

Minority public managers prefer integrating social equity, traditional public values

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Minority public managers place more emphasis on both traditional values, like efficiency and effectiveness, and social equity when compared with their white counterparts, according to a new study that includes a University of Kansas researcher and two fellow KU alumni.

"Race does make a difference in how we talk about public values at the local government level, and we need more research on what that means," said Shannon Portillo, associate professor in the KU School of Public Affairs & Administration.

In their recent study published in the journal *Public Administration*, Portillo and her co-authors used data collected as part of the National Administrative Studies Project, which surveys senior managers and department leaders in U.S. local governments that serve a population of at least 50,000. Her co-authors are fellow KU School of Public Affairs & Administration alumni Edmund Stazyk, of the Department of Public Administration of Policy at State University of New York at Albany, and Randall Davis, of the Department of Political Science at Southern Illinois University.

"For a long time we've talked about the idea that [equity](#) is potentially in competition with ideas of efficiency and effectiveness, but for minority managers, that wasn't the case," Portillo said. "It is possible for managers to focus on how these public values can work in concert with each other more than conflict."

Prior research on public management had not examined whether race was a factor in how managers emphasized the traditional and social equity values.

The researchers said it was not surprising that both minority and white managers are likely to be attentive to traditional [public administration](#) values—such as budgetary decisions being based on departmental performance—because most public administrators likely entered the field due to the desire to help others.

The fact that minority managers place a higher value on both social equity public values and the traditional ones compared with their white counterparts might seem counterintuitive initially to the public, Portillo said.

"It may be that minority managers and managers generally think that equity won't be taken as seriously if it's sensed to be in competition with questions of efficiency and effectiveness," she said.

The minority respondents based on their own lived experience could have a more nuanced understanding of how the three types of values can be inter-related, the researchers said.

For example, managers in U.S. communities grapple with issues such as the outcomes of police stops varying by a person's race, or disparities by race in access to transportation, health care and the segregation of housing and public education.

"They connect all of these goals. What we argue is that this may be a form of trying to legitimize their focus," Portillo said. "These types of values really should be seen as in conversation with each other. Right now, we really only find that for the minority public managers."

More information: Edmund C. Stazyk et al, More dissimilar than alike? Public values preferences across US minority and white managers, *Public Administration* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/padm.12343](https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12343)

Provided by University of Kansas

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