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An agenda for the study of Public Administration in Developing Countries

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Abstract

Developing nations demand a different scholarly approach in the field of public administration. We advance an agenda for research that stands on four pillars. First, in the absence of easily accessible data scholars of developing world public administration must assemble it for themselves. Second, building and testing theory plays a paramount role because researchers face limited information. Third, in developing countries, multi-national and non-governmental organizations are often crucial and must be considered in studying public administration. Fourth, given the novelties and ambiguities researchers face, qualitative information must be integrated throughout the research process. Our article—and the articles in this volume—constitute a call for developing country research to contribute to the study of public administration writ large, informing our understanding of both developing and developed states.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Public administration exists to implement the commitments of government to citizens. These commitments are to policy aims, such as a basic education for children or clean water for everyone, but they also involve broader values, even basic human rights, that establish how society ought to be organized. As their political masters change over time, those who practice public administration use their discretionary authority to carry out public policies with a healthy component of pragmatism. The goal of any public program—from building infrastructure to protecting the environment to providing health care—is to fulfill obligations that government

has deemed important, as when transportation systems are modernized, or that are among the basic requirements of any state, as with the national defense. Seen in this light, getting public administration right is critical to good governance.

In developing countries, just as in the developed world, the practice of public administration is inextricably intertwined with the implementation of reforms (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2015; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Existing political and administrative institutions frustrate the goals of public policies and programs (cf. Bates, 1981; Fukuyama, 2013; Hacker & Pierson, 2011; Skowronek, 1982; Thomas & Grindle, 1990). Reformers seek to alter these systems. The study of public administration is consequently a sustained examination of institutional reforms and their behavioral consequences. It may be too easy for politicians to change the behavior and outcomes of the public administration, as in the case of nineteenth century patronage in the United States and its attendant "corruption, ignorance, indolence, incompetence, favoritism, and oppression" (Merriam, 1940, p. 305). It also may be too hard, as when processes are embedded within the legalistic administrative culture of a country like Italy (Capano, 2003; Mele, 2010). With the reform and maturation of institutions in developed countries came a shift of focus from technical to responsible administration—that is, the normative importance of the *public* in public administration grew (Bertelli & Lynn, 2006, pp. 3–6).

The articles in this volume show that developing countries wrestle with some of these same central challenges. They also show just how important comparative research on a global scale is essential to understanding public administration, both as an institution and in its practice. In some cases, developing countries are currently addressing these challenges in ways consistent with how they have addressed similar concerns historically. Where this is true, the ability to track such developments concurrently presents a novel opportunity to document long-theorized processes of transition in detail. Yet in other cases, developing countries are using different strategies, and sometimes with success. Writes Ang (2017, p. 283), "[m]any observers subscribe to a binary view of public administration: if an organization does not conform to conventional standards—the Weberian model—then it must be defective, rather than different." The study of public administration in developing countries necessarily challenges this assumption.

There are important differences when studying developing nations that can help us understand the institutions and behavior of public administration beyond its context. Developing nations demand a different scholarly approach and explore that approach and its lessons for the wider research community in this article. We hasten to add that many scholars based or having substantial experience in developing countries have long been researching public administration in these contexts. Unfortunately, little of this research appears in our field's most prominent journals. This might be because these scholars work in different linguistic or methodological traditions, face constraints on resources and research time, or, arguably most problematic, because their cases are viewed as too different from the handful of developed countries whose contexts dominate internationally prestigious journals. Whatever the reason, we see an urgent need to escape this equilibrium. We believe that the appeal of our research program will extend to these scholars, and it builds on their contributions.

Our agenda stands on four pillars—studying new data, emphasizing theory, integrating non-state actors, and exploring qualitative information—and the contributions to this special issue illustrate them individually and collectively. First, new data, and new ways of seeing those data, are required. To study developing countries, scholars must assemble novel data from sources readily available in some, but surely not all, developed countries. What is more, this process also will uncover useful empirical material that is not often available in developed country settings. Defining the quantity of interest in a study on the basis of theory commits a

researcher to a search for appropriate data, rather than to simply analyzing those data that governments make readily available. In this volume, Hassan and O'Mealia (2020) encounter this problem with the biographical data required to study representative bureaucracy in Kenya, and Kay, Rogger, and Sen (2020) likewise implement an original survey to capture attitudes about the institutional locus of control in the Ethiopian bureaucracy. Williams and Yecalo-Tecle (2019) move well beyond the quantitative analysis of hundreds of innovation plans through a qualitative study of work processes in the Ghanian civil service. Novel data can be used to answer different questions than extant scholarship has asked.

Where administrative data is available in developing country settings, it is often imprecise, incomplete or inaccurate. The inability simply to trust information that formal channels provide leads us to reconsider the role of the state and our assumptions about bureaucracy. Many developing countries have institutional histories that depart from the Western modes of public administration. This admits greater variation on important independent variables than may be present in developed country contexts alone. As such, new data on the developing world can challenge and extend theories with new arguments that can inform studies of public administration in the developed world.

Consequently, the second pillar of the research agenda we encourage is that theory plays a paramount role because researchers must sort through limited information. This means that we both examine existing theories and shape their contours as well. In this way, Angulo Amaya, Bertelli, and Woodhouse (2020) illustrate a dynamic in Colombia that recasts pocketbook into sociotropic voting when news about privately financed infrastructure projects across the nation is less than positive. Opalo (2020) likewise shows evidence from Kenya that gender differences in the personal use of public health services play a role in informing theories regarding differences in political knowledge.

Institutional contexts in developing countries are complicated by the influence of a variety of actors that both support and influence domestic public administration. For this reason, a third pillar of our research agenda is the crucial importance of multi-national and non-governmental organizations. The private consortia that construct the infrastructure projects examined by Angulo Amaya et al. (2020) and the discretionary authority of World Bank staff in their interactions with developing country governments in Honig (2020) are but two illustrations. Developing countries do not "go it alone" when reforming public administration or even carrying out some of its essential tasks (Ghani & Lockhart, 2009; Levy, 2014).

That high quality mixed-methods research is important to public administration (Mele & Belardinelli, 2018) and complementary to quantitative strategies (Honig, 2019) is not a novel statement. What is critical to researching public administration in developing countries is the extent to which qualitative accounts provide an initial understanding of the institutional context for the scholarly community. A fourth and final pillar of our research agenda is the integration of qualitative information into both theory building and empirical testing. While Williams and Yecalo-Tecle (2019) do this with their novel qualitative accounts, each of the papers in this volume makes an essential use of both qualitative and quantitative information. Amassing qualitative information is a crucial first step for understanding the institutional context precisely because past research is limited and there is more uncertainty about variations in the operation in institutions. Relying on developed country models for theory building is frequently inappropriate.

In the remainder of this article, we explore these pillars beyond the contributions to this volume. We begin by observing that in recent years, developing-country scholarship constitutes less than 10% of articles published in several leading public administration journals. This is

both a symptom and cause of the disconnect that we see in research programs studying the developed versus the developing worlds.

While discussing new data, we introduce readers to various sources of information that may be useful in stimulating research in the context of developing nations. Theoretically, the essays in this volume both address and recast classic public administration arguments from representative bureaucracy to the locus of control. Our consideration of the role of actors beyond domestic public administration includes a variety of international development organizations. To illustrate the importance of considering both qualitative and quantitative evidence, we revisit some classic examples as well as suggest new directions. We conclude with our view of the importance of this agenda to understanding public administration more generally.

2 | RESEARCH ON DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IS UNDER-REPRESENTED IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

To support our claim that public administration research has unduly neglected developing countries, we conducted a brief and selective—but nevertheless illustrative—bibliometric analysis of several highly ranked generalist public administration journals. For articles published between 2015 and 2019, we asked the following question: what portion of the content in top public administration outlets focuses exclusively or substantively on developing countries? We use country and lending group classifications from the World Bank (2020) and consider all non-high-income countries as developing countries. The category includes countries like China, Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa, but excludes those like Singapore, Chile, and South Korea. For each journal issue in this time period, we count the number of full research articles and then code how many of these articles were focused entirely or substantially on developing countries. We include cross-country analyses in which developing countries made up a non-trivial share of the data.

Figure 1 shows that three major public administration journals—the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART)*, *Public Administration Review (PAR)*, and *Public Administration*—devoted less than 10% of their total annual article budgets to studies focused on developing countries (7.8, 9.4, and 9.5%, respectively). Yet these countries are home to the vast majority of the world's population. *Governance* was an outlier in this respect, with 39.2% of
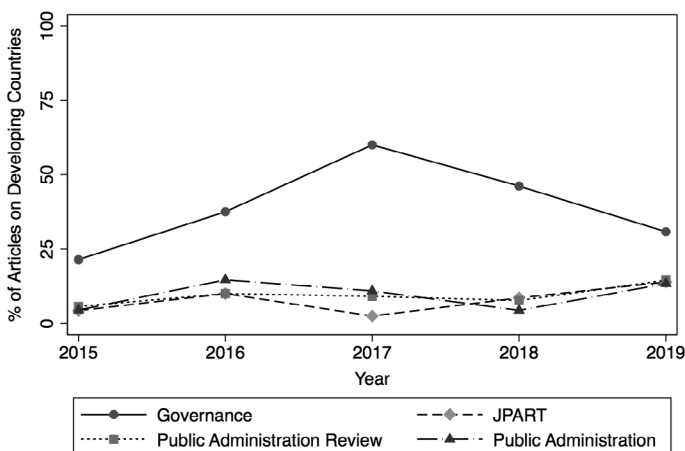

FIGURE 1 Developing Country Contexts in Public Administration Journals

all articles in this period including a strong developing country focus, though showing significant variation from year to year. While there are clearly many scholars across disciplines studying issues of bureaucracy and government functioning—many of whom are publishing in *Governance*—much of their work is currently at the periphery of other elite outlets in public administration.

We also think it useful to highlight the frequency with which many articles neglected to specify the geographic context in which the research was undertaken in the title or abstract, and in some cases even in the introduction. While our focus in this article and in the special issue as a whole is the representation of developing countries in public administration research, this perhaps points to a more general need within the discipline to use a comparative lens to understand how contextual factors shape bureaucratic institutions and behavior.

3 | DATA: WHAT CAN WE TRUST?

Despite the appetite of public managers for producing records, converting them into data that can be effectively analyzed is frequently daunting. Existing public administration data is imprecise, incomplete and inaccurate. This is particularly true in the developing world, where many records remain on paper, rather than appearing online. What is more, accountability mechanisms and associated resources for maintaining efficient records are weak, and there is limited centralization of comparable data. We begin with some common data problems and then highlight both the ways in which scholars collect primary data and the impact their efforts have on theoretical and methodological rigor.

Low levels of state capacity in developing countries often make it difficult to assume the accuracy of readily available government data. For instance, while collecting data on civil servants in Ghana, Rasul, Rogger, and Williams (2019) found a widely varying nomenclature for registering the units of public officials in administrative data, even within the same organizational unit. Simply generating an accurate organogram and staff listing for civil service organizations would have poses challenges. Similarly, when collecting data on subnational entities in Kenya for the fieldwork underlying their contribution to this volume, Hassan and O'Mealia (2020) found omissions in the source file for the census used by the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics. While in some instances government data are purposefully destroyed (Balcells & Sullivan, 2018) or manipulated (Wallace, 2016), in many others, missing data are simply a function of the weak institutional environment—or perhaps an ingredient of it.

Scholars in these contexts, instead, often rely on collecting primary data on their own or by partnering with international organizations. Indeed, the 2019 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics rewarded innovations in measurement and analysis in developing countries that stemmed from the collection of primary data there. The Nobel Memorial Prize committee stated that the underlying research had enriched the development economics, and, indeed, Duflo's studies of female political leaders has reshaped research on gender and politics well beyond the context of developing countries (e.g., O'Brien & Rickne, 2016). In other cases, primary data collection in the public administration frequently requires close collaboration with public sector actors. For instance, Derek Peterson, ahistorian focusing on Uganda, has received a MacArthur "genius" award for his ongoing work to sort, clean, and catalogue government records from various Ugandan district archives. After work in each site is complete, local governments are given digital copies of their records to improve retrieval and bureaucratic efficiency (Peterson, 2020).

Overcoming these data collection challenges has presented a range of benefits for scholars. To begin, the researcher has the freedom to define the quantity of theoretical or practical interest for herself, rather than simply analyzing data that governments collect for other purposes. For instance, despite its centrality for testing theories of public sector effectiveness, comparative data on the structure of public management across the world is nearly absent from official surveys, including the American Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (cf. Bertelli, Mason, Connolly, & Gastwirth, 2015; Fernandez, Resh, Moldogaziev, & Oberfield, 2015). Rasul and Rogger (2018) and Rasul et al. (2019) exemplify research programs that have independently surveyed managers and staff on the quality of management across institutions in the developing world. They have done this, importantly, in a way that is consistent with measures from the private sector and developed world. Not simply adapting standard measures used in developed settings, development scholars have already begun to measure novel aspects of public administration (Bertrand, Burgess, Chawla, & Xu, 2020; Finan, Olken, & Pande, 2017).

4 | INSTITUTIONS REVEAL THEMSELVES QUANTITATIVELY AND QUALITATIVELY

Our argument that qualitative work is a more integral part of the research process in developing country settings deserves further exposition. The *de jure* procedures of bureaucracies in developing countries are not uniformly followed. The reasons behind this variability in formal institutions varies by country and agency, but the result is that scholars working in developing countries cannot purport to understand "how things work" simply by reading the statutes and administrative rules (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). Merely examining an organizational chart is unlikely to provide clarity on de facto process and hierarchy in an administrative agency in most developing countries. What is more, wide variation in the de facto organizational procedures among—and sometimes within—agencies complicates the landscape (McDonnell, 2016). For this reason, thick description of informal norms and unwritten rules, through both qualitative accounts and quantitative summaries, is a necessary first step for public administration research in developing countries.

This form of qualitative work promises to improve the quality of research in numerous ways. First, preliminary context analysis done before an intervention or systematic data collection must be grounded in the de facto functioning of an agency. Doing this helps scholars to identify the most relevant and pressing research questions facing an agency; and it reveals how local norms interact with formal rules. Similarly, descriptive work promises to help researchers to locate creative data sources that can address a variety of essential questions for their research programs. While agencies collect information that evaluates *de jure* procedures, researchers must not assume that these data will always prove useful for evaluating important theoretical questions.

Second, process matters just as much as outcomes. The primacy of informal institutions does not mean that formal rules are not followed. Instead, agencies may find themselves complying with written procedures, but through different mechanisms than originally intended. For instance, in the wake of Kenya's formal gender quota, Hassan and O'Mealia (2020) find that Kenyan agencies are working to comply with the new quota. However, agencies are not increasing women's representation uniformly across the country, and in effect, undermining the spirit of the law. Berliner (2017), for example, finds evidence that South African municipalities are

complying with transparency laws because of local political competition rather than the efforts of watchdog agencies.

Third, given the large amount of international assistance devoted to improving the public sector in developing countries, descriptive work helps researchers to pinpoint why past interventions have failed and to devise better policy solutions. Recent research designs do this explicitly, by pairing quantitative evaluations of a randomized control trial with qualitative case studies that use process tracing to uncover how an outcome was achieved. For instance, Kumar, Post, and Ray (2018) evaluate an intervention intended to reduce waiting times for water. Ethnographic research from Hyun, Post, and Ray (2018) explains the lackluster intervention results, in part, because bureaucrats resisted changes to the core duties of their jobs. Rasul et al. (2019) present results from a large-scale randomized control trial on all members of the Ghanaian civil service, pointing to the importance of management practices that give bureaucrats autonomy. In this volume, Williams and Yecalo-Tecle (2019) provide systematic qualitative evidence about the limits of autonomy when managers are not receptive to innovation by subordinates. Moreover, as Schuster, Meyer-Sahling, and Mikkelsen (2020) suggest, solutions that fit one context should not be implemented to other countries without an understanding about how new laws will interact with unwritten rules and procedures.

Fourth, increasing the corpus of descriptive work on developing countries promises to help overcome normative assumptions about what is good bureaucracy. Descriptive work on public agencies that do not follow the Weberian model helps us to understand their logics, and in turn, stimulates us re-evaluate the assumptions and procedures latent in work focused on developed countries.

5 | THEORY: OLD WINE, BUT MORE THAN JUST NEW BOTTLES

A major challenge for studies of public administration in developing countries is that theory development in the discipline has taken place almost entirely in high-income countries, and with their contexts in mind. While government bureaucracies everywhere resemble each other in some formal respects, the economic, political, and social conditions in which they operate have a major impact on their functioning. There is, of course, a risk of overgeneralizing stylized differences between developing and developed countries as a matter of classification. Still, it is undeniable that the largely high-income, well-established democracies with which public administration has historically engaged represent a narrow slice of the contextual diversity within which government bureaucracies around the world operate. Research in developing countries thus faces challenges in applying standard theories, but also regarding the opportunity to extend and enrich these theories for the benefit of the field as a whole.

Bureaucracies in developing countries are certainly more likely to operate in conditions of severe scarcity of financial and human resources, not just due to low budgets or public sector wages, but, in some cases, because extremely thin skilled labor markets and low incomes in society reduce their capacity. Resource shortfalls in high-income countries for, say, transport departments are likely a political choice that might lead to sub-optimal maintenance. Yet in many low- and lower-middle-income countries, there simply is not enough wealth to pay for basic road connectivity, even setting aside problems of tax collection. At the same time, societal need for basic infrastructure and services is even higher, leading to heightened political demands and a shorter time horizon for politicians and bureaucrats to deliver results. While

distributive politics are a feature of public expenditure worldwide, the particularistic nature of basic infrastructure and greater demand for it make issues of distributive politics and clientelism especially salient in poorer countries (Golden & Min, 2013), an observation on which the Angulo Amaya et al. (2020) essay in the present volume builds its theory. The intensity of these needs has also contributed to effective service delivery, enhancing its role in the political science literature on bureaucratic development (Pepinsky, Pierskalla, & Sachs, 2017) more than in contemporary public administration research itself.

Differences in political, legal, and administrative institutions are perhaps even more important for theory than for wealth inequality. Studies of bureaucratic behavior in public administration largely take for granted that agencies operate in contexts of well-established democratic competition, with political checks and balances, and effective scrutiny by a free and informed media and organized interests. While many, even most, developing countries have some of these features, few have them all, and it is easy to see how their absence would affect theories of political control of the bureaucracy (cf. Huber & McCarty, 2004; McCubbins, Noll, & Weingast, 1989), public participation (cf. Ansell, 2011; Bertelli, Clouser McCann, & Travaglini, 2019; Nabatchi, 2012; Radin, Cooper, & McCool, 1989), and bureaucratic autonomy (cf. Carpenter, 2001; Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Miller & Whitford, 2016; Yesilkagit & Van Thiel, 2008).

Similarly, weak or unpredictable administrative justice systems can lead to poor adherence to formal laws and processes and to widespread reliance on informal practices. This creates opportunities for rent-seeking and makes it more difficult to change or improve organizational processes. Indeed, the gap between *de jure* and de facto practices is one of the most oft discussed features of developing country governments (Andrews, 2013). But this gap is far from unique to developing countries—as the literature on implementation challenges (cf. Ingram & Schneider, 1990; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1974; Robichau & Lynn Jr, 2009; Thomann, van Engen, & Tummers, 2018) illustrates, for example—presenting an opportunity to develop richer and more robust theories of the interplay between the formal and informal aspects of bureaucratic functioning.

Some of this new theory may in fact help scholars and practitioners alike to understand better the developed countries that they study most frequently (cf. Dahlström & Lapuente, 2017; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Developing countries provide greater variation in traditionally studied independent variables. For instance, the developing world offers greater diversity in legislative oversight arrangements, yielding papers like Onyango's (2020) exploration of legislative oversight in Kenya. This variation can help the field of public administration to understand whether the relationships between important independent and dependent variables are conditioned by context, and in what ways they might be.

While there are significant risks to transporting policies from OECD to developing countries wholesale, they have rarely been subject to systematic empirical exploration. Schuster et al. (2020) implement a survey experiment using civil servants in four countries. They find evidence that managerialist policies meant to increase bureaucratic autonomy are more at risk of being abused in the three developing countries than the one OECD country in their sample. This leads them to conclude that a "best practice" in one context can be a "worst practice" in others. While these results highlight important potential differences in theory and practice for which studies of public administration in developing countries must account, others have found positive associations between bureaucratic autonomy and performance in developing countries (e.g., Rasul & Rogger, 2018; Rasul et al., 2019). Indeed, Schuster et al. (2020) note that country-level factors are quite important even within broad categories of states. Given the extreme

heterogeneity of country contexts within both the OECD and "developing" categories, more research is necessary to understand the theoretical, contextual and methodological reasons for these divergent findings.

Another opportunity for public administration theory is the presence of large and growing literatures on bureaucracies in developing country contexts in the cognate social science disciplines of political science (e.g., Pepinsky, Pierskalla, & Sachs, 2017), economics (e.g., Finan et al., 2017), and sociology (e.g., McDonnell, 2017). This offers the potential for the cross-fertilization of ideas. For example, the long-established public administration on public service motivation (e.g., Perry, 1996; Perry & Vandenabeele, 2015) has been examined in ambitious randomized field experiments conducted by development economists in collaboration with developing country governments (cf. Ashraf, Bandiera, & Lee, 2016; Dal Bo, Finan, & Rossi, 2013). Similarly, Hassan and O'Mealia's (2020) study of representative bureaucracy in this volume builds both on public administration arguments about representative bureaucracy (e.g., Martin & George, 2018; Riccucci & Van Ryzin, 2017) and economic studies of randomized policy experiments with gender quotas in India (e.g., Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

Seizing these opportunities will require that scholars working in developing country-contexts find ways to extend and adapt existing theoretical models. It will also require scholars of high-income contexts to view developing country studies as part of the mainstream, rather than as interesting novelties. Because the vast majority of countries and citizens of the world live outside the high-income countries, public administration research that context is arguably the more niche agenda.

6 | TO UNDERSTAND DOMESTIC PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, LOOK BEYOND IT, AND AT ALL THE PLAYERS

Developing countries may provide insight into state formation processes that in turn inform scholarship of today's developed countries. Opalo's (2020) exploration of how information about state responsibilities affects legislative accountability in the present volume can inform settings where these responsibilities are widely understood (e.g., Potter & Shipan, 2019). In *China's Gilded Age*, Ang (2020) uses the American Gilded Age to inform our understanding of current developments in China, but also might be used by scholars to better understand historic state formation processes in the United States.

Developing countries also provide clues to cross-national differences on dimensions that have not traditionally been the focus of empirical attention. These settings provide greater variation, and thus allow examination of previously under-explored questions. This can in turn help us to question deeply held beliefs about what constitutes appropriate practice in public administration. Weaver (2018), for example, examines informal payments to gain access to jobs and promotions in the health bureaucracy of a large developing country—a practice that many scholars would call corruption, and consider to be at odds with efficient selection criteria and the creation of public value. Yet Weaver's analysis suggests that in this case, payments may in fact create public value. In this case, those with the highest willingness to pay are in fact those most likely to do the job well if given access to the position. This finding has potential implications for understanding various practices, such as patronage appointments, in developed countries as well.

As we write, the politics and public administration of many developed countries—the United Kingdom, United States, France, Italy, and beyond—are shifting in potentially unprecedented ways. Scholars in our field thus share an important caveat with the financial services industry: "past performance does not guarantee future results." As we look to understand what may happen as the features of political systems change, what better source of information might there be than countries with long experience operating under diverse regimes of rules?

In addition, developing country governments, more than their developed country cousins, frequently and systematically interface with powerful non-state actors having explicit goals to influence their conduct. These actors include international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, as well as myriad international Non-Governmental Organizations. Private actors of the kind examined by Angulo Amaya et al. (2020) may also have more influence in those developing countries where access to foreign investment is limited. Fully understanding public administration in the developing world means accounting for these external influences. As Honig (2020) suggests in regard to the World Bank in this volume, these non-state actors can influence state performance for the better or the worse depending on context.

Widening the scope of our studies to include developing countries also substantially increases the number of units whose behavior we can observe, as recent work published in *Governance* demonstrates (cf. Jindra & Vaz, 2019; Shockley, Ewers, Nardis, & Gengler, 2018; Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2019). The role of international organizations, or, for instance, country performance rankings (see e.g., Kelley & Simmons, 2020) can be better understood, and influences better identified, through an increase in statistical power that is borne of the widening of our cross-country scope. To build from Kipling (1891)'s beautiful turn of phrase, "what should they know of England who only England know," perhaps to understand any country—England, the United States, Uganda—one would do well to look well beyond its borders and even beyond countries with broad similarities.

7 | CONCLUSION

We believe that a research program that emphasizes new data, strong and often new theories, consideration of non-state actors, and the indispensability of qualitative information can make the study of public administration in developing countries both richer in its own right and more informative for developed country contexts. These four pillars are represented in the essays in this volume, which also engage in the cross-contextual conversation we hope will become commonplace in our field. That conversation, if realized, will have a number of important benefits. This article constitutes a call to this important research program.

The "developing world" is by definition a residual category—it is constituted of all countries that are not "developed." But treating the public administration of the developing world in this way is an error that damages not just the citizens and scholars of developing states, who have had to make do with recommendations and scholarship derived from inappropriate models and settings, but also the citizens and scholars of developed states. While developing countries do demand a different approach, theoretical insights from the study of today's developing countries are very likely to inform our understanding of the developed world. Including a wider range of countries in cross-country analysis will also deepen our understanding of *all* countries by increasing diversity in important quantities of interest.

Researchers in developed country settings will find important leverage on problems through a deepening dialogue with developing country scholars and research. This new dialogue must supervene on each of the four pillars of the agenda we outline in this article. Engagement between developing and developed country scholars can also make the latter less sanguine about what can be learned from "good" data and "standard" theories; and it has the potential to reinvigorate a variety of literatures. Cross-contextual lessons will encourage scholars to return to core theoretical problems in public administration armed with additional leverage over them. This can help to enrich theory building in the field overall. Finally, the importance of qualitative understanding can provide incentives for developed country researchers to return to the field and to undertake the rich, mixed-method inquiries that have become the standard among their counterparts who study and work in developing country contexts.

None of this is to say the study of public administration in developing countries is not substantively important in its own right—our claim is much the opposite. The substantive returns to "getting public administration right" in the developing world are massive. Public administration scholarship has seen frequent calls to focus on policy-relevant questions which impact the welfare of citizens (e.g., Barzelay, 2019; Roberts, 2020; Wilson, 1994). A scholar of public administration who seeks policy and welfare fruits from research will likely find the most fertile soil in the developing world.

Our article thus closes with a call to action. We urge scholars to take public administration in developing countries seriously, not just as a forum in which to apply, but to generate theories; not merely a source of additional data points, but as a set of unique environments, each of which can teach us many things. Focusing attention and scholarship on public administration in developing countries is likely to benefit scholarly careers. But far more importantly, it is very likely to benefit human welfare.

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