed, the domination of technocratic reasoning is likely to give experts a privileged position compared to lay people. However, lay people as well as experts can base an argument on technocratic or democratic reasoning. Turning to the concepts of knowledge and politics, knowledge makes up the most important, but not the sole, element of a technocratic mode of reasoning or justification and is therefore a narrower concept than technocracy. Politics on the other hand is a diffuse and wide concept.

In the light of the definition of technocracy used in the thesis, the tensions between technocracy and democracy should be understood as the tension be-

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<sup>3</sup> Laird (1990) shows that despite the good intentions of political leaders to involve lay people in the policy process, the framing of an issue as technocratic in reality leaves them with no real input.

<sup>4</sup> However, the relationship between expertise and power need not always be simple and straightforward, suggesting that technocratically framed issues always give those with expertise an upper hand. This might for instance be the case in times of scientific uncertainty, where experts do not have an answer or supply politicians with deviating answers. In these kinds of situations it is easier for the policy-makers to pick and choose among the heterogeneity of scientific evidence in ways that suit their belief structures (Lahsen, 2005).



tween a technocratic and a democratic mode of reasoning or justification. In modern democracies where political leaders are confronted with ever more complex issues, there is a need for both, for the system to gain support and sustain legitimacy (Dahl, 1989; Sartori, 1987). Thus the task becomes to find a balance between the two. Historically, the balance has fluctuated between and within systems. Opinions on what constitutes a good balance and how to achieve it differ and have gone in vogue. Recent studies concerned with the (im)balance between science and democracy (experts and lay people) have commonly been attuned to the idea of increasing public participation and thereby democratising science (see for example Beck, 1992; Corburn, 2007; Fischer 2000; 2009; Laird, 1990).

In this thesis the focus is different. Instead I am directing the searchlight towards two key actors in the upper reaches of representative democracy – bureaucrats and politicians<sup>5</sup>. I ask how they relate to technocratic and democratic reasoning and justification. I suggest that the beliefs, values and behaviour of key policy-makers are important for learning about the tension, as well as the potential for finding a balance between technocracy and democracy. This argument rests on the assumption that bureaucrats and politicians who are prone to a technocratic mode of reasoning and justification are likely to support a shift towards a technocratic discourse and technocratic decision-making.

The terms ‘technocracy’ and ‘technocrat’ are becoming part of common usage and it is frequently argued that technocratic decision-making is becoming more common due to the growing complexity of political matters (Boswell, 2009; Fischer, 1990; Radaelli, 1999b). However, there is a lack of research into this matter and the concept is underdeveloped. As expressed by Centeno (1993):

Few terms in political sociology are used as loosely as technocracy. Although persons with technological and administrative expertise are obviously critical to modern states, the concept of ‘technocrat’ remains vague and has limited descriptive, much less predictive, value. This has not prevented, however, the use of the term (with positive or nega-

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<sup>5</sup> This choice of focus does not mean I do not consider the citizens/voters an important point of reference. Obviously the citizens/voters are fundamental also to representative democracy. Further, I share the concern that citizens might lose power when issues are framed as technocratic. However, considering the empirically established problems with public participation (see Held, 2006 and Gilljam and Hermansson, 2003) as well as the fact that people in general seem unwilling/uninterested in playing an active role in between elections (as argued by Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; see also Esaiasson et al., 2011), I suggest we also need to consider the issue of (im)balance between technocracy and democracy within the boundaries of representative democracy and direct our attention to the peoples’ representatives (both those electorally chosen (politicians) and those that are not electorally chosen (bureaucrats).

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tive connotations depending on the author's opinion of the persons or governments being analyzed) to describe a variety of personnel in a wide range of political regimes. If the terms technocrat and technocracy are to have any scholarly value, the characteristics that are used as definitional criteria (e.g. education, professionalization, de-politicisation) must play a significant role in the type of policies advocated and followed by the relevant personnel or regimes as 'technocratic' not only should imply a set of definitional attributes, but also should indicate probable forms of behaviour. (Centeno, 1993 p. 309)

Although the quote is twenty years old it is still just as, or even more, true today. Technocrats are commonly defined as people in power appointed by their merits of (technical) expertise (Centeno and Maxfield, 1992<sup>6</sup>; Cheng and White, 1990; Collier, 1979; Mizuno, 2009; Silva, 2008; Rowney, 1989; Wonka, 2007; see also Centeno and Silva, 1998b). And the most cited definition of technocracy within political science is still likely to be 'a system of governance in which technically trained experts rule by virtue of their specialized knowledge and position in dominant political and economic institutions...the rise to power of those who possess technical knowledge or ability, to detriment of the traditional politician' (Meynaud, 1969, p. 31).

If we are interested in finding answers to the question of whether politics is becoming de-politicized and more technocratic, definitions such as these are not sufficient since their use for the analysis of the behaviour of individuals is limited. In fact, as argued previously (Centeno, 1993; Putnam, 1977), definitions based on personal attribute like these 'require the acceptance of the largely unproven assumption that technical education or job functions foster a strong alliance between graduates or colleagues and that they encourage a specific attitude towards policy making' (Centeno 1993, p. 310). With this as a point of departure, a more specific aim of this thesis is to challenge this unproven assumption. Departing from the literature on technocracy as well as previous studies of technocratic attitudes among policy-makers, I also challenge the traditional measurements used when defining a technocratic mentality<sup>7</sup>, arguing that they are likely to produce a false dichotomy between

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<sup>6</sup> Although there is an awareness of the potential problems of using educational background, this measure is still used for defining different types of political elites.

<sup>7</sup> While some scholars have added slightly to these traditional measurements, to my knowledge this is the most elaborated operationalisation for measuring the concept of a technocratic mentality. The only other measure of a technocratic index (based on attitudes) that I have come across is the one by Greenwald (1979). His index 'represents responses to seven questionnaire items, asking whether 'technical experts such as scientists, engineers, and other personnel with advanced, specialized training' have too much, too little, or about the right amount of power in certain areas of American life. The areas include education, national defence, foreign policy, planning of public transportation, budgeting of public funds, energy production and allocation, and local government'. (p. 637) The traditional measurements are presented in additional appendix 1:1 Essay 2, the

technocracy and democracy. These measurements were introduced by Putnam (1977), largely spread by the seminal work of Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981), and are still widely used (as also argued by Lee and Raadschelders, 2008; for some examples see Aberbach et al., 1990; Derlien, 2003; Gauld, 2002; Gregory, 1991; Radaelli and Connor, 2009; Wallin et al., 1999; Wonka and Rittberger 2011). Further, I also argue that we need to take different contexts into consideration (issue context and cultural context) when studying the presence of a technocratic and democratic mode of reasoning and justification.

While Putnam (1977) commendably challenged the common assumption that bureaucrats with technical training are also technocrats, he concluded that the preconception was confirmed. This, for two reasons I believe, was unfortunate. The main reason, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, is that his conclusions, while intuitively persuasive, are not as firm as they are presented to be. Nevertheless, his study has had considerable influence in the field, and therefore a second unfortunate reason is that, despite the fact that later studies provide us with mixed evidence as to the empirical relationship between educational background and technocratic attitudes (Atkinson and Coleman, 1985; Christensen, 1991; Gregory, 1991), there is a risk that Putnam's study is the one that will remain influential, not only because it was the first study of its kind, but also because it is intuitively persuasive confirming an expected result. Thus there is a risk that scholars and others will continue to make the assumption that bureaucrats with engineering and training in natural sciences are assumed to be technocrats.<sup>8</sup>

Further, I argue that the measurements traditionally used (Putnam, 1977) present us with too simple a picture of a technocrat. Nuances can be found both when considering different elements within the two modes of reasoning/justification as well as between different issue contexts. The thesis is primarily placed within the tradition of public administration studies (Essays 1 and 2) as well as the study of partisan politics and representative (parliamentary) democracy (Essay 3). However, by emphasising the importance of context, I also draw on institutional theory and policy studies.

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measurements developed in this study are presented in Essay 2 (in English) and the survey is presented as an additional appendix 1:2 Essay 2 (in Swedish).

<sup>8</sup> There are in fact examples of studies that, based on Putnam's results, continue using educational background as a proxy for technocratic sentiments (see Cheng and White, 1990). To be fair, Cheng and White (1990), based on the findings of Putnam (1977), choose to talk of a broad and narrow definition of technocrats. According to the narrow definition, only those trained in engineering and natural sciences should be defined as technocrats. In the broader definition they include economists, lawyers and political scientists when they have expertise, experience of using it and senior positions. They also acknowledge that subgroups of technocrats and diversification among top elites deserve further investigation.

Building on previous definitions of a technocratic and democratic rationale, I develop an analytical framework to explore the presence of a technocratic as well as a democratic mode of reasoning and justification in public policy-making. Before elaborating more on the specific aim of the thesis, in the remainder of the introduction I first define the two modes of reasoning and justification, and second I present some background to the overall theme of the thesis, presenting both a historical but also a contemporary perspective on the issue of the tension between technocracy and democracy.

## Two modes of reasoning<sup>9</sup>

A mode of reasoning could be defined as an articulation of motives, decision criteria, arguments or grounds for legitimacy. In short, the technocratic mode of reasoning stresses knowledge, facts and figures while emphasizing efficiency, whereas the political mode of reasoning focuses on norms, values and interests in the democratic process (Boswell, 2009; Fischer 1990; Putnam, 1977).

Based on previous literature on technocracy (Boswell, 2009; Fischer 1990; Meynaud, 1968; Radaelli 1999a, 1999b) and predominantly the studies on technocratic thinking and the technocratic mentality (Aberbach et al., 1981; Aberbach et al., 1990; Gregory, 1991; Putnam, 1977), as well as literature on public administration (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989; Rothstein, 1998) and literature on party politics (Downs, 1957), I have developed an analytical framework for studying the relative importance of the technocratic and democratic modes of reasoning respectively. Below is a brief introduction to my usage of the concepts. It is important to state that I do not claim the listed elements within the two modes of reasoning to be exhaustive, rather they should be seen as a first attempt to develop an analytical framework to explore the presence of a technocratic as well as a democratic mode of reasoning in public policy-making. It has been argued that the two modes of reasoning are not necessarily as opposed to one another as has been suggested theoretically (Aberbach et al. 1990; Albæk, 1995; Fischer, 1990). Still, while in real life they are probably intertwined, it has been argued that analytically they must be kept apart (Fischer, 1990). I will, however, return to the question of whether they ought to be viewed as a dichotomy or not.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The concepts are introduced briefly here since it is important for the further reading of the Introduction of the thesis. For further elaboration on the concepts, see the various essays, primarily Essay 2. Here I only refer to the concepts as modes of reasoning, however they also serve as modes of justification.

<sup>10</sup> See below *Lessons learned*, “A false dichotomy?”.

In previous literature, technocracy or technocratic elements are commonly posed against democratic or political elements. Sometimes the technocratic elements are seen as the rational or objective way of making decisions while politics is considered irrational or value-driven. I believe that using these terms is misleading. It is important to remember that this divide does not mean that a technocratic mode of reasoning is value-free, just as little as a democratic mode of reasoning is irrational. While I previously considered using the term ‘political mode of reasoning’ instead of ‘democratic mode of reasoning’, I decided this too would risk being misleading, since it implies that the technocratic mode of reasoning has nothing to do with politics. Politicians will frequently rely on both rationales and bureaucrats are aware of the fact that they are working within a political organization. While I have chosen to label the political elements under the concept ‘democratic mode of reasoning’ (according to Boswell, 2009), it is important to note that this does not necessarily mean that all of these elements by default are good for democracy and consequently that all the elements of a technocratic mode of reasoning are anti-democratic. Politicians that listen too much to narrow interests instead of considering the common good can pose an equally large threat towards democracy as politicians that ignore research<sup>11</sup>. They just present two different ways of reasoning and justifying when designing and defending policy<sup>12</sup>. As we will see in the next section, democracy will need elements of both modes of reasoning to be viewed as legitimate, and there is therefore a need for a balance.

## A technocratic mode of reasoning

Expertise or knowledge is undoubtedly considered the most important element of a technocratic mode of reasoning (Boswell, 2009; Fischer 1990, 2000; Putnam, 1977; Radaelli 1999a, 1999b). Accordingly, decisions should be based on knowledge and scientific facts are given a privileged position in policy-making. A technocratic mode of reasoning is further believed to emphasize effectiveness as the most important criterion by which to judge

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<sup>11</sup> According to some scholars, the technocratic elite do not pose a threat to democracy. On the contrary, they are believed to facilitate democracy since the technocratic ideology is based on instrumental reason as a means to end social conflict (see Centeno, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> This view has been similarly expressed by Centeno (1993): ‘We can understand this perspective [the technocratic] not as an ideology of answers or issues, but an ideology of method: a belief in the ability to arrive at the optimal answer to any discussion through the application of particular practices’ (p. 312). It has been suggested that the most powerful predisposition of a technocratic perspective is an epistemological assumption: that there is a unique and universal policy reality that can be analysed scientifically (and therefore no debate is possible for finding a solution). Solutions are determined through the application of relevant models and are not outcomes of the balance of power between different interests (Centeno and Silva, 1998b).

government (Aberbach et al., 1990). Connected to this is the prime importance attributed to the economic aspects of society (this could for instance be demonstrated through the emphasis on cost-benefit analysis, a method developed by engineers that is assumed to be a rational way of making a decision<sup>13</sup>), and especially productivity within the technocratic mode of reasoning (Centeno, 1993; Putnam, 1977). Finally, based on the emphasis on effectiveness, economic efficiency and the concern of whether a policy ‘will work’ (rather than ‘if it is right’), I suggest that the technocratic mode of reasoning will also acknowledge the importance of administrative efficiency and administrative compliance as a means of securing effectiveness. The notion that the technocratic set of criteria may be structured in such a way that they benefit a particular group is not only possible but also probable. The important point here, however, is that the public discourse of technocracy rejects such a linkage (Centeno and Silva, 1998b). The technocratic mode of reasoning can be said to rest on a technocratic legitimation principle emphasising professional accountability (Wonka and Rittberger, 2011).

### A democratic mode of reasoning

While a technocratic mode of reasoning has knowledge or expertise as its primary basis of legitimacy, one could claim that ideology and (moral) values (normative reason) are among the most important bases of legitimacy for a democratic mode of reasoning (Boswell, 2009; Fischer, 1990, 2000; Putnam, 1977; Radaelli, 1999a; Reck, 2003). Apart from values, interests are central to the democratic mode of reasoning (Boswell, 2009). In this respect, different political arenas each contribute to separate elements in a democratic mode of reasoning.

One central arena of proven importance is the public arena and ‘public opinion’ (see among others Downs, 1957). Public support is important to the democratic mode of reasoning for gaining legitimacy. A second arena, which politicians in particular must take into consideration when making policies, is the partisan arena, constituting the element of ‘partisan politics’ (Aberbach et al., 1981; Aberbach et al., 1990). Bargaining and all-night negotiations often resulting in compromises are common in politics, especially when there is no clear parliamentary majority. While these processes are not regarded as efficient or rational<sup>14</sup>, they are seen as a way of ensuring democratic decision-making, central to the democratic mode of reasoning.

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<sup>13</sup> Obviously the criticism of this is that they are hands-on methods that in disguise can lead us to believe that they do not build on values.

<sup>14</sup> According to the technocratic mode of reasoning, political bargaining is a frustrating element due to the compromises and delays associated with such bargaining (Centeno, 1993).

It is not only the public that influences decision-makers; organized interests trying to influence policy constitute an everyday feature of politics, and are a third arena that policy-makers need to consider. According to a technocratic mode of reasoning, the task is to assure that the public good (defined by a higher rationality) is protected against the unjustified influence of particular interests (Centeno, 1993). Within a democratic mode of reasoning, on the other hand, particular interests are taken into consideration and seen as a natural and also legitimate. Finally, there is the element of ‘redistribution,’ which is related to interests (when resources are to be redistributed, some will gain and others will lose) and can also be considered an element of a democratic mode of reasoning (Aberbach et al., 1981; Putnam, 1977). In his study of technocracy and politicisation in the EU, Radaelli (1999b) argues that redistribution is a political way of thinking, often found in regulatory policies, concerning politics as opposed to efficiency. The democratic mode of reasoning can be said to rest on a democratic legitimation principle emphasising social accountability (the public at large or at least stakeholders) (Wonka and Rittberger, 2011).

## Technocracy and the tension

Technocracy as an ideal won ground during the era of the Enlightenment, two of its foremost advocates being Auguste Comte and Claude-Henry de Saint-Simon<sup>15</sup>. Sharing the general idea of the Enlightenment, technocracy considers ‘reason’ the primary basis for authority. The thought behind technocracy is somewhat similar to Plato’s view of the state, although philosophers have been traded for experts in our time. The common good is to be achieved by following science. Technocrats see politics as the problem and not the solution; public decision-making ought to be value-free technical problem-solving (Fischer, 1990, 2000). The technocrat feels uneasy under conditions of political conflict, ideological debates and controversies on distributive issues connected to social justice (Radaelli 1999a), and will try to define all problems as technical (Fischer, 1990, 2000). Even though many desire well-informed policy, technocracy is now commonly seen as ‘the dark side of the cognitive dimension of politics’ (Radaelli, 1999b). We are thus not willing to make a trade-off between the enlightened policy and the democratic

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<sup>15</sup> For an extensive historical overview of the concept of Technocracy, see Burris, 1993; Dusek, 2006; Kleinberg, 1973; Moodie, 2011; Parkin, 1994. Specific American technocracy movement, see Chase, 1933; Raymond, 1933. Technocracy in Latin America, see Centeno and Silva, 1998a; Santiso and Whitehead 2012; Silva, 2008. Technocracy in Japan, see Mizuno, 2009, and in China see Cheng and White, 1990.

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process, political equality, political accountability, responsiveness and political/moral values.

Technocracy as a movement has probably seen its heyday. At the rise of the advanced technological era in the 1970s, being a technician or engineer carried a certain cachet, and many believed (some with enthusiasm and others with fear) that scientists (or the technicians) would become the next rulers of society. At the time, both the USA and the Soviet Union were led by men trained as engineers (Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev). However, even if few speak of technocracy in the same sense today, many suggest that this does not mean that the technocratic mentality and ideas are buried and long gone, rather they argue there has been a de-politicisation of politics (Davies, Nutley and Smith, 2000; Fischer, 1990, 2000; Flinders and Buller, 2006; Radaelli, 1999b). In fact the recent emphasis on *Evidence-Based Policy-Making* in many countries has been referred to by some as ‘technocracy reinvented’ (Clarence, 2002).<sup>16</sup> Also, recent events in the wake of the ongoing financial crisis in Europe, where the people of Italy and Greece have now put their faith in the hands of unelected experts, has brought up to date the debate on technocracy<sup>17</sup>.

Few today believe in the advancement of a pure technocracy. Since technocrats are not believed to share a common ideology but rather a mentality or a cognitive framework (Centeno, 1993; Laird, 1990; for the limitations of the rule of experts see also Huneus, 1998; Santiso and Whitehead, 2012), it becomes difficult for them to govern collectively. While technocrats will agree that the choices of means will be justified on rational basis, it does not imply that they share the same ideology or that they will be able to escape the constraints of their value orientations. Making public policy is not solely about choosing desired means but also desired ends, and the definitions of values, goals and needs necessarily involve subjective criteria that are not necessarily

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<sup>16</sup> The UK and the New Labour government being one of the prime examples with the ‘what works is what matters’ mantra and their White Paper (see among others Kisby, 2010; Parsons, 2001, 2002; Wyatt, 2002; for EBPM see among others Nutley and Davies, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> On the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, Lucas Papademos, the former vice-president of the European Central Bank, was appointed Prime Minister of the new interim coalition government in Greece. Only a few days later Italy followed the Greek example and the new Prime Minister Mario Monti, professor of economics and former European Commissioner, now leads something as unusual as a government consisting solely of non-aligned experts. The new governments of Italy and Greece have (at least in media) been referred to as technocratic (“Italy unveils government of technocrats” in *The Guardian*, 16 November 2011; ‘Italy gets the full Monti government of technocrats’ in *The Guardian*, 20 November 2011; ‘Leading article: Don’t blame technocrats: they’re just doing their job’ in *The Independent*, 19 November 2011; ‘Diktaturanhångare i grekisk regering’ in *Arbeteven*, 1 December 2011). However, I suggest we should instead (at least at the outset) talk about them as meritocratic: they are appointed on merit but we have no knowledge yet as to whether they embrace a technocratic mentality or not, and this is an empirical question.



shared among technocrats (experts) (Centeno, 1993). Based on this Centeno, has suggested a definition of technocracy as:

The administrative and political domination of a society by a state elite and allied institutions that seek to impose a single, exclusive policy paradigm based on the application of instrumentally rational techniques. (Centeno, 1993 p. 314)

This is to be treated as an ‘ideal type’, although as argued by Centeno, it should not be dismissed just because no perfect real world examples can be found. Instead, he continues, it is more fruitful to view technocracy as a continuum than as a phenomenon that either is or is not present (Centeno, 1993). While doing this he presents three measures (all necessary, and none in and of itself sufficient) for the placement of a state along this spectrum: ‘a) The penetration of technocratic elites into the upper reaches of the state administration; b) The extent to which institutions where such persons predominate have become the dominant organizations in the regime’s most important policy areas; and c) The degree to which policies produced by these elites and institutions reflect a bias toward technocratic measures and interpretations’ (Centeno, 1993 p. 314).<sup>18</sup>

Those who argue that there is a rise in the level of technocracy commonly refer to the fact that public policy issues have become more complex, and therefore the need for knowledge has become paramount. As a consequence of this, the public (including the politicians who represent the public) become less and less able to make informed decisions and the decision-making ends up in the hands of experts who understand the technical issues involved in the creation of policies (Brint, 1994; Centeno, 1993). The main arguments presented behind the claim that politics has become more complex are: that the sheer number of experts working in and around government has grown; the abundance of policy-related research conducted for and by government as well as references to case studies (Brint, 1994)<sup>19</sup>. However, while there are

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<sup>18</sup> I share Centeno’s idea that technocracy should be viewed as a continuum and I find his measures for defining a technocracy reasonable. However, his measures say nothing about the definition of a technocratic elite or technocratic measurements and interpretations. In the thesis I take a step back and question common definitions of technocrats as well as design measurements for the technocratic mode of reasoning. If we are to be able to place systems along Centeno’s continuum, we also need to know what we are looking for. I argue that simply counting numbers of non-elected experts is not sufficient. While Centeno also, as previously mentioned, acknowledges the need to move beyond personal attributes, he does not develop this any further.

<sup>19</sup> Although it is difficult to argue against those who claim that society and politics have become more complex, it is interesting to find that this worry is not new. In the early 1920s Bryce (1923) argued that politics had become more complex and expressed great concern since this had not gone hand in hand with an increase in the level of intelligence among the members of parliament. While Bryce believed this development lead to enabling popular wishes to be better expressed, it also meant on the downside that the members of parliament

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those who claim that complexity leads to technocracy, there is also evidence presented that contradicts this, and rather than the ‘scientification of politics’ we can see a ‘politicisation of science’<sup>20</sup>.

Indeed several researchers have found that when the findings of scientific studies do not fit the purposes of top officials, they are very often suppressed, distorted, or simply ignored, and even purely technical considerations may take a back seat to political considerations in the allocation of benefits or the distribution of costs. (Brint, 1994, p. 136).

The conclusion above highlights the relationship and tension between knowledge and politics. Many have described it as if this relationship has gone through different faces (Fischer, 1998; Torgerson, 1986). The question of whether knowledge *should* and *can* play a role in politics is related to normative reasoning and one’s epistemological view (Fischer, 1998; Torgerson, 1997).<sup>21</sup> Different normative and epistemological trends are mirrored in the different faces of the relationship between knowledge and politics. In the first face, during the Enlightenment, the neo-positivist view of knowledge dominated. There is a strong belief in the idea of one objective truth and that facts can be clearly separated from values (the facts and values dichotomy). In this face knowledge replaced politics (Torgerson, 1986) and the relationship can be illustrated by the famous expression ‘speaking truth to power’ (Wildawsky, 1987). If there was great faith in science during the rise of technology, science started to be questioned during the 1970s (Fischer, 1998; Jasanoff, 1990; Torgerson, 1986). Experts were confronted with uncertainty and the fallibility of (social) science became more evident, researchers arrived at different conclusions and further the same evidence was interpreted differently depending on one’s theoretical views (this is a recurring theme in environmental studies, for example, see among others Orekes, 2004; Pielke, 2004; Sarewitz, 2004). As a consequence of this, people became more sceptical towards knowledge claims (Jordan and Davidson, 2000) and knowledge no longer had the same authority as previously. This is the second face, where politics overwhelmed knowledge. This also opened the door for a post-positivistic view of science, where knowledge claims are no longer seen as

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stood more on the same intellectual level as their constituents. ‘Whether or not it be true, as is commonly stated, that in European countries the intellectual level of legislative assemblies has been sinking, it is clear that nowhere does enough of that which is best in the character and talent of the nation find its way into those assemblies’ (Bryce, 1923 p. 373).

<sup>20</sup> On the politicisation of science, see also Maasen and Weingart (2005).

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of different epistemological outlooks and how these relate to the role of knowledge in the policy process, see Tapio and Hietanen 2002.

objective truths but rather interpretations of reality, contributing to an ongoing academic discussion. This has been referred to as the 'argumentative turn in policy analysis' (Fischer and Forrester, 1993).<sup>22</sup>

The relationship between knowledge and politics can be seen as this evolutionary process, but one can also view it as if the models exist in parallel in different systems or different policy domains within the same system. Some claim that the role of knowledge and expertise differs between policy areas, and empirical studies have also supported this claim (Boswell, 2009; Brint, 1990; Gormley, 1986; Jasanoff, 1990; Lowi, 1972; Radaelli 1999b).

It has been argued that following these two faces (first an over-confidence in science and then the politicisation of science), we are looking at the third face of policy analysis where 'we glimpse the potential for a relationship in which politics and knowledge are no longer deadly antagonists' (Torgerson, 1986, p. 39). There are several normative ideal models suggesting how we might be able to find a sound balance between knowledge and politics. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927) talked about a division of labour between citizen and experts where experts, instead of rendering judgements, would analyse and interpret for the benefit of citizens; Fischer (2000, 2009) speaks of *Participatory policy-making* (where the expert is seen as a counsellor or facilitator of public learning and political empowerment); Jasanoff (2004) speaks of the *co-production account* according to which 'we gain explanatory power by thinking of natural and social orders as being produced together' (p. 2); Dahl (1985) speaks of *Limited guardianship* (in between guardianship and democracy) and Habermas (1971) speaks of the *pragmatic model* where a clear separation between the function of the expert and the politician is replaced by a critical interaction (as an ideal in between the decisionistic and technocratic models).

Common for all these models is the theme of 'making sense together' (Hoppe, 1999). While some wish to involve the public at large in this process, also emphasising the importance of local knowledge, others lay the emphasis on transparent representation and deliberation among the elite (followed by elite competition and accountability through regular elections). Par-

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<sup>22</sup> None of these models necessarily challenges the process as rational, it is just the status of knowledge claims that vary. However many have described that policy-making in reality in terms of 'muddling through' (Parsons, 2002) a swampy lowland where problems are confusing messes incapable of technical solutions (Schön, 1983) or a 'garbage can model' (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). Recent research (Howlett and Newman, 2010) shows that, according to policy analysts, formal policy analysis techniques are rare. The response by these policy analysts when asked what policy analytical techniques they employed shows that informal techniques were more common than formal techniques. Accordingly 'brainstorming' was by far the most common technique used (82.5%), followed by 'Consultation exercises' (67.5%) and 'Check lists' (60.1%). The 'Cost-benefit analysis' is the only formal technique used by more than 50 per cent.

ticipatory democracy, deliberative democracy and electoral democracy all have their, by now, well known problems (Gilljam and Hermansson, 2003; Held, 2006).

While acknowledging the research suggesting that political decision-making is not confined to the formal structures of government, but that public policy is formulated and implemented through a cornucopia of formal and informal institutions (commonly referred to as governance, Pierre, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000), it is difficult to imagine governance without government, however. Despite the challenges facing liberal democracy (see for example Sørensen and Torfing, 2005), it is the predominant political system in the world.<sup>23</sup> This is why I believe we also need to study the tension between technocracy and democracy within representative democracy. In fact it might be reasoned that representative democracy in theory provides several features that could help in creating a balance between the two. Representative democracy creates potential for the people to have representatives that can acquire specialized knowledge within a field, which is a prerequisite in order to make informed decisions. A division of labour between different policy areas also allows politicians (MPs as well as Ministers) to have a reasonable chance to inform and keep themselves up-to-date. To help with this, civil servants can provide a link between the politicians and experts as knowledge brokers (Liftin, 1994; Meyer, 2010).<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, representative democracy can provide a good setting for deliberation<sup>25</sup>. It also has the potential to prevent strong self-centred interests and group interests in favour of the common good. This is of course in an ideal scenario, and to meet all these ideals a range of different institutional arrangements are required (committee system, hearings, equal access, etc.). However, the success with which representative democracy manages to balance the two is likely to be decided by the building of both formal as well as informal institutions, yet is also likely to be dependent on the roles taken by and the behaviour of key actors. It has been argued that we at the heart of government need politicians that can navigate between the two extremes of ignorance and expert delegation.

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<sup>23</sup> See Freedom House, although Freedom House considers many officially liberal democratic governments as undemocratic in practice.

<sup>24</sup> See Meyer (2010) for a review of literature on knowledge brokering.

<sup>25</sup> After all the word Parliament has its origin from Anglo-French parlement, and parler (to talk). First known use: 13th century (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Based on principles of democracy (and efficiency) it is thus desirable that politics can navigate between total nonchalance and an excessive respect for the information that is supplied in the decision-making process. We neither wish to find ourselves in a situation where knowledge replaces politics nor where politics masks itself as knowledge. (Ahlbäck Öberg and Öberg, 2012, p. 48<sup>26</sup>)

Further, it has been argued that we need bureaucrats that are not only professional but also responsive, in order for them not to pose a threat to democratic policy-making. Technocracy, as defined here, is more likely to be compatible with democracy when it is operated by bureaucrats who possess a higher level of subjective compatibility than when it is operated by those who possess a lower level of subjective compatibility (see Hwang, 1999 on subjective compatibility between bureaucracy and democracy).

The role taken by key actors is believed to be decided both objectively and subjectively. In other words both by formal and informal institutions, the issue context as well as personal beliefs and values. As previously stated, the main focus in this thesis is on two key actors within the representative democracy – civil servants and politicians – and their relationship with a technocratic mode of reasoning and justification. However, I will also take into consideration and discuss the importance of formal and informal institutions as well as the issue context. A central argument in this thesis is that we need to consider the context and open the door to the detection of nuances.

The thesis consists of two parts. You have just read the introduction to the first part, the *Introduction of the thesis*. In the following section I will discuss *the essence of the contribution* of the different studies included in the thesis in relation to the overall theme and aim of the dissertation. Subsequently a brief summary is given of *the three essays* included in the thesis. In the last section, *Lessons learned*, I discuss the findings in the different studies in relation to the overall aim of the thesis as well as previous research. In the second part of the dissertation, the three essays are presented at length. Essay 1 is reprinted with the permission of *Public Policy and Administration*. Essay 2 has recently received a revise and resubmit at *International Political Science Review* and Essay 3 is currently under revision at *Scandinavian Political Studies*.

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<sup>26</sup> My translation.



# 2

## Essence of the contribution

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Overall the thesis wishes to contribute to the old, but with continued centrality, discussion on the tension between technocracy and democracy, the balance between enlightened policy and the strong principle of political equality (Dahl, 1989). Resting on the claim that the degree of technocratic reasoning and justification among elite bureaucrats and politicians is one powerful determinant of the extent to which technocracy can be compatible with (representative) democracy, I focus on two actors at the heart of policy-making – top civil servants and politicians – in a setting of representative (parliamentary) democracy. By studying their beliefs, values and behaviour, I believe we can gain important insights that have a bearing on the discussion of the tension between technocracy and democracy and the potential to create a balance between the two. As previously stated, the more specific aim of the thesis is to challenge the common assumption that technocrats can be defined by personal attributes (primarily based on their educational background) and also to develop new measurements for studying the presence of technocratic and democratic reasoning and justification.

Below I present an outline of the essays included in the thesis in relation to the overall theme, introducing elaborating further on the more specific aim of the thesis. The first section *Bureaucrats and technocratic reasoning* relates to the first two essays, after which the second section *Politicians and technocratic justification* relates to the third essay. This discussion should be read as an introduction to the problems dealt with later in the specific essays, creating a bridge between the overall theme of the thesis, presented in the introduction, and the essays.

## Bureaucrats and technocratic reasoning

I reached the conclusion during the consultations that the absence of political personalities in the government will help, rather than hinder, a solid base of support for the government in parliament and in the political parties because it will remove one ground for disagreement. I hope that with good, serious governance and with the politicians' support my government and I can make a contribution, and bring reassurance and cohesion among the political forces. (Mario Monti<sup>27</sup>)

Bureaucrats play an (increasingly) important role in policy-making (Aberbach et al., 1981; Aberbach et al., 1990; Christensen, 1991; Gauld, 2002; Grønnegard Christensen, 2006; Olsen, 1983; Putnam, 1973, 1977; Radaelli 1999a, 1999b; Vibert, 2007). This is especially true when it comes to complex policy issues (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2006; Gormley, 1986; Pekonen, 1985; Radaelli, 1999a, 1999b) where the politicians are dependent on their and other experts' input. 'Bureaucrats, monopolizing as they do much of the available information about the shortcomings of existing policies, as well as much of the technical expertise necessary to design practical alternatives, have gained a predominant influence over the evolution of the agenda for decisions. Elected executives everywhere are outnumbered and outlasted by career civil servants' (Putnam, 1973, p.257). Today, we even see examples of governments made up solely of non-elected career civil servants, as is the case with Mario Monti's government in Italy.<sup>28</sup>

A common criticism of bureaucratization is that 'key decisions in modern nation states are not made by citizens or even by the officials they can sanction, but by bureaucrats who, as agents within a governmental institution are at least two or three steps removed from anyone the citizens elect' (Kranz,

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<sup>27</sup> Speech given by Mario Monti when introducing his new government, presented in the Guardian ([www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) Wednesday 16 November 2011), translation from Italian to English produced by the Guardian.

<sup>28</sup> However, based on previous experience and arguments, we might expect this to be a short-term influence. Once the crisis is solved and the emergency has passed, other concerns will emerge and with that perhaps the call for a different kind of expertise (Huneus, 1998; Santiso and Whitehead 2012). As argued by Santiso and Whitehead (2012), if they do their job, the experts undermine their basis for authority: 'Particular types of expert may therefore enjoy brief periods of concentrated power, but if they live up to their promises they will thereby undermine the conditions for their preeminence' (p. 435). Kathryn Sikkink (1991) has further argued that unless institutional embodiment is acquired, experts will lack the requirements needed to design public policy in the longer run. And should they become institutionalized, they also become subject to the processes of political bargaining and analytical dilution (see Santiso and Whitehead, 2012). If they do become institutionalized they also become subject to broader processes of political bargaining and analytical dilution, Huneus (1998).



1976). There is no a priori reason to believe that the bureaucracy is accountable, responsible and responsive to their political masters (Hwang, 1999). Given that this is the case, and also bearing in mind the claims that the growing complexity of political matters has led to the domination of a technocratic norm in the making of public policy (Anselm 2000; Fischer 1990, 2000; Hager, 1995; Lundquist, 1991, 1992; McAvoy, 1999), I suggest a central question is: to what extent is bureaucracy likely to encourage and enforce a development in this direction? In other words, how responsive is bureaucracy to changing social needs and political demands? The question has been posed before and, as previously discussed, the answer has frequently focused on the background of bureaucrats, building on the assumption that bureaucrats with a particular background will have certain attitudes in common, for example that technically trained bureaucrats will be technocrats. However, in tune with Putnam (1977) and Centeno (1993), I argue that this is not sufficient. To find a satisfying answer to this question we need measurements that capture the essence of the technocratic norm as well as the democratic norm. We need to go beyond personal attributes such as educational background and get inside the minds of the bureaucrats (and politicians). Further, I argue that we need to develop the measurements used when studying the presence of a technocratic and democratic mode of reasoning and justification, allowing for more nuances to be found and thereby challenging the traditional dichotomy (see further Essay 2).

While acknowledging that it is not the sole factor for explaining the responsiveness of bureaucracy to its social and political environment, in tune with Putnam (1973), I suggest that the beliefs and values of bureaucrats are a powerful determinant of the extent to which bureaucracy can be compatible with democracy, or more to the point here, technocracy to democracy. This argument rests on the premise that the kind of decisions and actions key civil servants take depends on their orientations and their values (Mosher, 1968).

The beliefs and values of bureaucrats and different bureaucratic roles have been, and remain, one of the prime subjects of investigation within the field of public administration. This research has provided us with several important theoretical as well as empirical contributions on the topic (Aberbach, 2003a<sup>29</sup>; Aberbach et al., 1981; Peters, 1987; Svava, 1999, 2006; Weber, 1924). Considering the first writings on the issue were published in the turn of the last century (Weber, 1924; Wilson, 1883), it is a little surprising that it

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<sup>29</sup> See also the other articles in this special issue of *Governance* (2003, Volume 16, Issue 3, Pages 315–468) for follow-ups of the Aberbach, Putnam and Rockmans 1981 study, with specific country contributions on Britain (Wilson & Barker, 2003), Germany (Derlien, 2003), Sweden (Ehn et al. 2003) (these three countries were also represented in the original study), Belgium (Dierickx, 2003) and the USA (Aberbach, 2003b).

was not until the 1970s that the first systematic empirical studies were undertaken. The most renowned study, *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies* by Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981), is still considered a classic and has generated a whole field of studies (Lee and Raadschelders, 2008). Studies like these have given us important insights into the world of administrators (and politicians).

The classical Weberian distinction between the world of the bureaucrat and that of the politician, where there is a clear hierarchy and division of labour between the two, has been a foundation for most discussions. The model has developed into a normative ideal in western society, although there is a considerable amount of evidence proving it is poorly supported empirically, suggesting that both groups of actors are intimately involved in making public policy, even if they seem to do it quite differently (see among others Aberbach et al., 1981, Aberbach and Rockman, 2006).

In the 1981 study, Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman concluded that the evidence pointed towards a change in the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats towards what they described as ‘the pure hybrid’ where the two groups are fused together (they are both deeply involved at all stages of policy-making in a similar fashion). At the same time, however, they found that when analysing ‘role foci’, the traditional Weberian distinction between politicians and bureaucrats was well sustained. ‘Politicians especially orient themselves towards partisan politics, toward representing groups, and toward advocating causes, role foci that are largely foreign to bureaucrats. Bureaucrats are far more apt to focus instead on applying technical expertise to the solutions of problems, a role with little resonance among politicians’ (Aberbach et al., 1981, p. 89). Also in more recent studies they have found that the Weberian distinction is upheld through the different ways politicians and bureaucrats engage in policy-making (Aberbach and Rockman, 2006).

The meritocratically appointed bureaucrat is generally believed to be especially prone to a technocratic mode of reasoning, rather than a democratic mode of reasoning (Boswell, 2009). Hansen and Ejersbo (2002) expressed it as if administrators have a deductive logic of action (as opposed to politicians who have an inductive logic of action). This can partly be explained due to a cultural-historical legacy where bureaucracies, according to the Weberian account, are characterized by their technocratic and rationalist styles of decision-making. However, it can also be seen as a compensation for a lack of a direct democratic mandate (Boswell, 2009). Due to this, bureaucrats are instead accountable to their professional peers and more concerned with fulfilling the goal of their organization rather than pleasing voters (Alesina and Tabelini, 2007). According to Sabatier, this lack of democratic legitimacy

can partly explain ‘the tendency of many officials to wrap their decisions in a cloak of technical jargon and scientific studies’ (Sabatier, 1978, p. 401).

Bureaucrats are likely to be more technocratic than politicians, although at the same time previous studies have provided empirical evidence that beliefs, values and behaviour vary significantly between bureaucrats (see among others Aberbach et al., 1981; Gregory, 1991; Peters, 1987; Price, 1971; Putnam, 1973). Previous research has portrayed different ‘ideal type’ bureaucrats, each with a different set of attitudes towards politics and political actors: the Classical bureaucrat, the Political bureaucrat (Putnam 1973), the Traditional bureaucrat and the Technocrat (Gregory, 1991; Putnam 1977).<sup>30</sup> Based on these four ideal types, it is reasonable to assume that technocratic bureaucrats pose the largest threat towards the compatibility of bureaucracy and democracy, considering technocrats are believed to be fundamentally in repugnance of the imperative of responsiveness. Departing from this conclusion, I suggest we need to direct more attention to the minds of technocratic bureaucrats. Not least since recent claims have been made that governance has become increasingly technocratic, stressing the important role of technical knowledge (invoking expertise and data in the settling of debates rather than rival values or interests) causing a ‘post ideological’ approach to policy-making (Boswell, 2009; Fischer, 1990).

## What can we learn from studying technocratic bureaucrats?

In relation to the overall theme of the thesis, two questions are posed in this section that will be further elaborated on in the next chapter. First, by challenging the assumption that bureaucrats with technical training are technocrats, and instead empirically exploring the question of *What makes a technocrat?* (suggesting that a technocratic mentality might not necessarily be caused by educational training but rather by different institutional contexts), we can learn more about the potential to create a more or less technocratic bureaucracy (by appointment or by institutional arrangements), thereby altering the balance between technocracy and democracy (Essay 1).

Second, by challenging the traditional measurements used in the study of a technocratic mentality and exploring the question of *How technocratic is a technocratic bureaucrat?*, we can learn more about whether technocracy and democracy can be compatible on a subjective level and shed some light on the question of whether government by technocratic bureaucrats is likely to become ‘increasingly technocratic in the pejorative sense – less responsive,

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<sup>30</sup> For a description of these see Essay 2.

more remote, less sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged groups, perhaps even more authoritarian?' (Putnam, 1977, p. 408) (Essay 2).

### Politicians and technocratic justification

In the previous section I discussed the relationship between bureaucrats and technocratic reasoning, suggesting that bureaucrats might not be as technocratic as they sometimes are assumed to be. Below I will shift focus to politicians and technocratic justification. Politicians might be less technocratic than bureaucrats in general (Aberbach et al., 1981), but this does not necessarily mean that they do not take notice of a technocratic mode of justification. I will start off with two examples, illustrating two divergent pictures of politicians' use of knowledge in the public policy debate.

In the midst of the negotiations on the ending of tax-free sales when travelling within the EU, the Swedish Prime Minister declared that Sweden would not oppose a prolongation of tax-free sales. Not only did the fact that this was a new position lead to annoyance, but also the fact that he did this with the motivation that 'tax-free makes a pleasant part in travelling'. What is perhaps less often cited is that he continued by stating that this was an opinion he shared with many voters, something he believed they should not close their eyes to. The Swedish Prime Minister's motivation was widely and heavily criticized, in fact it has been described as one of the most obvious examples of how a politician can dismiss heavy factual arguments with a glib motivation. With the consequence that decisions are based on short-term political considerations instead of rational analysis leading to objectively justified decisions and the most desirable development in the long run (Calmfors, 1999).

This example illustrates a core question for representative democracy – the possible trade-off between the principle of rule of the people and competence, or put another way, the dilemma that the demands of competence might be in conflict with the ambition to secure representativeness. This problem has received plenty of attention (Aberbach et al. 1981; Beckman, 2006; Dahl, 1989) and is by no means novel, but probably as old as the notion of representative democracy itself (for an early reference, see Mill, 1862).

While the Prime Minister in the above example was criticized for being ignorant, other politicians are being criticized for being too technocratic (or academic) in their approach. This is the case with the current Swedish Minister of Finance, for instance; he is accused of putting too much emphasis on

research when justifying his political reforms, not only from within the party but also from people within academia:

...it is doubtful whether one should refer to economic research explicitly in political discussions. Because, it is always possible to find any other research that shows something else and then it will be throwing research at each other. My understanding is that perhaps [you should do this] at the investigation stage, but then when formulating policy, then you should have it as a support for itself, but you may not use it explicitly as much as he does... (Magnus Henrekson<sup>31</sup>)

Note that the important part of this criticism is not the fact that research is used in the investigation stage, but that it is also used explicitly to legitimize the politician's policy position, which can be seen as the politicisation of science (Torgerson, 1986). On a similar note, the Minister of Finance was accused of not being humble enough before the research in seeming to believe that one can base something as enormously complex as economic policy entirely on science, when politics always boils down to experience, reviewing and balancing different interests<sup>32</sup>. In a response to this, however, the Swedish Minister of Finance believes he is being nothing else but humble in basing his decision on research:

I am a very humble person, therefore I try to base the ideas I have on research and empirical experience. If it then is also true that [...] a policy of redistribution is greater for those with a little lower and normal income, I think it is an advantage. I cannot see that a credible growth strategy should only be based on that we favour the wealthiest in society. It is a strange attitude and it really is not substantiated by either research or experience, but it is more an ideological outcome. (Anders Borg<sup>33</sup>)

The case involving the current Minister of Finance, Anders Borg, demonstrates the tension between 'rational' and normative reasoning and underlines important questions regarding the limitation of expert knowledge and the use of science when underpinning political decisions. Conventional wisdom and scholarly research indicate that policy-makers favour advice supporting their

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Magnus Henreksson, Professor of Economics and CEO, Research Institute of Industrial Economics, 21.03.2010, on Swedish Public Radio (SR) P1, God Morgon Världen (part two).

<sup>32</sup> This accusation was made by P.J. Anders Linder, Political Editor-in-Chief for the independent moderate newspaper Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), in an interview, 21.03.2010, on Swedish Public Radio (SR) P1, God Morgon Världen (part two).

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Anders Borg, Minister of Finance, 21.03.2010, on Swedish Public Radio (SR) P1, God Morgon Världen (part two).

previous convictions and will primarily use scientific knowledge to support the positions they have already taken and to rationalize their policy preferences (Murswieck, 1994; Weiss, 1979, 1989). Further, they will seldom experience any difficulty in finding research supporting their points of view, since social science often results in mixed evidence (Weiss, 1979). Although it has been argued that, even when science is used primarily for political advantage, it is still beneficial since it leads to greater sophistication of the debate (Whiteman, 1985), there is an obvious risk that politicians will use this as a strategy when making uncomfortable decisions as well as for avoiding blame in the case of policy failure (Hood, 2008; Weaver, 1986). 'Making experts responsible for technical judgements is an established way for politicians to shift blame for judgemental failure in many kinds of regulation. Passing judgements over risk and safety to expert advisers has the political advantage of allowing those eminences to be held responsible when things go wrong, as well as the technical or functional one of ensuring well-informed decision advice' (Hood, 2008).

Taken together, the examples involving the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance not only direct our attention to important problems challenging representative democracy, they also illustrate where we stand today in the research field on the utilization of expert knowledge in public policy debate. Just as with the two examples outlined here, existing contributions point in different directions. While the political communications literature points to the 'dumbing down' of political debate, implying little use of expert knowledge, a different set of literature in the field of sociology and theories on the role of science in risk construction suggests that expert knowledge has become more crucial than ever in influencing public debates in late-modern societies (see Boswell, 2009, for a review and comparison of the views in these two sets of literature).

While previous research has focused on how far, and under which conditions, knowledge is drawn on to shape policy, there is a lack of studies looking into the more symbolic role that knowledge can play in lending authority to policy positions. In addition, the studies that have focused on the symbolic utilization of knowledge have directed their attention to the administration rather than the context of political mobilization. 'The question of how knowledge is utilised as a source of legitimation in party politics has largely been ignored' (Boswell, 2009). Furthermore, previous research has to a large extent been based on small-n case studies presenting no or limited opportunities to explore whether politicians' use of expert knowledge to legitimize policies varies systematically. In relation to the overall aim of the thesis, this study wishes to further explore the importance of context (issue context as

well as cultural context) for explaining variation in technocratic and democratic justification. In Essay 3 I set out to explore the question of when politicians are likely to advance knowledge claims in the policy debate.

### **What can we learn from studying politicians' symbolic use of knowledge?**

Following the discussion above and the overall theme of the thesis, I argue that by exploring the question of *When politicians adhere to a technocratic mode of justification?* we can learn more about whether politicians are likely to support a shift towards a technocratization by supporting a technocratic discourse. Also, can the divergent pictures in previous studies (illustrated by the two examples above) be explained (at least partly) by policy context? Further, is there a difference in party culture when it comes to the utilization of knowledge in policy debate? This will be further elaborated on below (Essay 3).





# 3

## The Essays

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In the following section I will give a brief summary of the three essays included in the thesis and make more explicit their relation to the overall theme. The studies are all based on the Swedish case, and throughout the essays I argue that the Swedish case provides a good case for studying the presence of a technocratic mode of reasoning and justification<sup>34</sup>. The main argument for this is the formal institutional context. Sweden has been described as both a commission democracy and a committee democracy (Manzer, 1984). The policy-making process has therefore been described as rational. Official investigations are a key feature of the Swedish policy-making process, and at any given time approximately 200 inquiries are in progress ([www.sweden.gov.se](http://www.sweden.gov.se)). From a comparative perspective, the influence of research results and academic experts on the policy-making process is considered among the highest in Sweden of all OECD countries ([www.sgi-network.org](http://www.sgi-network.org)). The Government Offices of Sweden is a politically controlled but mainly meritocratic organization. The Committee system in the Swedish parliament (Riksdagen) allows MPs to specialize in policy issues in which they, by virtue of previous experience or educational background, have acquired, or seek to acquire, expertise (Albæk, 2003).

While I believe the lessons learned from these studies ought to travel beyond the studied cases, we must also, as is the case with all empirical case studies, be cautious regarding the possibility of generalization. In order to know the limits of the potential to generalize, we have to know our case well, including whether and how it might differ from other cases (Gerring, 2007). In the thesis we will see evidence pointing towards the importance of context (issue context, party culture context, ministerial context, etc.). There is also reason to believe that this varies culturally between countries (see for exam-

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<sup>34</sup> See further the method section in the different Essays.

ple Aberbach et al., 1981)<sup>35</sup>. One important clarification to be made is that I have studied elite bureaucrats and politicians at a central political level in relation to policy-making in a parliamentary representative democracy. I have not studied attitudes among bureaucrats and politicians at a local level, nor in relation to the implementation of policy (street-level bureaucrats).

I have chosen to focus on two actors in the policy-making process, although this does not mean that I view other actors as unimportant or uninteresting – quite the opposite. Throughout the thesis there are discussions about the influence of experts, both through the research they produce as well as through their opinions. I also discuss the importance of other actors (the public at large, organized interest groups, government agencies, members of the opposition), and these actors are particularly taken into consideration in Essay 2.

Although my point of departure is that elite bureaucrats and politicians are key actors in the policy-making process, the question of whether technocracy and democracy can be made compatible is obviously not solely decided by the beliefs, values and behaviour of these two groups of actors. This is particularly true considering less research is conducted by in-house commissions and more by consultants. Nevertheless, despite governance, important legislation and policy formulation are still formed within the government. In this perspective, bureaucrats and politicians can still be considered key actors, and their beliefs, values and behaviour therefore remain an important subject of investigation. Having said this, let's turn to the presentation of the essays.

## Essay 1: What makes a technocrat?

In Essay 1 I challenge the assertion that civil servants with technical training are assumed to be technocrats. Instead I turn the question of who is a technocrat into an empirical one, searching for explanations behind variations in the degree of technocratic mentality among elite bureaucrats and posing the question: *What makes a technocrat?*

This question is interesting on its own, particularly in relation to the overall aim of the thesis of challenging common assumptions of technocracy and technocrats. Still, I believe it becomes even more interesting in relation to the overall theme of the thesis – the tension between technocracy and democracy.

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<sup>35</sup> There is a rather large body of literature studying the influence of technocracy in Latin American countries as well as China and Japan. Technocracy in Latin America, see Centeno and Silva, 1998a; Santiso and Whitehead, 2012; Silva, 2008. Technocracy in Japan, see Mizuno, 2009, and in China, see Cheng and White, 1990.

The question of what makes a technocrat is related to the question of whether it is possible to steer the level of technocratic thinking within the bureaucracy, and perhaps in the long run to alter the balance between technocratic and democratic reasoning in the policy-making process. Assuming that the politicians wish to steer the level of technocratic thinking within bureaucracy – are there ways to do this? As regards turning the question of who is a technocrat into an empirical one, a technocrat is accordingly understood to be someone who possesses a technocratic mentality, and this study takes two possibilities into consideration. First, it considers the importance of educational background for determining the level of technocratic thinking within the bureaucracy. Second, it explores the possibility that the level of technocratic thinking within the bureaucracy is related to the institutional context and, rather than being caused by personal attributes, is due to post-recruitment socialization, in particular the level of politicisation within the ministries.

### The ideal type technocrat and technocratic mentality

Taking the statement that a technocrat is someone who embraces a technocratic mentality as a point of departure, we must define ‘technocratic mentality’ if we are to measure it empirically. The study lends on Putnam’s (1977) definition of an ideal type technocrat as well as the empirical measurements introduced by Putnam for studying the presence of a technocratic mentality. According to Putnam, an ideal type technocrat believes that: ‘technics must replace politics and defines his own role in apolitical terms’; is ‘sceptical and even hostile towards politicians and political institutions’; ‘is fundamentally unsympathetic to the openness and equality of political democracy’; ‘believes that social and political conflict is, at best misguided, and, at worst, contrived’; ‘rejects ideological or moralistic criteria, preferring to debate policy in practical, “pragmatic” terms when analysing public issues’; ‘is strongly committed to technological progress and material productivity’ (Putnam, 1977, pp. 385–387).<sup>36</sup>

As is the case with most (all) ideal types, one rarely expects to find one in reality. We are therefore highly unlikely to find a pure technocrat among bureaucrats working in a government office (as will be further explored in Essay 2). However, this study does not aim to define bureaucrats as technocratic or not (in an either/or analysis), but to explain the variations found in the degree of technocratic thinking among bureaucrats as a group. Putnam’s outline of the technocratic mentality lets us do exactly this: empirically examine degrees of technocratic thinking.

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<sup>36</sup> For further elaboration on the technocratic mentality, see Essay 1 and Putnam (1977).

First, however, the aspects Putnam identified must be transferred into operational indicators. One might well question how well these operational indicators capture the different aspects. However, for the purposes of Essay 1 and for comparative purposes, I am staying with these traditional measurements, since they are widely used in research into attitudes among bureaucrats and politicians (Lee and Raadschelders, 2008). Furthermore, regardless of the flaws of these traditional measurements (see further Essay 2), they can help us in our query about what causes the variation found within the group of bureaucrats, something we still know very little about.

In seeking evidence of a technocratic mentality, four different indicators are studied – *political neutrality versus political advocacy*, *technics versus politics*, *tolerance for politics* and *elitism* – corresponding to the three first aspects of the technocratic mentality. It could be argued that these three aspects make up the core of the technocratic mentality, since they best mirror the three role foci (i.e. partisan, advocate and technician) that, according to Aberbach et al. (1981, pp. 86–91), are most central to the role focus dimension ‘politics/technics’. It is also for these three role foci (out of nine) that they find the largest differences between bureaucrats and politicians (Aberbach et al., 1981, p. 88).<sup>37</sup>

### Data and respondents

The hypotheses outlined in the study are tested empirically by both re-analysing Putnam’s data from the late 1970s and analysing data from a survey of elite bureaucrats working in the Government Offices of Sweden. For details on Putnam’s study, see Putnam (1977). The Swedish elite survey was sent to all non-politically appointed senior civil servants working on the drafting of government bills in the Government Offices of Sweden.<sup>38</sup> It was distributed to 1,741 senior civil servants; completed questionnaires were received from 860 respondents, giving a response rate of 49.4 per cent. Considering the widely noted problem regarding response rates to elite surveys (largely due to survey fatigue and a reluctance to provide written answers to controversial questions) and the demanding nature of the questionnaire (containing 350 sub-questions), this is deemed satisfactory. (For similar discus-

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<sup>37</sup> Further details regarding the operational indicators, such as phrases used in the questionnaire, how the indexes are constituted, and the differences with/similarities to Putnam’s original study, are found in the Method Appendix of Essay 1.

<sup>38</sup> The survey was carried out in 2004 by the REKO research programme. Principal investigators: Bengt Jacobsson, Södertörn University, Jon Pierre, University of Gothenburg and Rune Premfors, Score, Stockholm University. The research programme was supported by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ).

sions see Bailey, 2008; Öberg and Svensson, 2010; Smith and Hay, 2008). When checking for bias, no systematic biases were found.<sup>39</sup>

### The importance of educational background

In his study from 1977, Putnam systematically compares attitudes expressing a technocratic mentality among elite bureaucrats in Britain, Germany and Italy with different types of training. Describing his findings as ‘striking’, Putnam concludes that ‘type of training’ is indeed an independent variable to be considered seriously when seeking to explain variation in the technocratic mentality; notably, bureaucrats trained in the natural sciences are more technocratic overall than are their colleagues trained in law and the humanities or the social sciences (Putnam, 1977).

At first glance the differences in proportion seem quite convincing and intuitively persuasive as well. However, taking a closer look, and considering the relatively small number of respondents in each country, one becomes more sceptical. A re-analysis of Putnam’s results, using a difference of proportions z-test, leaves us with results that are far from striking and much less convincing<sup>40</sup>. However, Putnam also presents results that are more robust, suggesting that we should not dismiss educational background altogether, but rather investigate this hypothesis further, and the larger n of the present study provides an excellent opportunity to do precisely this.

The analysis of the Swedish survey confirms the doubt raised by the re-analysis of Putnam’s study, namely, that ‘type of training’ does not qualify as a strong determinant when explaining variations in technocratic thinking (see Table 1 in Essay 1). In fact, this hypothesis gains no support at all, as the only significant differences found between the different groups do not clearly point in the hypothesized direction – that those trained in natural sciences are clearly marked out as the most technocratic.

### The importance of organizational culture and politicisation

Concluding that educational background does not provide us with a good explanation for differences in a technocratic mentality, I decided to set out to test a different hypothesis suggesting that the differences are caused by either organizational or cultural factors, as suggested by Dierickx (2003) and also discussed by Putnam (1977) in terms of post-recruitment socialization.

Departing from the claim that individuals inside an institution will behave in what can be defined as the most appropriate way according to their roles

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<sup>39</sup> See further methods section in Essay 1.

<sup>40</sup> Further details on the results of these analyses are presented in Additional Appendix Essay 1:1.

and the rules and norms of the organization (March and Olsen, 1989), I argue that it becomes relevant to elaborate on the importance of organizational culture for creating bureaucracies with more or less technocratic thinking. As with individuals in other organizations, civil servants' perceptions and attitudes are largely believed to be shaped by their institutional surroundings (Pierre and Ehn, 1999). While the Swedish Government Offices were merged into a single integrated authority by a recent reform in 1997, many have borne witness to the reform's limited effect, describing it as a 'stovepipe' organization emphasising the different cultures of specific ministries (Premfors and Sundström, 2007). Thus, in a first analysis I choose 'ministry' as a preliminary, rough proxy for organizational culture, suggesting that we might find evidence of cultural differences between the studied ministries in terms of the degree of technocratic mentality present.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that organizational culture (i.e. 'ministry') better explains the variations found in technocratic thinking than does 'type of training' (see Table 2 in Essay 1). When looking at the three indicators of technocratic thinking that differ significantly between the ministries, the situation becomes less clear, however, since it is not the same ministries that stand out as the most technocratic for all three indicators. Instead, a different ministry qualifies as the most technocratic for each indicator. All this leads to the conclusion that we must find a better explanation for differences in culture: there might be different institutional explanations depending on which aspect of the technocratic mentality we are considering, or the organizational culture might affect the different aspects of the technocratic mentality in different ways.

Arguing that one important factor in explaining the differences in degree of technocratic thinking is the level of (formal) politicisation in the various ministries, I test the following hypothesis: the more political appointees there are in a ministry, the less we should expect the bureaucrats working in that ministry to embrace the technocratic mentality. This hypothesis lends on the term 'key beliefs' from management theory (Harrison and Wood, 1999). According to management theory, a successful management strategy entails creating an organizational culture involving 'the inculcation in employees of a set of key beliefs about the organization which will guide their decisions and behaviour thereafter' (Harrison and Wood, 1999, p. 764). In the language of institutional theory, 'key belief' in this sense *could* be translated as the 'logic of appropriateness'; this represents a way of creating control.

The most frequently mentioned reason for politicisation (as in a political appointment system) is that politicians wish to exercise control over the bureaucratic machinery by attempting to change the attitude and culture of the

public service (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2007a, 2007b, Huber, 2000; Page and Wright, 1999; Peters and Pierre, 2004; Rouban, 2003). As Peters and Pierre put it, 'the assumption is that the best way to gain control over the public bureaucracy is to have the capability of appointing one's own faithful to positions that influence or control public policy' (2004, p. 4).

In the Government Offices of Sweden, a minister heads each ministry with a state secretary as his or her immediate subordinate. Together with the press secretaries and political advisers, this group is generally referred to as the political executive. 'Key beliefs' are defined by level, suggesting that the 'key beliefs' are established by the political hierarchy, implying a logic of appropriateness defined by political rather than technocratic rationality. However, the political executive is inferior in numbers to the non-politically appointed staff. The ministers and state secretaries are likely to attempt to establish the 'key beliefs' of the organization, and having aides such as political advisers is likely to help sustain and reinforce this culture further down in the hierarchy. Thus, the more political appointees are present in a ministry, the stronger the political rationale is expected to be and, in turn, the weaker the technocratic rationale. Bureaucrats working in a highly politicized ministry are believed to think and act more as politicians (being more open to political rationality) and less as classical bureaucrats (favouring technocratic rationality).

The Government Offices of Sweden mainly apply a meritocratic system, with only approximately 200 political appointees out of a total of 4,600, i.e. a 4 per cent level of politicisation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2008). However, the political staff is not evenly distributed among the ministries, and the Ministry of Justice and the Prime Minister's Office represent the two extremes, containing 1 and 66 present political appointees respectively (data from the Government Offices of Sweden's internal payroll database). The Swedish case thus provides a good opportunity to test the politicisation hypothesis.

Although 'politicisation' is not as strong an explanatory factor as 'ministry' (see Table 3 in Essay 1), it still provides an explanation of what causes cultural differences, among other possible explanations. Further, it better explains variations in the technocratic mentality than does 'type of training'. However, the pattern is rather confusing. The more politicized the work environment of the bureaucrats, the more inclined they are to state that civil servants, like themselves, should never engage in writing speeches or statements for their ministers. As defined in this study, this means they are more rather than less technocratic. At the same time, however, the more politicized the

work environment is, the more tolerant the bureaucrats tend to be of politics (in line with the hypothesis).

This might at first seem counter-intuitive, that bureaucrats working in a politicized environment advocate a higher degree of neutrality than of political advocacy, even though they have a higher tolerance for politics. However, this supports Eichbaum and Shaw's argument – rather than political appointees threatening the impartiality or neutrality of the permanent public service (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2007a; Mulgan, 2007), the presence of political advisers might have quite the opposite effect, helping the rest of the staff to remain neutral (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2007b). Ministers need help in highly partisan activities, and if there are no politically appointed staff to give them this help, they will probably ask non-politically appointed staff for such help in their place.

### In summary

Based on the empirical analyses, Essay 1 reports three important findings. First, the 'type of training hypothesis' is poorly supported. Second, the technocratic mentality of bureaucrats varies depending on ministerial affiliation. Third, the level of politicisation is connected to the degree of technocratic mentality among the bureaucrats, although not exactly as hypothesized: more politicisation indeed leads to higher 'tolerance for politics' among bureaucrats but, counter-intuitively, also makes bureaucrats more likely to advocate neutrality rather than political advocacy among civil servants. Higher politicisation thus seems to help uphold the classical distinction between the administration and the political elite. The greater support of political advocacy in the less politicized ministries might also be interpreted as an expression of the strong sense of loyalty among the bureaucracy created by the comparatively small ministries in Sweden.

Overall, the empirical analysis strongly supports the post-recruitment socialization hypothesis, though we cannot know for sure whether this is real evidence of post-recruitment socialization or whether the results are due to self-selection. Further research to provide firmer evidence of the underlying causality of this hypothesis using the panel data method is thus encouraged.

If we return to the initial question posed when relating this study to the overall theme of the thesis: Assuming that the politicians wish to steer the level of technocratic thinking within bureaucracy – are there ways they could do this? Based on the results of this study, this is unlikely to be done by choosing bureaucrats with a certain educational background, since this is not a good determinant for technocratic attitudes. However, once again based on the results of this study, one possible way might be to steer the level of polit-



icisation within the ministry. However, while politicisation might lead to a greater tolerance for politics, politicisation also brings its own problems. I will return to the discussion of politicisation in the next chapter – Lessons learned.

## Essay 2: Public Policy-Making in the Minds of Technocratic Bureaucrats

In Essay 2 I set out to explore the question of how technocratic a technocratic bureaucrat is. The traditional measurements used to identify technocratic thinking among bureaucrats (used in Essay 1) introduced by Putnam (1973), widely spread by Aberbach et al. (1981) and still commonly used (Lee and Raadschelders, 2008) are, as also noted by Putnam (1977) and Aberbach et al. (1990), likely to fabricate too simplistic a picture of a technocratic bureaucrat. As expressed by Aberbach et al. themselves: ‘There may well be no clear overarching dimension that distinguishes “technics” and “politics” as unique perspectives. It may be possible to be oriented toward both, yet not equally. ... however, we have tried to tap a set of close-ended questions that logically force choices about decision-making criteria’ (Aberbach et al., 1990, p. 5). Relating to the overall theme and aim of the thesis, the question of how technocratic a technocratic bureaucrat is questions the dichotomy of technocracy and democracy, suggesting that these two might very well be compatible not only within a system but also on a subjective level.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of the technocratic mentality (Putnam, 1977), and the empirical studies of technocratic bureaucrats (predominantly Aberbach et al. 1990, Gregory, 1991; Putnam, 1977), I develop an analytical framework for studying the relative importance of the technocratic and democratic modes of reasoning by identifying different decision criteria that are believed to support one of the two modes of reasoning<sup>41</sup>. Despite previous research, we still know little about which criteria these bureaucrats consider important when making decisions on public policy. The research design, in comparison to previous studies, allows for the detection of nuances both between different elements within a technocratic and a democratic mode of reasoning as well as between different policy modes. Thereby it challenges

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<sup>41</sup> At the outset five decision-making criteria associated with the technocratic mode of reasoning are identified and transferred into arguments stressing the importance of: expertise; effectiveness; economic efficiency; administrative efficiency; and administrative commitment. Likewise five decision-making criteria associated with the democratic mode of reasoning are identified and transferred into arguments stressing the importance of: ideology (values); partisan politics; public opinion; organized interests and redistribution. See further Essay 2.

not only the idea that a technocrat is a technocrat regardless of the issue at hand, but also that a technocratic bureaucrat is not equally hostile towards all elements in a democratic mode of reasoning.

### Research design

In order to study how technocratic a technocratic bureaucrat is, I first identify a group of technocratic bureaucrats. When selecting the technocratic bureaucrats, I analysed the answers to a number of questions included in an elite survey sent to non-politically appointed civil servants working in the Government Offices in Sweden (the same survey as in Essay 1, N=1741, with a response rate of 49 per cent giving an n of 860). The questions analysed were identical or very similar to those used by Putnam (1977) in his study of technocratic mentality among bureaucrats (see further Essay 1). Based on these results, a second questionnaire was sent to the bureaucrats working in the ministry that overall was identified as the most 'technocratic', i.e. the Ministry of Agriculture<sup>42</sup> (see Table 1 Essay 2). The sample in the second survey consisted of 64 non-politically appointed civil servants, corresponding to all those non-politically appointed bureaucrats working on preparing national bills. The response rate was 62.5 per cent, taking into consideration those ineligible (those no longer employed, on parental leave or on leave; n=35).

To test technocratic bureaucrats' support for as well as assessed importance for each criterion applied to decision-making, I designed a survey containing five hypothetical scenarios each representing the drafting of a policy proposition, presenting an alternative research design in an attempt to get closer to reality while still retaining the survey method. Each scenario comprised one hypothetical political proposition, inspired by parliamentary motions drafted by members of parliament from the governing party or its supporting parties, together with ten hypothetical supporting arguments (supporting either a technocratic or a democratic mode of reasoning).

The five hypothetical scenarios were chosen to reflect different policy modes, enabling an exploration as to whether the degree of technocratic reasoning might vary depending on the type of issue<sup>43</sup>. It is argued that policies that are high in complexity (Gormley, 1986) or concern areas of risk (Boswell, 2009) will favour a technocratic mode of reasoning. On the other hand, issues that are low in complexity or risk and primarily concern (moral) values

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<sup>42</sup> Without adding any emphasis, it is interesting to note that when Aberbach et al. (1990) studied technocratic attitudes among bureaucrats, they found bureaucrats trained as Agronomists to be the most technocratic in the sample.

<sup>43</sup> For further information on the hypothetical policy propositions, see Essay 2 as well as the Methodological appendix in Essay 2.

or interests are expected to favour a democratic mode of reasoning. Further, regardless of the character of an issue, issues that are salient are believed to favour a democratic mode of reasoning (Boswell, 2009). Thus the design allows for detecting possible nuances, both across different policy issues as well as between different types of decision-making criteria.

The respondents were asked to imagine that the government was about to formulate a bill articulating the proposition; furthermore, they were asked to imagine themselves, in their current positions, being asked to assist the government in this work. The arguments were hypothetical in that they were not necessarily supported empirically. The respondents were informed of this and were repeatedly reminded to focus on the essence of the argument. They were to assume that all arguments were equally well founded empirically, that the scenarios concerned the current political situation, and that the government stood behind all arguments.<sup>44</sup>

I wanted to allow the bureaucrats to rate all criteria as equally important, and thus did not contrast them to one another or ask them to rank them. This allows us not only to detect possible nuances across different types of policies, but also across different types of decision criteria within the different modes of reasoning, unlike previous measurements used when studying technocratic attitudes.

## Findings

In asking the technocratic bureaucrats to rate their preferred importance of different decision-making criteria, this paper is searching for the answers to the following two questions: Do technocratic bureaucrats consider all political criteria less important than any technocratic ones? Do technocratic bureaucrats invariably hold policy issues against technocratic criteria, or does the extent of technocratic as opposed to democratic reasoning vary depending on the type of issue?

The technocratic bureaucrats are also asked to rate the assessed importance (estimating the perceived importance in real life) of the different decision-making criteria. It is important to note that this is not believed to produce a proper picture of reality, but rather to learn if the technocratic bureaucrats perceive a tension between their preferences and the preferences of the social and political environment they work in.

Based on the Swedish case, and a relatively small sample of technocratic bureaucrats, the empirical evidence provided is primarily meant to have an il-

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<sup>44</sup> Table 2 in Essay 2 presents an example of how the theoretical decision-making criteria were developed into empirical indicators in the form of arguments.

illustrative function in relation to the main analytical questions discussed. In many ways this study should be viewed as a first attempt at challenging the stereotypical view of a technocrat, often produced by the traditional measurements of the technocratic mentality. However, I argue that the study might also to some degree be viewed as a critical case: if we find nuanced views among these 'technocratic bureaucrats', this would probably also be the case among less technocratic bureaucrats.

As expected, overall the technocratic mode of reasoning is dominant when these technocratic bureaucrats are allowed to rate the preferred importance of the different decision-making criteria. However, the situation is not as simple as the results based on standard measurements regarding the technocratic mentality (see Aberbach et al., 1981; Putnam, 1977) might suggest. Technocratic bureaucrats clearly wish that some elements within a democratic mode of reasoning, especially 'partisan politics', were less important, but when it comes to the ideological criterion, they do not wish these were less important or even unimportant as sometimes has been suggested within the technocratic literature (see for example Fischer, 1990).

Overall, the results of this study do not strongly support the idea that the policy mode is significant. This is true both for preferred as well as assessed ratings of importance. 'Technocratic' bureaucrats largely seem to use the same cognitive schema when rating the importance of the different criteria, regardless of the issue involved. One should bear in mind, however, that confronting the respondents with hypothetical scenarios caused the variation in policy mode. Considering there were some results pointing towards a variation between different 'policy modes', I argue that in future studies this hypothesis should not be overlooked but further tested.

Overall the bureaucrats assess the political criteria to be more important than the technocratic criteria. The criterion with the largest discrepancy between preferred and assessed importance is the political criterion 'partisan politics'. It is thus likely that the bureaucrats, at least in some aspects, perceive a tension between their preferences and their political environment.

### In summary

When technocratic bureaucrats are given the opportunity to express more nuanced opinions on the technocratic and democratic modes of reasoning, important nuances emerge. They are not equally hostile to all democratic decision-making criteria, in fact they find some of them as important or even more important than some of the technocratic decision-making criteria. Based on this study, there is no clear evidence that the policy context has bearing

for the bureaucrats when they rate the importance for different decision-making criteria, and this is true both for preferred and assessed importance.

Let's return to the question of responsiveness and the overall theme of the thesis – the tension between technocracy and democracy. If we imagine a bureaucracy exclusively appointed with technocratic bureaucrats, how responsive to changing social needs and political demands might we expect this bureaucracy to be? Remembering that the empirical evidence in this study is based on a small sample, the answer provided here to this question is obviously highly preliminary. Thus, the following discussion is mainly meant to highlight interesting observations that can be addressed further in future research.

Based on this study we should not expect bureaucrats, even if overall they favour a technocratic rationale, to be equally hostile towards all political decision-making criteria at all times. To some extent, technocratic bureaucrats are likely to support a shift towards technocratic decision-making, at least in some regards, but not necessarily if by this we also mean a shift from value-based decision-making to purely evidence-based decision-making (not that this should be regarded a value-free activity!).

Finally it is worth noting 'that the prospects for technocratic government depend not merely on the skills and propensities of bureaucratic elites, but also on the skills and propensities of politicians' (Putnam, 1977). The proposed trend towards more technocratic governance is not to be seen as exclusively caused by the bureaucracy. In fact, there has also been a call for more 'evidence-based' policy-making from the world of politicians, a prime example being the UK and the New Labour government with their 'what works is what matters' mantra (Clarence, 2002). In future studies of the technocratic mentality, we ought not to limit our investigation to the bureaucrats, but also include politicians. I will return to this, as well as subjective compatibility between technocracy and democracy, in the next chapter – Lessons learned.

## Essay 3: Science on Tap

Essay 3 explores the question of when politicians are likely to use expert knowledge to substantiate claims made in public policy debate. While previous studies have examined the use of expert knowledge in policy shaping, we still know little about the symbolic role of such knowledge in lending legitimacy to policy positions. This is especially true considering the context of party politics and political mobilization.

Recent research offers several suggestions as to when politicians are likely to use expert knowledge in public policy debate. While these studies pro-

vide important theoretical insights and rich examples, further research is needed. The study systematically tests hypotheses suggested by previous research (Boswell, 2009) as well as additional hypotheses regarding when we might expect politicians to use expert knowledge in public policy debate.

According to Boswell (2009), we should expect politicians' use of knowledge to differ depending on the character of the policy under debate. Politicians are expected to use knowledge to substantiate their claims on policies concerning *risk* or *social and economic* steering compared to policies primarily concerning *values or interests*. The reason for this is believed to be that in the first two types of policy issues, the politicians are more disposed to accept a technocratic mode of justification (Boswell, 2009; see also Radaelli 1999b).

Further, according to Boswell (2009), regardless of the policy mode, politicians will be less likely to invoke knowledge to substantiate their claims when an issue is highly salient (in the media), since science rarely follows the criteria of newsworthiness.

Boswell (2009) also presents findings suggesting incumbents will be less inclined to invoke knowledge in the public policy debate. The reason for this is believed to be that they will take a more careful position, aware of the fallibility of (social) science and that they might be held accountable for a decision that in retrospect will be regarded as wrong. However, one might also argue that incumbents are more likely to invoke knowledge claims in the debate since they have comparatively more access to information and knowledge than the opposition. Further, by invoking knowledge claims, they might also avoid the blame (reference). Thus the alternative hypothesis is also tested.

In addition to the hypothesis introduced by Boswell (2009), I further also test the possibility that there are variations not only between incumbents and members of the opposition, but also between different political parties, suggesting that there are differences in party cultures (Barrling Hermansson, 2004). All in all, five hypotheses are empirically tested.

### Research design

To find out when politicians use knowledge to support their claims in the policy debate, I analyse the contents of all legislative debates in the Swedish Riksdag preceding decisions on government bills during the 2009–2010 session, providing information on no fewer than 142 cases. To analyse this vast amount of text (total word count 1,183,729), I used Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. This software enabled me to search for passages in which MPs use expert knowledge to substantiate their claims. This was essential

considering the staggering number of words in the material, though every code was manually determined. To identify all relevant passages, I cast the search net wide, leading to a time-consuming coding of the debates.

The dependent variable in the study is the use of expert knowledge in parliamentary debate. Expert knowledge does not lend itself to an easy definition. The notion of expert knowledge is likely to vary not only over time but also between contexts, communities, systems, and people. In line with Boswell (2009), a broad and fluid definition is used when coding use of expert knowledge in debate. The definition used is broad in that not only scholarly research is considered expert knowledge, but references to knowledge produced by public agencies, public investigations and NGOs are also taken into account. The definition is fluid in that I consider how expert knowledge is constructed by those drawing on it. This means that, if an MP refers in a debate to an ‘expert study’, this is coded as expert knowledge although we cannot be certain who actually conducted the study. Furthermore, references to less precise statements based on expert ‘opinion’ are also coded (except for opinions expressed by NGOs), as are references to ‘practitioner knowledge’ (although as a separate category).

Three independent variables are included in the study, i.e. *policy type*, *salience* and *party*. The operationalizations of the first two are based on assessment and require further explanation. Based largely on Boswell’s typology (2009), policies are categorized into areas of *risk*, *social or economic steering*, *values or interests* and *bureaucratic policies*<sup>45</sup>. To categorize the various *policy types*, I read the summary of each government proposal and of the parliamentary decision. This information was compared with theoretical definitions of the various categories and with the examples discussed by Boswell (2009).

When defining *salience*, I build on the tradition of measuring public salience using data on media coverage<sup>46</sup> (Brody, 1991; Canes-Wrone and de Marchi, 2002; Maltzman 1995). By means of a content analysis of the four major national daily newspapers, two evening papers, and material from two

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<sup>45</sup> When categorizing all the policies according to Boswells’ typology, it became evident that some policies did not fit into any of the three categories suggested by Boswell. Policies are perhaps often thought of as large blueprints for improving society. However, a government will also need to draft bills concerning minor, often technical or editorial changes in the language of existing legislation or policies. In order also to categorize these policies, this fourth category was added.

<sup>46</sup> Salience could also be understood as salience among voters, however Boswell speaks of the media’s colonization of politics, and for this reason salience is defined in this study as salience in media.

news agencies,<sup>47</sup> salience is based on the number of media reports in which a bill was mentioned between the time of the government decision on the bill and the time of the parliamentary debate on the bill.<sup>48</sup>

### Findings

Based on extensive empirical analyses, Essay 3 reports several key findings. First, MPs are more likely to use expert knowledge to substantiate their claims when a policy concerns risk than when a policy concerns values or interests, suggesting that MPs are inclined to adopt a technocratic mode of justification in these areas. However, expert knowledge was not invoked to justify the social or economic steering policies analysed here. While the use of practitioner knowledge is more common in debates on these policy areas than in debates concerning the policy area of risk, the analysis does not support the claim that policies on social or economic steering adhere to a more technocratic mode of justification than do policies on values and interests. This suggests that, unlike what has been claimed to happen in other countries (primarily the UK), debates concerning social or economic steering issues are unlikely to have become depoliticized or 'post-ideological' (Fischer, 1990) and reduced to mere technical issues in Sweden.

Second, differences in media attention do not affect parliamentary debates on the issues considered. That is, MPs use expert knowledge when substantiating their claims in policy areas concerning risk and social or economic steering regardless of whether or not the issue has received considerable or little media attention. Further analysis of the content of media coverage is needed to establish whether this can be explained by the fact that the media also use expert knowledge when covering these issues, suggesting that the research in question might have met the criteria of newsworthiness, or whether the media has indeed not colonized politics.

Third, as anticipated by Boswell (2009), incumbents are less inclined to use expert knowledge to substantiate their claims than are opposition members. This is believed to be because incumbents will be more careful in using expert knowledge, aware both of the uncertainty often surrounding science (the social sciences in particular) and that they might one day be held accountable for a decision retrospectively viewed as wrong. It is also likely that the difference might be due to the possibilities displayed to the incumbents and the opposition in the public debate in the plenary session, and the ad-

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<sup>47</sup> The included national dailies are Dagens Nyheter, Göteborgs Posten, Svenska Dagbladet and Sydsvenska Dagbladet, the two evening papers are Aftonbladet and Expressen, and the two news agencies are TT and TT Spektra. The search was performed using the online media archives presstext.se and mediearkivet.se.

<sup>48</sup> For further detail on definitions and operational indicators, see Essay 3.



vantages the opposition usually has when it is able to use expert knowledge in criticizing the government. In order to provide further evidence on these matters in future studies, I encourage analysis that takes into consideration whether expert knowledge is used to substantiate one's own claims or to criticize the opponent's claims.

Finally, differences in the use of expert knowledge between members of parliamentary parties, independent of whether they are opposition members or incumbents, suggest that differences in party culture should also be taken into account when assessing the use of expert knowledge in parliamentary debate. I suggest that the levels of education and of trust in research can partly explain these differences in party culture.

### In summary

Based on previous studies, Essay 3 presents several potential explanations of when we can expect politicians to use expert knowledge to legitimize their positions. As previously discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the way politicians relate to knowledge is of importance for the overall theme of the thesis – the tension between technocracy and democracy. While bureaucrats primarily gain legitimacy from being professional, we expect politicians to make sound decisions, yet also follow their ideological compass (the platform that gave them their mandate) as well as being responsive representatives. Politicians are frequently criticized for not taking enough research into account (Calmfors, 1999), for setting up commissions so that they will arrive at a conclusion well suited for their already set opinion on the matter (Ahlbäck Öberg and Öberg, 2012), and for using knowledge symbolically rather than instrumentally (Murswieck, 1994; Weiss, 1979, 1989). However, regardless of why politicians invoke knowledge claims into the debate, according to some scholars they do this ever more frequently, leading to a de-politicisation of the political debate (Davies et al, 2000; Fischer, 1990, 2000; Flinders and Buller, 2006; Radaelli 1999b).

According to my findings, there is no clear evidence that the political debate in general is technocratized. In fact, unlike the situation in the UK, debates on policies concerning social and economic steering do not seem to have become de-politicized. There is variation to be found between different policy areas, and arguments based on knowledge claims are less frequent in policy issues primarily concerning values and/or interests. Further, the differences between the parties suggest differing cultures with regard to the parties' relation to the use of knowledge in public policy, which also suggests that the discourse is not entirely technocratic. Taken together these findings might support Boswell's (2009) hypothesis that the different conclusions of

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researchers in terms of the dumbing down of the public policy versus the depoliticisation is in fact related to different institutional contexts. I will return to these questions in the next chapter – Lessons learned.

# 4

## Lessons learned

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I do not understand why we even have any sort of politics. Why do we treat community building separately, when, like everything else, we can apply science to it? Just set the goal that the population should live as happy and healthy as possible and then ask science if we should raise or lower the tax rate by 5 per cent to get closer to that goal. What is so f---ing difficult about that?<sup>49</sup>

The tension between expertise and popular voice remains one of the most important unsolved issues in contemporary politics (Fung, 2006). Given the dominance of expertise today, it stands out more than ever (Fischer, 2009). While few apart from the technocrat would argue that there exists a pure technocratic choice of policy or a scientific answer that perfectly solves policy problems, when we seek the assistance of experts (technocrats) in policy-making their political influence becomes a potential threat towards representative democracy (Kato, 1994). In this final chapter of the Introduction of the thesis, I discuss the most important findings of the thesis in light of previous studies and in relation to the overall theme of the thesis – the tension of technocracy and democracy – as well as the overall aim of the thesis – challenging common assumptions of technocracy and developing new measurements for studying the presence of technocratic and democratic modes of reasoning – suggesting some lessons to be learned.

### A professional, responsive and accountable bureaucracy

We often wish for the impossible. Usually a trade-off between different values is inevitable. Appointments on merit are thought to lead to a less respon-

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<sup>49</sup> This comment was published on the Internet forum ‘Flashback forum’ in a thread titled ‘The absurd with politics and knowledge’ by the member ‘Soffbord’, 11.02.2012, my translation.

sive and accountable bureaucracy, while political appointments are believed to be more responsive and accountable but less professional. Departing from the claim that policy-making has become inherently more technocratic, I set out to find an answer to whether there are ways to make the bureaucracy less technocratic, but also learn more about the technocratic bureaucrat – how technocratic is she?

### The question of politicisation

The first conclusion reached in the thesis (Essay 1) is that there does not seem to be an easy way of identifying a technocrat, at least not judging from a civil servant's educational background. Instead the study supports the idea of a post-recruitment socialization mechanism, based on the fact that the degree of technocratic thinking among the bureaucrats varies systematically depending on ministerial affiliation (this finding is in tune with Derieckx, 2003). One plausible explanation for this variation is likely to be the degree of politicisation in the ministry. However, the post-recruitment socialization mechanism has not been established empirically and it could also be the result of self-selection. However, if we assume for now that it is due to post-recruitment socialization, this could be seen as good news for those politicians aiming to reform the bureaucracy, making it more or less technocratic/responsive. Different types of reforms have been suggested and attempts have been made at making bureaucracy less technocratic (Rowat, 1985). One of these measures taken is the politicisation of bureaucracy.

In my study of elite bureaucrats within the Government Offices of Sweden, I found that the level of politicisation seemed to promote a culture within the ministry where bureaucrats became more tolerant towards politics and political institutions. Politicisation also seemed to help to sustain and uphold the different roles of civil servants and politicians (this finding is in tune with Eichbaum and Shaw, 2007b). Thus, in the more politicized ministries, bureaucrats were more tolerant towards politics but also more neutral.

The experience from Denmark also strengthens this line of reasoning. While a civil service based purely on merit has been upheld here, Ministers have made use of the in-built flexibility of the civil service to allow them to tailor the appointments to their personal needs. Although formally there has not been an outright politicisation, this has led to a more subtle form of politicisation where the merit bureaucracy has been seen to respond to a 'wide palette of ministerial demands' (Grønnegaard Christensen, 2006).

The potential good of politicisation has been discussed previously. In *Politicisation of the Swedish civil service. Necessary evil – or just evil?* Pierre (2004) argues that political appointments serve many functions that are criti-

cal to democratic government, such as policy choice, bureaucratic responsiveness and compliance vis-à-vis elected politicians as well as accountability. However, he concludes that the arguments against politicisation still seem to have the upper hand in the debate. ‘First and foremost, politicisation undermines merit-based systems of employment and promotion in the civil service. Second, politicisation is believed to jeopardize bureaucratic integrity and further down the road, the legalist nature of the civil service and its decision making process. Administrative credibility and legal security’ (Pierre, 2004).

Others have also pointed towards the potential danger of adding on layers of political appointments, since this moves politicians further away from the professional bureaucrats with their expertise (Rose, 1987). Furthermore, Gregory (1991) argues that a political bureaucrat will not necessarily always act responsively, and you might then end up with a bureaucrat who is neither responsive nor professional. Recent research has also shown that ‘merit-based’ bureaucracies are less corrupt than politicized bureaucracies (Dahlström et al., 2012; Rauch and Evans, 2000). Dahlström and colleagues argue that the reason for this is not believed to be that merit-based bureaucrats *per se* are better than politically appointed bureaucrats, but rather that they are different from the politicians. The different lines of accountability, where merit-based bureaucrats are accountable to their peers rather than the electorate, seems to be an important mechanism for keeping corruption levels low (Dahlström et al., 2012). Further, a merit-based bureaucracy has also been shown to significantly enhance prospects for economic growth (Evans and Rauch, 1999).

Considering the downside of politicisation, Pierre (1994) instead advocates subtle politicisation in which the key issue is rather that of fostering *samsyn* – a shared vision – between politicians and senior civil servants. ‘Seen from the point of view of the political elite, hiring people with the merit requirements but who also are sympathetic to your political project is a way of ensuring responsiveness in the senior civil service without increasing the number of political appointees’ (Pierre, 1994 p. 51).

Rose (1987) on the other hand says it is time to look beyond the reformation of bureaucracy and suggests that politicians instead should bring upon themselves a new role, infiltrating and interpenetrating civil service ranks. By doing this, party ‘indoctrination’ will be given to technical experts at the same time as technical expertise is cultivated among party members. Rose argues that it is necessary for a politician to learn how to discriminate between policies that are and are not likely to achieve the desired ends in order to become capable of making trade-offs that only a politician should make.

However, it is important that the politician does not abandon an interest in political goals in order to become expert in the mechanics of how programmes work, although they will thereby ‘gain the esteem of higher civil servants for ‘really’ understanding government – but they do so at the price of forgetting what politics is about’ (Rose, 1987, p. 429). Instead the politician should act as a policy entrepreneur, i.e. ‘officeholders who have a well-defined political will *and* a capacity to examine programmes’ (Rose, 1987, p. 429), as this is when they will have the best chance of giving direction to government.

These remedies each present their difficulties, and it is difficult to know if a civil servant one appoints on merit will also be sympathetic to the government at the time. Also, a shift in Government will not lead to a shift in meritocratically appointed bureaucrats, thus a new Government might then end up inheriting bureaucrats sympathetic to the former Government’s policy project. Further, in order for the politician to be able to mantle the role prescribed by Rose (1987), a great effort is needed. Following the lessons learned by Evans and Rauch (1999), Rauch and Evans (2000) and Dahlström and colleagues (2012), there are strong incentives to uphold differences between bureaucrats and politicians.

So, if one arrives at the conclusion that one does not wish to add layers of political appointees in the bureaucracy, but is still worried about a technocratization of politics, how worried need one be? The exploration of the question of how technocratic a technocratic bureaucrat is might give us a clue.

### A false dichotomy?

According to the empirical evidence provided in Essay 2, a technocratic bureaucrat does not invariably hold policy issues against technocratic criteria. While technocratic reasoning overall dominates, the technocratic bureaucrats are not equally hostile towards all criteria supporting a democratic mode of reasoning. Thus, even the most technocratic bureaucrats in the Government Offices of Sweden seem to find compatibility between a democratic and a technocratic mode of reasoning. This result challenges the stereotypical image of a technocratic bureaucrat, instead suggesting that they are less one-dimensionally technocratic in thought than previous studies have made us believe (Aberbach et al., 1990; Putnam, 1977). Does this mean that the technocracy-democracy dichotomy is a false dichotomy?

A factor analysis of the ratings of the different decision-making criteria within this group of technocratic bureaucrats at large confirms that the different criteria divide into the two modes of reasoning. However, they do not load on one dimension (from positive to negative), suggesting that they are

two extremes of the same single dimension (a dichotomy). Based on this result, I suggest it is a false dichotomy. When respondents are allowed to rate each element of the two modes of reasoning, we find that these divide into at least two dimensions. The factor analysis suggests that the criteria are divided into two or four dimensions (using the elbow criterion). The first dimension generally comprises the criteria of the technocratic mode of reasoning, while the three other dimensions comprise criteria from the democratic mode of reasoning. Thus, there seems to be greater variation between the elements of the democratic mode of reasoning. However, when forcing the factor analysis to display two dimensions, the general results confirm the theoretical suggestion of the two concepts, generally dividing the various criteria into the two underlying dimensions<sup>50</sup>. The technocratic and democratic modes of reasoning based on this do represent two different dimensions, although they are not opposed to one another on one single dimension and thus should not be viewed as a dichotomy. While the previous measurements used to study the presence of a technocratic mentality reinforce the theoretical idea of a dichotomy, the measurements introduced in this study open the door to the discovery of more nuances and also empirically challenge the idea of the technocracy-democracy dichotomy.

As further discussed in Essay 2, we need to remember that the result of the more nuanced view of a technocratic bureaucrat is highly preliminary due to the small sample of technocratic bureaucrats. However, it still serves as an interesting point of departure for further discussions. The findings in Essay 2 indicate that technocratic bureaucrats are likely to support a shift towards more technocratic policy-making, but not necessarily towards de-politicized policy-making. At first this might seem contradictory, but let me elaborate a little more on this. By this I mean that a technocratic mode of reasoning can gain ground, although not necessarily at the expense of a democratic mode of reasoning. Having said this, however, we also need to remember that the decision-making criteria were all framed as arguments in support of the policy proposition and, intentionally, the respondents were not asked to rank the criteria but to rate them. While ranking can generate striking results, these might not produce an accurate picture of the reality. However, in reality it is likely to be the case that different criteria will stand in opposition to each other and the decision-makers will be forced to make a choice. By also studying these cases, we will be able to learn more about the tension and balance between the two modes of reasoning. The picture of a more nuanced technocratic bu-

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<sup>50</sup> However, the factor analysis also displays some interesting exceptions (for further details see Tables A1 and A2 in Methodological appendix, Essay 2).

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reaucrat does however find support outside this study, as in the following statement made by Page:

To be a good civil servant in any country, to do your job, to gain promotion, possibly also even job satisfaction, some degree of acceptance of the political values of the political leadership is likely to be necessary even if it means the suppression of your own values. An official at any level who finds herself in constant conflict with superiors and political leaders is likely at least to make life difficult for herself. (Page, 2008, p. 5f.)

If, as also suggested by Page in the quotation above, it is difficult to find a technocrat within the political system (see also Greenwald, 1979 for similar line of reasoning), those who are worried about the responsiveness of bureaucracy can be pacified. However, I have only studied elite bureaucrats within the Government Offices. As previously mentioned, government might only be seen as one, important but not sole, centre of governance (Pierre, 2000; Pierre and Peters, 2000). Contemporary policy-making often involves consultants (Page, 2010), think-tanks, etc., which are positioned further away from the reach of politicians, and they are therefore perhaps not as responsive as the technocratic bureaucrats working within government. Also, while decision-making plays an important part in policy-making, low-level bureaucrats in agencies further develop policies in the implementation stages. Fischer (1990) has described technocracy as a quiet revolution, since technocratic decision-making often takes place in administrative settings outside the realms of public scrutiny. Further, a frequently recurring theme (especially in the EU context) is that when there are no obvious political conflicts, political decisions are often decided upon within the bureaucracy (Beyers & Kerremans, 2004). This is also commonly the case when issues are deemed to concern minor details (even if these detail decisions can in fact have major consequences for the people, Ström Melin, 2011). Thus it is not uncommon for decisions to be taken within the bureaucracy without public political debate. However, let us now turn to those issues that do lead to public policy debates and lessons learned from the study of politicians' symbolic use of knowledge.



## The symbolic use of knowledge – a threat towards technocracy and/or democracy?

It is politics. Politics is not science but politics is to convince others that you are right.  
(Elisabeth Tandh Ringqvist<sup>51</sup>)

This response by the former spin doctor was given to a reporter's question of whether or not she believed it was right that politicians used statistics to serve their purposes. The interview followed a media reportage in which politicians were criticized for deceiving the public by choosing their numbers. To be sure, the spin doctor supported the claim that in a political debate 'any numbers are better than no numbers'.

You look at an issue and then you try to find the data that are positive and then you can look for OECD numbers, you can look at Swedish statistics. If you do not find good numbers in Sweden you try to find that Sweden is relatively speaking better than other countries, or you look at... "Yes, it is true that it is not so good within this category but among the young we have actually a very... and this we consider the most important." So you can also learn to prioritize what is important when looking for numbers. ... You choose time periods; you can also choose geographical areas. "Yes, we have had a decline in Stockholm but in the north of Sweden we have also a fantastic... which has been extremely important during this period." (Elisabeth Tandh Ringqvist<sup>52</sup>)

The interesting thing about this quote is not only that, according to the spin doctor, politicians choose to boost what they have done in the past by finding numbers to prove their point, but also that the numbers themselves can help set their priorities. It also illustrates a symbolic way of using knowledge in politics. As previously discussed, the relationship between knowledge and politics can take different forms, and from a democratic perspective it is neither desirable that knowledge replaces politics nor that politics disguises itself as knowledge (Ahlbäck Öberg and Öberg, 2012).

In Essay 3 I study the symbolic use of knowledge in Swedish politics, where knowledge fills the function of legitimizing policy positions in the debate. There are no signs in my study that political debate is heavily technocratized. There is variation to be found between different policy areas, and ar-

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<sup>51</sup> Elisabeth Tandh Ringqvist, former spin doctor in the Centre Party, interviewed by Swedish Public Television (SVT), Agenda, 12.02.2012, in a reportage on reports of politicians' sloppy use of the term employment in the political debate.

<sup>52</sup> See previous note.

guments based on knowledge claims are less frequent in policy issues primarily concerning values and/or interests. Further, in contrast to the case in UK, where scholars have witnessed an emergence of non-ideological debates on policy issues concerning social or economic steering, I do not find that the use of knowledge claims is more frequent in issues of these types than in issues concerning values and/or interests. The findings in this study therefore does not suggest that politicians are largely supporting a shift towards a technocratic discourse.

Given the design of my study, I cannot know if the knowledge claims are purely used strategically (symbolically) or if the politicians have actually taken the research they refer to into account at an earlier stage when formulating policy (instrumentally). However, the higher usage of knowledge claims among the opposition compared to the incumbents could support a conclusion that they are to large extent (even if not only) used strategically. This should probably not come as a surprise to us, however, since the debate in parliament is not commonly seen as an arena for pure deliberation where one is hoping to reach consensus. The issue under debate has commonly already been decided upon (in the parliamentary committee), and in the debate one does not primarily aspire to change the view of opposing MPs, but rather to convince the public that you are right.

One obvious question that follows from this is which kinds of arguments are significant when politicians formulate their positions in their internal party debate. Although I do not have a corresponding analysis of the internal debate, we can get a little closer to an answer by turning to The Riksdag Survey. This survey presents us with a unique dataset on the opinions and behaviour of members of the Swedish parliament.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1994, 2002 and 2010 Riksdag Surveys<sup>54</sup> the members were asked the following question: 'According to your experience, how important are the following factors when it comes to influencing the decisions in your party group?' As can be seen in Table 1, strong support from experts/specialists, compared to the support from other groups (which it could be argued tend rather to support a democratic mode of reasoning), is not an important factor<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> The Survey was initiated in 1969 by Sören Holmberg, Per-Anders Roth and Bo Särilvik, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg. Since 1985, a survey has been conducted once each electoral term.

<sup>54</sup> Brothén Martin, Esaiasson Peter & Holmberg Sören. The Riksdag Survey 1994, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden; Brothén Martin & Holmberg Sören. The Riksdag Survey 2002, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden; Esaiasson Peter, Gilljam Mikael, Holmberg Sören & Wängnerud Lena. The Riksdag Survey 2010, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

<sup>55</sup> However, if we compare the party groups that have been present in the parliament during the three studied electoral terms (excluding Sweden Democrats), the importance of strong support from experts/specialists has

Table 1. Importance of different factors for influencing decisions in the party group, among parties, 1994, 2002 and 2010 (per cent).

	Moderates (M)	Liberal Party (FP)	Christian Democrats (KD)	Centre Party (C)	Social Democratic Party (S)	Left Party (V)	The Greens (MP)	Sweden Democrats (SD)	Total	Eta2
2010										
A strong support within the own party	46,7	47,6	70,6	61,1	41,3	50,0	40,9	28,6	46,0	,200
A strong public support in the electorate as a whole	30,0	33,3	47,1	33,3	27,9	43,8	13,6	7,1	29,1	,261**
Support from organisations affected by the decision	6,8	10,0	23,5	16,7	15,4	50,0	9,1	7,1	14,0	,393***
Support from agencies affected by the decision	5,6	0,0	0,0	5,6	3,8	12,5	4,8	0,0	4,3	,202
Strong support by experts/specialists	5,6	14,3	29,4	16,7	4,9	18,8	22,7	0,0	9,7	,256*
To succeed in the debate at the party meetings	15,7	30,0	11,8	22,2	18,3	25,0	33,3	14,3	19,4	,168
2002										
A strong support within the own party	54,9	57,8	60,6	57,1	70,5	50,0	46,2		61,6	,159
A strong public support in the electorate as a whole	22,0	31,1	36,4	38,1	43,2	42,9	23,6		36,6	,210*
Support from organisations/agencies affected by the decision	6,0	7,0	6,1	5,0	8,5	17,9	7,7		8,2	,206
Strong support by experts/specialists	14,0	18,2	18,2	10,0	5,4	7,1	15,4		10,7	,169
To succeed in the debate at the party meetings	19,6	25,0	27,3	19,0	21,4	17,9	61,5		23,4	,208*
1994										
A strong support within the own party	53,7	56,0	46,7	53,8	70,0	45,0	72,2		61,7	,171
A strong public support in the electorate as a whole	17,9	8,0	20,0	38,5	38,1	45,0	27,8		30,5	,302***
Support from organisations/agencies affected by the decision	4,5	0,0	0,0	7,7	11,6	5,0	0,0		7,3	,324**
Strong support by experts/specialists	6,1	12,0	0,0	3,8	6,8	10,0	11,1		6,9	,091
To succeed in the debate at the party meetings	14,9	36,0	13,3	19,2	16,4	15,0	11,1		17,4	,172

Source: Brothén Martin, Esaiasson Peter & Holmberg Sören. The Riksdag Survey 1994; Brothén Martin & Holmberg Sören. The Riksdag Survey 2002; Esaiasson Peter, Gilljam Mikael, Holmberg Sören & Wängnerud Lena. The Riksdag Survey 2010. All Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Note: Survey question: "According to your experience, how important are the following factors when it comes to influencing the decisions in your party group? Possible answers: "very important", "fairly important", "fairly unimportant", "not important at all". The table shows percentages answering "very important". Eta<sup>2</sup> should be interpreted as the percent of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. n 1994 = 317-321; n 2002 = 327; n 2010 = 299-302, (N=349) \*\*\*p<.001; \*\*p<.01; \*p<.05.

increased from 6.9 to 16.05 per cent that consider it very important. Among some party groups, too, the increasing importance of this factor is evident, namely The Greens, Centre Party and Christian Democrats. However, among other party groups there is either no clear trend (Moderates and Liberal Party, Left Party) or a slight decrease in support for this factor (Social Democratic Party).

While the question on The Riksdag Survey does not take policy context into account, it does support the more general picture presented in previous studies of the use of knowledge in policy-making, suggesting that despite the large amount of research produced, politicians do not use knowledge to a large extent (Brint, 1994). Still, we have to remember that this refers to the party group debates in parliament and therefore says little about the Government's use of knowledge when formulating a policy issue. Considering the opposition parties normally only have 15 days to respond to a government proposition, members of parliament have little opportunity to prepare legislation and even less to produce research of their own (Pålsson, 2011). Yet it does say something about what matters in party politics, and support from experts and specialists cannot be considered important in this context.

Returning to the public policy debate in the parliament and the results of the analyses presented in Essay 3, one might ask if it is good or bad news for democracy and/or technocracy? As discussed previously, the Minister of Finance, Anders Borg, was criticized for using research so explicitly when justifying his policy propositions. The critics claimed that this might only lead to a debate where research is thrown at each other. In fact, in times of scientific uncertainty, when politicians are more likely to easily find research supporting rival positions, Sarewitz (2004) has suggested the insertion of a 'quiet period' for scientific debate 'to create time and space for the underlying value disputes to be brought into open, explored, and adjudicated *as such* in democratic fora' (p. 400). Sarewitz continues:

During such a "quiet period," those who make scientific assertions in fora of public deliberation would have to accompany those claims with a statement of value preferences and private interests relevant to the dispute. This rule would be enforced for scientists as well as lay people. Science does not thereby disappear from the scene, of course, but it takes its rightful place as one among a plurality of cultural factors that help determine how people frame a particular problem or position – it is a part of the cognitive ether, and the claim to special authority vanishes. (Sarewitz, p. 400)

At the same time, as previously stated, Whiteman (1985) has argued that even when science is used primarily for political advantage, it is still beneficial since it leads to greater sophistication of the debate (Whiteman, 1985). Yet again, this might lead to politicians using knowledge and experts as a strategy for blame avoidance in the case of policy failure as well as shielding uncomfortable decisions (Hood, 2008; Weaver, 1986). Also, the politicisation of science might raise doubts among the citizens towards research and a

technocratic mode of reasoning, in tune with the popular saying 'lies, damned lies and statistics'<sup>56</sup>.

In the end, the good or bad in the utilization of knowledge in the public policy debate and the politicisation of science is a normative question. The answer also depends on one's normative view of the most important function of the parliamentary debate. The parliamentary debate can be used to inform citizens of the contents of the policy proposal being decided upon and alternative proposals. It can also be used to clarify the positions of different political parties and their reasons for holding this position, as well as being used to boost previous accomplishments and to make one's opponent look bad. In an ideal situation, the parliamentary debate should do all of these things. A cautious yet also balanced point of view is that voters will benefit from an informed debate, although not strictly in the sense of a sophisticated debate based on knowledge and research, but rather an informed debate where the different alternatives are made clear as well as the arguments behind the different parties' policy positions, regardless of whether they are based on empirical facts or values.

## Concluding remarks and questions for future research

The different studies in my thesis have shown that it is possible to think in terms of modes of reasoning and justification when analysing the beliefs, values and behaviour of different actors in the policy process. In relation to the overall theme and aim of the thesis, the thesis reports several interesting findings and identifies important gaps in the literature.

First, in future studies we should continue making the question of who is a technocrat into an empirical one and not assume that bureaucrats with a certain educational background are technocrats. According to my study, educational background is not a strong determinant behind variations in degrees of technocratic mentality.

Second, the technocratic and democratic rationale ought to be viewed as two parallel dimensions rather than opposing sides of the same single dimension. In future studies of technocratic and democratic attitudes, we should therefore not place the two rationales in opposition to each other. When we force the respondents to choose, we risk creating a false dichotomy that is not empirically supported. Instead we ought to use measurements such as the

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<sup>56</sup> The term was popularised by Mark Twain who attributed it to the 19th-century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): 'There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics'.

ones developed in this study that allow the respondents to express nuances. However, by asking them to rank the different elements (instead of rating them), we might also learn more about their priorities when different criteria come into conflict with each other. I realise that abandoning traditional measurements comes at the price of a lost opportunity for comparison. In fact, I would say this is not infrequently presented as an argument for sticking with previously used measurements even when aware of their deficiencies<sup>57</sup>. This problem is not unique to the traditional measurements in this study, and as researchers we need to act with good judgment. Are the costs of the loss of comparisons in space and over time greater than the risk of drawing an incomplete or, in the worst case scenario, false picture? Either way it is important that we are clear about which conclusions we can draw based on the measurements used and critically reflect upon their shortcomings.

Third, a technocratic bureaucrat is unlikely to be equally hostile towards all elements in a democratic mode of reasoning. Although the empirical sample was small, I argue that we should not think of technocratic bureaucrats according to the stereotypical image produced by previous survey studies.

Fourth, bureaucrats working within politicized environments are likely to be more neutral (upholding the Weberian distinction between bureaucrats and politicians) and more tolerant towards politics and political institutions.

Fifth, politicians are more likely to invoke knowledge to substantiate their claims in policy areas of risk rather than policies concerning interests and values.

Sixth, politicians do not invoke knowledge to substantiate their claims more frequently in policies concerning social or economic steering than policies concerning interests and values. This suggests that, in the Swedish context, policies on social or economic steering are still likely to revolve around ideology, in contrast to what seems to be the case in the UK.

Seventh, politicians' use of knowledge in the parliamentary debate is likely to be determined in part by their parliamentary role. Incumbents invoke less knowledge claims than members of the opposition. This suggests that politicians who one day might be held accountable for a decision that in retrospect will be viewed as wrong will be more cautious and critical when selecting knowledge and research to substantiate their claims.

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<sup>57</sup> This argument has recently been presented for the traditional measurements focused on in this thesis. In addition to the fact that I use this argument in Essay 1, it is also used for example by Wonka and Rittberger (2011).

Eighth, politicians' use of knowledge in the parliamentary debate is likely to be determined in part by party membership, suggesting there are differences in party culture with regards to the using knowledge in policy debates.

Finally, the findings on politicians' use of knowledge in the parliamentary policy debate jointly indicate that, despite the relatively favourable conditions for knowledge utilization in the Swedish case, the debate is not likely to be largely depoliticized, since there is evidence of variation.

In conclusion I would like to make a few notes for future research on the study of technocracy and democracy, in addition to those already mentioned above. In my thesis I present some mixed evidence regarding the importance of issue context. There was no clear evidence to be found that the issue context mattered for the technocratic bureaucrats when rating the importance of different decision-making criteria, however the analysis of politicians' use of knowledge in the parliamentary debate supported the idea that policy context is of importance. In the light of previous research (Boswell 2009; Jasanoff, 2005; Radaelli, 1999b), I would however like to stress the importance of including policy framing, as a determinant for explaining variation in technocratic and democratic reasoning and justification, in future research. In the words of Radaelli:

The policy-making logic is not inherently political or technocratic. An important part of the conflict over policy problems is all about those who argue that there are technical solutions and those who push for a more political debate. Consequently, politicisation is often the result of a successful attempt to break the walls of technocratic discussions. (Radaelli, 1999b)

In a three-country comparative study of genetic engineering in Germany, the UK and the USA, Jasanoff (2005) concludes that the different approaches to policy-making in these countries can largely be explained by 'the stickiness of frames'.

Another potentially important determinant for explaining variation in the degree of technocratic and democratic reasoning and justification in public policy-making, that I also believe needs further attention in the future, is the degree of political conflict surrounding an issue. A study of decision-making within the working groups of the European Union showed that there was an informal rule stating that technical decisions should be decided upon in the working group while political decisions should be decided upon in the political echelons. However, when interviewing civil servants in the working group about how they defined a technical issue, it was revealed that this is often decided upon based on the criterion of whether or not agreement could be reached at the bureaucratic level. The consequence of this was that bureau-

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crats in reality decided upon many political decisions, as long as there was no disagreement (Beyers and Kerremans, 2004).

Further, in the matter of political conflict, in a study of the use of expert knowledge in policy-making Öberg and Lundin (2012) find that when political disputes are intense, expert knowledge is used more by politicians in policy-making, although in these situations there is less deliberation around the knowledge used. They also find that expert knowledge will be consulted more and the decision-makers will take a more deliberative approach when there is a lot of attention from citizens. This leads them to the following interesting conclusion: 'These findings suggest that public attention tends to imply instrumental rational utilization of knowledge in order to improve performance, whereas this is not the case when there are political disputes. Perhaps expert knowledge is often used in a symbolic way when there are large political disagreements' (Öberg & Lundin, 2012, p. 25). Thus, in future studies of the presence of a technocratic and a democratic mode of reasoning and justification, we also ought to take political conflict into account, as well as public attention.

The tension between technocracy and democracy is likely to continue to exist, as will the normative discussion as to what constitutes a good balance between the two. Thus, continued studies of policy-makers, including beyond bureaucrats and politicians, and their relation to technocratic and democratic reasoning and justification, can hopefully continue to produce important insights with a bearing on the question of the balance between the two and the potential for making them compatible.



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