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Abstract

Politicians need expertise to make public policies, and civil servants are principal and proximate providers of knowledge. Yet, what constitutes relevant knowledge and skills for bureaucrats is regularly contested—both by politicians and bureaucrats—and subject to change. How can we explain the processes of contestation and change in the expertise of policy bureaucracies? The article presents a theoretical framework for analyzing the politics of bureaucratic expertise. It proposes the concept of "expertise bargains" to capture the understanding between politicians and bureaucrats about the knowledge and skills of civil servants. Based on a transactional view of authority in bureaucratic politics, it argues that the terms of this expertise bargain are mutually defined by politicians and bureaucrats through a dynamic bargaining process. The analytical utility of the framework is demonstrated through a comparative-historical analysis of contestation and change in bureaucratic expertise in the field of economic policy.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of expert knowledge in governance has been hotly contested. Most notable has been the populist attack on experts and established knowledge. As the British politician Michael Gove famously stated during the Brexit campaign: "People in this country have had enough of experts in organizations with acronyms … saying that they know what is best and constantly getting it wrong". Populist politicians have contested the knowledge of public organizations regarding climate change, vaccines, and economic policy and promised to "take back control"

from unelected bureaucrats. With the coronavirus crisis, the opposite demand has been raised: We need more—not less—experts, government policy should be based on evidence rather than politics, and government experts should be shielded from political interference.

These are only the latest episodes of the long-running battle over the expertise of the civil service. Politicians need information and expertise to make effective policies, and civil servants are principal and proximate providers of knowledge. Yet, what constitutes relevant knowledge and skills in government is regularly contested by both politicians and bureaucrats. Scholars of public administration have long highlighted the importance of the expert knowledge of the civil service for the power, legitimacy, autonomy, decision-making, and efficiency of bureaucratic organizations (Carpenter 2001; Peters 2010; Weber 1946; Wilson 1989). Yet, existing research has paid surprisingly little attention to what determines expert knowledge in public bureaucracies, and to the processes that bring about change in bureaucratic expertise. What happens when existing conceptions of bureaucratic expertise come under attack? How can we explain change in expertise in public bureaucracies?

The article presents a theoretical framework for analyzing the politics of bureaucratic expertise, which directly addresses these questions. Building on Hood and Lodge's (2006) notion of "public service bargains," it argues that the understanding between politicians and bureaucrats about the knowledge and skills of civil servants can be conceptualized as *expertise bargains*. (The article uses the term "expertise" broadly to denote the range of different knowledge and skills that bureaucrats may possess.) The notion of a bargain rests on a transactional understanding of authority in bureaucratic politics, where the terms of the political-administrative relationship are not dictated unilaterally by the political principal but mutually defined by politicians and bureaucrats (Carpenter and Krause 2015).

In expertise bargains, bureaucrats offer politicians some form of knowledge or skills in exchange for some degree of administrative responsibility and discretion. Yet, expertise bargains vary in the emphasis on bureaucrats' expertise relative to their political loyalty, in the kind of knowledge bureaucrats provide (e.g., specialized expertise in economics or law, generalist skills, or political process knowledge), and in the degree of autonomy bureaucratic experts enjoy.

Expertise bargains may be deeply institutionalized and persist over time, but can also break down and give way to new bargains. Based on the view that bargains are mutually defined by politicians and bureaucrats but also contested, the article argues that changes in bureaucratic expertise reflect a bargaining process between politicians and bureaucrats.

This entails, first, that expert bargains can be destabilized both by political and bureaucratic action. On the one hand, as a result of external changes, such as a change of government or an economic crisis, political leaders may no longer see the particular knowledge and skills offered by bureaucrats as relevant for achieving salient political goals. This may lead politicians to pursue strategies to alter the expertise bargain, for instance by strengthening control over the bureaucracy or promoting other forms of expertise. On the other hand, external changes may spur bureaucratic action to revise the expertise bargain, for instance, if intellectual shifts within academic professions inspire bureaucrats to promote new forms of expertise inside the administration or to seek greater autonomy in policy formulation.

Second, in line with the notion of bargaining, the impact of these political or bureaucratic strategies depends on the response from the other party, which can range from acquiescence to rejection. Third, since this political-administrative bargaining process unfolds over time, the change in expertise bargains resulting from political and administrative strategies and responses depends on how sustained these strategies and responses are.

To demonstrate its analytical utility, the theoretical framework is applied empirically to analyze contestation and change in bureaucratic expertise in the field of economic policy in three national administrations (New Zealand, Norway, and Denmark) across two periods of contestation (the 1930s–50s and the 1970s–80s). The analysis shows how external economic, political and intellectual shocks discredited existing bureaucratic expertise and spurred various political and bureaucratic strategies to alter expertise bargains and responses to these strategies. Specific patterns of political and bureaucratic actions and reactions produced significant and varying changes in the role and type of expertise in these administrations.

The article makes a theoretical contribution to scholarship in public administration and beyond. First, it contributes to discussions about expertise in public bureaucracies, which is often highlighted as important but seldom systematically theorized and explained (Christensen 2021). The theoretical framework offers a way of thinking about the politics of expertise in bureaucracies that recognizes the variable and changing role of expertise and how this role is shaped by both political and bureaucratic action. Second, the article responds to calls for research on bureaucratic politics rooted in a transactional view of authority (Carpenter and Krause 2015, 18). While existing contributions in this vein highlight the "dynamically evolving relationships" between politicians and bureaucrats (Bezes and Lodge 2015; Carpenter and Krause 2015, 10; Hood and Lodge 2006), the article theorizes and shows empirically the specific processes that drive change in political-administrative bargains.

The theoretical framework can potentially be applied to analyze a wide array of instances of contestation and change in bureaucratic expertise. This includes the effect of populist attacks on the role of expert knowledge within public administrations (Bauer et al. 2021; Peters and Pierre 2019), the processes of contestation and delegitimation of international bureaucracies (Morse and Keohane 2014; Tallberg and Zürn 2019), or current efforts to reform the knowledge and skills of top civil servants in several European countries.

The article proceeds as follows: First, it reviews existing literature about expertise in the civil service. Second, it develops the notion of expertise bargains and discusses the dynamics driving change in expertise bargains. Third, it applies this argument to analyze the politics of bureaucratic expertise in economic policy. It concludes by discussing the theoretical contributions and broader applicability of the framework.

2 | STATE OF THE ART

The expertise of bureaucrats is a crucial element of the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats. Max Weber pointed to the expert training of bureaucrats as a key feature of the bureaucratic model of organization and as a primary source of bureaucratic power vis-à-vis politicians and the efficiency of bureaucracies (Weber 1946). Expert knowledge is equally central to the principal-agent model of public administration, where the specialized expertise of bureaucrats is a key rationale for delegating responsibility to bureaucratic agents but simultaneously makes political control of bureaucracies challenging (Bawn 1995). Similarly, in reputational accounts of public administration, the analytical capacities of bureaucratic organizations are an important basis for their reputation and autonomy (Carpenter 2001). Yet, despite the centrality of expertise in these theories, existing literature has paid limited attention to what determines the expert knowledge of the bureaucracy and, more specifically, to what explains change in bureaucratic expertise.

Principal-agent scholarship argues that the level of expertise in a bureaucracy reflects the technical complexity of its tasks. Principals face a trade-off between expertise, i.e., access to the agent's knowledge about policy consequences that can improve decisions, and control, i.e., making sure that the agent acts in accordance with the principal's preferences. When the level of technical uncertainty is higher, there are greater gains from delegating responsibilities to specialized experts (Bawn 1995; Callander 2008). However, this argument has important limits: First, it builds on a 'principal authority' view of political-administrative relations, where it is the political principal who unilaterally "chooses" the level of expertise given the relevant constraints, a view that neglects the important role bureaucrats can play in shaping the expertise of the administration (see Carpenter and Krause 2015, 6). Second, public bureaucracies with similar tasks can possess very different levels of expertise, which belies any simple relationship between task complexity and actual expert knowledge in the organization (Christensen 2017; Fourcade 2009; Wilson 1989).

By contrast, institutional and sociological scholarship tends to see the position of expertise in a bureaucracy as a reflection of how knowledge produced in academic professions filters into—and is shaped by—state institutions. The varying emphasis on specific types of expert knowledge in government bureaucracies is thus attributed to features of administrative institutions, such as the openness of recruitment (Fourcade 2009; Weir and Skocpol 1985) or the

institutional links between bureaucratic organizations and academic professions (Chwieroth 2010). Yet, while this work highlights important factors, it does not consider the political-administrative relationship and the specific significance of expertise as a bureaucratic resource in this relationship.

Specific literature on knowledge and policy-making also touches upon the issue of bureaucratic expertise. For instance, the literature on "policy advisory systems" considers the wide array of actors providing policy advice to politicians and describes major shifts in these systems, such as the growing politicization of advice and the increasing externalization of advice provision from bureaucrats to outside actors like think tanks or consultancies (Craft and Howlett 2013; Halligan 1995). Yet, this literature does not provide a coherent theory to explain change in expertise.

The article goes beyond these conventional understandings of expertise in government bureaucracy by proposing a theoretical argument based on a transactional view of the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats. In contrast to previous work, this argument takes into account both the political and bureaucratic determinants of the role of expertise in government policy-making, seeing changes in expertise in public administrations as a result of a bargaining process between politicians and bureaucrats. And going beyond existing accounts, it theorizes the specific dynamics driving change in expertise in public bureaucracies.

3 | A THEORY OF THE POLITICS OF BUREAUCRATIC EXPERTISE

3.1 | Expertise bargains

The article proposes a theoretical framework for analyzing the politics of expertise in public bureaucracies that builds on the "public service bargains" model (Hood and Lodge 2006). This model centers on the idea that public administrations rest on explicit or implicit agreements or understandings—"bargains"—between public servants and those they serve, i.e., politicians, citizens, and clients (Hood and Lodge 2006, 6). These bargains can be formal—codified in constitutions or civil service regulations—or informal, i.e., based on unwritten conventions or understandings.

The notion of a bargain rests on a transactional understanding of authority (Carpenter and Krause 2015). This implies that authority lies not only with the political principal but also with the bureaucratic agent. Instead of the political principal unilaterally defining the terms of the contract with the bureaucratic agent, transactional authority entails that the terms of the political-administrative relationship are mutually defined by politicians and bureaucrats through bargaining and exchange.

A public service bargain involves an exchange between politicians and bureaucrats, and the main elements of this exchange are competencies, loyalty, responsibility, and rewards: "Politicians normally expect to gain some degree of political loyalty and competence from bureaucrats or public servants, and those public servants normally expect to gain some assured place in the structure of executive government, a definite sphere of responsibility and some mixture of tangible and intangible reward" (Hood and Lodge 2006, 7). Yet, exactly what is exchanged varies. Bureaucrats can offer politicians different types of competencies (more on this below), but also different types of loyalty, whether personal loyalty to the minister, unwavering political loyalty to the current government, or loyalty to the state or the constitution. In exchange, politicians may grant bureaucrats different degrees of responsibility, that is, autonomy and discretion to define and implement policy in an area, but also different types of rewards, whether extrinsic rewards like salaries or job security or intrinsic rewards such as the satisfaction of contributing to the common good.

Understandings regarding the competencies of bureaucrats—what this article calls "expertise bargains"—are thus a core element of bargains between politicians and administrators. In expertise bargains, bureaucrats offer politicians some form of knowledge or skills in exchange for some degree of administrative responsibility and discretion. The term "expertise" is here used in a broad sense to refer to a range of different knowledge and skills that bureaucrats may possess. (While broadly interchangeable with Hood and Lodge's notion of "competencies" as "ability, skills or experience" [2006, 86], the term expertise is preferred here since competency has many different meanings (see Lodge and Hood 2005) and in order to relate more directly to current debates about the contestation of expertise.)

Hood and Lodge (2006, chap. 5) distinguish between four types of knowledge/skills bureaucrats may offer: technical skills (*Fachkompetenzen*) ("wonks"), boundary-spanning skills ("go-betweens"), political craft ("sages"), and the ability to get things done ("deliverers"). However, this typology does not capture important variations in the emphasis on bureaucrats' expertise relative to other things bureaucrats can offer in a public service bargain, such as political loyalty or the ability to represent social groups. Nor does it capture the significant differences in the *type* of technical skills bureaucrats provide.[1]

This article therefore instead conceptualizes expertise bargains as varying along three dimensions: First, they vary in how much weight is placed on bureaucrats' expertise compared to their political loyalty. We can expect there to be a trade-off between expertise and political loyalty, as die-hard loyalists may lack the requisite expertise and the most competent experts on a topic may not have political sympathies with the government (see Hood and Lodge 2006, 87–88). Some bargains will put bureaucrats' expertise over their loyalty to the regime, while others will value loyalty over expertise. Second, expertise bargains differ in the kind of qualifications, knowledge, and skills expected from bureaucrats, including different types of disciplinary expertise (e.g., in law or economics), multidisciplinary knowledge from civil service schools, general analytical skills, political know-how and managerial skills (Lodge and Hood 2005; Peters 2010; Page and Wright 1999). Third, they vary in the degree of autonomy and responsibility granted to bureaucrats in exchange for this expertise.

Expertise bargains are not only expressed in formal rules, such as provisions in constitutions and civil service statutes about the qualifications required of bureaucrats, modes of recruitment and promotion, and the loyalty and independence of bureaucrats. They are also expressed in actual practices, such as the qualifications actually emphasized in recruitment and promotion or the actual use of knowledge in decision-making, and the informal understandings of politicians and bureaucrats about the proper role of scientific versus political considerations in policy-making.

Expertise bargains vary across countries and organizations but also over time. Expertise bargains can be highly durable: bargains exist within formal governing institutions and may be deeply institutionalized, for instance when the dominance of a specific type of bureaucratic expertise is embedded in formal rules or structures. But expert bargains may also break down and give way to new bargains. Hood and Lodge (2006) attribute public service bargain change to sudden environmental changes or longer-term developments in policy agendas or technology, or strategic action ("cheating") by politicians or bureaucrats. However, they do not specify the process that produces change or consider how environmental changes and strategic action may combine to produce change. Bezes and Lodge (2015) tie public service bargain change to generic historical-institutionalist dynamics (e.g., path dependence, layering, or drift), but say little about how bargains are disputed or about the political-administrative bargaining involved.

Going beyond existing work, this article argues that to understand change in expertise bargains, we need to consider the contestation of expertise bargains by political and bureaucratic actors and the ensuing political-administrative bargaining process.

3.2 | Change in expertise bargains

A key contention of this article is that the role of expertise in bureaucracies is regularly contested by politicians and bureaucrats. Contestation generally implies that actors who are dissatisfied with existing institutions adopt strategies that challenge the formal or informal rules of institutions (see Morse and Keohane 2014). This also applies to expertise bargains, which may be criticized and sought change by actors who question the validity, relevance, or policy implications of the expertise. For instance, Demortain (2019) shows how the role of science in decision-making in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been subject to intense contestation. This article argues that the contestation of expertise bargains sets in motion a process of political and administrative actions and reactions (i.e., bargaining) that can explain change in expertise bargains.

First, since the terms of the political-administrative relationship are mutually defined by politicians and bureaucrats but also contested (Carpenter and Krause 2015, 8), *expertise bargains can be destabilized both by political and*

bureaucratic action. On the one hand, the legitimacy of bureaucratic expertise with politicians depends on its ability to help politicians achieve their goals. Existing bargains thus become imperiled if *politicians* no longer see the particular knowledge offered by bureaucrats as relevant for solving salient problems.

Contestation of existing institutions is often occasioned by exogenous shocks (Morse and Keohane 2014), and several types of external shifts may produce dissatisfaction among political leaders with existing bureaucratic expertise: A change of government may bring politicians to power who have other political goals and other ideas about which expert communities have the most relevant expertise for achieving these goals, or even about whether experts should be listened to at all (e.g., Demortain 2019). A major crisis—e.g., an economic crisis or public health crisis—may also discredit the bureaucratic expertise underpinning existing public policies with politicians and set off a search for other knowledge that can better respond to salient problems (Campbell and Pedersen 2014). For instance, the 2008 Financial Crisis undercut the legitimacy of the regulation-skeptic financial and economic experts who had dominated U.S. financial regulation and spurred political demand for advice from alternative experts from behavioral social science, and history (Carpenter 2011). Moreover, changing norms and models in the institutional environment may alter politicians' perceptions of the appropriate place and forms of knowledge in policy-making, such as New Public Management models emphasizing managerial skills (Lodge and Hood 2005) or norms about "evidence-based policy-making." Major technological or societal changes may have the same effect.

The de-legitimization of existing bureaucratic expertise may lead politicians to pursue various *strategies* to alter the existing bargain. Politicians may seek to reduce the responsibility and discretion of bureaucratic experts by reversing delegation or strengthening control, or by abolishing or defunding agencies (cf., Peters and Pierre 2019, 1529–1530). They may also seek to replace existing bureaucratic experts with other types of experts through appointments or by changing recruitment policy, or they may seek alternative sources of expertise by consulting or even creating competing expert bodies or units inside or outside the bureaucracy (Campbell and Pedersen 2014; Craft and Howlett 2013). The choice of strategy will be conditioned by the institutional context. For instance, the strategies pursued to bring new expertise into the bureaucracy will depend on whether the bureaucracy is merit-based or partly politically appointed and whether recruitment is centralized or decentralized.

On the other hand, expertise bargains may be destabilized by *bureaucratic* action. Different external shifts may lead bureaucrats to try to change the terms of existing expertise bargains. Most importantly, ideational changes within academic professions can alter the central tenets of an expert profession (Kuhn 1962), both about what constitutes valid expertise and about what role expertise should play in policy-making. These new ways of thinking can find their way from academia into public administration through recruitment and professional networks (Chwieroth 2010; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The external changes mentioned above—such as economic crises or changing norms in the institutional environment—may also weaken the legitimacy of existing expertise bargains in the eyes of bureaucrats.

These factors may lead bureaucrats to pursue various strategies to revise expertise bargains. They may seek to alter the level or type of expertise in the bureaucracy by favoring particular types of qualifications in internal recruitment and promotion or by setting up dedicated organizational research/analysis units. They may also seek to expand the role of expertise in decision-making by instituting science-based decision procedures (Demortain 2019), insulating policy processes from political intervention or by taking a more assertive stance when advising politicians, or even seeking political support elsewhere, including from interest groups, citizens, media or opposing parties (Carpenter 2001).

Second, the bargained character of the political-administrative relationship implies that *the impact of political or bureaucratic strategies depends on the response from the other party to the bargain*. Politicians cannot unilaterally dictate a change in the expertise bargain. Instead, "political control under transactional authority recognizes the potency of bureaucratic action in either neutralizing or off-setting the principal's use of formal powers to direct agent behavior" (Carpenter and Krause 2015, 10).

Political and bureaucratic action can be met with different responses from the other side, ranging from acquiescence via compromise to rejection (see Barnett and Coleman 2005; Peters and Pierre 2019). For instance, if

politicians bring a new type of expert into the bureaucracy, existing civil servants may refuse to accept the new recruits, they may co-exist peacefully, they may bow to the dominance of the new experts, or they may resign or retire. Conversely, new forms of knowledge promoted by bureaucrats may either be embraced or rejected by politicians.

Third, since this political-administrative bargaining process unfolds over time, the *change in expertise bargains resulting from political and administrative strategies and responses depends on how sustained these strategies and responses are*. In the case where political or bureaucratic strategies to revise the bargain are met with acquiescence from the other party, a new bargain may be forged quickly. But when strategies to alter expertise bargains are met with resistance from the other party, two different outcomes are possible.

If action to change the bargain is sustained over a long time period, this may overcome the initial resistance and led to the formation of a new bargain. For instance, a political party that remains in power for a long period can gradually bring an initially skeptical bureaucracy around to accept a new expertise bargain, including through natural generational change in the bureaucracy. Similarly, sustained bureaucratic efforts to change the bargain that meet initial political resistance may have more success with the following government or may gradually be embraced by political leaders.

By contrast, if action to revise the bargain is short-lived, resistance is likely to thwart the formation of a new bargain. For instance, a political party that is in power for a short period may see its attempts to revise the expertise bargain sabotaged or ignored by resistant bureaucrats and reversed by the next government. Similarly, short-lived bureaucratic efforts to change the bargain may easily be ignored by hostile political leaders.

The theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

To summarize, the theoretical framework highlights the political and bureaucratic determinants of expertise in public administrations, and the specific dynamics explaining change in bureaucratic expertise. In the next section, this framework is applied to analyze the politics of bureaucratic expertise across a set of empirical cases.

4 | CONTESTATION AND CHANGE IN BUREAUCRATIC EXPERTISE IN ECONOMIC POLICY

To demonstrate its analytical utility, this section applies the theoretical framework to analyze processes of contestation and change in the expertise of bureaucrats. Since these processes unfold over long periods of time, the article adopts a historical-institutionalist explanatory approach (Skocpol and Pierson 2002). It presents a comparative-historical analysis of the politics of bureaucratic expertise in economic policy across three national cases—New Zealand, Norway, and Denmark—and two extended periods of contestation of expertise in economic matters—the 1930s–50s and the 1970s–80s.

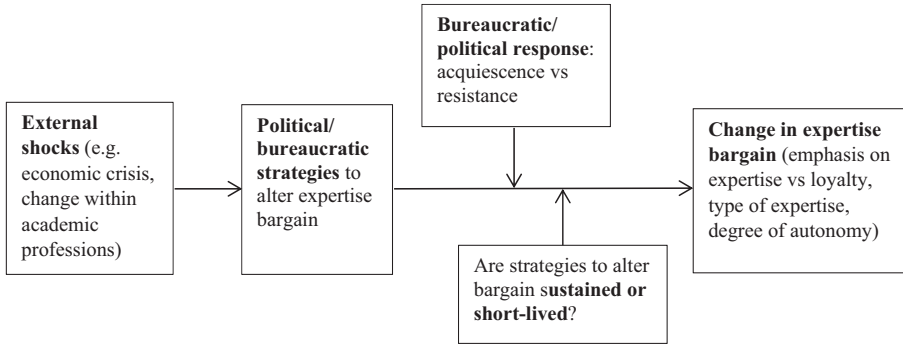

FIGURE 1 Simplified conceptual model

The purpose of this analysis is to trace empirically the theorized steps in the processes of change in bureaucratic expertise (see Figure 1) and to explain how change in expertise bargains varies depending on patterns of political and bureaucratic strategies and responses. The empirical narratives, therefore, zoom in on the types of external shocks discussed in the theoretical part (i.e., changes of government, economic crisis, and intellectual paradigm shifts), on the political and bureaucratic actions taken to alter expertise bargains in response to these shocks, on the political and bureaucratic responses to these actions, and the resulting changes in expertise bargains.

The three national cases are selected because of their relative similarity on theoretically important dimensions. Beyond the basic commonality that they have established democracies with developed economies, they are all small states that are highly exposed to the types of external shifts discussed above: their open economies are vulnerable to international economic shocks (Katzenstein 1985), and their smallness exposes them to intellectual shifts within international academic professions (Fourcade 2006). The three countries also have similar administrative institutions: they are merit bureaucracies with decentralized recruitment (i.e., recruitment by single departments rather than through centralized mechanisms). Their political systems partly differ, however, as New Zealand had a majoritarian electoral system and a two-party system while Norway and Denmark have proportional representation systems and multiple parties. The case selection thus guarantees broad comparability and holds some theoretically important factors constant across the cases. This makes it possible to examine more closely how variation in change in expertise bargains was linked to different patterns of political and bureaucratic strategies and responses.

Furthermore, focusing on economic policy allows us to examine the politics of bureaucratic expertise in a core area of government activity, where the place of expert knowledge in the administration can have a major impact on policies and socio-economic outcomes. The empirical narrative presented in the following draws on a larger study of expertise and economic policy-making (Christensen 2017).

4.1 | From legal to economic expertise

In the early 20th century, economic policy was largely about managing the public finances, that is, seeking to balance the budget. The finance ministries and treasuries in charge of managing the finances were often dominated by officials with legal education. Much like Max Weber's German bureaucracy, the Danish and Norwegian states were effectively characterized by a *Juristenmonopol*. In Denmark, graduates in law had a formal monopoly on most civil service positions until 1919 and remained completely dominant also thereafter (Østergaard 2007). In Norway, jurists made up 75% of the academic staff in the ministries in the inter-war period—and 92% in the Ministry of Finance (Lie 1995). The basic expertise bargain centered on civil servants providing politicians with legal knowledge in exchange for responsibility in managing the affairs of the state, including the budget. In New Zealand, the situation was different. Civil servants were traditionally little more than clerks and rarely had higher education (McKinnon 2003). Only in the early 20th century did the civil service start hiring people with professional training. To manage the state finances the Treasury particularly recruited accountants, who by the interwar period made up half of the department's staff (McKinnon 2003, 180). In all three countries, these expertise bargains were situated within broader public service bargains in which civil servants enjoyed secure tenure and career prospects in exchange for serial loyalty to successive governments (Lie 1995; Lodge 2009; Salomonsen and Knudsen 2011).

However, the profound economic, political, and intellectual shifts of the 1930s put the existing expertise bargains under pressure. The Great Depression led to a downturn in economic activity and high unemployment, which discredited the existing economic policies of laissez-faire and balanced budgets and the ideas and knowledge underpinning these policies (Hall 1989). The crisis coincided with a major intellectual shift within the economic discipline, namely the emergence of Keynesian macroeconomic theory. Keynes's ideas about stimulating economic demand provided an answer to the crisis and an alternative approach to economic policy (Hall 1989). In the political sphere, calls for new economic policies were particularly strong within labor parties, which emerged as a powerful political force in this period. To guarantee high economic activity and full employment, labor parties advocated more active economic policies and greater state intervention.

In all three countries, the labor parties that came into government in the 1930s or 40s saw the existing bureaucratic apparatus as an obstacle to more active economic management. This led them to pursue strategies to change the existing expertise bargain, although these strategies differed. In Norway and Denmark, labor politicians argued that to manage the economy, new expert knowledge was needed within the state, namely the macroeconomic expertise of Keynesian economists.

The Norwegian Labor Party, which swept into power with an absolute majority in 1945, set about building economic expertise in the state apparatus (Lie 1995). The Labor government established an economic division staffed exclusively by Keynesian economists inside the Ministry of Finance in 1952, and actively sought to strengthen the position of economists in the ministry. This policy met resistance from the ministry's legal corps. For instance, the division responsible for taxation for decades refused outright to hire economists (Lie and Venneslan 2010, 29). Yet, many bureaucrats were nearing pension age, and every time a lawyer retired from top position labor made sure he was replaced by an economist. Labor's long tenure in government—it enjoyed an absolute parliamentary majority until 1961—bolstered this shift. By 1965, "the economists had gained hegemony in the previously completely lawyer-dominated ministry" (Lie 1995, 442).

The economists in the Ministry of Finance hailed from the sophisticated "Oslo School" of economics led by later Nobel laureate Ragnar Frisch, which proposed a Nordic version of Keynesianism that placed greater emphasis on planning and macroeconomic modeling (Pekkarinen 1989, 334). A core tenet of the Oslo School was that economic management should be based on economic *science*. This spurred the economists in the ministry to pursue bureaucratic strategies to strengthen the emphasis on academic credentials and expertise in the administration. They systematically recruited the best and brightest economics graduates from university and increasingly based promotion on academic excellence rather than on the seniority principle that had been a key element of the public service bargain until then (Lie 1995). The ministry economists thereby forged close links to academia and a culture of "academic autonomy" in the organization (Lie and Venneslan 2010, 161). Through this combination of political and bureaucratic action, a new expertise bargain was established that centered on bureaucrats providing scientifically based economic knowledge to help realize Labor's economic program in exchange for considerable bureaucratic autonomy in analyzing and designing policies.

The Danish Social Democrats, who formed a minority government in 1947, pursued a similar strategy of expanding economic expertise in the state. They quickly established an economic secretariat charged with analyzing the economy and economic policies, which unlike other government departments was staffed by young Keynesian economists, many with close links to the party (Økonomiministeriet 1997). However, the secretariat was set up outside the regular ministerial structure and met with disapproval from bureaucrats in the ministries, who saw it as a threat to their own responsibilities and turf (Økonomiministeriet 1997, 9). The economic secretariat also lacked support from the other political parties. The center-right government that took over soon after folded the secretariat into the Ministry of Finance and took away some of its tasks. The secretariat was later resurrected by the social democrats and became a permanent Ministry of the Economy in 1958, yet subsequently lost responsibilities to the finance ministry (Østergaard 2007).

Thus, although the Danish civil service included an increasing number of economists (Salomonsen and Knudsen 2011), economic expertise did not gain the kind of central position in the expertise bargain as in Norway. This can be explained by the fact that the Labor Party's efforts to boost economic expertise in the state were more short-lived in Denmark than in Norway, reflecting the weaker position of the party in Denmark. Due to the frequent alternation of political power, the place of economic expertise in the state was subject to constant renegotiation between different political and administrative forces. It can also be linked to the absence of decisive bureaucratic strategies to root policy-making in economic science as seen in Norway, which reflected the relative weakness of the Danish Keynesian economics discipline (Pekkarinen 1989).

In New Zealand, the Labor Party, which gained a majority in the 1935 elections, pursued a different kind of change to the existing expertise bargain. Since Treasury had administered the laissez-faire policies that had deepened the economic crisis, labor concluded that they could not be trusted to carry out more active economic policies.

Instead, politicians needed to take back control. The Labor government, therefore, moved to revise the extant public service bargain, by "assert[ing] the primacy of politics over experts and bureaucrats" and by sidelining the Treasury bureaucracy from economic policy-making (McKinnon 2003, 151). As opposed to Norway and Denmark, economic experts played no significant part in New Zealand Labor's plans, and their position within the state remained marginal throughout the 1940s and 50s. The government's strategy reflected their lack of academic allies in New Zealand's economics community: Keynesian economics had yet to gain a foothold in New Zealand; economists of the time were rooted in the old liberal economic paradigm—and were regarded with deep skepticism by Labor (McKinnon 2003, 157–158).

However, Labor's rejection of both the old bureaucratic advisors *and* of alternative new recruits or outside experts left a void. The administrative head of the Treasury responded to this situation by carving out a new economic advisory role for himself, which was neither based squarely on neoclassical nor Keynesian economic thinking but instead involved offering usable economic advice directly to politicians (McKinnon 2003, 160–163). The bargain that was established thus emphasized the responsiveness of bureaucrats to political directives over their expertise and granted bureaucrats little autonomy, but also gave the Treasury head a peculiar role as a trusted advisor to the government.

To summarize, this brief discussion shows how external economic, political, and intellectual shocks in the 1930s–40s discredited existing administrative expertise about the economy and spurred various political and bureaucratic strategies to change existing expertise bargains. Different political and bureaucratic strategies and responses produced different changes in expertise bargains, with economic skills acquiring a central role in the Norwegian expertise bargain, a moderate role in Denmark, and a marginal position in New Zealand. Next, we look at contestation and change in expertise bargains in economic policy in the 1970s–80s.

4.2 | A new brand of economic expertise

The expertise bargains in economic policy-making forged in the postwar decades came under pressure from external developments in the 1970s and 80s. The first shock was the economic malaise of the 1970s, which was partly driven by the oil crises and lead to significant budget deficits and economic imbalances (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002). In New Zealand, the economic decline started even earlier, in the 1960s. The second was the intellectual shift within the international economics discipline from Keynesian to neoclassical economics. Driven by new economic ideas from U.S. universities, the attention shifted from demand management to the supply side, from macroeconomics to microeconomic behavior, and from equity to efficiency (Fourcade 2009). Third, the political landscape was changing. In Scandinavia, social-democratic parties had lost their former grip on power and the 1980s saw a marked rightward electoral shift. In New Zealand, political change was of a different character, bringing a reinvented Labor Party to power.

The first country that experienced economic decline was New Zealand, as international demand for its agricultural products dropped from 1960 onwards. The crumbling of New Zealand's traditional economic model set off a search for new ideas to revive the economy. Interestingly, this spurred *bureaucratic* strategies to alter the role of expertise in economic policy-making. The top Treasury bureaucrat argued that in order to relaunch the economy, an expert administration was needed. Based on "a belief that government needed expert assistance in managing the economy … [he] was determined to create a central role in economic management for the department" (McKinnon 2003, 272). He set about boosting the economic expertise of the Treasury by recruiting high-achieving university graduates—mostly economists—as policy advisors. This was a major shift in a department that until then had hired much of its staff right out of high school and offered on-the-job training (Boston 1992). The department also sent staff abroad to international organizations and U.S. universities, which both strengthened economic analysis skills and forged ties with the international economics community (McKinnon 2003, 235; Goldfinch 2000). Academic qualifications in economics became increasingly important to reach top positions.

As the economic crisis deepened in the 1970s, bureaucrats doubled down on their efforts to boost the role of economic expertise in policy-making. An internal economics "think tank" was created to improve analysis of the country's economic problems and develop policies for growth (McKinnon 2003, 239, 285). Led by an economist with a Ph.D. from the U.S., the unit was strongly inspired by neoclassical economic thinking, recruited several Ph.Ds., and developed "a strong professional identification as economists" (McKinnon 2003, 298). These neoclassical economic ideas quickly took hold within the Treasury. There was little internal resistance, in part because the older generation of civil servants went into retirement at the time and was replaced by young economists who were open to the new ideas (Boston 1992).

The rise of neoclassical economics in the Treasury also brought with it a more activist approach to giving advice, which sought to revise the terms of the existing expertise bargain. This approach entailed that the Treasury should persistently offer expertise-based advice to politicians regardless of what ministers wanted to hear. This broke with previous practice and differed markedly from the more submissive approach taken by bureaucrats in other departments (McKinnon 2003, 292, 300). As one Treasury official put it, "the traditional boundaries observed by public servants in the policy arena were crossed from time to time in the interest of gaining a particular desired state of affairs" (Dickson 2007, 51).

Initially, the Treasury's new approach to policy and advice-giving was flatly rejected by the conservative National Party government. For instance, when Treasury bureaucrats presented unsolicited proposals for tax reform, prime minister Muldoon (who was also the finance minister) was furious at the Treasury's impertinence and refused to take their advice (McKinnon 2003, 304). Relations between the Treasury and Muldoon's government were so bad that the public service bargain effectively broke down in these years (Hood and Lodge 2006, 6).

However, Roger Douglas, finance minister in the Labor government that came to power in 1984, had a completely different attitude. Douglas wanted major reform of New Zealand's economy and saw Treasury's economic expertise as highly useful for achieving that goal (Oliver 1989). Douglas respected the economic skills of Treasury bureaucrats and granted them great autonomy to conduct economic analyses and design reform proposals. This gave the Treasury unprecedented influence over the series of far-reaching market-oriented economic reforms that were introduced on Douglas's watch (Boston 1992; Goldfinch 2000). These reforms reflected a radically altered expertise bargain, in which bureaucrats were no longer at the beck and call of politicians but rather provided the minister with neoclassical economic expertise in exchange for wide responsibilities in economic policy formulation.

The enduring powerful advisory role of the Treasury economists was also a key driving force behind subsequent reforms of the broader public service bargain in New Zealand, namely the 1988 State Sector Act which introduced an NPM-type bargain that ended the career-based civil service model, introduced performance-based pay and emphasized civil servants' ability to deliver results (Lodge and Gill 2011, 152). Note the paradoxical co-existence of two very different conceptions of the kind of expertise civil servants should offer: the Treasury's privileged role as a provider of economic expert advice in policy formulation and the emphasis on civil servants' managerial skills in the NPM reform doctrine promoted by the Treasury.

In Norway, the Keynesian economic expertise provided by the finance ministry had been central to the postwar expertise bargain in economic policy. Yet, in the 1970s, Labor's interventionist policies produced growing economic imbalances, including soaring deficits and debt and low productivity growth and returns on investments. These problems started to raise questions in the finance bureaucracy about the soundness of its approach to economic management (Lie and Venneslan 2010). Importantly, these doubts coincided with the arrival of new economic ideas. In the late 1970s, the ministry hired two economists to leading positions who had Ph.Ds. from the U.S. and were schooled in microeconomic questions, market analysis, and supply-side issues (Christensen 2017, 113). These economists actively promoted neoclassical economic thinking within the ministry. The older generation of economists in the ministry was "skeptical" or "not interested" in the new approach (ministry official quoted in Christensen 2017, 113–114). Yet, many of them were on the verge of retirement, paving the way for an ideational shift. This shift was reinforced by the recruitment of high-achieving young economists right out of university, who had a greater affinity

with market-based economic theory (Lie and Venneslan 2010, 102–103). The ministry also strengthened its links to the more neoclassical elements of the domestic economics discipline.

Like in New Zealand, this ideational shift was accompanied by bureaucratic efforts to revise the norms about policy advice. The neoclassical economists thought that the ministry was not being clear enough in its advice to politicians about the major problems facing the economy and that ministers urgently needed their input. They therefore promoted a new "doctrine" which entailed that "officials should not be afraid to give scientifically based advice that goes against what politicians want" (ministry official quoted in Christensen 2017, 115). One expression of this approach was that the ministry sought to sideline politicians from policy formulation on major economic issues like tax reform by delegating the task to advisory commissions dominated by ministry economists (Lie and Venneslan 2010, 121).

Politically, the response to the ministry's new economic agenda and more assertive approach was mixed. This was a period of frequent alternation in power between labor and center-right governments. While Labor saw the need for economic reform, the Conservative Party leadership had little affinity with market-oriented economic ideas about efficiency and blocked several attempts at reform (Christensen 2017, 119–120). However, the ministry eventually found allies in both parties' ministers and undersecretaries of finance—the latter were themselves economists with a background from the ministry (Christensen 2017, 123). This served as a conduit for the ministry's economic ideas, which came to shape a series of major economic reforms around 1990 that garnered bipartisan support (Lie and Venneslan 2010). These reforms reflected an updated expertise bargain, where finance bureaucrats provided ministers from both the left and the right with a new type of economic expertise to help manage the economy in exchange for significant influence over the design of the economic policy.

Denmark experienced a different sequence of contestation and change in its expertise bargain. Although economic experts had failed to conquer a dominant administrative position in the immediate postwar decades, the macroeconomic expertise of the finance ministry was eventually expanded in the 1960s and 70s (Østergaard 1998, 2007). However, the ministry simultaneously hired a large number of political scientists, who would come to play a central role in the ministry. This disciplinary mix meant that economic training never became the only legitimate source of expertise in economic policy like in Norway and New Zealand. In the late 1970s, Denmark ran into deep economic problems, including large deficits and rising unemployment (Asmussen 2007). Yet, unlike in Norway and New Zealand, this did not give rise to bureaucratic strategies to alter the economic expertise underpinning policy. This was partly because the Danish finance ministry did not have close ties to the international economics discipline and therefore was less exposed to market-oriented economic ideas (Christensen 2017, 141).

Instead, these new economic ideas later gave rise to *political* strategies to change the expertise bargain. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Liberal Party's minister of taxation from 1987, was deeply inspired by supply-side economics ideas from the U.S. and saw liberalization, deregulation, and tax cuts as the answer to Denmark's economic ills (Asmussen 2007). To pursue this policy agenda, the government needed different economic advice than it was getting from the existing Keynesian-oriented bureaucracy. Fogh Rasmussen, therefore, created a special unit in his ministry—the Tax Policy Secretariat—and staffed it with supply-side economists who were mostly hired from outside the bureaucracy (Asmussen 2007, 126). Fogh Rasmussen and his secretariat had considerable influence within the government, including over the economic analyses carried out by the finance ministry in these years. Yet, finance ministry bureaucrats remained deeply hostile to the supply-side secretariat, characterizing its staff as "taken in from the street" and "not regular civil servants" and dismissing their economic ideas as "ideological statements" and "political theater" (ministry official quoted in Christensen 2017, 143).

Fogh Rasmussen's campaign also turned out to be short-lived: When the government changed a few years later, the supply-side economists were marginalized and the finance ministry and its Keynesian economists took back responsibility for economic policy (Jensen 2008). In other words, unlike the bureaucratically driven shifts in economic knowledge in Norway and New Zealand, the political effort to change the economic expertise of the bureaucracy failed in Denmark.

Furthermore, the economists in the Danish finance bureaucracy did *not* pursue specific strategies to expand the role of economic expertise in policy formulation like in New Zealand and Norway. Rather, the major shift in the advisory role of Danish top civil servants in this period was the increasing emphasis on offering political-tactical advice to ministers alongside technical advice (Salomonsen and Knudsen 2011). This led finance bureaucrats (including political scientists) to play a central role in some areas—such as budget policy and public management reform (Jensen 2008). Yet, they had little influence in other areas. For instance, in tax policy, economists in the ministry were effectively sidelined by politicians, who designed tax reform in the early 1990s according to a predefined political agenda (Christensen 2017, 148). Thus, compared to the other two countries, the Danish expertise bargain granted bureaucrats less autonomy in policy formulation, put less exclusive emphasis on economic knowledge over expertise in other fields, and did not center on neoclassical microeconomic knowledge.

To summarize, the economic shocks and intellectual and political shifts of the 1970s-80s discredited existing economic policies and led to calls for more or different economic expertise in policy-making. In some countries, these shifts spurred sustained bureaucratic strategies to boost economic expertise, revise economic thinking and take a more assertive approach to policy advice. In others, they led to more short-lived political attacks on the bureaucracy's economic expertise and efforts to implant other economic ideas. The bureaucratic and political responses to these strategies ranged from acquiescence to rejection. These different patterns of political and bureaucratic actions and reactions produced cross-country variation in change in expertise bargains regarding the autonomy granted to bureaucratic experts, the centrality of economic knowledge and skills, and the type of economic expertise involved.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has proposed a theoretical framework for analyzing the politics of expertise in public administrations. It argues that the understandings between politicians and bureaucrats about the knowledge and skills of civil servants can be conceptualized as "expertise bargains," and that theorizing the dynamics of these bargains can help us understand the processes of contestation and change in expertise in public administrations.

The article makes some distinct theoretical contributions to scholarship about expertise in public bureaucracies and political-administrative relationships. First, it advances debates about bureaucratic expertise by offering a theory that recognizes *the variable and changing position of different types of expertise in the bureaucracy*. Bureaucratic expertise is not a simple reflection of the complexity of the task, as principal-agent scholarship argues (Bawn 1995). Neither is the type of knowledge offered by bureaucrats a static property of an administrative system. As illustrated by the empirical narratives, the bargains between politicians and bureaucrats about the expertise of civil servants vary and change along several dimensions: Are bureaucrats valued for their expertise or rather for their political loyalty or ability to implement political directives? How much autonomy and responsibility are granted to bureaucratic experts in policy formulation? What kind of expertise do bureaucrats provide (e.g., legal or economic) and what type of disciplinary ideas do they offer (e.g., Keynesian or neoclassical economic thinking)?

Second, the article contributes to scholarship by arguing that *bureaucratic expertise is shaped by the interplay of political and bureaucratic action*. Existing theories tend to privilege either the political or bureaucratic side of the story. Responding to calls for research on bureaucratic politics anchored in a transactional view of authority (Carpenter and Krause 2015; Hood and Lodge 2006), this article instead argues that politicians and bureaucrats mutually define the role of expertise within the state.

As shown in the empirical cases, both politicians and civil servants actively pursued strategies to alter the position and type of expertise in the bureaucracy. Political strategies to change bargains often followed the ascent of a new government to power and were driven by the belief that the existing bureaucratic apparatus did not have the right expertise to address the country's economic problems or could not be trusted to pursue new economic policies. This led politicians to set up units with new forms of expertise inside the state or to reassert political control over policy-making. But bureaucrats also actively sought to change existing expertise bargains, in response both to economic problems that exposed the

need for more or different bureaucratic knowledge and to new ideas from the academic sphere. This led bureaucrats to pursue strategies such as changing administrative recruitment and promotion practices, boosting the knowledge of staff through further training, or taking a more assertive approach to policy advice.

Crucially, the success of these political and bureaucratic strategies depended on the response from the other party to the bargain, and on how sustained these strategies and responses were. In some cases, the efforts to alter the bargain were begrudgingly accepted or even enthusiastically welcomed, such as when ministers embraced new economic ideas offered by civil servants. In other cases, there was fierce resistance to the attempts to revise the bargain, such as when ministers refused to consider new expert advice offered by bureaucrats or when bureaucrats were openly hostile to new experts parachuted into the bureaucracy by politicians. When efforts to revise bargains met resistance, the outcome depended on how sustained these efforts were: For instance, political parties that remained in power for a long period were gradually able to bring an initially skeptical bureaucracy around to accept a new expertise bargain, whereas short-lived governments saw their attempts to revise the expertise bargain sabotaged by unwilling bureaucrats and undone by the next government.

Third, the article contributes to the literature on political-administrative relationships by further *theorizing the mechanisms driving change in public service bargains* (see Bezes and Lodge 2015; Hood and Lodge 2006). Extant work argues that bargain change can be the result of either environmental changes or strategic action. This article instead combines these two elements into a theory of the process of change. The empirical narratives illustrate this argument, showing how exogenous shocks spurred political or bureaucratic contestation of expertise bargains, which set in motion a political-administrative bargaining process that defined the degree and direction of change in expertise bargains.

This article's explicit focus on the policy bureaucracy as a knowledge provider allows it to bring the political-administrative bargaining over expertise more clearly into view. Yet, it also leaves out alternative providers of policy-relevant knowledge. In recent decades, bureaucrats have faced increasing competition from external suppliers of policy knowledge, such as consultants and think tanks (Campbell and Pedersen 2014; Craft and Howlett 2013; Seabrooke and Sending 2022). Nonetheless, policy bureaucrats still have an important knowledge role to play, not only because they are structurally located close to ministers but also because a lot of external expert advice is routed through the bureaucracy. This means that bureaucrats have a crucial function as knowledge brokers and translators between outside experts and politicians (Laage-Thomsen 2022). Moreover, the expertise bargains framework can capture differences across systems in the emphasis on bureaucratic expertise versus outside knowledge, and how this balance can change through political and bureaucratic action to revise expertise bargains.

The theoretical framework can potentially be employed to analyze the politics of bureaucratic expertise across a wide range of contexts, including both national and international bureaucracies. First, it can be used to analyze the effect of populist attacks on the role of expertise within national administrations and international organizations, a topic that has received extensive media attention but has so far not been systematically studied (Bauer et al. 2021; Peters and Pierre 2019). Second, the framework speaks to the current interest of international relations scholars in understanding the contestation and delegitimation of international organizations (Morse and Keohane 2014; Tallberg and Zürn 2019), whose technocratic character is one of the main targets of contestation (Steffek 2021). Finally, the framework can be applied to analyze ongoing efforts in several countries to alter the knowledge and skills of civil servants, such as the attempts of the Tories in the U.K. to overhaul bureaucrats' training and skills, President Macron's reform of the *grands corps* in the French administration and debates in the Netherlands about the appropriate skill-set for the top civil service corps.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

There is no data connected with the manuscript.

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ENDNOTE

[1] Similarly, typologies that distinguish between "epistemic" knowledge (scientific, research-based), "techne" (tacit knowledge acquired through professional practice), and "phronesis" (lay knowledge or common sense) (Flyvbjerg 2001) treat epistemic knowledge as one thing and do not consider the different *types* of scientific knowledge.

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