

# American and German federal executives – technocratic and political attitudes

Joel D. Aberbach, Hans-Ulrich Derlien, Renate Mayntz and Bert A. Rockman

## Bureaucracy and technocracy – preliminary considerations

There is no doubt that the civil service elites in modern industrial societies are involved in making public policy. This involvement inherently leads them to be intertwined with the worlds of politicians and of politics, though not necessarily in a partisan fashion. The mechanism of this involvement with policy and with politics varies somewhat from one civil service role to another, from the institutions and doctrines of government of one country to those of another, and within the same country, even from one political leadership style to another.

Regardless of the exact nature of these involvements with the policy and political world, bureaucrats typically look at decision-making in ways different from politicians. As Max Weber observes, bureaucrats tend to give most weight to the technical point of view, because these are likely to affect their selection and career; that is, in the world of the bureaucrat, expertise and technical mastery of facts are dominant considerations. By contrast, the dominant consideration of politicians is not expertise but political services and causes.<sup>1</sup>

Weber's important theoretical distinctions are borne out by empirical evidence that, among other things, demonstrates a remarkably sharp

distinction between bureaucrats and politicians across several European countries, and to a lesser extent in the United States, in the emphasis they give to the technical or advocacy and partisan aspects of their jobs. Bureaucrats tend to emphasize the technical and de-emphasize the advocacy and partisan considerations within their role understandings, whereas politicians tend to do exactly the reverse.<sup>2</sup>

We know also from these prior studies of senior bureaucrats (in the early 1970s) that according to many indicators, the Americans displayed a very significant political predisposition relative to the norms elsewhere, and that, for the most part, the Federal German civil service elite was also more politically oriented than the norm.

Nevertheless, the extent to which technocratic and political criteria mix within the role understandings of

elite bureaucrats is influenced by:

1. ideological characteristics (the Right typically tends to be less 'political' in approach than the Left);
2. institutional and situational incentives (American bureaucrats tend, for example, to be confronted with a more complex political environment than in Europe; hence, they have a greater tendency to move beyond the narrower confines of purely executive politics – a result of the consti-

Joel D. Aberbach is professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, USA, and Hans-Ulrich Derlien is professor at the University of Bamberg, FRG. Renate Mayntz is professor and director of the Max Planck Institute in Cologne, FRG. Bert A. Rockman is senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C. and professor at the University of Pittsburgh, USA.



The sequel to the front cover: the same bureaucrat tries to fix his quill pen. Goursat/Rapho

tutional division of authority); and  
 3. differences in the administrative doctrines of nations (the administration-politics distinction is theoretically sharper in the United States than in Europe, for instance).

This article is only a preliminary effort to compare two sets of national administrative elites (American and those of the Federal Republic of Germany) from the perspective of one critical element of their role understandings – the extent to which technocratic values appear to override political ones. We are presently in a position to compare the strength of technocratic attitudes amongst German and American federal administrative elites as a result of broadly similar surveys conducted in Bonn and Washington between 1986 and 1988. These surveys follow up those conducted in 1970–1 in the United States by Aberbach and Rockman, and in the FRG by Putnam.

While we shall soon have more to say about the exact nature of these samples and the specifics of the data we shall draw upon, for the moment we want to focus on the theoretical implications of technocratic thinking among

bureaucratic elites, and the problems of measuring a technocratic role understanding.

Clearly, there are policy matters which require technical competence in which professional personnel must play a large, if not necessarily decisive, role. It is entirely possible that few matters can be sensibly discussed without some technical background regarding the 'facts'. Technical knowledge and professional balance are vital ingredients in the policy-making process. The question is whether these wind up being exclusively controlling values to the detriment of political values such as participation, compromise, or the need to obtain political support. Justifiably, an equal concern may be voiced over the fear that wholly political values could dominate policy-making, in which case 'a crisis of frenzy' is likely to be produced.<sup>3</sup> Attitudes that emphasize the *technical* aspects of a role at the expense of political thinking may appropriately be called *technocratic*.

Of course, the high-level officials whom we have sampled and interviewed are, for the most part, functionally political. Their roles frequently thrust them into political (but not necessarily partisan) functions. Despite this they

may deny the existence of these (political) aspects of their jobs – an attitude that tends to be associated with denigrating these same aspects.<sup>4</sup> However, the role understandings of senior bureaucrats of the relative importance of technical and political criteria in decision-making are inevitably more complex than any operationalization can be. This is especially so under the present circumstances because our analysis here is based upon only a small subset of the data, presently available in coded form and comparable across the American and German elite surveys. Thus, we regard the present analysis as a preliminary one en route, at a later point, to a more complete elaboration of the empirical underpinnings of technocratic and political thinking among bureaucratic elites.

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. In the analysis below, however, we have tried to tap a set of close-ended questions that logically force choices about decision-making criteria.

## Setting and sample

Notwithstanding marked differences in civil service traditions,<sup>5</sup> the bureaucracies of industrialized democracies resemble one another today in being basically career systems emphasizing professional expertise. At the top of the civil service hierarchy, however, the American system formally allows for political appointments and the employment of non-career civil servants, a peculiarity alien to the German civil service, which formally resembles the British model with respect to career staffing right up to the top. Nevertheless, there is room for politicizing the

two top ranks of the German federal ministries by legally purging the so-called political civil servants and putting them into temporary retirement. This tends especially to occur when the political civil servants lack congeniality and political congruency and/or personal chemistry with their minister and the government of the day.<sup>6</sup>

Such purges affect roughly 50 per cent of state secretaries and every third division head (*Ministerialdirektor*) when there are changes in the governing party coalition.<sup>7</sup> Even taking these purges into account, the US bureaucracy is still markedly different with respect to recruitment according to political criteria and the number of positions that can be legally purged. Compared with approximately 25 state secretaries and 110 ministry directors in Bonn, there are about 600 political executives in Washington.

Political manipulation of the bureaucracy below these top ranks is possible, but takes more time. Selective promotion of sympathizers, and the reshuffling into less sensitive positions of those whom the political executive does not trust, provide ways of gaining political direction over the bureaucracy. In the Federal Republic, such efforts can affect subdivision heads and section heads (*Ministerialräte*) at the levels below the ostensible political civil servants (*Ministerialdirigenten*); in the United States these efforts can affect the comparable career Senior Executive Service (SES) posts.

## Rank

In each country we drew a disproportionately stratified sample from the career civil service hierarchy, including also some German high-fliers (well-regarded younger civil servants likely to attain senior posts) as a control group (Table 1). In the US we also interviewed non-career

TABLE 1. Samples by rank

		US		FRG	
		<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Senior Executive	PAS	18	9.0	State secretary	13 8.8
	Non-career SES	47	23.6	<i>Ministerialdirektor</i>	46 31.3
	Career SES (level 1)	64	32.2	<i>Ministerialdirigent</i>	51 34.7
	Career SES (level 2)	60	30.2	<i>Ministerialrät</i>	24 16.3
	Below SES	8	4.0	Below <i>Ministerialrät</i>	13 8.8
Total		199	100.0	147	100.0

appointees, both PAS (passed with approval of the Senate) and non-career SES appointees.

We would expect that in both countries technocratic attitudes are more prevalent as we go toward the lower (and somewhat less politically interactive) ranks of our samples.

### Party

Another variable important to the composition of the administrative elites in each country is that of party sympathy. In each country, a majority of the administrative elite claims to have at least some allegiance to a political party. Most of those expressing a party preference share allegiance to the governing party, by nearly 2:1 in the United States, and by nearly 4:1 in the Federal Republic of Germany (Table 2).<sup>8</sup> In each country at the time of our fieldwork, the conservative party controlled the government or, in the case of the US, at least its executive apparatus – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian affiliate, the Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bonn, and the Republican Party in Washington. The Right-Centre coalition in Bonn also includes the small liberal Free Democratic party. The major organized party opposition is on the Left – anchored in each country's own terms. The Social Democrats (SPD), in the German case, and the Democrats, in the American case, are in the opposition. Unlike the SPD, however, the Democrats are not wholly out of power at the federal level. During the period of the fieldwork in Washington, the Democrats controlled either one or both chambers of the Congress. If the Democrats could not speak for the government, they could help mould or inhibit policy. They also could exercise some influence over agency operations. On the whole, however, they are basically an opposition party, and since the same political tendencies are 'in' and 'out' in both countries, we decided to present the party data from the vantage point of governing or opposition.

Three possible relationships between party and 'technocratism' may be worth our attention. The first is whether party affiliation itself militates against technocratic tendencies since, obviously, it reflects some measure of political commitment. The second is whether, as noted from the earlier studies, the Left is more political

TABLE 2. Party affiliation

	US		FRG	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Government party	103	57.2	65	45.5
(Social)-Democrat	57	31.7	17	11.9
Independent/non-member	20	11.1	61	42.7
Total	180	100.0	143	100.0
N.A.	19		4	

because it desires change. The third is whether those with affiliations to the governing party are more likely to be 'technocratic' because they, after all, have an agenda that they wish to have implemented. Unfortunately, due to the coincidence in both countries of the parties' ideological tendencies and their status as governing and opposition parties, we will not be able to distinguish, for now at least, between the second and third hypotheses.

### Agencies

Our samples were drawn from 21 federal agencies in Washington and 13 federal ministries in Bonn whose primary responsibilities are in the domestic policy areas. The subject matters dealt with in these bureaucracies range from problems requiring rather technical or scientific expertise such as energy, to more political or politicized agencies and departments in the 'soft' policy areas of social services (health, education, welfare, housing). Twenty-three per cent (Washington) and 29 per cent (Bonn) of our samples were taken from these social service departments and agencies. We expect that here technocratic mentality in both countries would be less pronounced than in most of the other domestic policy areas.

### Training

Each system differs with respect to the types of educational training federal executives have typically undergone. Whereas the content of educational training is more varied in the US, the German civil service is still disproportionately composed of jurists (Table 3). Over three-fifths of the German sample is composed of

TABLE 3. Field of training

	US		FRG	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Lawyers	37	18.6	92	62.6
Economists	21	10.6	26	17.7
Science/Medicine	53	26.6	12	8.2
Agriculture	9	4.5	11	7.5
Social science	29	14.6	5	3.4
Business/Pub. admin	33	16.6	0	0.0
Humanities	12	6.0	0	0.0
General education	4	2.0	0	0.0
Military	1	0.5	0	0.0
No university training	0	0.0	1	0.7
Total	199	100.0	147	100.0

law graduates, while less than one-fifth of the American sample is. On the other hand, there are over three times the percentage of scientists in the American sample as in the German, and (excluding economists) over four times the percentage of social scientists as well. In addition, a significant proportion of the Americans were also trained either in public or business administration. A smaller, but not significant, number of the Americans were also trained in the humanities. These latter categories do not have direct counterparts within the German sample.

According to Robert Putnam's analysis,<sup>9</sup> role understanding varies with training, and social scientists appear to be less technocratically minded than, for instance, jurists or scientists.

Naturally, there is a relationship between type of training and policy area or department; those with a scientific training are most often found in the technical or scientific ministries. Does training possibly have an independent bearing on technocratic attitudes, separable from effects caused by departmental affiliation?

In the following sections we shall compare the American and German samples along four individual items, which hint at technocracy, and analyse attitudinal differences with respect to the variables outlined. Finally we combine these items in an index in order to provide more coherent interpretation of the factors behind variations in a technocratic role understanding.

Immediately prior to this, however, we propose to provide a structural logic to our efforts at explanation.

## Explaining technocracy

In exploring prevalence or absence of 'technocratic' role understandings across the two politico-administrative systems, there are several logics of explanation.

The first such logic is that of *cross-national* difference. It is necessary to distinguish between cross-national differences explainable by the differential distribution of certain sample characteristics which themselves have strong relationships to the dependent variable and those which do not. In the first case, for example, if scientific training were to make a difference in role understanding, differences in technocratic disposition across the American and German samples might simply be a function of the more numerous scientists in the higher executive posts of one country than the other. However, in the second case, when such sample characteristics fail to make a difference, and yet cross-national differences persist, we are left with three possibilities: (1) there are real cross-national differences that transcend individual level variables and for which we must look to exogenous factors such as the historical development of bureaucratic roles and culture; (2) there are individual level variables that account for such differences, but these are either exogenous to the present analysis, or are in some fashion insufficiently specified; (3) there is measurement variance or some form of response tendency reflecting different meanings that individuals attach to similarly worded questions across different cultures.<sup>10</sup>

The second logic is that of *structural* differences. Structural differences are those deriving from sample (or universe) characteristics. For example, the fact that the American executives include a one-third complement of politically appointed, non-career officials is a feature that could account for differences in role understanding across the two systems. As indicated, such factors as educational training, party affiliation, and so forth could be due to structural differences that actually account for the differences in the cross-national marginal distributions.

A third logic involves *situational* considerations. An instance of such a consideration might be the desire of a governing party to implement its goals efficiently, while an opposing party presumably would wish to emphasize the virtues of politics, diversity, and compro-



The US Congress in Washington D.C.: a meeting place for federal executives and politicians. H. Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

mise. In theory, this logic should apply regardless of which party governs or is in opposition.

Because of the preliminary nature of this analysis, we will not always be able definitively to distinguish one logic from another, but where the data warrant, we will try to point to ways whereby we might arrive at more definitive answers.

Now, we turn to the individual items that compose the technocratism index.

## Indicators of technocratism

We sought to measure technocratic attitudes in both Bonn and Washington by means of four statements with which respondents could agree or disagree, on a 4-point scale. Agreement with the statements indicates a technocratic mode of thinking. These questions were administered in a close-ended manner in each country.

### **Technical factors are more important than political ones**

We asked the bureaucrats in our samples the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the following statement:

In policy-making it is essential for the good of the country that technical considerations be accorded more weight than political factors.

While about half of the Washington sample agreed in some fashion with this statement, less than two-fifths of the bureaucrats in Bonn agreed (Table 4 (a)). The German bureaucratic elite, on average, appears slightly less technocratic.

### **Political considerations interfere with rationality**

A second item asked our respondents to register

TABLE 4. Distribution and parameters of items on the technocratism index

		$\bar{x}$	$s$	Coeff. of Var.	$n$	1 Agree	2 On balance agree	3/4 (On balance) disagree
						'In policy-making it is essential for the good of the country that technical considerations be accorded more weight than political factors.' 39.0%		
(a)	FRG	2.7	0.8	(.30)	141	6.4	32.6	61.0
	US	2.5	0.8	(.30)	194	9.3	41.2	49.5
						'In order to evaluate administrative activity rationally, it is necessary to eliminate political considerations.' 10.0%		
(b)	FRG	3.2	0.7	(.22)	147	1.4	8.8	89.8
	US	2.9	0.8	(.28)	197	5.1	18.3	76.2
						'Government should be more properly judged by the effectiveness of its policies than by anything else.' 70.0%		
(c)	FRG	2.1	0.8	(.38)	145	22.1	47.6	30.3
	US	1.8	0.7	(.39)	194	31.4	55.7	12.9
						'Congress too often interferes with the work of the agencies.' 31.0%		
(d)	FRG	2.8	0.8	(.29)	147	6.8	23.8	69.8
	US	2.3	0.9	(.39)	196	19.9	34.7	45.4

the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the following:

In order to evaluate administrative activities rationally, it is necessary to eliminate political considerations.

Among both administrative elites there was strong disagreement with this statement. Yet, once again, the American sample appears the more technocratic of the two. Only 10 per cent of the German sample agrees with the statement, while nearly a quarter of the American sample does (Table 4 (b)).

**Government should be most concerned with effectiveness**

The third item to constitute our 'technocratism' index is one that emphasizes effectiveness as the most important criterion by which to judge government. Thus, we asked respondents in both countries the extent of their agreement with the following statement:

Government should be more properly judged by the effectiveness of its policies than by anything else.

While the implicit contradiction between technical evaluation and political criteria of assessment raised in the preceding question was rejected by the overwhelming majority of top bureaucrats in Washington and Bonn, the statement was agreed to by large majorities of administrative elites in Washington (87 per cent) and Bonn (70 per cent) (Table 4 (c)). It is possible that this item could imply that our respondents see politics as a means by which effectiveness is to be attained. Notably, though, and consistent with the previous items, the American executives continue to be more technocratic in their responses.

**Political interference**

The items presented so far emphasize criteria of policy-making and policy-assessment. The last item in the technocratism index, however,

reflects the relationship between political and bureaucratic actors in the politico-administrative system. It states that

Congress (Parliament) too often interferes with the work of the agencies.

Overall, 54 per cent of the US respondents, agreed, but only 31 per cent of their German counterparts did so (Table 4 (d)). This difference in part derives from the peculiar US constitutional arrangement that subjects agencies to congressional purview, and makes Congress independent of executive authority. In Bonn, parliament cannot interfere in the same way.

Perhaps more than any item, this one has an implied constitutional component, especially in the US where there is the possibility – indeed the frequent occurrence – of a different party controlling the legislative branch than that which controls the executive. And of course, this statement carries with it the single largest cross-national difference.

Still, what is very interesting is that on all four items in the technocratism index, the American administrative elite is more 'technocratic' than the German. This is somewhat unexpected because in the earlier elite surveys, the American administrative elite was remarkable for its 'politicalness'. As we have stressed, however, the 'technics-politics' distinction could well be a complex one.

In order to go beyond the simple cross-national differences, however, we will look at the relationship between the technocratic index (derived through a simple additive procedure),

the specific items comprising the index, and the set of independent variables or sample characteristics.

First, though, we need to examine the *technocratism index* that we have built from the four items.

## The technocratism index

In order to simplify the data presentation and to generalize the findings derived from individual item inspection, we combine the item-scores into an index of technocratism.

We must be careful, however, not to over-interpret the index, for its internal consistency is not very high – in spite of the external consistency of the cross-national results. In Table 5, we see that the mean Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient ( $r$ ) is 0.18 across both countries, and the mean gamma coefficient for ordinal cross-tabulations is 0.22. The items seem to have a slightly higher consistency in the US than in the Federal Republic of Germany. (For the US, the mean  $r$  is 0.22; for Germany it is 0.14. The mean gamma for the US is 0.23; for Germany it is 0.20). The basic point here, though, is that there is only a moderate level of internal consistency across the items, despite both the seeming internal logic associating the items and a reasonable amount of external consistency. In addition to the persistent cross-national differences, for example, the mean gamma coefficient between age and the index items in Germany is  $-0.29$ ; younger civil servants are less technocratic, and

TABLE 5. Intercorrelations between items on technocratism index

		Rateval		Effectiv		Conginter	
		$r$	Gamma	$r$	Gamma	$r$	Gamma
TechPol	US	0.29	0.37	0.10	0.27	0.21	0.15
	FRG	0.21	0.31	0.19	0.27	0.09	0.15
Rateval	US			0.26	0.21	0.22	0.22
	FRG			0.12	0.12	0.16	0.27
Effectiv	US					0.26	0.14
	FRG					0.05	0.08
Means	US	$r$	= 0.22	US	Gamma	= 0.23	
	FRG		= 0.14	FRG		= 0.20	
	Both countries		= 0.18	Both countries		= 0.22	

TABLE 6. Technocratism item and index mean scores by rank, department, party, and training in the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States

Independent variable	TechPol		Rateval		Effectiv		Conginter		Techno-index		
	FRG	US	FRG	US	FRG	US	FRG	US	FRG	US	
<i>Rank</i>											
StS	PAS	2.6	2.4	2.9	2.9	2.2	1.8	2.6	2.2	10.4	9.3
MD	Non-career	2.8	2.4	3.2	2.9	2.0	1.8	2.7	2.0	10.7	9.1
MDG	SES I	2.7	2.5	3.2	2.9	2.2	1.8	2.7	2.3	10.8	9.6
MR	SES II	2.4	2.5	3.1	3.0	2.1	1.9	3.0	2.6	10.7	10.0
RD-RR	Below SES	2.7	2.6	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.0	3.1	2.4	11.7	10.0
<i>Department</i>											
Social sciences		2.7	2.8	3.3	3.1	2.1	1.7	3.1	2.4	11.3	10.0
Others		2.6	2.4	3.2	2.9	2.1	1.9	2.7	2.3	10.6	9.5
<i>Party</i>											
Government parties											
(Social-)		2.8	2.4	3.3	2.9	2.1	1.8	2.8	2.1	11.0	9.2
Democrats		2.7	2.7	3.4	3.0	2.4	1.9	2.9	2.6	11.3	10.0
Non-members/indep.		2.6	2.5	3.1	3.1	2.1	1.9	2.8	2.5	10.6	10.3
<i>Training</i>											
Agriculture		2.4	1.9	3.2	3.0	1.9	1.7	2.9	2.0	10.4	8.6
Science		2.4	2.3	2.9	2.8	1.8	1.9	2.8	2.4	9.9	9.4
Economics		2.8	2.5	3.3	2.9	2.2	1.8	2.9	2.4	11.2	9.5
Soc. science		3.4	2.9	3.4	2.9	2.8	1.8	3.0	2.2	12.6	9.9
Law		2.7	2.4	3.2	2.8	2.2	1.8	2.8	2.2	10.8	9.2
Bus./Pub. admin			2.6		3.1		1.8		2.4		10.0
Humanities											
(US only)			2.7		3.3		2.0		2.5		10.6
Total		2.7	2.5	3.2	2.9	2.1	1.8	2.8	2.3	10.8	9.6

Note: On item scores, 1 = high technocratism and 4 = low technocratism  
On index scores, 4 = highest technocratism and 16 = lowest technocratism

the coefficients are highly consistent across items.

In brief, while the technocratism index provides a convenient way of putting these items together, it is most likely an incomplete operationalization of the underlying concept of technocratic role understanding. For this reason, at least in the initial presentation of the relationship between the index and the independent variables of rank, department, party and educational training, we shall also present the relationships of these variables to each of the individual items of the index.

In a small number of cases (seven), we were missing a response to one of the items. In these few cases we estimated the means of the individual items to substitute for the missing response in order to maintain our sample complement.

## Analysis

### Cross-national differences

An inspection of Tables 6 and 7 tells us, as we should expect from the individual items, that American senior executives are more technocratically oriented than their German peers. Little more than one of every ten senior civil servants in Bonn falls onto the high end of the technocratism index (Table 7), whereas more than one of every four Americans does. Altogether 84 per cent of the Americans are at the high or medium end of the index, while 65 per cent of the German sample is so situated.

Most important, for every category on each independent variable (but one), the American administrative elite consistently scores higher (lower on mean values) on the technocratism

TABLE 7. Technocratism index by rank, department, party and training in the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States (%)

Independent variable	Technocratism						
	High (4-8)		Medium (9-11)		Low (12-16)		
	FRG	US	FRG	US	FRG	US	
<i>Rank</i>							
StS PAS	23	22	54	72	23	6	
MD (SES) Non-CA	11	38	56	45	33	17	
MDG (SES) CA-I	12	28	55	59	33	13	
MR (SES) CA-II	13	20	54	58	33	22	
RD-RR Below SES	—	25	38	63	62	12	
<i>Department</i>							
Social services	2	20	55	61	43	20	
Others	15	29	53	56	32	15	
<i>Party</i>							
Govt. parties	11	32	57	55	32	13	
(Social) Democrats	—	19	53	60	47	21	
Non-members/Indeps.	13	25	52	54	34	21	
<i>Training</i>							
Science	17	35	67	49	17	16	
Economics	12	25	46	55	42	20	
Social science	—	31	—	48	100	21	
Law	11	32	56	54	33	14	
Agriculture	18	22	55	78	27	—	
Business admin./Public admin.	NA	18	NA	70	NA	12	
Humanities	NA	—	NA	75	NA	25	
Total	(%)	11	27	54	57	35	16
	<i>N</i>	(17)	(54)	(79)	(113)	(51)	(32)

index than their German peers. It does not, in other words, appear that these persistent differences are explained by the differential effects of other variables internal to each sample. In general (with some exceptions in the professional training area), the variables that relate to the technocratism index in one country tend to do so in the other.

There is obviously no clear-cut or simple explanation here, though one of the variables pushes the country differences in the index a bit more than the others, and that is the variable that probably has most to do with institutional differences across the political systems – the matter of politicians' (parliamentary/congressional) interference in the administration (see Table 6). The constitutional role of the US Congress in this regard gives it both the right to oversee the executive (or interfere if one wishes to look at it negatively), and the tools by which to do so (the power of appropriations, for example). The institutional division of political control also seems to lead to a fairly wide difference of opinion on this matter between administrators

with Democratic and those with Republican Party sympathies. The former see the interference of the Democratic Congress in the Republican-dominated executive branch as much less of a problem than do the Republican executives. This division of authority could not exist in the Federal Republic of Germany, and, therefore, as it turns out, party affiliation plays no particular role in the attitudes of German administrative elites toward parliamentary political interference.

### Rank

In both countries there is a tendency for the very top corps of administrators to be most technocratic in outlook, especially once we collapse the high and medium scores and compare them to the country means (Table 8). The German state secretaries and the American appointees in positions requiring Senate approval score, respectively, 12 per cent and 10 per cent above their country's mean. Virtually all of these officials in each country are affiliated

TABLE 8. Percentage of combined high and medium scores of technocratism index by rank, department, party, and training compared to each country's mean percentage

Country	Evidence of technocratic attitude (High and medium scorers)	
	FRG	US
Total (%)	65	84
<i>Rank</i>		
Sts PAS	(+12)	(+10)
MD Non-career	(+ 2)	(- 1)
MDG CA-I	(+ 2)	(+ 3)
MR CA-II	(+ 2)	(- 6)
RD-RR <SES	(-37)	(+ 4)
<i>Department</i>		
Social service	(- 8)	(- 3)
Other	(+ 3)	(+ 1)
<i>Party</i>		
Government	(+ 3)	(+ 3)
(Social) Democrat	(-12)	(- 5)
Non-mbrs./Indep.	( 0)	(- 5)
<i>Training</i>		
Science	(+19)	( 0)
Economics	(- 7)	(- 4)
Social science	(-65)	(- 5)
Law	(+ 2)	(+ 2)
Agriculture	(+ 8)	(+16)
Bus./Pub. admin.		(+ 4)
Humanities		(- 9)

as well with the governing party. At the bottom in the German case, the small number of high-fliers are considerably less technocratic, but little clear-cut pattern exists in the US.

While ordinarily one would assume that ascendancy to top positions filters out pure technocrats and encourages those with political instincts, the evidence in Table 7 and, especially, Table 8 implies otherwise. This curious result may stem from the sympathy that these top officials have with the goals of the government they are serving. They may especially want to see these goals acted upon and unimpeded by political considerations. However, before taking this explanation too far, we must note that among the next level of political appointees in the American bureaucracy (the non-career SES officials), there is no particular departure from the national parameter. It is not as yet clear, in other words, that these findings are other than idiosyncratic.

We can at this point, however, offer two hypotheses regarding rank and technocratism.

The first, we might call a structural hypothesis. It asserts that political skills become more important the higher one's rank, and that a purely technocratic disposition is thus weakened (or weeded out). While we cannot definitively rule out such a proposition in view of the incomplete nature of our operationalization of technocratism, the evidence we have at hand is clearly not consistent with such an hypothesis.

A second hypothesis, alternatively, may be thought of as situational. It proposes that those closest to the top are most apt to share the goals of the government of the day. (Note again that, as contrasted to the UK, there is a good deal of politicization in the top administrative strata in both the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States.) For this, however, we need in both countries to control for party affiliation. There is some evidence that those affiliated with the government party at the level of state secrecy in the FRG are more technocratic (89 per cent compared to 50 per cent non-affiliated state secretaries). But this relationship no longer holds up at the next level, that of *Ministerialdirektor*. And in the United States, the two top rungs are occupied almost wholly by Republicans. Consequently, the difference between the top-most and the second rung *cannot* be explained by party.

As a result, we can arrive at no clear conclusion here with regard to the 'situational' hypothesis. There is, however, evidence to indicate, as we shall soon note, that the 'in' party members in both countries are mildly more technocratic, and the 'out' party members are moderately to significantly less technocratic in their administrative role understandings.

### Department

As we proposed earlier, officials in social service agencies usually deal with softer technologies and with more politically controversial problems. Accordingly, we might expect them to be less technocratically oriented than their colleagues in other departments. Indeed, the evidence in Tables 6-8 fits well with this expectation, particularly in the FRG (gamma coefficient = -0.25). Only a trace percentage of German social service civil servants fall into the high range of the technocratism index, and they fall 8 per cent below the national mean

when the high and medium categories of the index are combined.

Whether these differences, particularly the stronger German ones, are a function of a general difference in ideology – in the early 1970s, leftists tended to be more predominant in the social service agencies of both countries, but no longer so in the US by the mid-1980s – we cannot tell for certain at this point. It should be noted, however, that in the German case, 42 per cent of all the SPD bureaucrats are in the social service agencies, though these agencies account for only 29 per cent of the German civil service sample.

### Party

Party affiliation also makes some difference in technocratic attitudes. In both countries, administrators, affiliated with or sympathetic to the more conservative party also hold a more technocratic understanding of their roles. As we remarked earlier, we cannot now distinguish between the effects of conservative ideology (which tends to see things from an authority or managerial perspective), and the notion that the more important element is that these are the parties in power at the moment (implying that it is the situation of governance or opposition that is critical).

Again, these differences are greater in the Federal Republic of Germany than in the United States. In both cases, the governing party is about 3 per cent above the national value, and in each case, the opposition and more leftist party members are below the national value. The SPD bureaucrats, however, are 12 per cent less technocratic than the German mean, while the Democrats are only 5 per cent less technocratic than the US mean. The larger number of non-affiliated German bureaucrats are at the mean, while those in the US score below the mean to the same extent as Democratic bureaucrats. This adds a further puzzle to interpreting these findings.

For now, we can say only that party makes a difference in each country in regard to bureaucrats' technocratic attitudes, but a bigger one in the Federal Republic of Germany than in the US. We cannot presently distinguish whether these differences derive from broader ideological outlooks or merely reflect strategic or situ-

ational considerations. To test these hypotheses, we need to compare these precise measures over time under different situational circumstances. That is not possible in the American case, because during the earlier study the Republicans also controlled the executive branch while the Democrats controlled the legislative one. Unfortunately, also, the precise questions posed here to form the technocratism index were not used in the first American study. There are some opportunities in the German case, however, to evaluate these hypotheses, as the elements of the index did exist (at least partially) in the earlier study done in Bonn, and, importantly, the federal government was then in the hands of a Social-Liberal (SPD-FDP) coalition dominated by the SPD.

One curiosity worth nothing thus far is that, in general, the independent variables used in this analysis seem to have a somewhat greater impact on the German than the American sample. This is especially interesting because, if anything, the American sample has somewhat greater internal consistency on the items composing the technocratism index, yet it is the German sample that seems to have a bit more external consistency in relation to the index.

### Training

In Robert Putnam's (1977) article on technocracy, he compared the educational backgrounds of bureaucrats in three countries – UK, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Italy – in regard to both substantive attitudes and attitudes about appropriate processes of decision-making.<sup>11</sup> He found that the type of training that individuals underwent made little difference in regard to substantive views, but a good deal of difference in regard to views about decision-making processes. Most particularly, natural scientists had a more technocratic outlook on decision-making than others, and social scientists the least.

There are more natural scientists and also social scientists in the higher reaches of the American bureaucracy than in the German apparatus – about three times the percentage of natural scientists and four times the percentage of social scientists. About 27 per cent of the US sample has scientific training, contrasted to only 8 per cent of the German sample, and about 15



Graduation day at Columbia, New York, in the late 1950s; some of these graduates are perhaps amongst today's federal executives. H. Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

per cent of the US sample has a background in social science (other than economics), whereas only about 3.5 per cent of the German sample have social science training (other than economics).

As a result, we expected, given the differential distribution of professions, that this might account for (1) the greater degree of technocratism in the American case, but perhaps also (2) a greater degree of variation among the American sample than among the German sample. Neither of these expectations appear to be met by the data (Tables 6–8). Indeed, as has typically been the case, the range of variation is greater in Germany than in the US.

In Bonn, the original Putnam findings hold up very well – natural scientists are by far the most technocratic, and social scientists overwhelmingly the least. Certainly, the training variable makes for an especially large difference in Bonn. In Washington, training also seems to make somewhat more of a difference than other

factors, but much less so than in the Federal Republic. Looking at Table 8, for example, the range of variation in the US is 25 per cent (agriculturalists are the most technocratic, and those with humanities backgrounds the least). In the Federal Republic of Germany, however, the range is 84 per cent, with none of the social scientists expressing any degree of technocratic role disposition as contrasted to 84 per cent of the natural scientists. While the percentages of natural scientists expressing some technocratic orientation is the same in each country, that figure is 19 per cent higher than the German average, but is exactly the same as the American one. And though American social scientists also are less technocratic than the American average, they deviate from the mean percentage only moderately, while German social scientists deviate drastically.

In general, the directions for other comparable professions in each country are broadly similar.

The Putnam hypothesis, then, appears to be much more powerfully confirmed in Bonn than in Washington. Why this is so is not altogether clear, though it should be noted that training and agency may have an interactive effect. In the Federal Republic, for example, all of the social scientists are in the social service departments and all of the natural scientists are outside of these departments, while this is not the case in the US.

## Interpretation

We have tried here to analyse one element of the role understanding of high level bureaucrats in the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States – that is the element of technocratic thinking in relation to political thinking. We recognize both the theoretical importance of this element (and the importance of balancing technical and political criteria) and the limitations surrounding its present operationalization, but, more fundamentally, the limits of any operationalization. Conceptualization outpaces operationalization.

Still, in spite of these limitations we composed an additive index of four items administered to our samples of high level bureaucrats in Bonn and Washington. Although the empirical consistency of the items was only moderate, the logic that led us to their selection was stronger. In each case, the logic of technocratic and political choice seemed clear.

We posed several different ways of exploring explanations for technocratism, and it is here that we must emphasize the preliminary nature of the analysis. It is clear that there are remarkably consistent cross-national differences in the technocratism index and in each of its component items – and, above all, these differences do not accord particularly well with received wisdom.

In the course of the analysis we discovered similarities and differences which partly ran counter to our hypotheses. Other differences between the US and the German executive elite are subtle, but nevertheless interesting as they reflect structural differences between and within the national settings. On the aggregate level we arrived at the following conclusions:

First of all, contrary to all one would reasonably suppose from the existing literature, the US executive of 1987 turns out to be more technocratic than the German executive. This finding falsifies the assumption that explicit political staffing of the executive leads *per se* to more political and, therefore, less technocratic attitudes.

Secondly, we observed a party effect on technocratism which partly corroborates our hypothesis: (Social-) Democrats in both countries, i.e. opposition party members or supporters are less technocratic than the followers of the governing rather conservative parties. Thus, in both capitals after seven (US) and five (FRG) years of uninterrupted rule there are still clashing beliefs in the apparatus.<sup>12</sup> We could not, however, clearly distinguish as to whether this effect is the result of the Left-Right difference between the parties, or their governing-opposition status.

Third, the hypothesis could be supported that social service departments in both countries, particularly in the Federal Republic of Germany, are staffed with less technocratic officials. This phenomenon is caused only partly by properties of the soft policy area; it also results from the persistence of Social Democrats in German departments and to their specific training profile – more social science and less natural science.

Fourth, training in natural science and particularly in agriculture predisposes towards more technocratic attitudes – especially the former in the German and the latter in the US context. As expected, social scientists regardless of their party affiliation are non-technocratic; to a lesser extent this also holds for economists. Somewhat surprisingly, the classical German training of the executive elite in law did not produce unusually high technocratism. Nor did the even more specialized nature of legal training in the US.

Finally, we have shown that the distribution of more or less technocratic executives in the individual subsamples is determined by a combination of structural factors, the most important of which seem to be the kind of party people sympathize with (particularly in Bonn), department, and certain types of training.

In sum, cross-national differences are not explained away by reference to any of the independent variables we examined – rank, depart-

ment, party, or training. These tend more or less to vary in the same way, but at different magnitudes. Their relationship to the technocratism index in the Federal Republic of Germany is consistently stronger than in the United States. The findings (especially the German findings) appear to be compatible with the prevailing empirical literature on the subject of technocratic attitudes.

We end, therefore, on a note of some puzzlement, requiring yet further elaboration and analysis. The German and American differences remain to be explored at greater depth, and with a more complete operationalization of technocratic attitudes.

For now, we refer to some evidence sug-

gesting further issues of interpretation. In a recent paper comparing American and Japanese bureaucratic elites, it was found that whenever there was divergence in response, it was the American sample that appeared as the more technocratic of the two and the less political.<sup>13</sup> So, whatever else, there is some element of consistency here. We cannot be sure as yet, though, whether these divergences that particularly mark the American case in unexpected ways result from short-run situational factors or are the product of deeper structural and cultural influences in politico-administrative systems. We shall attempt to reduce that uncertainty as we continue our efforts in the future.

## Notes

*Acknowledgements:* We would like to express our gratitude for assistance in data analysis to Hermann Gross (Bamberg), to Joseph Seman and Kerry Manning (Pittsburgh), and to Daniel B Mezger (UCLA). The ongoing projects from which the data are drawn are supported by research grants of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (De 353/2-1) and the US National Science Foundation (Grant SES 85-17167). Joel D. Aberbach thanks the Academic Senate and the Institute for Social Science Research at UCLA for support. Bert A. Rockman is grateful for support from the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh.

1. Max Weber (1958). 'Politics as a Vocation', and 'Bureaucracy'. In H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 77-128 and 196-244.

2. For evidence of this, see Joel D. Aberbach, Robert D. Putnam and Bert A. Rockman (1981). *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies*. Cambridge,

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), Ch. 4. In the United States, however, at least in the context of the early 1970s, bureaucrats actually had a somewhat higher degree of partisan focus in their roles than did congressional politicians. This finding was unique to the United States.

3. Aberbach et al., op. cit. p. 259.

4. Such implications can be drawn from Robert Putnam's discussion of the theory of technocracy in his article, 'Elite Transformation in Advanced Industrial Societies. An Empirical Assessment of the Theory of Technocracy', *Comparative Political Studies*, 10, October 1977, pp. 383-412.

5. For instance, see Renate Mayntz (1984). 'German Federal Bureaucrats: A Functional Elite Between Politics and Administration'. In Ezra N. Suleiman (ed.), *Bureaucrats and Policy-making*. New York: Holmes & Meier, pp. 174-205; Hans-Ulrich Derlien (1987). 'State and Bureaucracy in Prussia and Germany'. In Metin Heper (ed.),

*The State and Public Bureaucracies. A Comparative Perspective*. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 89-105; Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman (1985). *The Administrative State in Industrialized Democracies*. Washington: American Political Science Association; and Hugh Hecllo (1984). 'In Search of a Role: America's Higher Civil Service'. In Suleiman (ed.), op. cit., pp. 8-34.

6. Hans-Ulrich Derlien (1983). 'Einstweiliger Ruhestand politischer Beamter des Bundes 1949-1983', *Die öffentliche Verwaltung*, 37, pp. 689-99.

7. Hans-Ulrich Derlien (1988). 'Repercussions of Government Change on the Career Civil Service in West Germany: The Cases of 1969 and 1982', *Governance*, 1, pp. 50-78.

8. More than half of the total US sample expressed a preference for the governing party, whereas slightly less than half did so in the FRG. See Table 2. However, in the American case, party affiliation is measured by voting

preference, whereas in the German case, it is measured by party membership.

9. Putnam, op. cit.

10. Sidney Verba (1971). 'Cross-National Survey Research: The Problem of Credibility'. In Ivan Vallier (ed.), *Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays in Trends and Applications*.

Berkeley: University of California Press.

11. Putnam, op. cit.

12. Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman (1976). 'Clashing Beliefs Within the Executive Branch: The Nixon Administration Bureaucracy'. *American Political Science Review*, 70, June, 456-68; and Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman (1988). 'Ideological

Change in the American Administrative Elite'. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Session, Rimini, Italy, April 5-10.

13. Joel D. Aberbach, Ellis S. Krauss, Michio Muramatsu, and Bert A. Rockman (1988). 'Comparing Japanese and American Bureaucratic Elites'. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Session, Rimini, Italy, April 5-10.

---