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Abstract: Public administration literature usually assumes that citizens’ participation in administrative decision-making (PDM) processes can improve public sector performance and trust. In this article, we question the universality of this assumption, arguing that PDM processes will have positive results in terms of performance and trust only when there are available channels to influence policy outcomes and democratic participatory behavior. We construct theoretical arguments based on a mechanism of social learning and illustrate them by reference to the case of Israel. The framework highlights the centrality and importance of culture and social characters for the study and planning of public administration reforms.

Keywords: trust, citizen participation in decision-making, social learning, political culture, alternative politics

The appropriate role of citizens in public administration has received significant attention from both practitioners and academics (Ebdon, 2002; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Weeks, 2000). This interest is basically the result of public disenchantment and apathy at the end of the twentieth century, which expressed itself in a low level of trust in government in many Western democracies...
Most studies assume that citizens’ participation in administrative decision-making processes (PDM) can improve public sector performance and have therefore concentrated on finding the most efficient methods of participation—usually at the local level and/or in the budgeting process (Berner, 2003; Church et al., 2002; Franklin & Ebdon, 2004; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Orosz, 2002; Simonsen & Robbins, 2000). Other studies have stressed that a stable democracy requires citizens’ participation and involvement (e.g., Barner & Rosenwein, 1985; Box, 1998; 1999; Frederickson, 1982; 1997; King, Feltey, & Susel 1998; King & Stivers, 1998). Citizens’ trust in government was found to be related with political efficacy, trust in citizenship involvement, and participation in politics, all of which are major concepts in the modern discourse about democracy (Almond & Verba, 1963; Citrin & Muste, 1999).

The literature about PDM is rich, and over the years empirical findings have been gathered from public organizations in Europe (e.g., Summary, Yoder, & Eby, 1990), the Far East (e.g., Jong & Hiromi, 1995), Australia (e.g., Hazel, 1989), South America (e.g., Aguilar, 1996) and developing nations worldwide (e.g., Devas & Grant, 2003; Dibie, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2001). This data has added to the core knowledge gathered from the American public sector (e.g., Walters, Aydelotte, & Miller, 2000; Weeks, 2000). Apparently, however, little research has been conducted in this context in the Middle East, especially in Israel.

While the findings of these studies point to a generic relationship between PDM, higher performance levels, the increased satisfaction of citizens and employees, and the formation of a generally healthy environment for public organizations (e.g., Nyhan, 2000), the studies also point out the difficulties in exporting PDM techniques to private and public organizations in other cultures and nations. They also illustrate the obstacles in implementing PDM techniques in other professions and in impacting the everyday work tasks of public personnel (Coursey & Bozeman, 1990; Jong & Hiromi, 1995).

In this paper, we question the universality of PDM mechanisms, which were developed to a large extent in the context of American society, and the implicit assumption that citizens’ participation in administrative decision-making processes can improve public sector performance and thus trust. We suggest that understanding the benefits of participation is pre-conditioned by democratic participatory behavior and that democratic societies may differ in the ways they interpret the democratic ethos, thus forming different types of political cultures. Given that a specific political culture does not necessarily include democratic participatory behavior, PDM strategies should be carefully reviewed and adjusted to the political culture.

More specifically, we argue that Citizens’ participation in administrative decision-making (PDM) processes will positively affect trust only when certain conditions exist, in other words, when there are channels available to influence policy outcomes and democratic participatory behavior. Citizens are likely to understand the relationship between involvement in decision-making
processes and trust only after they go through the process of learning about these relationships. Such a learning process is not trivial because it is pre-conditioned by a certain institutional setting. To elaborate on this argument, we will consider the ways in which cultural, structural and social factors as well accumulated experience and institutions influence processes of social learning (Giddens, 1979; Hall, 1993; Hong, 1999; Huber, 1991; Mantzavinos, 2001; Mantzavinos, North, & Shariq, 2004; Wang & Ahmed, 2003).

The theoretical arguments will be illustrated by reference to the case of Israel. We will explain the learning processes that Israeli citizens have gone through until they reached the point where the dominant mode of political participation can be characterized as alternative politics. That is, when people are dissatisfied with policy outcomes but cannot, or do not want to exit or protest (voice)—usually because they believe that conventional democratic influence channels are blocked—they often initiate non-institutionalized mechanisms to create alternatives, illegal or semi-legal, to governmental services (Ben-Porat & Mizrahi, 2005; Lehman-Wilzig, 1992; Mizrahi & Meydani, 2003). It follows directly from the theoretical framework developed in this paper that under these conditions of blocked influence channels and alternative politics, Israeli citizens are likely to discount the idea that their involvement in administrative decision-making processes would have any effect on performance. Thus, this variable is unlikely to be a good predictor of trust in public administration.

In other words, the level of democratic participatory behavior can explain the degree to which citizens recognize the benefits and contribution of PDM. If the level of democratic participatory behavior is low due to a lack of democratic awareness, the public first has to learn about the advantages of participation before they can be efficiently integrated into administrative decision-making processes.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the main arguments regarding the increased involvement of citizens in administrative decision-making, both from a normative perspective and based on empirical studies that refer to citizens’ participation in areas such as budgeting, planning and health care organizations. Next, we present the theoretical framework, and suggest an interpretation of socio-political processes in Israel based on the theoretical framework. Finally, we highlight the main insights of the paper and its possible implications for the study and planning of administrative reforms in democratic societies.

CITIZENS’ INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT, TRUST, AND SOCIAL LEARNING

Empowering Active Citizens: The Centrality of Citizen Involvement and Participation

Participation in decision-making is one of the most studied concepts in management and business administration. The early studies on PDM from the late
1950s and early 1960s developed the rationale for increasing the involvement of employees and other stakeholders in organizational processes. Methods such as Quality Circles or MBO (Drucker, 1974; Vroom & Yetton, 1973) have brought the topic to the forefront of managerial theory and affected the public administration arena as well. This rapid growth of interest went hand in hand with the strengthening of democratic ideas in many countries, especially with post-World War II dynamics that called for a higher level of individual involvement in decisions made by high-ranking officials in both political and business administration (Callanan, 2005).

However, the early studies of PDM have suffered from several limitations. The first is cultural bias, which makes PDM difficult to translate to other cultures and ethnic groups. For example, PDM strategies that worked in the Far East were inadequate in Western societies. Even within Western cultures, the implementation of PDM techniques varied, witness the differences between the United States and Europe. Another serious limitation of the early studies on PDM was their failure to consider the political dynamics, influence tactics, and general organizational politics that strongly affected the development of PDM processes and their implementation in organizations (Vigoda-Gadot, 2003). Finally, one of the most significant limitations of early studies on PDM was the overly simplistic tendency to search for direct relationships between this concept and public sector performance. In the face of these limitations, our study offers a more thorough understanding of the field, one that is moderated by other factors such as learning and culture.

The involvement of citizens in public administration decision-making, as well as possible reforms in that direction, have been the focus of public administration research for several decades (Arnstein, 1969; Ebdon, 2002; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Weeks, 2000). For example, public hearings are one of the most frequently used methods of participation, yet such public participation often proves inefficient in several ways (Berner, 2003). Arnstein (1969) and Church et al. (2002) suggest viewing community input as a spectrum or “ladder” of participation. The lower rungs of the participation ladder comprise processes in which power holders seek to educate the public about particular issues. Higher up on the ladder are processes through which power holders consult individuals or groups who could potentially be affected by a proposed or current policy. Still higher up on the ladder, power holders and interested parties agree to share responsibilities for decision-making. On the top rungs of the ladder, lay individuals dominate decision-making. This level of participation requires a transfer of decision-making power from traditional decision-makers to lay individuals.

Adams (2004) found that PDM in the form of public meetings have an impact on policy processes by conveying the concerns of the citizenry to public officials. He therefore concludes that PDM is a direct and strong support of the democratic ethos. Walters et al. (2000) provided a more detailed model for broadening public involvement in policy decisions and suggested
two determinants of success in this process: the purpose for the public’s involvement and the nature of the issue. Similarly, Weeks (2000) presented results from four large-scale trials in cities with a population of more than 100,000 to suggest that it is possible to convene a large-scale, public, deliberative democratic process that enables local governance to take effective action on major policy issues. From the intra-organizational perspective, Nyhan (2000) conducted a literature review of more than 100 articles and books to examine the role of PDM among public sector employees. He found that PDM and feedback from and to employees, and empowerment of employees lead to increased interpersonal trust and higher productivity in public organizations.

This approach is also supported by democratic participatory theory suggesting that participation in decision-making processes increases the players’ responsibility for the outcomes, so the players tend to accept and cooperate with the system (Dahl, 1971; Pateman, 1970; Putnam, 1993). Moreover, participation in decision-making processes may strengthen the sense of group identity and correspondingly, loyalty to the group/organization (Bouckaert, Van de Walle, Maddens et al. 2002; Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990; Osterman, 1999; Rose, 1999). In this manner, widespread participation of citizens in decision-making processes helps increase the performance of public agencies and the trust in them. Fornell, Anderson, Cha et al. (1996) demonstrated, for example, that monopolist companies receive lower client satisfaction ratings than non-monopolists because the use of the latter companies depends on free choice. Therefore, the monopolistic nature of many government services alone could explain part of the dissatisfaction.

Highly involved citizens might become more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to make, and the improved support from the public might create a less divisive, combative populace to govern and regulate (Irvin & Stanbury, 2004; King et al., 1998; King & Stivers, 1998; Putnam, 1993). Irvin and Stanbury (2004) focused on the role of culture when weighing the advantages and disadvantages of citizens’ participation. They concluded that the ideal conditions for citizens’ participation are based on strong community ties, small groups organized locally, a willingness to volunteer and the urgency of the issues at stake.

Similarly, Fung and Wright (2001) studied several participatory mechanisms operating in a variety of cultures and structural conditions. They pointed to the usefulness of such mechanisms for solving particular problems, usually at the local level, yet they also highlighted the limitations of generalizing such mechanisms to the national level and to complex issues. Fung (2006) elaborated on Arnstein (1969) and Fung and Wright (2001) in developing a framework for understanding the range of institutional possibilities for public participation. He argued that mechanisms of participation vary with regard to three important factors: who participates, how participants communicate with one another and make decisions together, and how discussions are linked with policy and public action. Characterizing participatory methods according to
these factors can help us design the proper mechanism for achieving social goals such as legitimacy, justice and effective administration.

These studies support the idea that there are positive relationships between PDM, trust in public agencies and performance. However, in this article we try to identify those potential conditions that are required for such relations to exist, emphasizing the role of institutional setting, political culture and social learning. In other words, we argue that observed relationships between PDM, trust in public agencies and performance are, first and foremost, formed in the mind of citizens through a learning process and only then find expression in empirical data. Given that such learning processes are culturally dependent, we cannot assume that they actually occur in every social setting. Rather, we suggest that the political culture necessarily influences such learning processes and hence the extent to which a relationship between PDM, trust and performance actually exists in a given society. We now discuss the ways in which social learning may explain the diffusion of ideas throughout various social domains.

Individual and Collective Learning, Institutions, and Culture

The ways in which people learn about their environment and accumulate knowledge about their society have been studied from various angles by numerous researchers. This discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is conventional wisdom that individual and collective learning are formed through complex interactions between individuals and social/structural factors (Giddens, 1979; Hall, 1993; Hong, 1999; Huber, 1991; Mantzavinos, 2001; Wang & Ahmed, 2003).

Learning is conventionally said to occur when individuals assimilate new information, including that based on past experience, and apply it to their subsequent actions. Thus, Hall (1993) defines social learning as a deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information. From a sociological perspective, Giddens (1979: 64) suggests the concept of structuration, which implies recognizing the existence of knowledge of “how things are to be done” on the part of social actors, social practices organized through the recursive mobilization of that knowledge and capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes.

Similar approaches can be found in the organizational literature where collective learning at the organizational level is termed organizational learning (Argyris, 1995; Glynn, 1996; Handy, 1989; Senge, 1990). It affects change in organizational behavior while it sustains organizational self-identity. Organizational learning theories present different models. Kolb’s theory of learning (1971), for example, views collective learning as an individual process. It is a cyclic process of doing, reflecting, thinking, deciding and (re)doing. Yet, Huber (1991) has enhanced the aspect of memory. Huber identified four
components of organizational learning: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory. Learning, by means of accumulating collective knowledge and insight can be theoretical or experiential.

From a new institutional perspective, Mantzavinos et al. (2004) explore the cognitive processes of individual and collective learning as an experimental mechanism. Referring to individual learning, they adopt an approach that views human learning as related to problem solving, i.e., any human activity involves problem solving, and the individual is constantly engaged in learning ways to solve problems—either existing ones or new ones (Argyris, 1995).

People accumulate knowledge through their mental model. The model is based on a coherent, but transitory set of rules that enables people to make predictions about the environment based on the available knowledge (Mantzavinos, 2001). A mental model helps the individual formulate solutions to given problems. When this mental model, as well as inferential strategies, does not solve the problem, the individual is forced to form new, creative, mental models and to try new solutions. It follows that individuals learn existing or new ways to solve problems through direct interaction with the environment. Therefore, norms, values, and ideas conveyed to the individual through cultural and educational mechanisms may play a significant role in the learning process and the creation of mental models. This idea is basically supported by other learning theories presented earlier.

Referring to collective learning, when individuals communicate with each other to try to solve their problems, the direct result is the formation of shared mental models, which provide the framework for a common interpretation of reality and give rise to collective solutions to the problems arising in the environment (Denzau & North, 1994; Mantzavinos, 2001). Hence, the process of social learning also involves the diffusion of ideas from one social domain to another, e.g., ideas and mental models constructed through social interaction may influence political behavior and vice versa (Damico, Conway, & Damico, 2000; Giddens, 1979; Mantzavinos, 2001; Newton, 2001). Such diffusion processes may be complex and indirect and in most cases are mediated by cultural or institutional factors (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Damico et al., 2000; Newton, 2001). Indeed, some studies employed theories of skill and resource transaction between social institutions to argue that the tradition of citizens’ involvement is acquired through a process of political learning (e.g., Pateman, 1970; Peterson, 1990; Sigel, 1989; Sobel, 1993; Soss, 1999; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). While these studies related institutional actions or culture to individual political participation, they rarely considered the mutual relationships among democratic participatory behavior, citizens’ involvement in decision-making processes and trust in public agencies. In the next section we hypothesize on these relations using the rationales discussed above.
PDM, Performance, and Trust in a Democratic Culture: How to Put the Puzzle Together?

The literature presented in the previous section provides theoretical support for the idea that there are positive relationships among five elements:

1. the level of citizens’ involvement and participation in decision-making processes within the public sector,
2. the perception of the quality of management in public administration,
3. the perception of the public sector’s performance,
4. the level of trust in governmental agencies and
5. the level of democratic participatory behavior.

At the core of these relationships is the impact of the first element on the other four (for further discussion of these variables and their measurement see: Vigoda, 2000; 2002; Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2008).

Given that trust in public agencies is usually considered the most significant outcome of these relationships, we suggest a set of four propositions. These propositions are summarized in Figure 1. The first proposition suggests that trust in public administration is positively related to PDM. The rationale for this proposition is based on the idea that citizens who participate in the making of decisions are likely to feel responsible for the outcomes and thus have a higher level of trust in governance and in public administration.

Yet, these elements may also be related to democratic participatory behavior in several ways. In particular, we suggest that there are direct relationships between democratic participatory behavior and PDM, which then influence the other variables mentioned above. To explain these relationships, we refer to the learning mechanism presented in the previous sub-section.

As explained in the previous section, any human activity involves problem solving, where the individual is constantly engaged in learning ways to solve problems—either existing ones or new ones. Individuals are likely to participate in decision-making processes in both the bureaucratic and political arena only after they learn that such a strategy indeed helps solve social problems in their particular society. In other words, the two variables—citizens’ participation in administrative decision-making processes and democratic participatory behavior—are necessarily related because they belong to the same category of problem solving mechanisms. Once citizens learn that participation in decision-making processes is an efficient problem solving mechanism in one domain, they are likely to employ it in any area of their lives, resulting in its use in public and private venues.

In a similar vein, Peterson (1990) and Sobel (1993) described the relationship between work and politics as a spillover effect. This notion arose from early research on the work/non-work relationship (Blauner,
The spillover model states that the nature of one’s work experiences will carry over into the non-work domain and affect attitudes and behaviors there. It posits transference of beliefs, attitudes, and values learned in one setting to another. The degree of involvement at work will be directly related to the degree of involvement in social roles outside the workplace (Champoux, 1981; Randall, 1988). Moreover, influences also flow from family and religion to the community or to the political system (Crouter, 1984; Price, 1985). Sobel (1993) suggested a spillover effect in the opposite direction where intense participation in politics

1964; Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer et al., 1971). The spillover model

Figure 1. The Propositions of the theoretical framework.
might influence work participation, PDM, and one’s attitudes towards the organizational environment.

Thus, participatory behavior may evolve either at the organizational/bureaucratic level or at the national/political level. Once it has proved successful at one level, it is likely to be duplicated at the other level. Yet, adopting participatory behavior in one arena and learning about its effectiveness is pre-conditioned on the existence of a decentralized institutional setting—both formal and informal—that provides channels for such participation (Dahl, 1970; Pateman, 1970; Putnam, 1995). If both the organizational/bureaucratic and the national/political spheres are characterized by a high level of centralization, then such learning processes are not likely to develop. Thus, a decentralized institutional setting in at least one of the above-mentioned areas is a necessary condition for a PDM reform to increase perceived management quality, performance and trust. Given that organizational/bureaucratic systems tend to be hierarchic and centralized while democratic political systems usually provide channels for democratic participatory behavior at the national/political level, we may infer that the learning process will usually start at the national/political level and then will be diffused to the organizational/bureaucratic level. This analysis allows us to posit two additional propositions.

The second proposition suggests that PDM is related to political participation either positively or negatively depending on the nature of social learning. Intensive learning about the advantages of participation will breed a positive relationship, whereas the absence of such intensive learning will result in negative relationships. Hence, democratic participatory behavior will motivate PDM via learning. In addition, the third proposition suggests that the nature of political participation is positively related to the nature of the institutional setting. Democratic participatory behavior is pre-conditioned on a decentralized institutional setting, whereas a centralized institutional setting breeds lower levels of participatory behavior.

Putting it a little differently, we suggest that the relationship between PDM and performance (and trust) depends on the nature of the political culture. This idea is presented in the final and fourth proposition: Public sector performance (and thus trust) is related to PDM either positively or negatively depending on the nature of the political culture. A participatory political culture will motivate positive relations between PDM and performance, whereas a non-participatory culture will encourage negative relations between PDM and performance.

In this paper we argue that Israeli society has gone through learning processes at the national/political level that have led to the internalization of a problem solving approach characterized by unilateral solutions. As a result, participation by the public in the political arena has focused on the use of alternative politics. This mode of behavior significantly differs from democratic participatory behavior, and therefore the necessary condition
for successful implementation of PDM has not been fulfilled. Furthermore, we will suggest that similar conditions exist in many centralized, often Third World, systems, meaning that the public sector really cannot serve as a central agent of democratization.

ALTERNATIVE POLITICS AS A KEY FEATURE OF POLITICAL CULTURE

The Israeli Case Political Culture in Israeli Society

In this section, we will demonstrate that Israeli society is characterized by a non-participatory political culture, which makes it difficult for the public to believe that their participation in decision-making has any real effect on outcomes. Therefore, contrary to the assumptions made by the studies presented in the second section, the Israeli public is also unlikely to believe that PDM mechanisms such as public hearings, citizens’ governing boards, and citizens’ conferences will result in better public sector performance and increased trust in government. In other words, in Israel the necessary condition for the successful integration of citizens into administrative decision-making has not been fulfilled. In fact, several empirical studies of citizen attitudes in Israel demonstrated the weakness or complete lack of relations between PDM and trust (Mizrahi, Vigoda-Gadot, & Cohe n, 2007; Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2008; Vigoda-Gadot, Mizrahi, Miller-Mor et al. 2008). Thus, any reform program in Israel must take into account the characteristics of its political culture, which is analyzed below.

Israeli political culture can best be described by what we term the alternative provision of public services or alternative politics. Specifically, during the 1980s and 1990s many groups and individuals in Israeli society employed non-institutionalized initiatives to create alternatives, often illegal or semi-legal, to governmental services. The 1980s were characterized by a significant growth in the “black-market economy”—particularly the illegal trade in foreign currency, “gray-market medicine”—expressed in the semi-legal, private supply of health services using public facilities, “gray-market education”—expressed in the employment of privately paid teachers and the evolution of independent private schools, and pirate cable networks—all of which were alternatives to inadequate governmental services (Lehman-Wilzig, 1992). In the 1990s, this mode of behavior spread to other policy areas such as internal security, social welfare, and even the policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict (Ben-Porat & Mizrahi, 2005). Indeed, during the 1990s, it became clear that, for the most part, only initiatives of this kind could help people access the services they needed (Mizrahi & Meydani, 2003).

Furthermore, the Israeli government responded positively to those initiatives by changing its policies in the direction demanded by these groups. The rules
became more decentralized than previously—particularly in the fields of foreign currency trade and the communications market (Bruno, 1993). In the fields of education and health care, the government followed the lead set by society and initiated several reform plans leading towards decentralization (Chernichovsky, 1991; Yogev, 1999). These processes intensified during the 1990s when unilateral initiatives and alternative politics were expanded to a wide variety of fields such as internal security (Zinger, 2004), social welfare services provided by ever-growing third sector organizations (Gidron, Bar, & Katz, 2003) and civil marriage procedures (Lehman-Wilzig, 1992). Furthermore, in this process the legislative and the executive authorities were weakened, while the Supreme Court, which enjoyed public legitimacy and trust, was considerably strengthened (Barzilai, 1999; Mizrahi & Meydani, 2003).

Although these processes seem very central to the understanding of Israeli society, they have not been included in sociological or political analyses. One possible reason for the ignoring of these factors is the now conventional view of students of Israeli society and politics that since the late 1970s, Israeli society has become imbued with Western influences. In the eyes of these analysts, Israel appears to have embraced all aspects of Western society including acceptance of a free market economy, an emphasis on the individual, and a private ownership orientation (Arian, 1998; Horowitz & Lissak, 1989). To a large extent, many view these cultural changes as the core explanation for any social and political development in Israel. Thus, the fact that the Israeli political system has become more voter-oriented than it previously had been is attributed to American influence (Barzilai, 1999), and policy changes in the direction of retrenchment of social services is attributed to the emergence of free market ideologies and values that replaced the old welfare state tradition (Doron, 1999).

Under certain conditions, this basic view may also help explain the processes we are concerned with here. If most Israelis now feel that services should be provided by the private sector rather than the public one, then alternative institutions can be understood as in keeping with this attitudinal change. Furthermore, internalization of such values may signal a move towards a more liberal and pluralistic political culture, thus laying the groundwork for PDM reforms. We will argue, however, that during the 1980s and 1990s Israeli society has actually moved in the opposite direction. The internalization of liberal values as well as the respect for the rule of law have continuously declined, and the degree of violence has dramatically increased (Bar-Tal, 1998; Landau & Pfeffermann, 1988; Migdal, 2001; Shprinzak, 1986). According to the World Bank governance indicators, Israel has experienced a sharp decline—from 84.2% in 1996 to 80.8% in 2002, 75.5% in 2003 and 73.4% in 2005—in the various indicators measuring the rule of law (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2006).

Thus, in this section we outline an alternative explanation that focuses on the learning process through which Israeli society went regarding
problem-solving mechanisms that transformed the strategies adopted by individuals and groups for influencing policy and politicians. The transformed political culture has little to do with conventional democratic participatory behavior, meaning that there are no solid grounds for PDM reforms. It follows directly that the structural and cultural conditions in Israel significantly differ from those in the United States, meaning that most of the PDM literature developed in the American context should be applied carefully. Furthermore, we suggest that there are similarities between the Israeli case and other centralized, often developing, societies.

The Evolution of Alternative Politics in Israel

The framework elaborated in the previous section suggests that the nature of a given institutional setting, i.e., its level of centralization, strongly influences the nature of its political culture, i.e., its level of participatory behavior and plurality. The specific nature of the political culture then motivates learning processes, which in turn determine whether the relationship between PDM and trust will be positive or negative.

Referring to the Israeli institutional setting and political culture, it is commonly agreed that they were shaped by the rule of the British Mandate in Palestine from 1917–1948. As explained elsewhere (Mizrahi & Meydani, 2003), the Jewish community in Palestine under the British Mandate had a relatively large measure of autonomy in managing its own affairs in most fields of life (Arian, 1997; Horowitz & Lissak, 1978, 1989; Migdal, 2002; Shprinzak, 1986). The Jewish leadership, elected via a relatively independent political system, created independent organizations, separate from those of both the British authorities and the Arab community, to accelerate economic development, provide public services such as health, education and welfare, and develop an infrastructure such as electricity, roads, water supply, and building construction. Thus, the idea that the Jewish community could not trust others and had to create its own institutions and organizations gradually became a building block of the Zionist ethos.

At the same time, facing significant threats from the Arab population and a British ban on widespread Jewish immigration, as well as the aspiration to expand Jewish settlement in Palestine, the Jewish leadership gradually built illegal para-military forces that had three main goals: fighting the Arab paramilitary forces, organizing illegal Jewish immigration, and establishing and defending illegal settlements. These channels of activity were not only “alternative,” but also illegal as far as British mandatory law was concerned. The political culture that was passed down to generations of Israelis included the idea that acting via unilateral initiatives that might skirt the letter of the law, and sometimes even operate outside formal regulatory structures, is not only permitted, but actually serves national goals. To a large extent, this
became the modus operandi of Israeli society (Lehman-Wilzig, 1992; Migdal, 2001; Shprinzak, 1986).

The approach of unilateral initiatives was repressed during the 1950s and 1960s, when Israel’s political, administrative and economic systems were highly centralized (Aharoni, 1998; Mizrahi & Meydani, 2003). This centralism also prevented the development of strong interest groups and significantly slowed down the development of a civil society based on liberal values (Horowitz & Lissak, 1989). During the 1950s and 1960s, Israeli society did not exert significant pressure for change, even though political participation through voting was intense. Nevertheless, the approach of solving problems by unilateral initiatives was expressed during the 1950s and 1960s at the level of personal relations where citizens developed informal routes to bypass the highly centralized bureaucracy, thus partially implementing a “do-it-yourself” strategy (Shprinzak, 1986).

A significant change in the development of Israeli political culture came in 1967 with the Six Day War (Barzilai, 1996; Naor, 1999). As explained elsewhere (Mizrahi & Meydani, 2003), the war gave rise to nationalistic and religious feelings regarding the holy places in the West Bank, which heralded the re-appearance of the mental model that characterized the pre-state period, i.e., solving social problems through unilateral initiatives. In the mid-1970s, the creation of illegal settlements became the core activity of a large grassroots movement—Gush Emunim—the young guard of the mainstream National Religious Zionist party. In their settlement activity, they applied a strategy similar to that used by the Jewish leadership during the British Mandate, i.e., well-planned overnight forays.

Using the framework of Mantzavinos et al. (2004), we can infer that the settlers employed the shared mental model that had been developed during the pre-state period as a useful means of solving social problems. They even called themselves “the true Zionists” (Ra’anana, 1980). In doing so, they created alternative methods for establishing settlements. The strategy of unilateral (private) initiatives has proven useful for forcing a specific policy on the government, and it has gradually been institutionalized in the formal game rules of government.

The process analyzed so far signaled the evolution of unilateral initiatives in many other fields in Israeli society as well. As explained elsewhere (Horowitz & Lissak, 1989; Lehman-Wilzig, 1992; Mizrahi & Meydani, 2003), socio-political processes in the 1970s and 1980s increased political fragmentation, intensified social divisions, and downgraded the rule of law as well as the functioning of public administration. These dynamics created the impression among the public that the political system was facing a deep crisis—the inability to govern efficiently and provide public services (Arian, 1997; Horowitz & Lissak, 1989). The Israeli public experienced a continual failure on the part of the government to provide public services, coupled with a lack of effective channels through which they could influence the government.
Furthermore, although the first seeds of reform and change in the management of the public sector were planted at the end of the 1970s with the political revolution that brought the Likud to power, these seeds did not blossom into widespread systemic change and were not sufficiently nurtured by the major political parties (Galnoor, Rosenblum, & Yeroni, 1999).

Given these structural conditions, large sectors of Israeli society attempted to find alternative means of solving social problems through existing or new, shared mental models. As in the process analyzed earlier regarding the settlers, these sectors also interpreted the problem of government failure combined with blocked influence channels as an “old problem.” Therefore, like the settlers, numerous individuals and groups in Israeli society unconsciously employed solutions that had proved useful in the past, namely, unilateral initiatives. As exemplified earlier, such initiatives have spread to all areas of life.

Explaining these processes in terms of problem solving mechanisms and learning processes that originated in the pre-state period allows us to argue that Israeli political culture is characterized by alternative politics.

This concept represents a completely different set of values and strategies than conventional democratic participatory behavior. Its core characteristics can be summarized as follows.

1. A “do-it-yourself” (or unilateral initiative) approach that is widely used by citizens in many areas of life. Such an approach does not allow much room for the bargaining and mutual comprises that are the prime goals of democratic participation and PDM reforms.
2. Alternative politics is characterized by a complex mix of private and public finance, facilities, provision and consumption. The need to form such a complex mix usually pushes citizens to operate semi-legally or through illegal channels that are diametrically opposed to the core values of democratic participation and PDM reforms;
3. Alternative politics thrives when the circumstances that feed it have been in place for long periods of time (i.e., several decades), so that citizens internalize it through learning and socialization processes; and
4. As a central characteristic of the political culture, alternative politics spreads to all areas and levels of social and political life.

In particular, as explained in the previous section, there is a diffusion of these values and practices into the public sector, thus overruling the possibility of PDM reforms. The analysis so far has shown that all these conditions have been fulfilled in the Israeli case.

This characterization is especially important because it means that Israeli society has gone through a transformation of its belief system that is likely to spread to all areas of life including attitudes towards the public sector. In contrast, if we follow the thinking of Lehman-Wilzig (1992) and Mizrahi & Meydani (2003), and characterize this behavior as an ad-hoc strategy, we
would have to infer that not all of society has gone through these belief changes. Therefore, the diffusion of this mode of behavior into all areas of life will not necessarily occur. In other words, if attempts by Israeli citizens to create alternative public services to those of the government are understood as a short term strategy to solve a particular problem, these processes will not necessarily affect reform programs.

We argue, however, that these processes express a deep transformation of the belief system and the political culture and should be considered prior to any reform of the administrative or political system. In particular, this transformed political culture is significantly different from what is usually meant by democratic participatory behavior. Therefore, attempts to integrate citizens into administrative decision-making processes are likely to face great difficulties because Israeli citizens do not necessarily recognize the benefits of participation.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY: LEARNING, PARTICIPATION, AND THE DEMOCRATIC ETHOS

This article discusses the mutual dependence of political behavior and decision-making procedures in the public sector. While it is usually assumed that citizens’ participation in administrative decision-making processes can significantly improve the way they evaluate public sector and trust, in this paper we question this assumption in order to identify the necessary conditions for such an assumption and the derived model to hold.

The framework elaborated in the paper has an important implication regarding the study of public administration reforms in democratic societies. Researchers and theorists of public administration tend to assume that in democratic societies, citizens internalize the democratic ethos with its concomitant values and motivations. Furthermore, it is often assumed that some of the building blocks of the democratic ethos, such as the benefits of participatory behavior, are universally understood. Based on these implicit assumptions, students of public administration construct theories and models regarding desired reforms in general and PDM reforms in particular. Yet, the analysis in this article suggests that understanding the benefits of participation is preconditioned by democratic participatory behavior and that democratic societies may differ in the ways they interpret the democratic ethos, thus forming different types of political cultures. Since a given political culture does not necessarily include democratic participatory behavior, PDM reforms should be carefully reviewed and adjusted to the political culture.

The article analyzed the process of social learning based on the idea that any human activity involves problem solving, and the individual is constantly engaged in learning ways to solve problems—either existing ones or new ones. This approach was utilized to develop a twofold argument. First, the process
of social learning includes the diffusion of behavioral patterns from one area of life to another. Internalization of the benefits of democratic participatory behavior at one level, i.e., either the organizational/bureaucratic or national/political level, is likely to spread to other levels, and therefore, learning processes in these two domains are necessarily interconnected.

Furthermore, since bureaucratic organizations are hierarchic and centralized, while democratic political systems usually provide channels for political participation, we suggest that the direction of diffusion is likely to be from the political/national to the bureaucratic/organization domain rather than in the opposite direction. It follows that democratic participatory behavior is a necessary condition for the successful integration of citizens into administrative decision-making procedures. If this condition is fulfilled, such integration and reforms are expected to increase trust in government and then, in a cyclic dynamic, feed the motivation for democratic participatory behavior.

Second, processes of social learning help explain the evolution of unilateral initiatives and alternative politics as central characteristics of Israeli political culture. These characteristics significantly differ from what we term democratic participatory behavior because they actually attempt to bypass conventional participatory channels by acting outside of, or on the margins, of the law. If PDM reforms are implemented under these conditions, citizens are unlikely to understand the advantages of participation. Most likely, they will adopt a behavior of alternative politics and try to utilize these mechanisms to bypass the system and create shortcuts in the administrative process. In fact, as explained earlier, these were the main characteristics of the Israeli centralized bureaucratic system throughout most of its existence, and the general political culture will only strengthen these tendencies rather than transform them. Given this analysis, we argue that since the necessary condition for the successful implementation of PDM reforms is not fulfilled in Israeli society, it is not yet ready for such reforms.

It follows that the structural and cultural conditions in Israel significantly differ from those in the United States, meaning that most of the PDM literature developed in the American context should be applied carefully. Furthermore, we suggest that there are similarities between the Israeli case and other centralized, often developing, societies. Helmk and Levitsky (2004) point to a set of informal norms (“blat”) that have emerged in the Soviet Union—set up by individuals and personal networks to provide basic needs—which have created incentives to behave in ways that alter the substantive effect of formal rules, without directly violating them. They also characterize substitutive informal institutions—such as the alternative provision of public goods in rural northern Peru and in rural China—as aimed at achieving what formal institutions were designed, but fail, to achieve.

Furthermore, Helmk and Levitsky note that such alternatives emerge where state structures are weak or lack authority. Thus, alternative politics characterizes societies in which the conventional democratic mechanisms
either do not exist or do not function properly. Imposing PDM reforms in such societies may result in a complete failure because people in such societies are not sufficiently socialized to participatory democratic behavior.

The framework expanded on here opens up a wide variety of opportunities for further research. First, it identified at least three elements that should be operationalized for empirical measurement: a problem solving approach characterized by unilateral initiatives, alternative politics, and the perceived level of openness of influence channels. Second, given such variable definitions and measurements, it will be useful to test the argument elaborated on in the paper empirically, both in Israel and in another society for the sake of comparison. A comparative study that integrates these variables will enable us to explain the ways in which different interpretations of the democratic ethos influence public sector functioning and reform programs. It can also shed some light on other conditions required for the successful implementation of PDM reforms.

REFERENCES


