Book Review

Bring Back the Bureaucrats by John J. DiIulio, Jr.

Benjamin M. Brunjes – University of Washington

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There is a long tradition of scholarship assessing how organizational complexity influences public administration. As governments are increasingly reliant on one another and on private sector partners in all phases of the policy process, researchers have attempted to determine how to best manage complex networks (O'Toole, 1997), identify the ramifications of intergovernmental policy devolution (Rivlin, 2009), and provide insights into reform efforts that strive to make governments operate more like for-profit firms (Box, 1999). In these studies, scholars have struggled with determining what these changes mean for both public values and organizational management. From the perspective of public values, organizational complexity can weaken democratic accountability mechanisms and reduce transparency (Rosenbloom & Piotrowski, 2007). Management scholars worry that complex structures increase transaction costs and widen information asymmetries between government principals and their private sector agents (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2006; Peters & Pierre, 1998). With increasing complexity, measuring and managing performance become at once both more necessary and more difficult to accomplish (Moynihan, 2008). However, the promise of increased efficiency and effectiveness, along with ongoing political pressures, has spurred the use of complex organizational structures anyway (Kettl, 2006).

In *Bring Back the Bureaucrats*, John J. DiIulio, Jr. highlights many of these longstanding concerns, expressing frustration with a federal government that is increasingly behaving as a "leviathan by proxy." DiIulio, currently on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania and a fellow at the Brookings and Manhattan Institutes, calls for a return to direct service provision through the hiring of a million new federal employees by 2035. Though other scholars have noted that federal employment has not kept pace with public demands for services (Light, 2008), few have presented such direct hiring recommendations. In DiIulio's view, a stronger federal bureaucracy will reduce much of the uncertainty about where and how federal funds are used, provide a closer tie between government and American citizens, and limit the influence of contracting and intergovernmental lobbies. As a result, this proposal is consistent with calls for a return to the centralization of policy implementation and a firmer control of administrative activities from institutional overseers (Balla, 1998; Wood & Waterman, 1991). For others who have embraced complexity, networks, and collaboration as management challenges of the future, the core themes of this book are an indictment of much of the propriety of much of the discourse in public administration today. Should scholars be more worried about the dark sides of public service delivery networks and their potential to undermine traditional democratic institutions? DiIulio strongly advocates for taking steps to reduce complexity as a way to protect public values, ensure more effective use of public funds, and increase administrative accountability.

DiIulio's argument rests on the assertion that today's federal government is both huge and hidden from view. Through the use of grants, contracts, and intergovernmental agreements, federal agencies are involved in nearly every aspect of American society. However, due to the mechanisms used, the extent and cost of a system is obscured from most citizens. Political actors have allowed this to occur to curry favor with an electorate that demands ever more despite a

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cultural aversion to "big" government. Through the use of debt financing, which places the financial burden of policies on future generations, and proxy administrative instruments (such as grants and contracts), political actors have been able to provide desired services without raising taxes despite long-term threats to the nation. In this system, corporate and intergovernmental lobbies have a strong interest in maintaining the ever-growing flow of federal funds, which, over time, have come to be essential for many firms, charities, and governments. As a result, some of the core elements of democracy, primarily responsiveness to citizens and the checks and balances system, are at risk as self-interested organizations and politicians bargain over the dispersal of funds behind closed doors. According to DiIulio, the problem is exacerbated by a weakened bureaucracy, which lacks the human capital to effectively oversee grants and contracts, thus creating a system that further enables special interests to subvert democratic processes.

DiIulio's argument is clearly presented and backed by numerous reports from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Congressional Budgeting Office (CBO), and non-governmental think tanks, which indicate that complexity is increasing in federal agencies. As many scholars in public administration (Moe & Gilmour, 1995), political science (Mayer, 1995), and law (Minow, 2003) have recognized, the influence of innumerable, varied actors with uncertain motivations has the potential to significantly alter policy processes in this country. However, these studies tend to presume the dominance of certain public values, usually accountability and control, over other values, such as responsiveness and efficiency. Importantly, DiIulio holds that these other values, purportedly associated with networks, contracts, and grants, are not being achieved due to the lack of sufficient administrative capacity in the federal government. This argument is both powerful and important for the discourse around public policy and public administration in the United States.

However, it is also a familiar argument to public administration scholars. Indeed, concerns associated with contracting, grants, and intergovernmental networks have been voiced for decades (DeHoog, 1984; Frederickson, 1997; Moe, 1987; Raab & Milward, 2003) particularly regarding implications for democratic values and human capital concerns. There have even been prominent calls for returns to stronger, bureaucracy-led government (Olsen, 2006). It is here that DiIulio fails to deliver on his promise. DiIulio references very little of the relevant existing and active scholarship on topics central to his argument. He claims that "for the most part, respected academics have learned to love Leviathan by Proxy and profess various concepts and techniques for manipulating and mastering it in the public interest" (p. 82). With this generalization, DiIulio discounts both the breadth and diversity of scholarship on these topics in the public affairs literature. In doing so, he fails to take advantage of a wealth of theoretical and empirical knowledge regarding how complexity has influenced public organizations. As a result, his proposed systemic remedies are not backed by the leading empirical evidence and ring hollow. DiIulio falls back on general prescriptions that are overly reliant on political decision-makers who are extremely unlikely to act on the problems presented due to the political culture that he blames for creating the problem.

Bring Back the Bureaucrats is the sort of book that could be a rallying flag for scholars and practitioners of public administration. Indeed, it is widely recognized that the current federal workforce is shrinking per capita, and that procurement officials in particular are overworked and undertrained. Further, there are many who worry about how contracts, excessive lobbying, and the diffusion of authority will affect public values and democratic institutions. Those who are concerned about these trends will find this book both informative and underwhelming. DiIulio makes a strong case that "Leviathan by Proxy" is a threat to our government system but

fails to present realistic policy solutions based on empirical evidence and the decades of scholarship that should inform this discussion.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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Author Biography

Benjamin M. Brunjes is an assistant professor at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Washington. He is a public management scholar whose research focuses on the implications of structural complexity and third party governance for public programs. He has ongoing research related to contractor performance, contract design, the management of public grants, representation and source selection, the effectiveness of competitive mechanisms, and the relationship between discretion and performance. Prior to entering the academy, Professor Brunjes served as an analyst and project manager for the Homeland Security Institute in Arlington, VA. He received his Ph.D. and M.P.A. from the University of Georgia, and holds and B.A. in Politics from the University of Virginia.