

Chapter 15

The Bureaucracy: The Real Power?

Key Chapter Questions

1. How big is the federal government?
2. How did the bureaucracy evolve?
3. Who are the bureaucrats and what do they do?
4. How is the federal bureaucracy formally and informally organized?
5. How are bureaucrats hired and regulated? What are principles of bureaucratic management?
6. What does the public think of bureaucrats and the bureaucracy?
7. What is bureaucratic accountability to the President and to Congress?
8. How might the bureaucracy be reformed?
9. How does the U.S. bureaucracy compare to other nations?

Chapter Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. Despite downsizing efforts, federal government remains big (2002-2 trillion spent)
 - B. Federal bureaucracy employs nearly 2.7 million civilians, 1.4 million military personnel
 - C. Many believe bureaucracy is wasteful, too unaccountable, too controlling of people's lives
 - D. Chief characteristics: continuity, predictability, impartiality, SOPs, and "red tape"
- II. Bureaucracy: A Perennial Political Issue
 - A. Bashing federal bureaucracies is a favorite American pastime (IRS, INS, FDA)
 - B. People believe their lives are overregulated—rules are numerous and inflexible
 - C. Gore tried reforms; Bush called for reform through "faith based" institutions
- III. The federal bureaucracy (corps of officials organized in a pyramidal hierarchy; inevitable feature-14 cabinet-level departments, 50 independent agencies; also a rational, efficient method of organization)
 - A. How did the bureaucracy evolve?
 1. From 1789 until 1829, the federal service was drawn from an upper-class, white male elite
 2. In 1829, Andrew Jackson introduced the spoils system, based on party loyalty, which was followed until the 1890s
 3. The Pendleton Act set up a limited merit system based on a testing program for evaluating candidates
 4. By the 1950s, coverage under the merit system had grown from 10 percent of all federal employees to about 90 percent

5. In 1978 the Civil Service Reform Act abolished the Civil Service Commission and split its functions between two new agencies
 6. Today the Office of Personnel Management administers civil service laws, rules, and regulations and an independent Merit Systems Protection Board is charged with protecting the integrity of the federal merit system and the rights of federal employees
- B. Who are the bureaucrats? (about 4.1 million people, civilians plus military)
1. Only 15 percent of the career civilian employees work in Washington
 2. More than 25% percent of the civilian employees work for the army, the navy, the air force, or some other defense agency
 3. Less than 10percent of the bureaucrats work for welfare agencies
 4. Bureaucrats are more broadly representative of the nation than are legislators or politically appointed executives
 5. Federal employment has decreased steadily
 6. Most federal employees are white-collar; more than 15,000 personnel
- C. What do bureaucrats do?
1. Implementation of policies following passage of a bill; success cannot be guaranteed
- D. How is the bureaucracy organized?
1. Formal organization
 - a. The executive branch departments are headed by secretaries who are directly responsible to the president, and departments also have a deputy, assistant secretaries, and assistants to secretaries
 - b. Departments are subdivided into bureaus and smaller units, and the basis for their division may differ
 - c. Government corporations are a cross between business corporations and regular government agencies
 - d. Independent agencies are government entities that are not corporations and do not fall within cabinet departments
 - e. Independent regulatory board or commissions exercise quasi-legislative/judicial roles
 - f. Within each of the departments, corporations, and independent agencies and commissions are many subordinate units; the standard name for the largest subunit is the bureau
 2. Assistant Secretaries: a weak link (low pay, little prestige, short tenure)
 3. The senior executive service—8000 career officials (filled without senatorial confirmation)
 - a. hasn't lived up to expectations; little impact upon federal workers it was supposed to help
 4. Office of Management and Budget—mostly career officials trained to evaluate projects
 5. Informal organization
 - a. Bureaucrats differ in attitudes, motives, abilities, experiences, and political clout, and these differences matter
 - b. Informal organization can have a significant effect on administration

IV. The bureaucracy in action

A. Hiring practices and employee regulations

1. The Hatch Act, old and new
 - a. The 1939 Hatch Act was designed to neutralize the danger of a federal civil service for being able to shape the election of presidents and members of Congress; in essence, the act permitted federal employees to vote, but not to take an active part in partisan politics
 - b. 1994 New Hatch Act made many forms of participation in partisan politics permissible
2. Employee unions
 - a. Since 1962, federal civilian employees have had the right to form unions that represent them in seeking to improve government personnel policies

- b. One-third of civilian employees have joined unions
 - B. Principles of bureaucratic management
 - 1. Principles of a model of administration
 - a. Unity of command
 - b. Chain of command
 - c. Line and staff
 - d. Span of control
 - e. Decentralization
 - 2. Textbook model of limitations of bureaucrats
 - a. The basic legislative power of Congress compels agencies to identify the will of Congress and to interpret and apply laws as Congress would wish
 - b. Congress has closely regulated the procedures to be followed by regulatory agencies under the Administrative Procedures Act of 1946
 - c. Under certain conditions, final actions of agencies may be appealed to the courts
 - d. Some federal agencies are created for the purpose of overseeing and limiting their fellow agencies
 - e. Administrators are constrained by informal political checks
 - C. Bureaucratic realities
 - 1. Many bureaucrats often learn they are more likely to get into trouble by attempting to improve or change programs than they are if they just do nothing
 - 2. Bureaucrats sometimes become more skillful at building political alliances to protect their own organization than at building political alliances to ensure their programs' effectiveness
 - 3. Organizations tend to resist change and to resent "outside" direction
 - 4. Administrative agencies may come to resemble entrenched pressure groups in that they operate to advance their own interests
 - 5. Bureaucrats get caught up in a network of issue experts and politicians who specialize in certain policy areas
 - 6. Some bureaucrats become more entangled than others with external coalitions in what are called iron triangles
 - 7. Some view bureaucrats as acquisitive in nature—they always seek expansion of their agency by increasing their budget, personnel and projects
 - D. The case of bureau chief George Brown
 - 1. Three generalizations about bureaucrats
 - a. Bureaucrats are people, not robots, and are subject to many influences
 - b. Bureaucrats do not respond merely to orders from the top but to a variety of motives
 - c. Bureaucrats are important in government
- V. Bureaucratic responsiveness
 - A. Standard operating procedures
 - 1. Quick, personalized, and sympathetic service is sacrificed for order
 - B. Privatization - is the process of contracting public services to private organizations
 - 1. Advocates of privatization claim it would reduce costs and provide better service than reliance on the federal bureaucracy
 - 2. Critics of privatization point to the cost overruns and waste in the procurement of weapons systems as failures of privatization
 - 3. Should the U.S. Postal Service be turned over to private firms?
- VI. Bureaucratic accountability
 - A. To the president

1. Some presidential control over the bureaucracy may be exercised through the powers of appointment, reorganization, and budgeting
 2. Presidents appoint about 4,000 people to top positions within the executive branch; however, many of these are confidential assistants or special aides to cabinet officers, and many require Senate confirmation and are not exclusively a president's choice
- B. To Congress
1. Congress has a number of ways to exercise control over the bureaucracy
 - a. Establishing agencies
 - b. Formulating budgets
 - c. Appropriating funds
 - d. Confirming personnel
 - e. Authorizing new programs or new shifts in direction
 - f. Conducting investigations and hearings
 - g. Reorganizing authority
 - h. Rebuking officials
 2. The foundation of Congress's bureaucratic power is legal authority; a bureaucrat's expertise augments this legal authority
 3. Congress is criticized by some for encouraging the growth of federal spending and for deliberately allowing the bureaucracy to remain too independent
 4. Whose Bureaucracy is this anyway?
 - a. Search for improved accountability is never-ending
 - b. Virtually all national bureaucracies are more responsive today to Congress, White House, and to the American people
- VII. What the public thinks of bureaucrats and the bureaucracy
- A. Red tape and waste
1. The most criticized aspect of the federal bureaucracy is that career public employees enjoy job security
 2. Critics say that we have failed to subject the bureaucracy to the control and discipline alleged to operate in the private sector
 3. Critics charge that once a program is established, the people assigned to it become committed to "the cause"
 4. About 63% of the public believes that the federal government can only be trusted "some of the time"
 5. Critics charge that the bureaucracy is not flexible enough
- B. Two Cheers for bureaucracy
1. A comparison of the performance of our bureaucracy with most bureaucracies in the world suggests that we have good services; state and local governments have made their bureaucracies more entrepreneurial (St. Paul, Minnesota; Indianapolis, Indiana as examples)
 2. Compared to most other nations, we should be grateful for the service we get from our bureaucracy
 3. One study finds that American public bureaucracies respond well to effective leadership; under such conditions, federal bureaucracies are competitive, adaptable, and dynamic