

## Module 2

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# The Theory and Reality of Administration

## Introduction

The purpose of module two is to introduce you to the political context of administrative systems by looking at the different types of structures of government such as the variations in constitutions and legislatures. You will also consider what was until recently a less emphasised aspect of political systems: their cultural context and the social capital that exists within civil society.

As discussed in module one, public administration is a function of political systems. Political systems around the world differ, and as such, the context of public administration differs worldwide. Different political systems structure power in different ways. While the function of public administration is to carry out the policy decisions of its political masters, its actions are constrained not only by people, but also by these structures: in particular, the particular arrangement of political institutions. This module introduces you to the basic structures of political power: constitutions, legislatures, and federal/unitary systems of governments. It reviews the strengths and weaknesses of various organisational and political contexts, particularly with respect to the abilities of administrators to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

Understanding the different structures that underpin administrative systems provides the basis for beginning to think about other factors that influence administrative systems – namely the people that administrative systems provide services to. These people comprise civil society. Recently, scholars have begun to pay more attention to the impact of culture on administrative systems than they have paid to it previously. Module one described how the post WWII welfare state is transforming; specifically, many of its services are being outsourced to the private and the not for profit sector. As such, the importance of civil society to the functioning of the state is growing, while the divisions between the public, private and not for profit sectors are shrinking. This module considers the role culture plays in shaping the administrative context, the increasing emphasis on social capital and citizen engagement. Finally, this module will look at the outputs of administrative systems: public policy.



Upon completion of this module you will be able to:



### Outcomes

- *compare* the different types of constitutions and *discuss* the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- *compare* the different types of legislative models.
- *discuss* how different legislative models represent and structure power.
- *discuss* how culture influences administrative reform.
- *compare* the implicit cultural assumptions behind administrative reform.
- *explain* what social capital is, why it is important, and how it can be fostered.
- *outline* the steps in making public policy.

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## Terminology



### Terminology

Plurality-majority (first past the post)	Individual candidates who win the most votes in a constituency are elected. This is a “winner takes all” electoral system, whereby a winner in a constituency with multiple candidates may not receive a majority of votes.
Proportional representation	A list of candidates from a party is presented to run in a constituency; the number of “winning” candidates from that list is in direct proportion to the number of votes cast for that party in that constituency.
Federalism	A political system whereby the constitution divides power between levels of government.
Unitary	The central (national) government has a monopoly of power; it delegates power to lower levels of government.
Social capital	The connections between people that come from their interactions in voluntary organisations such as churches, service groups and clubs. This “capital” produces societal cohesion because the people involved develop relationships of trust and reciprocity that strengthen communities.

## The organisational and political context of an administrative system

### The constitution

The best place to begin in understanding the various structures, functions, and processes of national administrative systems, is to examine the relationship between a nation's constitution and its corresponding legislature. A country's constitution defines a country's political and legal structure; it defines the country's law making body, or legislature. A constitution stipulates the basic powers of the legislature and its relationship to other state organs and political institutions. Of most importance, the constitution is a statement of the legal relationship between citizens and their governments. The job of a public administrator is to run the country within the prescribed structures, according to the basic principles that are expressed through a constitution.

A constitution directly affects the work of legislatures by describing:

- whether the legislature is unitary or federal;
- the role of the chief executive in relation to the legislature (parliamentary versus presidential);
- the electoral process for representation in a parliament and the structure of parliament, for example if legislative chambers are unicameral (one-chamber or house) or bicameral (two-chambers or houses) and the official powers of presiding officers; and
- the type of political party or alternate system that is encouraged through electoral design or established by law.

While the role that these "rules" have in structuring power might not be obvious, a closer examination reveals their influence.

A good example of how rules structure power is the use of federal systems of government. Federalism is a political system where power is divided between two levels of government that both exert power over the same territory and citizens. As such, laws are divided between the central government and state, provincial, or territorial governments. The majority of governments in the world today are unitary – the powers afforded to local governments are delegated to them by the central government.

The use of a federal system is usually a reflection of a political community that promotes a certain understanding of the role of the state, or seeks to accommodate the needs of diverse groups, especially if these groups are spread over a large land mass. In the USA, federalism was seen as a method to discourage the concentration of power, while in Switzerland, federalism accommodated the needs of three linguistic groups. In Canada, federalism speaks to the need of a French-speaking minority to have a degree of autonomy in its relations with the national



government. As the population of Canada grew, federalism allowed the articulation of regional interests over a vast land mass. Similarly, federalism allows countries such as India, Brazil, and Russia to give more or less autonomy to particular groups. The link between structures and the exercise of power will be explored in more depth later in this module.

In some cases, constitutions will include things that the creators or framers of the constitution aspire to rather than what is currently possible. These may include such items as a right to a clean environment. In addition, in some established constitutional systems, the constitution serves a symbolic function, as in the United States, where it has become the object of loyalty.

The majority of modern constitutions are written. In them, principles are seen to take precedence over laws. Constitutions vary from one country to the next. The following are some elements common to written constitutions:

- A *preamble* introducing the country's constitution;
- A description of *division of powers* or a system of *checks and balances* within and among the nations governing institutions;
- A description of the *structure of governing institutions* which includes the constitutional obligations of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as other political involvement such as the monarchy or military, of government;
- An outline for selecting government officials through a *political party system* or *alternate system*;
- A statement of fundamental *rights* and *freedoms* to be held by individuals; and
- An outline of circumstances and protocol for *amending, revising, and suspending* the constitution.

In countries where there are said to be unwritten constitutions, such as those of Britain, Israel, and New Zealand, the constitution refers to a broad body of common and statutory laws and practices that have evolved over time. In these countries, the legislatures act as the final arbiter of decisions made under an unwritten constitution. As such, the very laws that make up this unwritten constitution can be changed through an act of parliament. One of the primary benefits of this type of constitutional system is that it is very flexible in the event of a constitutional crisis.

Other types of constitutional structures may exist in countries that are not primarily based on political competition. This is illustrated in some countries in the Arab world, where the Islamic code of law or *Shari'ah* often serves as the foundation for the country's legal system. For

example, in Saudi Arabia, the Quran is considered the constitution of the country. In fact, the royal family claims to derive its authority to rule from this religious document. In Afghanistan, the constitution allows non-Muslims freedom to exercise their faith, however, the crime of apostasy (renunciation of a religion) from Islam is punishable with the death penalty.

Some constitutions, like that of the USA, can provide a statement of fundamental rights and freedoms of their citizens. As a statement of shared values, these constitutions can become important national symbols. Other constitutions, however, limit themselves to a description of the country's basic institutional structures. For example, prior to 1982, Canada (like Britain) relied on a variety of case law and other documents for its "unwritten" constitution. The *British North America Act 1867* outlined Canada's basic governing structure, including the federal division of power, the parliamentary system, and the relationship of the British Crown to Canada. When Canadians repatriated their constitution in 1982, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was included along with the formal announcement of principles contained in the *BNA Act*. Because the *Constitution Act 1982* guarantees rights across Canada, it curtails the power of provincial governments as outlined in the federal division of power. For this reason, the primarily francophone province of Quebec refused to sign the constitution. These examples show that because constitutions outline fundamental governing structures, they should reflect the basic values of political community. If they do not reflect the values of the community, they will lack legitimacy. As such, constitutions can be representative of the things that both unify and divide political communities.

### Constitutional engineering

Also known as constitutional reform, this refers to the creation or amendment of constitutions to ensure the future success of a governing system. Because constitutions are so fundamental, constitutional reforms include such measures as changes to the electoral process, or changes to government structures to more effectively represent regional, ethnic, or other minority interests in pluralistic or divided societies. Here are some examples of constitutional reform:

- reforming electoral systems to encourage or discourage smaller parties with an ethnic base, or developing quotas for their representation within government and legislature;
- creating a federal system which allows for some regional or local autonomy;
- designing political systems to limit instability or deadlock between executive and legislature (for example presidential powers versus parliamentary powers);



- creating a system of rights protection, such as the amendments to the US constitution that are collectively referred to as the US Bill of Rights or the creation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada; and
- transforming an informal constitution into a formal one, such as the final step toward sovereignty that Canada took when it passed the *Constitution Act 1982*.

Written constitutions are designed to be difficult to amend; most require more than a simple majority vote. Amendments to a constitution can include legal requirements such as a vote in the legislature with a super-majority in one or both houses. For example the U.S. Constitution requires a two-thirds majority by both chambers as well as ratification by two-thirds of the states in the country. Many countries also require a public referendum after an initial vote in the legislature. Other countries may have different requirements for amending different sections of their constitutions. For example, in South Africa changes to the Bill of Rights requires a two-thirds majority in the lower house and the support of six provinces in the upper house. On the other hand, constitutional amendments only affecting provinces require a simple majority (i.e., 50 per cent plus one in support) in both houses. The reason that constitutions are made difficult to amend is that as the primary governing structure of the country, changing basic rules must only be done when there is a consensus that the benefit of altering the constitution is not only clear, but also desired.

In module five you will learn about the reform process within the context of a legislative development framework. From a public administration perspective, constitutional reform alters basic configurations of power to achieve a particular purpose such as political inclusion through structural change. There are other methods that seek similar goals of inclusion; these will be studied later in this module. But first, we will now turn to examining the functions, types, and contemporary problems of legislatures.

## The legislature

Legislatures are found in nearly all societies, albeit in different forms. Legislatures are representative assemblies empowered to enact statute law. Often, the representatives who comprise a legislature are constitutionally elected by a wide segment of the population. By discussing and passing public policies, legislatures give legitimacy to governments – even those with only nominally representative institutions.

Legislatures represent the process for collective decision making over the passage of legislation. In a democratic system they have some claim to

legitimately represent the public with some degree of equity. As such, they serve representation, law making and oversight functions.

Legislatures are often the branch of government in which popular complaints, dissatisfactions, and demands for action are first articulated. Johnson and Nakamura (1999) attribute this to the fact that legislatures typically operate with greater transparency, or at least with less secrecy, in comparison to either the judicial or the executive agencies of the government. They are also more diverse in their memberships; they are often designed to represent various groups or regions. Moreover, in a democratic system the public has greater access to the legislature through their elected representatives, over which they have a larger claim for action and accountability than they have with other government officials. Legislative proceedings are often organised to include debate and discussion with the public, such as through advisory committees and hearings.

Citizen preferences are defined and implemented through enacting legislation. The process of law making can be difficult and usually requires that the differences in public preferences as stated by various representatives are reconciled. In most legislative bodies, reconciliation of various public interests in law making is carried out through committees. Committee systems provide forums for different groups to express their differences, as well as environments that foster compromise and decision.

Oversight occurs after a law is passed. It involves monitoring executive activities for efficiency, probity, and fidelity. Most legislatures have some formal oversight powers, but effective oversight is difficult to exercise because it requires information about executive branch activities (which is often secret), the legislative capacity to process that information, the legislative will to act, and the power to back up demands for change (Johnson & Nakamura, 1999). Thus, oversight often puts the legislature into an adversarial relationship with at least some portion of the executive branch. As such, in parliamentary systems with a dominant majority (e.g., the United Kingdom and Canada), oversight tends to be less developed than in presidential systems, where different parties can control different branches of the government (e.g., the United States).

Although all legislatures seem to perform the same functions and operate the same way, there are many variations in the structure and the relationships between the various departments and arms of the legislature. These differences are important pragmatically for how the legislature functions, and symbolically, for how well they provide representation for members of the political community.



Similarly, representatives may seem to perform the same functions and operate the same way; however, the behaviours of representatives are influenced by a number of variables including their own personal motivations and how they view their role. They may be personally motivated by the desire: to be re-elected or selected for other positions; to influence policy; to wield power in the legislative body; and to attain private gain. Representatives' behaviour is also influenced by what they conceive their role in the legislature to be. The two most commonly cited conceptions of their role(s) are:

1. **the Madisonian/Delegate model** where the legislative representative reflects and communicates constituency attitudes;
2. **the Burkean/Trustee model** where the legislative representative uses his or her best judgment to determine what is in the best interest of his or her constituency. These are fundamentally different roles, and the behaviour of the representative will reflect these differences.

It should be noted neither of these models of the role of a representative should be considered “right” or “wrong;” there may be a consensus that people should be represented, but not consensus for how this should be done. Moreover, political systems vary in terms of the structure of the legislature that representatives sit in; these differences reflect a political community's understanding of which interests in society should be represented. This will be explored in more detail later in the module, but first we will explore different methods of selecting representatives.

## Variations in systems of representation

So far we have discussed the behaviour of the individual representatives based on their perception of the role. But the design of the system of representation can also influence both the type and frequency of contact that representatives have with their constituents. Of equal importance is the method in which representatives are elected. We now look at the most common electoral systems: plurality-majority, proportional, and semi-proportional systems.

## Electoral systems

### Plurality-Majority

Also known as “first past the post,” plurality-majority is a system where one candidate from each political party stands for election. This system is very simple; the individual candidate who wins the most votes is elected. The United States is an example of this system of representation, where a fixed number of members of the House of Representatives and Senate seats for defined geographical regions are elected by popular vote. In the first past the post Parliamentary system used in Britain and many of her

former colonies, more than two candidates may contest a seat in the legislature. In this case, the winning candidate does not need to gain 51% of the vote; she or he just needs to win votes than any of the other candidates.

Multiple candidates may mean that the winning candidate receives significantly less than a majority of votes. This system is characterised by returning majority governments; it tends to over reward winning parties and those parties with regionally concentrated support. Those parties with diffuse support tend to be underrepresented.

## Proportional representation

In a proportional representation system, voters cast their ballots for a party, not a particular candidate. The number of legislators elected from the party is determined by the percentage of the total vote a political party receives. Parties fill the seats by selecting candidates from a predetermined list (which are ordered in terms of the party's preference of who it would like to see elected). The strength of this system is that if it is determined that a particular underrepresented group needs to be better represented in the legislature, it is a fairly easy thing to do – the party simply puts the minority person high up on the list from which representatives will be selected. Moreover, this system accurately reflects the popular support that parties actually get. Accurately representing support, however, produces the major weakness of this system. As support for particular parties is often fairly evenly divided, this system tends to be less stable than the first past the post system because it tends to produce minority governments.

## Semi-proportional representation

This system is a combination of the plurality-majority and proportional systems. Often a system would be said to be semi-proportional in bicameral (two chamber) systems, where one house may be elected by plurality-majority while the other house be selected by proportional representation. The National Council of Provinces in South Africa provides an interesting example of both indirect and proportional representation in one of the country's two electoral chambers. Provincial legislatures nominate 10 members to the 90 person council. In this way, all provinces have an equal voice in one legislative assembly, regardless of their population. The ten members from each province must proportionately reflect the composition of the provincial legislature. In contrast, the country's members of the National Assembly are popularly elected on a representation by population basis.

The levels of interaction between a representative and his or her constituent are to some degree a function of the electoral design. So for example, in the proportional system where representatives are selected



from a list compiled by the parties, there will be less direct connection between the elector and the constituent because the elector votes for a party as opposed to a particular candidate. As such, the representative has more allegiance to the party that put him or her higher on the party list than other candidates, as opposed to the electors that voted for the party. Similarly, a fixed number of representatives for a particular territory regardless of either its geographic size or population make it more or less difficult for citizens to interact with their representatives. The different types of electoral chambers and the rationale behind them are explored in more depth in the next section.

## Electoral chambers

As noted in the previous section, legislative systems can vary in the number of legislative chambers they have. Historically, two chamber or *bicameral* legislative systems emerged from the Monarchy system in the United Kingdom and other European countries where there was a need to represent the views and interests of both the aristocracy and the common person. Bicameral systems also emerged out of federalist systems, such as that in the United States, where individual states required representation. Currently, there appears to a general trend toward two chambers in emerging democracies.



### Reading

For a more in depth discussion on electoral chambers, please read:

“Legislative Chambers: Unicameral or Bicameral?” accessed from <http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/Docs/parliaments/Legislative%20Chambers.htm>

Bicameral legislatures have two-chambers, often termed the lower house and the upper house. In the lower house, each member represents the same number of citizens in each district or region so that the population is proportionally represented. In the upper house, the way in which members are selected varies. Members to this house may inherit the seat, be appointed by other bodies, or be elected either directly or indirectly to the post. Bicameral systems tend to occur in federal states, because of the two-tiered power-structure.

In strong federal systems, state or local governments have the ability to raise their own revenue, and the national executive and legislature have corresponding weaker powers. The U.S., Germany, and Canada are examples of strong federal systems in that powers are clearly delineated and the boundaries between the two levels of government are respected. Nigeria represents a very weak federalist system, while Mexico falls in between. Canada and India, both former British colonies have, in fact, combined federalist and parliamentary systems. As you will see in the next section, the combination of federalism with the parliamentary

system is a particularly unusual arrangement because parliamentary systems concentrate power in the executive, while federal systems divide power between jurisdictions.

For public administrators working in federal systems, the ability to implement policy in a particular area is limited by whether or not that area falls within their government's (national or subnational) jurisdiction. So for example, in Canada the provision of health care is the responsibility of the provincial governments. The national government was only able to legislate in this area because it negotiated an arrangement whereby the provinces agreed to adhere to the rules established by the national government in exchange for money to provide health care services.



### Reading

For a more in depth discussion on Unicameral and Bicameral systems, please read the UNDP report:

<http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/Docs/parliaments/Legislative%20Chambers.htm>

## Division of power between branches of government

The structure of a country's political system will affect the relations between the legislature and the executive, between the public and their representatives, and among the representatives themselves. Each country has its own variety of one of three political systems, presidential, parliamentary, or hybrid, and corresponding difference in the relations between the executive and legislative power.

In *presidential systems*, both political and administrative powers are divided among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Government officials in these branches serve different constituencies and have different terms of office. With the exception of the American system, presidential systems historically have been associated with authoritarian regimes and politically unstable nations. Countries that the USA has influenced regionally, militaristically, or culturally, such as Latin American countries, also have developed presidential systems.

In *parliamentary or Westminster systems*, Parliament is sovereign and executive authority (the Prime Minister and Cabinet) is derived from the legislature. Parliamentary systems are used by the United Kingdom, much of Europe, many former British colonies and most Caribbean countries.

In *hybrid systems* executive power is shared between the President and a Prime Minister, both of whom are separately elected from the legislature. The hybrid French system serves as a model for former French colonies



in West Africa, including Gabon and Senegal. Other hybrid systems similar to the French system exist in eastern European states such as Poland, Bulgaria, and Portugal. The Portuguese system has also influenced former Portuguese colonies such as Mozambique and Angola.

The following differences in executive-legislative relations signify the differences between the three political systems:

1. The separation of powers or, the extent to which the powers of government are separated functionally between branches and the power (or lack of) of one branch over another. Among the three political systems the competition for control and capacity to introduce legislation varies considerably.
2. The conditions for removal of executive from office.
3. The structure of legislative parties and leadership (i.e., party discipline).

Moreover, each political system carries out the legislative function of creating legislation in slightly different ways.

For a more in depth discussion on how different types of political systems divide power amongst the various branches of government and manage executive-legislative relations, please read the UNDP report:

<http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/Docs/parliaments/governing%20system.htm>



### Reading

The purpose of this brief tour of different political systems is to underscore the fact that institutional arrangements reflect the historical and cultural context of countries. To illustrate the relationship between values and the structure of power, consider the case of two siblings of the same mother: the United States and Canada, both of which were former colonies of Britain. The elder sibling left home abruptly after a major conflict with her mother. In public administration terms, this can be seen as one of the earliest examples of the reinvention of government. The choice to become a republic reflects the desire of the framers of the US constitution to sever all ties with Britain. The choice of a federal system and the decision to separate power between two legislative bodies and the executive reflects a desire to dilute power – in effect to protect citizens from the actions of the state. A quick look at the composition of the framers of the US constitution reveals homogeneity: specifically, white, English speaking men from privileged backgrounds. It would take a civil war to see a constitutional amendment that would bring black men given rights to participate in the political community. The same rights were not extended to women until considerably later. As such, the constitution formally bestowed citizenship to a small constituency; informally,

participation in government was confined to those of a particular socio-economic status.

In contrast to the dramatic rupture of Americans from their colonial roots, one might consider Canada as the younger sibling who refused to leave the comforts of home, even when encouraged to by her mother! Canadian sovereignty is dated to the passing of the *British North America Act 1867*. Unlike the American constitutional framework, Canadians kept the basic parliamentary set up of the British system; they were not concerned by the concentration of power that comes with the fusion of the legislature with the executive in the British Parliamentary system. Interestingly, however, Canadians grafted the American federal system that divided power onto their parliamentary system in order to satisfy the demands of the French speaking population of Canada to have some degree of sovereignty over its own affairs within the larger context of the Canadian system. After many, many years of discussion and argument, Canadians finally took the step to full sovereignty when the *Constitution Act of 1982* was passed. Even so, the French-speaking province of Quebec has never formally approved the enactment of this Act because of some fundamental differences of opinion over how power is structured in Canada. Although Quebec abides by the constitution, the fact that it is not a signatory means that the Canadian constitution lacks the legitimacy (and thus the symbolism) of its American counterpart.

Any attempt to reform political institutions needs to be mindful that the chosen structures must reflect the composition and values of the political community. So, if the political community favours individualism, it may be best to choose a structure that inhibits the concentration of power, such as a presidential and/or federal system. If the political community is comfortable investing considerable powers in elected representatives and the administrative state, then a parliamentary and/or unitary state might be best. Administrative reform should similarly reflect the values and culture of the political community. The next section considers the role of culture in influencing administrative reform. It explains the importance of citizen engagement and the integration of minority interests into administrative processes in order to develop policy that responds to the needs of the community.

## The cultural context of administrative systems

The role of culture as the context for administrative systems, and as a factor in administrative reform is frequently neglected. Culture, however, plays a role in determining the outcomes of governance reforms. Bidhya Bowornwathana (2007) describes governmental culture as:

...the human creation and use of symbols and artefacts in government. It is the way of life of the entire government, covering code of manners, dress, language rituals, norms of



behaviour, and system of belief. Governmental culture is a product of history. Since human beings are both acted upon by culture and act back, new cultural forms and meanings are formed. So the culture of government in a particular country changes alongside changes in the political, economic, and social organizations of society and the global community. (p. 276)

Bowornwathana (2007, p. 275) argues that culture can play three distinct roles, it can be:

1. the independent variable
2. the dependent variable
3. the intervening variable

As the *independent variable*, governmental culture affects the outcomes of reform efforts. As the *dependent variable*, governmental culture changes as a result of governance reforms. Finally, as an *intervening variable*, governmental culture can obstruct the success of reforms.

As an independent variable explaining the success of government reform, governmental culture is only one of several. Bowornwathana identifies other variables as: “managerial, power and politics, neoinstitutional, public choice, globalisation, and leadership.” (p. 292)

Of these, culture tends to be downplayed. From Bowornwathana’s perspective, this is because scholars from the global north tend to see governmental culture as constant, and thus secondary to other factors. Moreover, if the scholar is a political scientist, power and politics explanations are more appealing. (Bowornwathana, 2007, p. 292)

Global south countries tend to be more interested in governmental culture as the dependent variable. Bowornwathana explains that in the global north, regimes are stable and reforms that are focused on improving managerial efficiency are incremental. In the global south, unstable regimes result in shifts between democratic and authoritarian impulses. Civil society is not well developed; citizens are not aware of their rights, nor do they know how to exercise them. Institutions within civil society lack capacity. These combine to centralise power within political elites. Clearly, changing the culture of government takes time and consistent effort.

As an example of culture as the intervening variable, Bowornwathana (2007) uses the example of the failure of performance measures to introduce fairness in evaluation of employees. He explains how superiors manipulate the scoring process to ensure that favoured subordinates receive high scores. In this way, nepotism and patronage are adapted to accommodate the new system and the traditional culture with its bureaucratic dysfunctions remains intact. Clearly, the culture must

change for a new process to achieve its desired goals, or, the goal must reflect the realities of the culture. In the latter case, the goal can be seen as a hybrid of the original practices.

One of the difficulties of studying the role of culture in policy implementation is that culture is difficult to define and to test. In one study of determinants of confidence in the Civil Service in sixty countries, Van de Walle (2007) concludes that the best strategy to understand attitudes toward bureaucracy is to focus on historical, cultural and political factors in any specific locality. He explains:

(r)ather than focusing on current performance of the public sector or on specific or general bureaucratic encounters, the focus in this strategy is not on the present, but on the past. Rather than searching for internationally valid explanations, the focus is on localized explanations, and attempts to reconstruct the constitutive events that have shaped a specific society's understanding of its public sector. (pp. 195-196)

This same strategy might be used not only in theory building, but also in the practice of public sector reform. In an article focused on e-government in Asia, Wescott (2007) makes the observation that:

Countries succeed in adopting ... notions of best practice through a combination of experimentation and imitation. Countries that are geographically and culturally close to countries that have already adopted desired policy and institutional reforms are more likely to succeed in imitating these desired reforms than those more distant. Countries most distant from the policy and institutional models may be successful with experimentation rather than imitation, thereby achieving an outcome closer to their 'ideal'. The least successful reformers are those intermediately close countries that try to imitate, but where the imported policies and structures prove inappropriate. (pp. 353-354)

While this may seem self-evident, it contradicts the dominant post WWII assumptions about the objectivity of administrative science principles. It might also explain why some practices that work well in the global north fail miserably when implemented in the global south. Other scholars such as Schech and Haggis (2000) and Watts (2006) take this thinking a step further. Radcliffe (2006) summarises:

The approaches of these critical thinkers demonstrated how development included not only the specific interventions – projects, programs, loans and aid flows – usually included in definitions of development, but that it was additionally embedded



in the cultural economy of Western capitalist political economies and the cultural histories of European colonialism. (p. 3)

So, for example, Schech and Haggis (2000) challenge the idea that global south women are passive victims of patriarchy that will be liberated through development initiatives through a demonstration of the diversity among women and their agency. Others argue that ensuing economic crises and the export of western culture cause not only economic dislocation, but also social dislocation and alienation (Yakubu, 2002; Prah, 2001; UN Preamble, 2003).

Critical perspectives help to explain the rise of global activism around social differences, particularly given the practical failure of development projects to make a material difference in people's lives and the fear of the cultural homogenising effects of globalisation.

The focus on culture necessarily shifts our gaze from institutions of governance onto civil society, and in particular, citizens that comprise the democratic polity. The next section discusses the issue of integrating citizens into government processes.

## Citizen engagement

Culture may be a difficult concept to define, to quantify, and to use in theory building, which may explain why so little attention has been paid to it. This does not, however, mean that it is not important. A major focus for those concerned about good governance and democracy is the strength of the connection between the governors (the state) and those being governed (citizens), and, the strength of connections among those within civil society. The notion of "social capital" refers to the connections between people that comes from their interactions in voluntary organisations such as churches, service organisations, or clubs. These organisations are sites where citizens interact with a measure of equality; these interactions result in the development of bonds of trust and mutual reciprocity that give communities cohesion. One of the first articulations of this concept was Jane Jacobs (1961) who argued that social networks give cities vitality and a strong base from which economic benefits can be derived. Like financial capital, social capital creates value and can increase through investment. Similarly, social capital can be unevenly distributed, and can serve to exclude as well as include. Thus if social capital is to be the glue that holds society together, its networks must create tolerance by cross cutting religious, ethnic, or class divides.

The most famous articulation of the social capital thesis was Robert Putnam's article "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" (1995). Putnam argued that civic engagement in the US had seen decades of decline; this is the consequence of the decline in group activities in

favour of those done individually. The favourite American leisure activity of bowling had shifted from leagues where players regularly interacted with the same people, to ad hoc individualised games. Replicated across the voluntary sector, the move to more individually-focused activities has, according to Putnam, decreased the bonds that tie Americans together.

While the debate rages on about whether or not social capital is declining in the global north, there are important implications of a focus on social capital for emerging economies. Civic participation and trust in government has long been argued to be important to healthy democracies (Nevitte, 2002; Almond & Verba, 1965). Reform of administrative structures is only one side of the coin; the building of social capital within civil society is the other. Governments have tried to build social capital in the past through supporting voluntary organisations to mobilise (Hall, 2002). These actions, however, run contrary to the idea that the role of government in society should be minimised. Nonetheless, such institutions as the World Bank now recognise social capital as the “missing link” for successfully dealing with intractable problems such as global poverty. Its website states:

Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together. (World Bank, 2013)

This is not to suggest that inserting cultural sensitivities into the economic development process is universally accepted. Some argue that social capital assists economic colonialism of the west through colonisation of the social sciences by the discipline of economics. As Fine (2002) notes that this approach ignores the differentials in power: “social capital is ahistorical and asocial, so it is complicit with mainstream economics” (pp. 796-9). Indeed, even the terminology is grounded in capitalism, as “social relations and networks become ‘capital’ assets that can be employed for income generation” (Nederveen Pieterse, 2006, p. 129).

Development initiatives tend to focus on the social capital’s ability to forge bonds within a community, as opposed to bridging connections between communities thus linking people with different socio-economic status. As a result, efforts to build social capital sometimes means applying blueprints for building grassroots cooperation within communities in an asocial and aspatial manner.

An even more fundamental question is whether social capital can be built using a “top-down” approach with governments or aid agencies



intervention. Some argue that social capital is embedded as it is the product of pre-existing patterns of social interaction (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995). Others like Rico, Fraile & Gonzalez (1999) argue that structural innovations can facilitate the creation of social capital, while Rubenson (2000) argues that active citizenship can be promoted through education that hones necessary skills. From the perspective of Rico et al and Rubenson, given the right conditions, marginalised groups can develop the bonds of social interaction that underpin social capital. The latter perspective in particular, aligns with Rose's (1998) categorisation of social capital as either formal or informal.

Informal capital is based on kinship, friendship, or proximity; it is typically face-to-face and between limited numbers of people. Formal capital, in contrast, is often supported by state or market funding, and is rule-bound, bureaucratic and legal. What is fundamental to both categories, however, is that social capital is not just the aggregation of social networks; it is a category of non-financial "resources" such as "trust" produced by these networks that facilitate both economic development as well as political participation.

The preceding might ultimately raise more questions than it answers with respect to the importance of social capital in fostering and promoting democratic governance. What few would argue is that a civil society that does not exclude people from economic, social or civic participation based on race, ethnicity, gender, or other visible or invisible attributes provides a solid foundation from which to build well-functioning institutional structures. Ultimately, the goal of democratic institution building is to create structures that respond to the needs of all citizens in the political community in a fair and equitable manner. While it is clearly not possible to be everything to everyone all of the time, citizens should feel that the policy process is responsive to their feedback and does not exclude their particular interests all of the time.

## Conceptualising the public policy process

At this point in the course you have read about the array of approaches to studying public administration, the rise of various theories, and the critical analysis of those theories. You have also read about the variety of ways that institutions, and networks of institutions, shape the exercise of political power and the various debates regarding how and why citizens should be engaged in governance. In comparison, the study of public policy is quite straight-forward; it describes, analyses, and explains the causes and consequences of public policy. The conceptualisation of the public policy processes has been quite consistently described as having three stages (Laswell, 1956). These stages are:

1. **Agenda setting.** This stage is where the problem is identified, defined, and ranked in terms of priorities. This stage is political: it involves non-state actors as well as the state.
2. **Policy formulation.** This stage is where the goal of the policy is identified, the instrument is selected, the policy is designed, and the policy is approved. It involves mostly politicians and bureaucrats, but non state actors are involved depending on their level of interest and expertise.
3. **Policy implementation.** This stage involves putting the policy “into action” and then evaluating its effectiveness. Bureaucrats are the primary actors at this stage.

The public policy process is arguably the most important component of public administration. Policy is the output of any administrative structure; it is of concern to all citizens as it shapes the society that we live in. Policy actors vary within any policy process, but as has been demonstrated throughout this module, the institutional context where this process unfolds is equally important. Institutions provide the context for the debate over policy; they shape who is represented and how, and in doing so, some voices are privileged over others. In an ideal world, everyone in the political community has some degree of input into the creation of the institutional form either directly, or, through credible representatives.

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## Module summary



### Summary

As discussed in module one, the study of public administration occurs within a political context. As such, it is important for administrators to have a basic understanding of the various forms of political systems in the world today in order to understand and effectively compare policy-making, its implementation and its evaluation across governments.

Constitutions, both written and unwritten, provide the fundamental principles governing nations, and often lay out the framework for political systems within the nation. Political systems, and the role and structure of a nation's legislature (which is the forum in which public policies are discussed) reflect a particular configuration of power that privileges some groups within the political community over others. The structure that distributes power should reflect the values of the political community; if it does not, the structures will lack legitimacy.

Analysing how existing structures of political and administrative systems operate, and the principles that underpin them, provides an understanding of the problems facing legislatures today in fulfilling their three major functions – representation, lawmaking, and oversight. This analysis equips administrators to ensure good governance.

As states move toward “governance,” that is, as the distinctions between the public, private and not for profit sectors merge, the role of civil society in fostering democratic structures increases. This module has reviewed some of the debates around “social capital” as component of governance; these debates are both academic (how do you measure social capital?) and practical (how can it be used to enhance democracy?).

Now that you have an understanding of the political systems, the structure of legislatures, and the role of civil society, we can turn our attention to global ideas and trends that are having an impact on the operations of administrative systems globally. These are the focus of the next module.

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## Assessment



### Assessment

**Answer the following questions with reference to both the larger global context, as well as your local context. Ensure that you provide examples to illustrate your points.**

1. Explain how constitutions structure power in a political community.
2. Explain what the purpose of constitutional reform is, and how different reforms can affect arrangements of power within a political community.
3. Explain how different legislative configurations reflect different political values.
4. Explain how different electoral systems reflect different political values.
5. Explain how different political systems divide and/or separate powers between different levels and branches of governments and how the different configurations reflect different political values.
6. Assess whether or not the cultural context of administration has been adequately accounted for in public sector reform.
7. Explain the relationship between social capital and citizen engagement, and assess the importance of both to administration.
8. How can social capital be leveraged to enhance trust in government, political participation, and economic development?



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