

1 Introduction

We see many calls to serve. From volunteer appeals drawing upon inspirational quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King (“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?”) to poets like Ralph Waldo Emerson (“It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.”). The role of service and cooperation in the United States can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville’s 1831 visit to America (de Tocqueville, 1831), as he describes:

As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found each other out, they combine. From that moment they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose actions serve for an example and whose language is listened to. (109)

As a result, we often see calls to service in US presidential inauguration speeches, from President John Kennedy’s (1961) often quoted “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country” to President George H. W. Bush (1989):

I have spoken of a Thousand Points of Light, of all the community organizations that are spread like stars throughout the Nation, doing good. We will work hand in hand, encouraging, sometimes leading, sometimes being led, rewarding . . . The old ideas are new again because they’re not old, they are timeless: duty, sacrifice, commitment, and a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching in.

During his term, President George H. W. Bush signed the National and Community Service Act of 1990, creating a new federal government agency to oversee national volunteering programs, now called the Corporation for National and Community Service. In highlighting the passage of the latest reauthorization, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009, Michelle Obama emphasized, “Service is a part of who we are as Americans,” and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stated, “In these great times of great challenge, America needs more people like all of you—rolling up your sleeves and pitching in to turn challenges in your communities into opportunities to serve” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2009). Service is at the heart of our American democracy.

However, social capital has been on the decline (e.g., Putnam, 2000) and the United States is facing increasing polarization from the labor market to politics to societal values. The government has become the bearer of risk as the United States faced three major shocks in recent decades: the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Great Recession of 2009, and the 2020 pandemic (Roberts, 2020). As we write this, our country faces not only the global

COVID-19 pandemic but also social unrest following the killing of George Floyd during an arrest, bringing attention to both police conduct and racism in our society. These events have shined a bright light on and exacerbated inequities and divisions across the nation (e.g., Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Wright II & Merritt, 2020). Scholars emphasize the need to overcome political divisions in favor of collaboration and argue: “To fully understand the crisis and response, research will need to incorporate constructs that capture ideology or values of elected leaders and their constituents” (Hall et al., 2020, p. 591).

Political ideology explains a proportion of the public’s views across a range of issues (Lauderdale, Hanretty, & Vivyan, 2018), but a significant proportion remains. In light of growing political polarization, Banda and Kirkland (2018) illustrate that higher party polarization in state legislatures reduces citizen trust in their state policy makers. Increasing polarization has led to not only a lack of trust in government among the public and a lack of consensus building among lawmakers, but also polarization of the American public by political party affiliation (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015). Assessments of candidate traits are increasingly polarized (Hetherington, Long, & Rudolph, 2016), and both Democrats and Republicans increasingly dislike members of the opposing party (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). With party identification driving clear divides, scholars are searching for a means to explain and reduce intergroup conflict. Yet greater empathy corresponds to higher polarization and greater partisan bias (Simas, Clifford, & Kirkland, 2020). With Americans increasingly divided by political party, could public service motivation (PSM) provide a common ground of concern for others rooted in public institutions?

Across fields and disciplines, scholars strive to understand what drives individuals, from managers wanting to understand employee motivation to politicians and policy makers wanting to understand public opinion. In public management, research on PSM has gained significant traction. Perry and Wise (1990) first defined PSM as the “predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions” (368). While conceptually PSM would extend beyond the workplace, and empirically, research finds high-PSM individuals enact more prosocial behaviors both within and beyond the workplace, we know little about how PSM might shape an individual’s attitudes and policy preferences. In addition, research on the antecedents of PSM are largely mixed (see Pandey & Stazyk, 2008; Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016). Therefore, we ask:

- Who has PSM? More specifically, what individual characteristics, socioeconomic factors, and sociocultural factors shape PSM?
- Can and does PSM drive public opinion? More specifically, how does PSM influence US public policy preferences and budget priorities?

As we discuss throughout this Element, particularly in the remainder of this section, the theoretical foundation of PSM lies in an individual's intrinsic valuation of broader public ideals, such as protecting the rights of others, belief in a civic duty to serve the public interest, or the importance of responsibly serving one's community and nation. In short, the concept and the instruments developed to measure PSM to date focus on a predisposition toward compromise, service, and the rights of others. Thus PSM might reflect a broad set of shared values important for identifying common ground across partisan identity and policy preferences that may reflect these broader values. Unfortunately, to date, little empirical attention has been given to the linkages between PSM, political identity, and policy preferences.

Our purpose throughout this Element is to offer a first look at these relationships, using a national sample in the United States, to fill this gap and motivate additional attention from the research community on how latent values and motivations relate to political and policy preferences. We view this work as useful not only for informing the theoretical refinement of the PSM concept but also for understanding what values underly public opinion that may in turn shape policy making, either directly through the decision making of elected officials and administrators alike or indirectly through the role of public opinion in the policy making process. For instance, framing policies linked to PSM in appeals to public values or the broader public interest may be an effective route to building support in policy making and implementation. Additionally, PSM may guide administrative decision making or administrators may find appeals to public values or to the broader public interest useful in aiding the successful implementation of some programs but not others.

In the remainder of this section, we define PSM and highlight the value of the concept. We then provide an overview of the current literature on both the antecedents and consequences of PSM.

In the following sections of this Element, we present our findings and their implications for both research and practice. We describe our data, a national sample of adults surrounding the 2016 US presidential election, variables, and methods in Section 2. We present our findings on how individual demographics and characteristics as well as socioeconomic and sociocultural factors shape PSM in Section 3. We discuss our findings on how PSM relates to policy preferences and budget priorities in Section 4. In light of the role PSM plays in prosocial behaviors outside the workplace, we also examine whether the influence of PSM extends to political engagement and political behaviors in Section 4. We then place our findings in the context of prior work, discuss the implications of our results, and raise avenues for future work in Section 5. We conclude with a summary of our key findings and contributions in Section 6.

1.1 Defining PSM

The groundwork for PSM began with studies examining public/private differences (e.g., Allison, 1980; Boyne, 2002; Perry & Rainey, 1988; Rainey, 2014; Rainey, Backoff, & Levine, 1976; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000) and the values of public service, such as fairness and benevolence (Frederickson, 1997), as well as representativeness (Mosher, 1968). At their core, these studies recognized that public management is different. Public administration is a separate field of study due to the need to connect political science with the management of government and nonprofits, as well as to connect businesses and organizations with social purposes. But scholars like us continue to wonder: Does something unique draw people to public service?

While research highlights important differences across job sectors (e.g., Piatak, 2015, 2017, 2019; Holt, 2018, 2020), PSM scholarship demonstrates that the public service ethos to help others is boundaryless. Individual career decisions are based on numerous factors (for a review of sector motivations, see Piatak, forthcoming). Just because a person leaves a government agency or nonprofit organization may not mean they lost their motivation to serve others, nor does working for a for-profit company mean someone has no desire to serve the public interest. Research on sector switching illustrates those in for-profit organizations move to the public sector in pursuit of intrinsic rewards (Bozeman & Ponomariov, 2009; Georgellis, Iossa, & Tabvuma, 2011), and government employees often stay to serve society (Hansen, 2014). Interestingly, government and nonprofit employees who volunteer are also less likely to move out of public service (AbouAssi, McGinnis Johnson & Holt, 2019), perhaps illustrating the need for PSM driven individuals to serve others regardless of within or outside of the workplace. With the growth of corporate social responsibility, social enterprise, and paid volunteer service hours, people may find ways to fulfill their PSM in opportunities that were unimaginable decades ago.

A unique feature of PSM is the multi-motive nature of the concept. Perry and Wise (1990) envisioned PSM encompassing rational (self-interest), normative (values), and affective (emotions) motives. People are complex and most decisions, actions, and views are not based on a singular motive. We see this as one of the benefits of PSM over related concepts in other disciplines (for a review, see Koehler & Rainey, 2008; for examples, see Piatak & Holt, 2020a, 2020b). Based on the original conceptualization of PSM (Perry & Wise, 1990), there are several rational reasons to serve the public, such as participating in the policy process, personally identifying with the program, or advocating for a special interest. Whether working in government, volunteering, running for office, or making everyday decisions as a citizen such as what cause to support, these

rational reasons may play a role. From the norm-based perspective, Perry and Wise (1990) suggest PSM includes a sense of loyalty and duty to the government, a desire to enhance social equity, and a desire to serve the public interest. Here, too, one can see these values as core to many Americans, regardless of their career goals, as these are some of the values at the foundation of our democracy. People are not only driven by reason and values but are also emotional beings. As such, PSM includes the affective motives of conviction of social importance and care for others, or what Perry and Wise (1990) dub willingness to sacrifice for others.

In light of the multi-motive aspect of PSM, Perry (1996) later developed a PSM survey and put forth four dimensions of PSM: commitment to the public interest, attraction to policy making, compassion, and self-sacrifice. Scholars have called for an examination of the dimensions (e.g., Wright & Grant, 2010), used the dimensions in examining how PSM corresponds to individual behavior (e.g., Clerkin et al., 2009; Piatak, 2016a), and called for specific dimensions to be transported to other disciplines (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2015). PSM measurement has received a great deal of attention, including creating alternate scales (e.g., Coursey & Pandey, 2007; Kim et al., 2013; Perry, 1996; Vandenabeele, 2008a). However, many raise issues with the multidimensional approach and highlight the benefits of the global scale (e.g., Piatak & Holt, 2020a; Vandenabeele, Ritz, & Neumann, 2018; Wright, Christensen, & Pandey, 2013). In pursuit of parsimony and coherence (Gerring, 1999), as well as to reap the benefits of a multi-motive construct, we focus on the overall concept (and measure) of PSM rather than a dimensional approach.

These multi-motives can be used to explain many decisions, behaviors, and views. Of course, people driven by PSM may pursue careers oriented toward serving the public, but PSM may have a much broader application. For example, an individual may consciously decide to be more supportive of Black-owned businesses to support the social justice movement. Rational: This individual may personally identify as Black or with the Black Lives Matter movement or this individual may want to be an ally or anti-racist. Normative: this individual may care deeply about social equity or the public interest. Affective: This individual has a genuine conviction to anti-racism or cares about others and our country and so is willing to sacrifice support for one business over another. In a simple choice, of perhaps which restaurant to order takeout from, people inherently evoke multiple types of motives. If PSM captures the public-oriented motivation behind everyday decisions, behaviors, and preferences, then its reach extends well beyond public management.

While PSM originated from examinations of what draws people to public service (Rainey, 1982), PSM extends beyond the public sector. As Perry and

Hondeghem (2008) argue, PSM may “transcend the public sector, that is, characterize motivations in other areas of society that involve the pursuit of the public good” (3). Definitions of PSM illustrate the broad reach of the concept. PSM has been defined as follows:

- “the motivation people have to serve others and contribute to the welfare of society at large” (Brewer, Ritz, & Vandenabeele, 2012, p. 1)
- “motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public service” (Brewer & Selden, 1998, p. 417)
- “denotes the idea of commitment to the public service, pursuit of the public interest, and the desire to perform work that is worthwhile to society” (Scott & Pandey, 2005, 156)
- “a mix of motives that drives an individual to engage in an act that benefits society” (Taylor, 2007, p. 934)
- “a cluster of motives, values, and attitudes on serving the public interest” (Taylor, 2008, p. 67)
- “the belief, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate” (Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 547)

Due to the reach of PSM, scholars call for PSM research to establish conceptual boundaries (e.g., Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016; Bozeman & Su, 2015; Vandenabeele, Brewer, & Ritz, 2014). Many scholars include other concepts, such as altruism, within definitions of PSM. For example, Perry and Hondeghem (2008) define PSM as “individual motives that are largely, but not exclusively, altruistic and are grounded in public institutions” (6), and Rainey and Steinbauer define PSM as “a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation, or humankind” (23). Piatak and Holt (2020a, 2020b) find that while altruism and PSM have some overlap, they are distinct concepts and PSM is a more consistent predictor of prosocial behaviors. We define PSM as the drive to help others, based in public institutions.

1.2 Why Motivation Matters

Motivation plays a central role in human behavior. For organizations, personal motivation shapes administration behavior (Simon, 2013). How to motivate employees is one of the central questions facing public management (Behn, 1995). As such, PSM research has grown dramatically to examine the motivation and behaviors of public employees. Indeed, Vandenabeele, Brewer, and Ritz (2014) suggest PSM as a means to motivate public employees, promote prosocial behavior, and connect public institutions to their core values.

PSM research tends to focus on government employment. This is largely due to origins (Perry & Wise, 1990; Rainey, 1982) that grew out of studies on public and private differences (e.g., Boyne, 2002; Perry & Rainey, 1988; Rainey, 2014; Rainey, Backoff, & Levine, 1976; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000) and public values (Frederickson, 1997; Mosher, 1968), as well as the data available. In a review essay, Ritz, Brewer, and Neumann (2016) find about three quarters of empirical work on PSM uses public sector data. Little work has examined PSM across job sectors. Instead, job sectors are often used as a proxy for PSM. However, the influence of PSM extends beyond government and even beyond the workplace.

Employees are whole people. What motivates an individual to join public service or exert extra effort at work may influence individual behavior and attitudes outside of the workplace. While the debate over whether PSM is a stable trait (e.g., Holt, 2018; Witteloostuijn, Esteve, & Boyne, 2017; Wright, Hassan, & Christensen, 2017), malleable state (e.g., Vandenabeele, 2011; Ward, 2014), or both continues, we follow Perry and Wise's (1990) conception that PSM is, at least in part, a *predisposition*. Surely, "the relation between motives and action is not usually simple; it is mediated by a whole chain of events and surrounding conditions" (Simon, 2013, p. 157). PSM can be enhanced and inhibited by the context of the world and interactions with others, but some people seem to care more about public service than others. We see PSM as a trait that may increase or decrease based on an individual's surroundings and interactions.

Understanding PSM, who tends to have higher levels of PSM, and how this shapes public policy preferences and priorities has several important implications. First, the influence of PSM may extend beyond behaviors to policy views. Public opinion shapes policy making and, in turn, policy outcomes. As such, public opinion plays a predominant role in policy-making theories, from helping to open policy windows (Kingdon, 1995) to explaining periods of policy instability and change (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010). In this sense, PSM may be a factor in understanding public support for certain policies and policy changes in the United States.

Second, PSM may influence the priorities, decisions, and actions of public employees. Since high-PSM individuals may be drawn to public service positions (e.g., Clerkin & Cogburn, 2012; Holt, 2018; Piatak, 2016a; Stritch & Christensen, 2016; Vandenabeele, 2008b; Wright, Hassan, & Christensen, 2017), understanding how PSM shapes policy preferences and priorities provides insights into the priorities of government employees, nonprofit employees, and policy makers, to the extent individuals sort into such positions.

Lastly, PSM may be a useful concept for other fields and disciplines, including political science. As an interdisciplinary field, public administration tends to

borrow and build upon theories from other fields and disciplines. PSM is one of the few concepts to originate in public administration and public management (Meier, 2015; Piatak & Holt, 2020a). With increasing applicability (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2015), perhaps PSM is a useful concept to understand not only motivation for behaviors to advance public service, but also attitudes about public service and how to serve the broader public.

1.3 Antecedents of PSM

Along with questions of why people are motivated come questions of who is motivated by PSM. Considering the positive outcomes of PSM, scholars have examined the antecedents. However, since PSM originated out of studies on motivation to join public service (e.g., Rainey, 1982), research tends to focus on how organizations and management can inhibit or enhance PSM (for a review, see Harari et al., 2017). While the question of whether PSM is an inherent trait, dynamic state, or both remains, we follow the perspective that PSM is a predisposition. As such, we focus on the influence of *individual* characteristics, socioeconomic, and sociocultural factors in shaping PSM. Outside of the workplace setting, what factors shape an individual's PSM?

Despite the research attention on the determinants of PSM (for reviews, see Pandey & Stazyk, 2008; Parola et al., 2019), research is largely mixed, particularly for our understanding of how demographic characteristics relate to PSM. For example, reviews on age and gender illustrate a mix of conflicting findings and null results (Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016). Studies are largely limited by the data available. Most work on the antecedents of PSM use samples of government employees (e.g., Bright, 2005; Camilleri, 2007; Vandenabeele, 2011), those in public service (e.g., Charbonneau & Van Ryzin, 2017), or volunteers (e.g., Perry et al., 2008), which biases the sample toward people already drawn to service.

Since PSM extends beyond the workplace, who exhibits higher levels? Using a national sample of US adults, we examine the influence of individual characteristics, socioeconomic factors, and sociocultural factors in Section 3. But first, we review what we know about who has higher levels of PSM.

1.3.1 Individual Characteristics

Sociodemographic characteristics are primarily control variables in examinations of PSM (Pandey & Stazyk, 2008), but there has been some work on the antecedents of PSM and these largely begin with demographics (e.g., Bright, 2005; Perry, 1997; Vandenabeele, 2011). Research tends to find higher levels of PSM with age and among women, but there are important nuances, discussed as follows.

Age

Research on the relationship between age and PSM has drawn upon psychological theories of development (e.g., Pandey & Stazyk, 2008). In particular, Erickson's (1963) generativity helps explain why the desire to make the world a better place for future generations and to have an enduring impact increases with age. As an individual gets older, the desire to have a positive influence on society and guide younger generations increases. A meta-analysis of thirty studies finds support for PSM increasing with age, but also finds this may vary by country context (Parola et al., 2019). Some find PSM declines with age, such as in the context of state civil servants in Flanders (Vandenabeele, 2011) and among Maltese public officers (Camilleri & Van Der Heijden, 2007), while Perry (1997) finds PSM increases with age in the United States.

Gender

Women tend to be more other-oriented. Research consistently finds women are more likely to volunteer than men (e.g., Musick & Wilson, 2008; Piatak, 2016b; Piatak, Dietz & McKeever, 2019), as women have a greater sense of obligation to help others (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Riccucci (2018) suggests biology, psychology, and socialization shape women's predisposition to a more nurturing nature, certain value system, and socialization into gender roles that align with PSM. Despite nuances across dimensions (Camilleri, 2007; DeHart-Davis, Marlow, & Pandey, 2006), women tend to have higher levels of PSM than men (Bright, 2005; Parola et al., 2019; Vandenabeele, 2011).

The individual attributes examined depend largely on government surveys available (like the Merit System Protection Board Survey; e.g., Naff & Crum, 1999) or those gathered (like the National Administrative Studies Project; e.g., DeHart-Davis, Marlow, & Pandey, 2006). Since surveys of government employees tend to require a partnership or at least approval of a government entity, the data gathered is sometimes limited. For example, detailed information on race and ethnicity is collected in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey but not shared publicly (e.g., Nelson & Piatak, 2019). While some studies examined racially underrepresented groups broadly, no significant results were found in relation to PSM (Bright, 2005; Charbonneau & Van Ryzin, 2017). This may be due to differences across racial groups that disappear when grouped into a binary white, non-white indicator.

We build upon the growing work on individual characteristics to examine not only age and gender, but also the influence of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and transgender in shaping an individual's PSM.

1.3.2 Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic factors may also play a role in shaping PSM. However, only education has received any significant attention.

Education

Education is the most consistent predictor of PSM (Pandey & Stazyk, 2008). Indeed, PSM research finds those with higher levels of education have higher levels of PSM (Bright, 2005; Camilleri, 2007; Perry, 1997; Vandenberg, 2011). This may be due to the socialization effect of education (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2009; Stubager, 2008). For example, MPA students have higher levels of PSM compared to MBA students (Van der Wal & Oosterbaan, 2013). Similarly, government professionals with a background in public administration or political science view their role as policy making more than those who studied other fields (Piatak, Douglas, & Raudla, 2020). While these are specific to degree programs, the act of pursuing each level of education may expand an individual's world view and social network.

We know far less about the social factors of marital status and having children, as well as the economic factors of employment and income. Using a dimensional approach to PSM, Camilleri (2007) finds those married with children at home have a higher commitment to the public interest and compassion, but we know little of the independent influences. Few have examined employment and income since many of the studies are based on government or public service employees. However, Perry (1997) found income had a negative influence on PSM. Perhaps those with higher incomes are more business-oriented and less service-oriented. Due to largely employee samples and work-focused surveys, we know little about how socioeconomic factors, aside from education, shape PSM.

We examine not only the role of education but also the potential influence of family and employment status, such as marital status, presence of children, disability, employment status, and income, on PSM.

1.3.3 Sociocultural Factors

People are shaped by their beliefs, values, and socialization. As a result, socialization has received a great deal of attention in the PSM antecedents literature. However, this work largely focuses on one's upbringing (e.g., Charbonneau & Van Ryzin, 2017; Perry et al., 2008) and organizational influences (for a meta-analysis, see Harari et al., 2017). How do current sociocultural factors outside of the workplace influence PSM?

We focus on two factors that are often studied in relation to public opinion (e.g., Zaller, 1992) but less frequently in PSM research: the role of politics and religion.