



Article

Blacklists and bureaucracy: navigating accountability in South Korean public administration

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Availability of data and material

Upon reasonable request, the datasets of this study can be available from the corresponding author.

Abstract

Public officials in a complex modern state may be challenged by conflicting accountability expectations. Work is yet to be done that adequately pulls together an emphasis on the response of public servants toward multiple accountabilities disorder, especially in South Korea. The purpose of this article was to demonstrate multiple accountabilities disorder with a case study of the so-called blacklist scandal in Korea. In particular, we examined how public officials behave in the response of the inappropriate directions to threaten the rights of artists. Our case study showed that the career public officials experienced dilemmatic multiple accountabilities disorder and either kept silent or raised their voice against the inappropriate directions from political appointees. Furthermore, our study is significant in that we identified the strategic activities of officials that Hirschman and his successors failed to identify. Strengthening strategic activities could contribute to enhancing the understanding of the Guardian State, which has recently received attention in the public administration academia against democratic backsliding.

Keywords: blacklist, South Korea, accountability, dilemma

Introduction

What if public officials face the situation when they have to follow the inappropriate orders from their superiors, which could be illegal? Public officials often experience multiple aspects accountabilities which require varying sets of expectations and norms about their conducts (Bovens, 2005). A law holds government officials accountable to their citizens. At the time, public officials have to be held accountable for the order from their supervisors. Public officials who received seemingly illegal orders from the higher ranking officers are of particular concern where high ranking officers are elected politicians or appointed by elected politicians. If the order is not clearly illegal, the official who received it is inevitably placed in a dilemma.

Accountability means obedience to the law as well as that to higher officials' directions (Kettl, 2011). The inappropriate direction from the high-ranking political appointees may perplex ordinary public officials. For ordinary public administrators, it is very difficult to oppose the directions of their superiors

(Peters, 2010). The main reason behind this scene is that accountability is a multi-dimensional concept and sometimes sub-dimensions of accountability are often conflicting (Romzek & Ingraham, 2000). It is difficult to find public administration theories that explore these situations and offer solutions. Career officials, experiencing inappropriate orders from elected officials, are realizing the limitations of the classical politics-administration dichotomy that demands a so-called 'soulless bureaucrat'. Therefore, this issue needs to be studied from various angles with the overall goals of establishing a richer understanding of accountability. This research is expected to highlight the vulnerability of liberal democracy, and to suggest implications in contemporary administration that is experiencing democratic backsliding (Yesilkagit et al., 2024).

In this paper, we will delve into the case of the blacklist scandal in South Korea during the Park Geunhye administration. Due to its importance, previous literature did shed light on the blacklist scandal in South Korea (e.g., Kim, 2018; Ryoo & Jin, 2020; Yuk, 2019). However, less attention has been given to strategic behaviors of public officials. In order to comprehend the case, we will employ the Hirschman (1970)'s model. Hirschman's model is the well-established work to account for the behaviors of members toward the declining organization. Despite his enormous contribution, it does not fully explain various aspects of behaviors. For this reason, some attempts have been devoted to expanding this model. For instance, Farrell (1983) added "neglect" so that he could capture passive behaviors that might sabotage organization. Nonetheless, this concentrated on passive and destructive aspects. However, members of an organization may strategically act to fulfill what (they think) is right. This aspect has not fully been explored. In this paper, we will attempt to add "strategy" that the member of organizations cleverly acts against the order of superiors. In this study, we will highlight this strategic behavior by illustrating the case study. And our case study theoretically improves the understanding of the existing Hirschman model. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this article is to explore the dilemmas and reaction associated with public officials in the case of the Blacklist scandal in South Korea.

Although the status and political impartiality of public officials shall be guaranteed by the constitution of Korea (Article VII, Section 2), public officials would possibly face inappropriate orders from political appointees. The Park Geunhye administration used budget and censorship to regulate cultural sectors (Ryoo & Jin, 2020). In particular, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (MCST) blacklisted 9,473 artists who had critical attitudes toward the Park administration for ceasing public funding (Hong, 2019; Kim, 2018). As fully explained later, there was an abuse of power to allocate public money by drafting blacklist of artists. Blacklisting artists made by the political push runs counter to the law. To a varying degree, government implements cultural industries policies regardless of political ideology (Chung, 2019). Conducting a case study of the Blacklist case in Korea will lead to a significant improvement of our understanding of accountability. Therefore, it is worth studying this issue. In this paper we aim to apply dilemma theory and Hirschman (1970)'s exit-voice-loyalty model to unveil how an illegal direction from hierarchical superiors can affect behaviors of public servants.

This study introduces theories on multiplicity of accountability, dilemma situations, and bureaucratic behaviors in dilemma situations, and then reinterprets multiple accountabilities disorder, dilemma theory and Hirschman's model to present an analytical framework. Based on the

framework, we analyze the Korean blacklist case which shows behaviors of bureaucrats in a tricky situation of conflicting accountabilities. Drawing on the analysis results, we argue that it is necessary to strengthen the strategic behavior of bureaucrats to overcome democratic backsliding.

Background Knowledge

Multi-dimensional accountability

Accountability has always been the core public administration value (Koppell, 2005). Moreover, it is central to the practice of democratic public administration (Forrer et al., 2010; Frederickson, 1997; Wirtz & Birkmeyer, 2015). One of the main purposes of accountability is to “control for the abuse and misuse of public authority” (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000). Citizens seem to have an intuitive feeling for what accountability is. However, the term accountability is used with great liberty because it is multi-dimensional (Aleksowska & Schillemans, 2021; Mueller, 2009). A tradition sense of accountability refers to a vertical process, following hierarchical chain of command (Vanhommerig & Karré, 2014). Somewhat tautologically, Haque (2000) defined accountability as “the expected role or duty of public governance for which it is held accountable.” Simply, accountability can be defined as “the requirement of a public organization to render an account to some other independent organization and to explain its actions” (Peters, 2010) or “the enforcement of responsibility (Hill & Lynn, 2009).” Also, accountability refers to “the ethical obligation of individuals (in this case, governmental officials) to answer for their actions, possible failings, and wrongdoings” (Zarsky, 2013).

Accountability has been developed over the past several decades and has diverse constituent elements (Eun, 2010). Koppell (2005) conceived accountability as the amalgam of transparency, liability, controllability, responsiveness, and responsibility. According to Koppell (2005), among five components, controllability is about “Did the organization do what the principal (e.g., Congress, president) desired?” whereas responsibility is about “Did the organization follow the rules?” Provided that the orders from the President are illegal, for instance, controllability would be at odds with responsibility. This situation poses serious challenges for public administrators. Incommensurability between political accountability and legal accountability may exist in practice (Romzek & Dubnik, 1987). Ordinary public officials are subject to significant political influences. He or she will be called upon to answer for any misbehavior. It means that public servants can uphold the law in defiance of superiors’ orders.

Organizational and legal accountability can be in a tradeoff relationship. Ordinary public officials hold their behaviors accountable through hierarchical structures of bureaucracy. Accountability cannot be separable from public servants’ answerability for their deeds and misdeeds (Harmon, 1995). We have to ask whether misdeeds of public officials stem from illegal order of superiors or personal negligence to abide by laws. Friedrich (1940) and Finer (1941) had a conflicting idea on how misdeeds of public officials should be handled. From Friedrich (1940)’s point of view, ethics is of a matter of the individual internal standards of conduct. As such, inner check provided by the professional values is necessary. Control was attainable through an inward sense of personal obligation. By contrast, according to Finer (1941), external controls, laws, rules, and regulations are

necessary for responsible behaviors. Personal obligation was not enough, and some external forces must be employed in order to enforce responsible behaviors. He made the case for the long tradition of administration held accountable by legal standards.

Public officers may conceive accountability in various ways (Joaquin & Greitens, 2011). Traditional accountability is built on the notion that superiors have an authority and subordinates' behaviors are accountable to their superiors (Brown, 2005). This meaning of accountability is compatible with controllability that Koppell mentioned. If X can induce the behavior of Y, it is said that X controls Y-and that Y is accountable to X (Koppell, 2005).

The problem of accountability in part emanates from the dichotomy of politics-administration. Bureaucracy rests on a hierarchical model where a good deal of authority goes to high-ranking officers (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010). In a democratic society, the separation of politics from administration implies that public administrators are subjugated to elected political principals (Harmon, 1995; Overman & Schillemans, 2022; Roberts, 2004). At the same time, public officers should be accountable under the law. As long as public administrators are accountable solely for the fact that they abide by laws, there would be no serious issue. Public administrators are subject to conflicting pressures when higher ranking politicians put strong pressures on lower ranking career public workers. Facing multiple accountabilities pressures, civil officials are in difficult positions to prioritize decisions (Aleksavska et al., 2022). Koppell (2005) described this situation where is impossible for concomitantly satisfying several dimensions of accountability at the same time as "multiple accountabilities disorder."

Perception of public servants: Dilemma theory

Dilemma theory provides an important theoretical explanation for the case that public servants' response. Yoon et al. (2000) have put forward the four conditions to constitute grounds for making a dilemma. A first condition of creating dilemma is that the options for the choice are mutually exclusive. In other words, incommensurability between option A and option B should exist. A second condition is the equivalence of payoffs of two options. A third condition is that it is impossible to simultaneously choose two options. He or she is compelled to choose only one option. It means that he or she does not have discretion in choosing both of options. The situation forces him or her to choose the one of the options. The last condition is that the time to make decision is finite. If four criteria are met, a decision-maker could be thrust into a dilemma. A public officer receiving unlawful orders from superiors may face a dilemma: to follow or not to follow. In this case, a public servant could be stuck in a Catch 22.

In the context of multiple accountabilities disorder situations, public officials may face dilemma. Some cannot be sure which principle of accountability should take precedence. The subordination of administration to politics intensifies the degree of conflicts. He or she can face incompatible choices: follow or disobey. The stress on political accountability conflicts with other dimensions of accountability. In this case, accountability is even more difficult to achieve. A public official can procrastinate their decision as long as possible to see the problem to be faded away by itself (Aleksavska & Schillemans, 2021). In some cases, however, public servants would face an array of task demands that must be balanced under serious time constraints. These conditions pose a tricky

dilemma.

Reaction of public officials: Hirschman's exit-voice-loyalty

The reaction from multi accountabilities disorder and dilemma could be explained by Hirschman's exit-voice-loyalty. The responses of public officers who face dilemma mentioned above may have more of a connection to Hirschman's concept of exit-voice-loyalty (EVL) model. His model offers a useful logic for analyzing the response of public administrators. Kettl (2011) provided a brief conflicting situation by adopting EVL model: facing a confusion direction from the superior, a subordinate can choose voice (remaining in their positions and fighting for what they think is right) or exit (resigning). In the context of workplace, voice of EVL refers to employees' capability to articulate grievances through a union (Dowding et al., 2000). Loyalty is "the willingness to trade off the certainty of outcome that would result from exit and the uncertainty from remaining in an organization and hoping things will get better" (Lee & Whitford, 2008). If public servants are in a situation where they face an illegal direction, they may not deny it because various things are at the stake. Those who recognize the potential risks may be reticent.

In Hirschman's model, exit is chosen when voice is not a valid option in practice (Van de Walle & Marien, 2017). An illegal behavior of a public officer makes an individual public official liable for punishment. In practice, it would be a bold attempt to raise their voice against the superior's direct order. Public officers who do not want to bear the burden of acquiescing to an illegal order may leave the organization. Perhaps, subordinates may defy superiors' instructions. Alternatively, this dilemma leads to reticence of public servants as some may want to abstain from reporting this illegal order. To summarize, quitting the job is "exit", disobeying the direct order (in other sense, upholding the law) is "voice," and following the direct order is "loyalty." Responding to this dilemma, in other words, public servants might seem to have only three alternatives: quit the job, raise the voice against their superior, or show faithful obedience to higher officials' directions.

Research framework and case selection

After Hirschman's monumental work, various scholars extended his model. Adding the aspect of "neglect" is one of the achievements. Neglect in a workplace indicates that employees spend less effort and pay less attention to the quality of work but appear to show loyalty to their organization (Farrell, 1983). Absentees and tardiness are examples of neglecting behaviors (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Neglecting behavior is often found in the declining organizations. For now, exit-voice-loyalty-neglect (EVLN) model is widely used (Aravopoulou et al., 2017; Hagedoorn, et al., 1999; Rusbult, et al., 1988).

Although EVLN model captures behaviors of employees to a large extent, there can be other types of reactions. It may be possible for employees to be loyal to the organization but at the same time he or she can pursue Plan B which deviates from the intention of the organization. By doing so, employees can fulfill his or her ideas. Facing conflicting demands, frontline employees tend to cast a doubt on decision-making routines and try to use new ideas (Hinterleitner & Wittwer, 2023). We propose strategy, meaning that employees act according to his or her conscience by utilizing a given environment. While neglect is doing nothing for the work (Withey & Cooper, 1989), strategy

is doing something for the work but looks to do nothing.

Strategy of our proposal is line with O'Leary (2017b)'s guerrilla government in that public servants can obey in public but disobey in private. Guerrilla government is a form of dissent of public servants, but in practice they opt not to go public for strategic reasons (O'Leary, 2017a). Strategic reasons lie in their action (O'Leary, 2013). Indeed, to some extent, street-level bureaucrats can play the role of tempering illiberal government policies that eventually slow down democratic backsliding (Piotrowska, 2024). In this paper, we will show that EVL model can be extended not to EVLN but to EVLS (Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Strategy).

In this paper, we will demonstrate conflicting values between controllability and responsibility as multiple accountabilities disorder. This multiple accountabilities disorder can create the dilemma to public officials. If the two options are mutually exclusive and simultaneous, and the payoffs are equivalent at the moment, these can create a dilemma. How can public officers react against this dilemma? Public officials can exit by quitting his or her job. Alternatively, public officials either accept the seeming illegal order or refuse to carry out it. Finally, public administrators can follow the orders, at the same time they can demonstrate personal integrity by executing strategic behaviors. Our research framework is depicted in Fig. 1.

This study aims to analyze the Korean blacklist case using the aforementioned framework. The Korean blacklist case is a specific example of the dominance of politics in the dichotomous relationship between politics and administration. Han Kang, a recent winner of the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature, was a blacklisted author. Also Hwang Dong-hyuk, the director of *Squid Game*, and Bong Joon-ho, the director of *Parasite*, were both on the blacklist. A number of artists who stood on the opposite political side of the ruling government were excluded from governmental support. As can be seen from the recent prominent activities of these artists, being blacklisted was a politically, legally, and even aesthetically failed decision.

Traditionally, in Korea, political influences have direct and grave authority over bureaucratic agencies. However, the blacklist incident triggered the impeachment of President Park Geunhye,

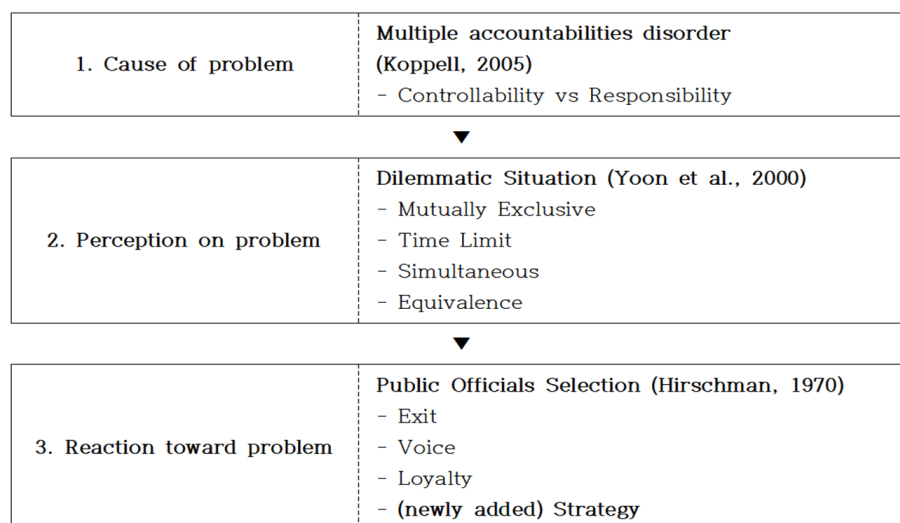


Fig. 1. Research framework.

which led to a re-establishment of the relationship between politics and administration, making it a worthwhile case to study. However, one point to note is that this case is not a conflict between populist politicians and bureaucrats that has recently emerged globally (Bauer et al., 2021). Although President Park Geunhye was democratically elected, the blacklist was not created to reflect the will of the people.

The primary source analyzed in this study is the white paper published by the Blacklisting Scandal Fact-finding Committee. After the existence of the blacklist became divulged and the administration was changed, the Committee was launched in July 2017 with the support of the MCST. This committee published a total of 10 white papers in February 2019. This white paper is approximately 6,600 pages long. Volume 1 broadly describes the activities of the committee, and Volume 2 contains the specific details of the investigation of the truth. Volume 3 contains institutional improvement plans proposed by experts. Volume 4 contains relevant reports. The white paper provides detailed documentation of the testimonies from those who directly experienced the blacklist incident, along with related case records. We conducted a case analysis mainly based on the contents of this white paper.

In addition, the data collected by one of the authors while working as a legislative researcher for the National Assembly and monitoring the blacklist investigation process was also used. For example, he interviewed officials from the Arts Council Korea several times (January & February, 2019) and interviewed a planner who worked at the Arts Council Korea and resisted orders from superiors (December, 2019). The results of the monitoring and interviews were compiled into a report of the National Assembly, which was partially used in this paper (NARS, 2019).

Case Study: Blacklist in South Korea

Cause of problem

The Park Geunhye administration drafted the blacklist of artists who are critical of the government (Lee, 2019; Yuk, 2019).¹ The MCST excluded artists or art organization for funding based on the requests from the Blue House (then South Korean presidential office). This blacklist included 1,094 artists and 342 art organizations. Arts Council Korea (ARKO), one of South Korea's quasi-governmental organizations excluded 235 personnel (or organizations) and 827 projects from the governmental funding. The existence of the blacklist was exposed when one expert involved in the evaluation disclosed this lapse (Kim, 2021). The chain of command started from the President to frontline workers. In general, South Korea's quasi-governmental organizations are directed, supervised, and evaluated by relevant ministries of a central government. The costs of running the most of their projects rest on the governmental subsidies. Therefore, frontline workers in the organizations routinely had been experiencing various interventions from the ministries (Bae & Sung, 2019). For instance, in 2014, ARKO excluded Seoul Theater Festival at 2015 Korea Art Performing Center Annual Competition project applied by the Seoul Theater Association. The Blue House forced the chairman and director of ARKO to exclude specific personnel and organizations

¹ Allegedly, Lee Myungbak administration also made the blacklist before Park administration (Park, 2022). However, its existence was not apparent because executions were not substantial.

via public officials of MCST (BSFC, 2019). Frontline workers carried out the blacklist following the inappropriate orders. There were various ways to carry out the blacklist (BSFC, 2019). To illustrate, public officials forced the applicants not to apply, change the procedure of applications, and sabotage the play by prohibiting facilities from moving. This point to controllability element of accountability.

The order of the Blue House contained illegal aspects (Cho, 2018). The Article XXI, section 1 of the Korean Constitution stipulates “All citizens shall enjoy freedom of speech and the press, and freedom of assembly and association.” Hence, the Blacklist scandal was an unconstitutional affair that violated the freedom of expression of cultural artists. And the Article 123 of the Criminal Act stipulates “A public servant should not abuse one’s authority to coerce other person to do non-obligatory task or to prevent the exercise of other person’s rights.” As such, the creation and instruction of the Blacklist were an alleged violation of the law by abuse of authority which disbarred the Arts Council Korea from exercising its rights.² Due to this issue, Gichoon Kim, then Presidential Chief of Staff, and Yunsun Cho, then Senior Presidential Secretary for Political Affairs, were indicted for the charge of making the blacklist (Lee, 2017). Eventually, the Constitutional Court ruled that blacklisting artist is unconstitutional as it violates the freedom of expression (Park, 2022). Hereby, we can find the aspect of responsibility of accountability.

Perception on problem

Career officials who received the order from the Blue House faced dilemma. The choices of excluding and not excluding were mutually exclusive. In other words, it is impossible to fund by excluding the blacklisted artists. In 2014, for instance, the ferry named *Sewol* sank and consequently there were 304 casualties. Numerous Koreans castigated the incompetence of Park administration to cope with the crisis. The documentary movie *Diving Bell: The truth shall not sink with Sewol* depicted the tragedy of Sewol ferry. This movie was excluded for being funded from diverse governmental projects (BSFC, 2019). For instance, there was an attempt to apply for the independent movie subsidy. Korean Film Council rejected the application as the Blue House applied pressures.³ This case demonstrates that carrying out blacklist for funding was mutually exclusive.

In addition, the two options cannot be simultaneously possible to exist. Jincheck Sohn, enlisted in blacklist, was in charge of directing the play *<Chunhyang is coming>*. Mr. Sohn was blacklisted because he described the former President Park Junghee negatively and portrayed the former President Roh Moohyun in a favorable manner when he directed the play *<Frog>* at the National Theater of Korea (Ko, 2016). National Theater of Korea received the message from the Blue House to replace Mr. Sohn. National Theater of Korea replied back to the Blue House that it could not replace Mr. Sohn. Ultimately, that play was shown to the people based on the consent of the Blue House (BSFC, 2019).

By contrast, there are actually a multitude of excluded cases (BSFC, 2019). Jaehwan Joo, also

² The Article 56 of the National Civil Service Act (obligation of sincerity) states “All public servants must perform their duties sincerely in compliance with legal norms”, and the Article 59 the National Civil Service Act (obligation of kindness and fairness) stipulates “Public servants must perform their duties kindly and fairly as servants of the entire nation.”

³ The Blue House threatened Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) not to screen the movie (Choe, 2017). MCST cut down the budget of BIFF. The mayor of Busan influenced BIFF for shutting down the movie. For example, the tickets were sold out and few ordinary audiences actually watch the movie. Allegedly, public officials of City of Busan got involved in preventing people from watching the movie by purchasing all tickets.

blacklisted, partook in <Already Not Yet> of Korea National Contemporary Dance Company. The Blue House asked director Ahn about Mr. Joo and made him exclude Mr. Joo. The Blue House drained budget resources and laid off a couple of other staffs including Mr. Joo. Also, director Ahn was assigned to be the director of opening ceremony of 2018 Pyeonghgang Winter Olympics. However, this assignment was withdrawn because of the order of MCST. This case illustrated that it was very difficult for two options to stand together.

The payoffs of the two options were almost equivalent. If blacklists are activated, cultural figures or art organization would either be or not funded on the basis of political reason. It meant that government relinquishes the arm's length principle, which government needs to be politically neutral. From the point of view of an art field, it was considered censorship. However, if the blacklist was not activated, that organization would face the crisis of running their business. Although the Korean public organizations were hive-off, they were heavily influenced by a central government. The evaluation of management was an archetype example how government wields their influences. Art organizations were evaluated by MCST or Ministry of Economy & Finance (MOEF). This evaluation mattered profoundly for organizations because their budget hinges upon it. Moreover, their paychecks were affected by the institutional evaluation. Culture and art enhancement funding of ARKO was dried out and could not run without government's budget. The influences of government came in a variety of forms. Other than a budget issue, government has various influences on artists or art organizations. The minutes of decision makings should be reported to MCST and requires the approval of MCST. Among those, MCST let the important figures of the Blue House know and asked the permission from them. This conveyed a sense of control. Furthermore, the order was should be executed as soon as possible.

Reaction toward problem

We have discussed how public officials could face the dilemma. Now we turn to how public officials can react. In this study, we focus on ARKO which situated in the center of the blacklist scandal.

The foremost reaction was exit. One example of exit is the case of Jinee Kim who whistle blew the so-called Popup theater crisis (Kim, 2017). Popup theater crisis occurred in 2015 (BSFC, 2019). Popup theater project was designed to transform an ordinary place to a playground. The play *This Kid* was supposed to be displayed in one café. ARKO banned to premier this play because it reminded of Sewol ferry disaster. Jinee Kim made a complaint to ARKO. ARKO did not accept Jinee Kim's complains. Therefore, Jinee Kim leaked the information to media and colleagues in the play field. However, she underwent diverse arrays of disadvantages and eventually quitted her job. Considering the fact that public officials tend to value job security, the number of whistle blowers was small. However, turnover rates were high when blacklisting aroused avoidance of felt shame. Several public officials took a leave in the name of a health problem.

The second type of response was voice. The chairman of ARKO argued that he tried his best to eschew the order to exclude the state support (BSFC, 2019). Backing up the argument, he showed the proportion of accepting the application. Among the total number of applicants, overall accepting rate was 34.8%. However, it was 46.7% among the applicants which the Blue House asked to deny

the acceptance.⁴ In fact, with regard to the literature field in 2016, he preceded the project although he was asked to exclude the blacklisted artists. With respect to the reputation, there might have been the pressure to exclude *Isangyun Competition of Tongyeong International Music Foundation* (Jang, 2022). ARKO have funded it based on the previous performance. The staffs of ARKO tried not to exclude *Isangyun competition*. Some were demoted because this process. For instance, one public official, charged with an art policy of MCST, was demoted to subsidiary organization after being reported to the Blue House. There was an attempt to persuade the Blue House. After the failures of persuading the Blue House, some public officials reacted independently. MCST asked ARKO to negotiate every step of evaluation applicants. However, ARKO funded *2016 Senior Artists Play* project without cooperation of MCST. Moreover, ARKO pretended to fail to receive the order from MCST. In addition, among *2016 Internship Subsidy Program*, there was a demand to exclude traditional art and play art. Hence, ARKO excluded it. Other than these fields, there was no demand so that ARKO objectively evaluated applicants. And ARKO did not report the funding to government. Furthermore, a number of artists assigned to conduct *2016 Korea-UK Mutual Research Representative Dispatch* were questionable. ARKO sought to find previous mutual cooperation and then did not report to MCST.

Loyalty was also displayed. MCST organized the committee for carrying out the order to blacklist artists. The committee investigated 145 cases regarding the blacklist and carrying out blacklist was found in most of the cases (BSFC, 2019). As mentioned earlier, *Seoul Theater Festival* was deeply related to the blacklist. The Seoul Theater Associated filed application to rent the theater of ARKO. ARKO declined the request because the Blue House asked not to do. ARKO reversed the decision after a number of professional artists had raised their voice and sued ARKO. However, the Blue House maintained its decision to arm-twist and ban the Seoul Theater Associated to borrow the theater. As such, ARKO shut down the theater day before *Seoul Theater Festival* opening in the name of safety.

In addition to exit, voice, and loyalty, career public workers strategically responded against the order from the Blue House. It merits our attention that the workers of ARKO attempted various efforts to evade the order to exclude blacklisted personnel. For instance, the secretary of the Blue House kept ordering public officials of MCST to exclude *Play Ticket 1+1 Project* in 2015 (BSFC, 2019). Hence, ARKO kept out this project for funding. In this situation, a team chief of ARKO and a public official of MCST asked the applicant to change its name and reapply. Also, they asked the members who evaluate the process to boycott it. Moreover, they created the “conditional approval” which makes the applicants be funded later. For instance, ARKO funded *40th Anniversary of Writers Association* based on the resource which a central government did not manage. ARKO supported non-funded artists and art organizations by organizing *Culturally Isolated Class Project 2016*. Having conducted *2015 International Creativity Residence Dispatch Project*, MCST was asked to exclude the novelist Han Kang who won the Man Booker International Prize (In, 2022). ARKO coordinated the British Council to fund her because the British Council was not under purview of the Korean public authority. In addition, ARKO made new projects such as *2015 Culture for Isolated Class Project* to

⁴ We cautiously cast doubt on the validity of this point. Simple comparison of the acceptance rates may be inappropriate because blacklisted artists and art organizations were already renowned.

support artists and art organization which were not funded.

Discussion and Conclusion

Public accountability is the key pillar of democratic governance (Aucoin & Heinzman, 2000; Bovens, 2005). Hence, there is no surprise that public officials should be held accountable for their actions. Nonetheless, of particular interest to this study is public servant's response toward a seemingly illegal direction from a superior officer. Our investigation has revealed several points that could create dilemma. Also, this case study provides confirmation of the observation predicted by dilemma theory and Hirschman's model.

Our study advances the understanding of the ways in which public employees react by extending Hirschman's model. Hirschman's model is theoretically and practically influential in explaining the behaviors of organization members. In particular, this model helps explain why and how conflicting accountability fits into the blacklist scandal. Although the Hirschman's EVL offers several advantages for analyzing the topic, a number of criticisms can be made of the explanation of exit, voice, and loyalty of public officials. For instance, it does not capture the strategic action that seems to follow the order but actually disobey it. We suggested the alternative reaction of strategy other than existing exit-loyalty-voice model by showing exploring the tensions arising from multiple accountabilities disorder.

Democratic backsliding could be defined as "state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy" (Bermeo, 2016). Democratic backsliding points to key features such as liberalism, polyarchy, participation, and deliberation (Gora & de Wilde, 2022). With regard to democratic backsliding, in particular, deterioration in the rule of law is pertinent to our paper. As we noted in the case study, public officials could face dilemma because of the conflicting accountability issue. Unless strong security is guaranteed, public officials cannot easily defy the illegal order. If it is the case, politicians would ruin the rule of law and accordingly democratic backsliding can occur. If the president asks illegal order, vulnerable ordinary public officials are threatened and tend not to protect the rule of law. Appointing a political figure at the head of a government organization is not unusual. If political appointees manipulate a career personnel system, public servants cannot safeguard the continuity of public interests and the rule of law is in danger.

The diverse behaviors of bureaucrats observed in the blacklist incident can provide implications for bureaucrats in countries around the world experiencing democratic backsliding. Yesilkagit et al. (2024) presented the concept of the Guardian State, emphasizing the autonomous role of individual public officials and agencies in safeguarding liberal democracy, and introduced various suggestions related to this. This study reveals the actual behavior of public officials in detail, which has not been identified in previous studies, and defines it as the strategic behavior of bureaucrats that Hirschman and his successors failed to identify. It also clarifies that strengthening this strategic behavior is what we can expect from bureaucrats in the face of democratic backsliding. It can be said that various institutions and norms of the Guardian State are for bureaucrats to act strategically based on their conscience and professionalism in dilemma situations where multiple accountabilities conflict.

The heart of our paper discusses the implications for multiple accountabilities disorder. Both citizens and governments need to design an institutional arrangement to ensure accountability. Transparency would be an effective counter to the advent of multiple accountabilities disorder. Transparency is expected to be a means to promote accountability (Lee & Sun, 2024; Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2007). Transparency would make it easier for public servants to discharge their responsibilities to citizens. The problems will deepen unless administrative malaise cannot be disclosed. The key here is that public servants need to account for their actions publicly. Thus, transparency may resolve ethical impasses. However, this institutional design can protect them from politically influenced directions.

In addition to greater transparency, government needs to foster a working environment that instills employees to raise their voice easily. An organizational climate in which no one fears the consequences of speaking up definitely helps to cure bureaucratic pathologies. A crucial factor contributing to the success of ethical public management is the environment in which public servants work because to some extent behaviors of public officials are shaped by the cultural milieu of a bureaucracy. In the strong hierarchical environment, low-ranked public officials may see themselves as powerless to confront their superiors. On a more practical level, ordinary public officials are not in a position to make a claim. In Korea, many public officials encounter various contextual barriers to express their own opinion as the Korean administrative culture is hierarchically rigid (Park & Joo, 2010). The Korean employees are afraid to voice concerns about ethical or legal problems in their organization. As such, much of frustration felt by public officials comes from the structure which oppresses free working environments. Thus, the working environment should be improved so that the costs of disobeying an illegal order do not outweigh that of breaking the law.

Despite the contributions of our paper, limitations should be noted. Case study has inherently a limitation in that the conclusion may not be generalized to other contexts. Indeed, public administrators are situated in political background. The study of accountability is fertile territory for comparative analysis because each country has its own accountability style (Schillemans et al., 2024). Future study could assess the similar case in other countries where different social atmospheres pervade.

Having said that, more research is needed to more fully understand how public officials experience multiple accountabilities dilemmas by employing quantitative research design. In particular, experiment research for examining multiple accountabilities disorder continues to merit attention in future studies. This method can contribute to the literature by empirically verifying the causal relationship regarding multiple accountabilities disorder.

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