



PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND ITS MISSION

Intro to Public Administration

Laurent Cortes
December 2023

One of the most important parts of being a citizen in this country is to being able to understand and participate in our government. The way we do that as a citizen is playing the important role of voting for our elected leaders in all levels of government. I am ashamed to say that for too long I have failed to participate in this endeavor and have slowly come to the realization that is something I can no longer ignore. Far worse was the fact that I never understood how much I don't know about the government is that I currently play a role within it. Originally, I saw the Intro to Public Administration course as starting point for a degree that would help me move up the ladder in leadership within the department of labor. What I found was, as the name implies, an introduction to the field that encompasses my entire career.

My theoretical understanding of the field of public administration was non-existent prior to enrolling into the Masters of Public Administration program at Rutgers. My sole reason for applying was to obtain a degree that would allow me to advance my position in the division of wage and hour compliance within the department of labor. What I quickly learned in the first few classes of Intro to Public Administration was that I had no previous understanding of what the study of public administration was. Public Administration can be defined as the coordinated effort of millions of people to manage people and programs that serve the public. It involves many aspects of our daily lives including city planning, education, public health, security, and regulation of various industries. I was completely unaware of the complexity of public administration, I was even more shocked to realize how little I knew about the history of how our government and public institutions were established.

Going through a historical overview of public administration I was able to see how our current state of public administration evolved throughout the years. More importantly I was able to see

that public administration is in a constant state of evolution and at times struggles to keep up with changes in the world. A historical overview defined many terms that were previously unfamiliar and was able to more clearly show me government in action. For the majority of classes, we closed the session with a review of supreme court cases that revolved around the topic of the class. The supreme court cases that were chosen were complex in nature and even more shocking was that I had never heard of any of them before. Shocking to me mostly because these cases have consequences that affect all citizens. Nothing made this more clear than studying the National Federation of Independent Business V. Department of Labor case.

In the National Federation of Business V. Department of Labor, the national federation of business represented private and nonprofit organizations from multiple states that argued against a mandate made by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requiring businesses with more than 100 employees to ensure that their employees were vaccinated against covid 19.¹ Using OSHA and the secretary of labor, the Biden administration issued this vaccine mandate as a response to covid 19. This mandate required business with more than 100 employees to ensure that they were vaccinated against covid 19 or required unvaccinated employees to provide a negative covid 19 test on a weekly basis. The National Federation of Business argued that the secretary of labor lacked the authority to issue such a mandate. They believed that OSHA was overreaching in their authority. Ultimately the supreme court sided with the National Federation of Business and ruled against the vaccine mandate stating that OSHA did not have the authority to decide how to respond to the covid 19

¹ US Supreme Court, “National Federation of Business V. Department of Labor”, Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov), January 13, 2022, Accessed November 12, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21a244_hgci.pdf

pandemic. Following the ruling of the supreme court, OSHA withdrew the vaccine mandate on January 25th, 2022.

To me the importance of this case is that it shows the system of checks and balances within our government. This was made clear during our Politics and Public Administration section of the class and further enforced in our Federalism section of class. We went into detail on the importance of the federalist papers and how they were used to outline the system of checks and balances. Additionally, the federalist papers brought about debate and opened the discussion on how our government should look when it was being formed.

In this case the executive branch tried to find a solution to the covid 19 pandemic by enforcing a medical procedure on employees of private entities. In mandating a vaccine for large private businesses, the executive branch might have inadvertently abused their power. The supreme court being part of the judicial branch was able to review and interpret the law in order to come to a conclusion but also limit the power of the executive branch.

Whether you believe the executive branch was overreaching or within its right, this case was able to illustrate how one branch was used to check another. Prior to learning about this case and the system of checks and balances, I had not given thought to how the government makes sure no branch of the government abuses its power. I now understand the importance of having a system in place that limits the power of each branch and how they maintain the balance of power in our country.

In reading about the supreme court cases covered in class I was able to further understand how complex and divisive issues are discussed in the highest court. In each of the supreme court

cases we covered I found myself agreeing with both sides and I further understood why these cases make it to the supreme court in the first place. It also made it abundantly clear that our vote truly matters when the judges making decisions on such complex issues are at times appointed by our elected officials. Voting or not voting for a president who doesn't align with your beliefs can possibly result in judges of the supreme court being appointed who also don't align with your beliefs. It doesn't end there because this is also the same for local elected officials. It is important to understand how the people we vote into office interpret laws and how it affects our daily lives. This point was brought home to me when studying the New York State Rifle Association V. Bruen case.

In the New York State Rifle Association V. Bruen case, the NYSRA argued that superintendent of the New York State Police, Robert Bruen was violating their right to bear arms by requiring applicants for concealed carry licenses to show a special need for self-protection or "proper cause".² The state of New York argued that the proper cause requirement was constitutional and that it was necessary for public safety. Ultimately the supreme court ruled in favor of the NYSRA and declared that in requiring applicants for concealed carry licenses to have "proper cause", the state of New York violated the second and fourteenth amendment. This case had a bigger impact within the country and eventually led to more challenges to states and their gun laws. It also raised many questions regarding how constitutional many of the state gun laws are throughout the country.

² US Supreme Court, "New York State Pistol & Rifle Association V. Bruen", Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/20-843_7j80.pdf), June 23, 2022, Accessed October 15, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/20-843_7j80.pdf

This case was a perfect example of the complexity of issues that make their way to the supreme court. I can understand the point of view for both parties when it comes to firearms. With the current state of mass shootings in the United States I can see why this issue can be extremely divisive. Prior to studying this case I had not given much thought to guns and gun control. I am very aware of the mass shootings in this country, but coming to a conclusion on how I feel about gun control was very difficult. On one hand I do believe that stricter gun laws are important to keep the public safe. On the other hand, we should all have the right to be able to defend ourselves and our family. With some states placing strict gun laws they are getting dangerously close to violating everyone's right to bear arms. Then again should everyone in the population be able to bear arms? I personally think there's no happy medium where we can have both the right to bear arms and allow for stricter gun controls. I believe that both sides are right, but if I had to choose one over the other, I would choose for stricter gun controls. In an ideal world we would be able to separate those mentally capable of bearing arms from those with mental issues looking to cause harm to the public. Ask me this question year ago and I wouldn't know what my ideas of gun control were. This further enforces the idea that our vote matters, whether your vote one way or another it is important to know where you stand in when it comes to complex issues because they affect your vote.

This plays a big role in cases like Kennedy V Bremerton School District. In Kennedy V. Bremerton School District, high school football coach Joseph Kennedy was reprimanded by the school district for praying after football games.³ Joseph Kennedy believes that the actions of the school

³ US Supreme Court, "21-418 Kennedy V. Bremerton School District", Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21-418_i425.pdf), June 27, 2022, Accessed October 22, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21-418_i425.pdf

district violated his rights under the first amendments free speech and free exercise clause. Joseph Kenney states that he led prayer at the end of games and in no way intervened or forced anyone to join. The school district states that the suspension of Joseph Kennedy was necessary in order to avoid the perception that they were endorsing any religious beliefs or practices. In the end the supreme court would side with Joseph Kennedy and agreed that Bremerton School District was in violation of his rights. Justice Gorsuch goes to say that free speech and free exercise clause of the first amendment protect individuals engaging in personal religious observance from any type of government reprisal. Furthermore, it the constitution neither mandates nor permits the government to suppress religious expression. One thing to note is that the supreme court voted 6-3, the 6 being the conservative justices and the 3 being the liberal justices.

I believe that the importance of this case is that it shows how a conservative supreme court decides on issues that are conservative in nature. We have to understand that there is no higher court than the supreme court in our country. Prior to this class I was completely unaware of how the supreme court judges were appointed that position. I was also unaware that these appointments were for the most part lifetime appointments and chosen by the President. This alone makes voting for president even more important because of their ability to appoint a supreme court judge once there is a vacancy available. Voting in a liberal or conservative president also has the ability to sway the balance of the supreme court one way or another. In this case President Trump was able to appoint three supreme court judges during his presidency and made a supreme court that leaned towards a conservative one. The conservative majority in the supreme court was able to make decisions on incredibly complex

issues like the previously mentioned Kennedy V. Bremerton School District and New York State Rifle Association V. Bruen. Both of those cases dealt with issues that historically are supported by conservatives and the supreme court with a conservative majority voted in favor of the petitioners.

This was even more evident in Dobbs V. Jackson Women's Health Organization. In Dobbs V. Jackson, the state of Mississippi through Dr. Thomas E. Dobbs argues that the Constitution does not provide a right to abortions and because of that, states are free to ban abortions.⁴ The state of Mississippi passed a law banning most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. The Jackson Women's Health Organization argued that abortion is grounded in the Fourteenth Amendment and that physical autonomy and body integrity are "essential elements of liberty protected by the Due process clause." Ultimately the majority conservative supreme court would side with Dobbs and upheld the Mississippi law that banned most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. More importantly the supreme courts decision to side with Dobbs overturned cases such as Roe V. Wade and basically eliminated the constitutional right to abortions in the United States. The importance of this case is that it highlights the importance of the supreme court and its balance between liberal and conservative judges. Since much of the supreme court at the moment is conservative, we can expect to see many more conservative cases being won.

What I learned from studying these supreme court cases was that its incredibly important to know how our government functions and how our participation in it can affect all aspects of

⁴ US Supreme Court, "19-1392 Dobbs V. Jackson Women's Health Organization", Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov), June 24, 2022, Accessed September 24, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf

daily life. Voting for people that support your beliefs is becoming more and more important in a highly divided country. Divisive and complex issues will always be part of this country, but knowing how the government works is the first step in participating.

Like the previously mentioned supreme court cases, the study of public administration continues to grow in complexity. Historically, issues would arise and the government would come in and create a solution and that solution provided a result. In today's world the issues we deal with are extremely complex in nature and very much like the supreme court cases the country seems to be divided. Add to that the growing distrust in government and what you get is an uncertain future for public administration. As we learned from the history of public administration, the study of public administration is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the people and government. History can teach us how public administration came to be what is today and supreme court cases teach us the complexity of issues we deal with. Knowing history and the current state of things is a first step in trying to understand where public administration will be in the future. For people like me who currently work in government and hope to be a future leader, knowing where things are headed is incredibly important.

As part of our class, we were tasked to choose a book from a list provided and create a presentation. For my reading assignment and presentation, I chose Bridgebuilders: How Government Can Transcend Boundaries to Solve Big Problems. As someone who works for the government, I thought this book would be the most relevant for me. If my goal is to become a future leader in my department learning ways to solve "big" problems would be a very good choice. What I didn't expect was how important I found this book to be in all aspects of not only my career but also the study of public administration.

In Bridgebuilders the authors argue that the government needs a new approach to deal with problems that are growing in size and complexity. Their new approach revolves around the idea that “bridgebuilders” are needed to solve complex problems. These “bridgebuilders” are leaders who can act as bridges or connectors between organizations public and private to get problems solved.⁵ The book goes into great detail discussing modern day examples of “bridgebuilders” in action and how they cross boundaries between departments, organizations and other obstacles to find solutions to problems they are facing. The book discusses several topics that have been covered in this class including the blending of public and private organizations in our current government. It also discusses the need for constant growth within public administration. At its core it pushes the idea that public administration and the issues it deals with will continue to grow in size and complexity. With this growth public administration must be able to evolve and adapt to meet the changing needs of the public and the issues they face.

What I found to be the most important part of reading Bridgebuilders was that the book offers a blueprint to future leaders on how to traverse this more blended government. If the class provided history of public administration and the supreme court cases showed us the current state of things, this book was able to show us where public administration is headed in the future. I was lucky to have chosen this book because I believe that it wraps up all the ideas and concepts learned in the class and puts them in detailed examples of current day issues that public administration is facing. In a more practical understanding, I am able to see

⁵ William D. Eggers, Donald F. Kettle, “*Bridgebuilders: How government can transcend boundaries to solve big problems*”, (Harvard Business Review Press, Boston Massachusetts) 2023

bridgebuilders all over my job. Working for the department of labor I currently work with multiple departments and organizations to deal with issues in child labor, immigration, wage theft and misclassification of employees. These diverse issues require me to reach out to not only departments within the government but also reach out to private and non-profit organizations who can assist in everything from advocacy, information spread and investigations. Interestingly enough I see that I have played the role of bridgebuilder myself on multiple occasions. The future the book talks about is already here and currently being discussed and implemented in our government today and I am fortunate enough to not only see it firsthand but participate in it.

This course in public administration was designed to provide a broad introduction into the incredibly complex nature of public administration. It does a great job of introducing a base knowledge of public administration in its historical context and more importantly it shows us how its history continues to influence today's public administration. As someone who came in with little to no knowledge of public administration, I feel I better understand my career field today. The course was able to link modern day issues via supreme court cases and not only show us our government in action, but also how things like the federalist papers affected our current day system of checks and balances. Working in the enforcement side of law and government I had little to no interest in how our government works. I was able to do my job investigating cases and focusing on labor law. Learning about public administration showed me that I play a role in government and its not as simple as just investigate a case and hand it in. Now more than ever I feel that I must be more involved when it comes to voting for officials in all elections including my local elections. If my goal is to be a leader within the department of

labor, I must be able to understand what it means to be part of public administration and where I stand within it. I must also be able to know that public administration will always be evolving along with the issues it deals with. I now know that I am public administration and every person I work alongside in Trenton also plays a crucial role in serving the public. A degree in public administration no longer just means a way for promotion, but an understanding of my duties and goals as a member of public administration.

Bibliography

US Supreme Court, “National Federation of Business V. Department of Labor”,

Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21a244_hgci.pdf), January 13, 2022, Accessed November 12, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21a244_hgci.pdf

US Supreme Court, “New York State Pistol & Rifle Association V. Bruen”,

Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/20pdf/20-843_7j80.pdf), June 23, 2022, Accessed October 15, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/20pdf/20-843_7j80.pdf

US Supreme Court, “21-418 Kennedy V. Bremerton School District”,

Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21-418_i425.pdf), June 27, 2022, Accessed October 22, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/21-418_i425.pdf

US Supreme Court, “19-1392 Dobbs V. Jackson Women’s Health Organization”,

Supreme Court of the United States, [Supremecourt.gov](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf), June 24, 2022, Accessed September 24, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf

William D. Eggers, Donald F. Kettle, “*Bridgebuilders: How government can transcend boundaries to solve big problems*”, (Harvard Business Review Press, Boston Massachusetts) 2023