CHAPTER 12

Bureaucracy

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. A Profile of the Federal Bureaucracy
   A. Who Are the Bureaucrats?
   B. What Do Federal Bureaucrats Do?
   C. Where Do They Work?
   D. A Diverse Institution
II. Growth of the American Bureaucracy
   A. Overview of Bureaucratic Growth
   B. Explaining the Growth of the Bureaucracy
III. Bureaucratic Power
   A. The Sources of Bureaucratic Power
   B. Limiting Bureaucratic Power
IV. Bureaucratic Problems and Reforms
   A. Bureaucratic Pathologies
   B. Calls for Reform
V. Conclusion: Expectations and Government Operations

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The bureaucracy is that part of the government, someone has said, that you love to hate. To many Americans, the federal bureaucracy means red tape, inefficiency, and wasted tax dollars. Other people see danger in the uncontrolled and unaccountable power of bureaucrats who do not face public election, cannot be easily fired, and work anonymously and behind the scenes. The bureaucracy, for many people, symbolizes all that is wrong with modern national government: it is big, costly, and intrusive. And yet for millions of Americans, the federal bureaucracy provides benefits and services that they would not want to do without. The public’s relationship to government bureaucracy is inevitably ambivalent.

This chapter deals with those attitudes by examining the myths of incompetence and unresponsiveness in the federal bureaucracy. The authors explore the evidence that supports those myths as well as the evidence that leads to a fuller understanding of the complex reality of how the bureaucracy works. In the process of examining these myths, you will learn about many of the most interesting and important activities of our national government.

First, you will explore the basic nature of the bureaucracy. Who are the bureaucrats, and how did they get their jobs? What kind of work do they do, and how are they organized to do it? The authors then trace the historical development of the federal bureaucracy, describing how it grew from a few thousand to nearly 3 million employees and how it expanded from a group of tax collectors and postal workers to include a vast array of trades and professions. Explaining this growth is an important part of the chapter.

Finally, you will look at the lifeblood of the administration to understand the power of the bureaucracy and how it is controlled. Where does the bureaucracy get its power? How does it use its power? Does it
have too much power? The answers to these questions will reveal some of the reality behind the myths of the bureaucracy.

Public complaints about the unresponsiveness and inefficiency of government employees sometimes reflect real problems of bureaucracies. These problems are described in this chapter as “bureaucratic pathologies”—faulty behavior that provokes many Americans to call for fundamental reform of the system. In the final pages of the chapter, however, the authors evaluate the performance of the federal bureaucracy and explain their conclusions about the myths of incompetence and unresponsiveness. You will learn why we cannot easily accept the evidence of inefficiency and poor management to condemn the bureaucracy. When you realize what it is that we expect of the bureaucracy, the myths will begin to fade before a more complete understanding of the role of the bureaucracy in American democracy.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
After carefully reading and studying the chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the myth of an incompetent and unresponsive federal bureaucracy and the evidence that contradicts it.
2. Explain the development of the modern employment systems within the federal bureaucracy.
3. Discuss the job of the national government bureaucracy, summarizing its several functions.
4. Describe the federal government structure, illustrating the range of positions and locations where government employees work.
5. Explain the growth of the federal government bureaucracy.
6. Identify and demonstrate the sources of bureaucratic power in the federal government.
7. Describe the constraints on bureaucratic power in the federal government.
8. Identify the pathologies or problems inherent in bureaucratic behavior.
9. Understand the steps that have been instituted to control bureaucratic behavior.
10. Evaluate the calls for reform of the federal bureaucracy, the reform efforts of several presidents, and the need for change in government operations.

READING TABLES AND GRAPHS
1. According to Figure 12.1, most of the federal government’s bureaucracies are under which branch of government?
2. Use Figure 12.1 to determine which four cabinet departments are the newest.
3. According to Table 12.1, how does the top salary range for general civil service workers compare with those in the senior executive service?
4. Compare Figures 12.2 and 12.3. What is the most striking difference about these two diagrams?

PREPARING FOR AN EXAM

Essay Questions
1. Discuss the myth that the bureaucracy is incompetent and unresponsive. Describe the reasons for that attitude and the reasons for believing that this is an incomplete view of the federal bureaucracy.
2. Provide a profile of the federal bureaucracy, describing the characteristics of federal employees.
3. Describe the growth of the federal bureaucracy, listing and illustrating reasons for that growth in the twentieth century.

4. What are the sources of bureaucratic power, and how is that power exercised? Provide illustrations of both external and internal sources of support.

5. List and explain the limits to the power of the federal bureaucracy. Evaluate the effectiveness of these limits.

6. Problems of bureaucratic behavior have been characterized by political scientists as five different pathologies. Identify and illustrate each of those pathologies and discuss their effect on public attitudes toward the bureaucracy.

**ANSWER KEY**

**Reading Tables and Graphs**

1. Executive.


3. The top general service range ($91,507–$118,957) is slightly lower than the senior executive service pay ($109,808–$165,200).

4. Although they are supposed to be depicting the same organizational materials, the diagram produced by the Office of Homeland Security paints a much neater and streamlined picture of the agency and its partners.

**Essay Questions**

1. When Americans think about the federal bureaucracy, they don’t think of people who risk or give their lives in public service. Federal agencies seem to serve their own self-interests.
   - Difference between government and business
   - Political appointments
   - Merit system
   - Regulatory commissions

2. Federal bureaucrats are employed under several personnel systems.
   - Political appointees
   - Cabinet members
   - Patronage system
   - Merit systems
   - Pendleton Act
   - Merit system
   - General civil service system
3. The history of bureaucratic growth reveals that there are many reasons for that growth.
   • Founders, like Alexander Hamilton, regarded the bureaucracy as a key part of our constitutional system.
   • The Constitution gives responsibility for carrying out the laws to the president.
   • Civil War.
   • Franklin Roosevelt’s responses to the Great Depression and World War II.
   • The expansion of the nation requires more services for more people and places.
   • The challenges of modern industrial life outstrip the capacity of families and smaller governments.

4. The competent and effective operation of government requires bureaucratic power.
   • Sources of bureaucratic power
   • The laws the bureaucracy is given to enforce or to implement public policy
   • External support from the public, interest groups, media, legislators, or the White House
   • Policy subgovernments
   • From agency expertise on technical issues
   • Discretionary power
   • Longevity in office due to the merit system, which protects bureaucrats from being fired

5. Limits to bureaucratic power
   • Self-restraint
   • Quantity and quality of resources available for bureaucratic operations
   • President can exercise control
   • Congress can impose controls
   • Courts play a role in limiting bureaucratic power
   • Internal sources of control—whistle-blowers
   • Inspector general
   • Media
   • Citizen lobbies

6. There are real problems with bureaucracies, which can be described as the following bureaucratic pathologies (or characteristically bad behaviors of bureaucracy).
   • Clientelism
   • Incrementalism
   • Arbitrariness
   • Parochialism
   • Imperialism