PUBLIC SERVICE
MOTIVATION AND PUBLIC
OPINION

Examining Antecedents
and Attitudes

Jaclyn S. Piatak
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Stephen B. Holt
University at Albany, State University of New York
Public Service Motivation and Public Opinion

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Jaclyn S. Piatak
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Stephen B. Holt
University at Albany, State University of New York

Author for correspondence: Jaclyn S. Piatak, jpiatak@uncc.edu

Abstract: Practitioners, policy makers, and scholars across fields and disciplines seek to understand factors that shape public opinion and public service values, especially in today’s polarized context. Yet we know little about how the two relate. Research on public service motivation (PSM), a drive to help others grounded in public institutions, has grown to examine career decisions and behaviors within and outside the workplace, but does the influence of PSM extend to individual values? Using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study surrounding the 2016 US presidential election, we first examine the antecedents of PSM: How do individual characteristics as well as socioeconomic and sociocultural factors influence levels of PSM? Second, we describe the role PSM plays in shaping public opinion on policy preferences, budget priorities, and political behaviors. Findings have implications for understanding both who has PSM as well as how PSM shapes public preferences, attitudes, and behaviors.

Keywords: PSM antecedents, public opinion, public service motivation, policy preferences, political participation

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