
CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE STATE EXECUTIVE SERVICE: A RESEARCH NOTE*

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Demographic data on public employees address two prominent public administration issues: the representativeness of bureaucracy and the qualifications of its personnel. A "representative bureaucracy" reflects the social characteristics of the population and is measured by the access of social groups to government jobs. The relationship between representative bureaucracy and democracy is well established in the public administration literature. A common assertion is that representative bureaucracy reflects attitudes, values, and policy preferences of society, thereby promoting administrative responsiveness to public needs (Meier 1987, 180). Others argue that public confidence increases in political institutions as they become more representative of the population they serve, and the perception of bureaucracy as open to major social groups, particularly women and ethnic minorities, has a necessary symbolic, legitimizing, and stabilizing effect on political systems (Krislov 1974, 64; Krislov and Rosenbloom 1981, 71). A highly qualified, competent, and professional workforce is an equally laudable societal value. It is gauged by the educational attainments and relevant experience of public servants. This study, reporting the demographic composition of the executive service in selected states, has implications for both of these salient concerns.

The data for this study were collected in 1977 and 1988 by mailed questionnaires designed to study state executives' political activities. In order to promote comparability of the two data sets, they were collected by similar methods. In 1977 questionnaires were mailed to state executives in seven states—Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, West Virginia. These states, identified as having the "most restrictive" Hatch Acts (Committee on Political Activity of Government Personnel 1967, 62-72), were selected because a circumscribed environment is expected to produce the strongest objection to Hatch Acts, the greatest political activity if restrictions are relaxed, and the most "extreme

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case” scenario of the consequences of Hatch Act repeal. In 1988 questionnaires were mailed to state executives of eight states (those surveyed in 1977, plus Texas).

Mailing lists for both surveys were compiled from state directories of agencies and officials (Pearson 1978, 237; Pearson and Castle 1990, 15). From these documents “executives” were identified by the following or equivalent job titles: assistant agency director, division or bureau director, assistant division or bureau director, program coordinator, and assistant program coordinator. Positions in only the following agencies were considered: health, education, welfare, highways, transportation, personnel, employment security, and public safety. State directories yielded the names and addresses of 1,250 executives in 1977; from these a random sample of 1,000 was selected to receive questionnaires, and 78.3 percent responded. Directories produced the names of 1,485 executives in 1988; a random sample of 1,000 was selected, and 75.8 percent returned questionnaires.

Although these data were collected for studying state executives’ political activities, they are used in this note for a secondary purpose. We focus on them to draw tentative inferences about the demographic composition of the state executive service, recognizing that these data may not reflect the political, social, and economic characteristics of all states.

Table 1 addresses the representativeness issue by comparing aggregate demographic features of 1988 state executives and 1980 state populations. This exercise demonstrates the under-representation of females, ethnic minorities, youth (25-29 year olds), and persons over 59. In other words, these groups occupy a smaller proportion of executive positions than their percent of the population. Males, whites, and middle-aged persons (40-59) are over-represented among state executives, producing a higher percent of executives than their proportion of the population.

Examination of longitudinal changes in executive demographics reveals some progress toward a representative executive service, although advances may be slower than expected given the preferred status of women and ethnic minorities under civil rights laws and affirmative action goals. For example, the percent of females in executive positions increased substantially from 1977 to 1988 (12.5 to 21.5 percent), but the proportion of nonwhites increased very little (2.7 to 4.6 percent), and the percent of those under 40 years of age declined. Disproportionate representation of demographic groups among executives, particularly women and ethnic minorities, means representative bureaucracy at the upper hierarchical levels remains an elusive ideal.

Changing Demographics of the State Executive Service

Other factors in Table 1, education and years of service, relate to the quality of the executive service. The proportion of executives with graduate degrees or graduate study (credit beyond a baccalaureate degree) increased from 59.9 percent in 1977 to 65.2 percent in 1988. Also the percent of veteran executives (10 or more years of public service) has increased since 1977, while newcomers (nine or fewer years) decreased from 22.2 to 9.7 percent. Increasing education and service longevity indicate executives are better trained than previously. Perhaps these qualities denote an element of growing professionalism in state bureaucracies (Mosher 1982, 115).

These findings suggest the social composition of the state executive service is undergoing change. It is considerably more open to women than in 1977, slightly more accessible to nonwhites than previously, and therefore increasingly representative. The fact that executives are better educated and possess more job experience than in 1977 means the quality of the workforce is improving. These trends, particularly if they are being emulated in other states, enhance the caliber of state government and justify an optimistic view of state bureaucracy's role in it.

Table 1. Demographics of State Executives, 1977 and 1988, and Population Characteristics of Selected States, in Percent

	1977 Executives	1988 Executives	1980 Population
Sex			
Male	87.5	78.5	48.3
Female	12.5	21.5	51.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	783	609	
Race			
White	97.3	95.4	82.8
Nonwhite	2.7	4.6	17.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	782	609	
Age			
25-29	2.7	0.5	14.6
30-39	22.1	15.3	23.6
40-49	33.1	42.1	17.3
50-59	32.0	33.5	17.6
60 or older	10.1	8.6	26.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	779	603	
Education			
Less than college degree	18.5	12.6	—
College degree	21.6	22.2	—
Post-graduate study	59.9	65.2	—
Total	100.0	100.0	—
N	779	612	—
Years of Service			
9 or less	22.2	9.7	—
10-19	33.5	39.0	—
20-29	29.8	34.5	—
30 or more	14.5	16.8	—
Total	100.0	100.0	—
N	773	608	—

“Selected states” include Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and West Virginia. Texas data are not reported because the state was not a part of the 1977 survey.

“Post-graduate” study includes executives with graduate degrees and those who have undertaken graduate study.

Population data are averages for the states in the study and are calculated from the 1980 Census of Population, *General Population Characteristics* (1982).

References

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