CHAPTER 13
The Bureaucracy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
After reading this chapter you should be able to

- Define the key terms at the end of the chapter.
- List key factors that have contributed to the growth of the American bureaucracy.
- Explain the difficulties that surround efforts to reduce the size of the bureaucracy.
- Outline the basic types of organizations that make up the bureaucracy.
- Explain why presidents often feel they have inadequate control of the bureaucracy.
- Describe the formal and informal processes of bureaucratic policymaking.
- Explain the “rational comprehensive” model of decision making and compare it with real-world decision-making.
- Give the main reasons why policies fail at the implementation stage.
- Describe the three major initiatives to reform the bureaucracy.

THE BUREAUCRACY AND THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRACY
After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, mistakes by federal agencies—security vulnerabilities left unchecked by the FAA and information not made public by the FBI—drew the attention of the media and elected officials. One fundamental and controversial reform—the creation of the Department of Homeland Security—came about as a result of this criticism. Responses to September 11 illustrate the dilemma created by Americans rejecting big government but wanting the services big government provides. Every day, through the bureaucracy, the government is involved in hundreds of situations that involve conflicts among the values of freedom, order, and equality. Departments, bureaus, and agencies are required to make rules, to adjudicate, and to exercise administrative discretion to fill in the details left out of legislation passed by Congress. In their effort to achieve legislative goals, do bureaucrats go too far? Does the bureaucracy try to do too much? Is it out of control and out of touch?

From a majoritarian standpoint, the answers to these questions would seem to be yes. In recent years, the public has shown a preference for a smaller bureaucracy. Once again, however, we see the impact of pluralism on the American system. The various bureaus, agencies, and departments exist to do what some part of the population (call it a faction or an interest group) wants government to do. Often, the bureaucracy balances competing interests, thus doing a job political scientists think is essential if pluralism is to be democratic.

Efforts to reform the bureaucracy may run into trouble because of pluralist politics. Interest groups that have built up contacts with existing agencies will fight reorganization. Deregulation offers another method of reducing the bureaucracy, but it raises anew the fundamental questions related to the scope of government. It may provide greater freedom, but it may also result in inadequate protection, thus undermining order.
CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Organization Matters
The large, complex mass of organizations that administer the nation’s laws and implement government policies is known as the bureaucracy. Although there is no perfect way to structure all bureaucracies, it is clear that a bureaucracy’s organization directly affects its ability to perform effectively.

Development of the Bureaucratic State
Government at all levels has grown enormously in the twentieth century. This growth results from several factors:

- Increasing complexity of society and the range of functions embraced by government
- Changing attitudes about government’s responsibilities to society and government’s role in the marketplace
- Ambitious officials who wish to expand their organizations to serve their clients more fully

On the whole, the public has little confidence in the government, but cuts in the government’s size are difficult, since each part of the bureaucracy does a job some part of society wants done. Interest groups with a stake in an agency or department will often organize to resist cuts. Pressure to restrict the federal bureaucracy but preserve government programs has led to a gradual devolution of authority to state and local government and increasing use of private for-profit firms and non-profit organizations to deliver government services.

Bureaus and Bureaucrats
The bureaucracy is not a unified entity but a collection of dozens of government organizations, including the following:

- Fifteen departments—cabinet-level organizations that cover broad areas of government responsibility and contain within them numerous subsidiary offices and bureaus
- Independent agencies and regulatory commissions—not part of any cabinet department and controlled to varying degrees by the president
- Government corporations—organizations that provide services, such as mail delivery and passenger rail, that could be provided by the private sector but have been made public because Congress decided it better serves the public interest

Many of the 2.8 million workers in the federal bureaucracy are part of the civil service, a system established to fill government jobs on the basis of merit rather than political patronage. The overall composition of the federal bureaucracy generally mirrors the population and a much broader spectrum of Americans are represented in higher-level civil service positions than either high-level corporate managers or high-level political appointees.

Although presidential appointees fill the top policymaking jobs in the federal bureaucracy, the bulk of civil service employees are independent of the chief executive. Even if they support the objectives of the president, agency administrators are constrained by demands from members of Congress and the scrutiny of organized groups attentive to agency policy choices.
Administrative Policymaking: The Formal Processes

Congress gives the cabinet-level departments and agencies it creates administrative discretion—that is, authority to make policy within certain guidelines. Sometimes the guidelines are vague. The wide latitude Congress gives the bureaucracy sometimes leads to charges that the government is out of control. But Congress does have the power to review the legislation that establishes bureaucratic organizations. It also controls the purse strings. Informal contacts between members of Congress and agency personnel also help Congress communicate its intentions to the bureaucracy.

Administrative discretion is exercised through rule-making—the quasi-legislative process of formulating and issuing regulations. Regulations have the force of law. They are created in accordance with a formal procedure that allows affected parties to register their views. Regulations serve to balance the needs of society. A regulation-writing agency (such as the FDA) may attempt to strike a compromise between interests, but frequently compromises fail to please either side.

Administrative Policymaking: Informal Politics

Real-world decision making in government does not really resemble the textbook “rational-comprehensive” model, in which administrators rank their objectives and carefully weigh the costs and benefits of all possible solutions to a problem. In practice, policymakers find that their values often conflict—that their time, information, and options are limited, and the decisions that are best in theory may in reality be politically impracticable. Policymaking becomes a matter of “muddling through” and tends to be incremental, with policies changing only very gradually over time.

Bureaucracies develop written rules and regulations to promote efficiency and fairness. In addition, certain unwritten rules and norms evolve, influencing the way people act on the job. Employees in a bureaucracy—the bureaucrats—wish to advance their careers, and as a result they may avoid rocking the boat—that is, engaging in behavior that might violate written or unwritten canons.

Problems in Implementing Policy

Policies do not always do what they are designed to do. To find out why, it is necessary to look beyond the process of policymaking, to policy implementation. Policies may fail because the directives concerning them or their implementation may be vague, or because lower-level officials have too much discretion. Programs may fail because of the complexity of government; the necessary coordination among federal agencies or among federal, state, and local agencies may be impossible to achieve. Policies may also fail because policymakers overestimate the capacity of an agency to carry them out. While bureaucrats have often been criticized for having too much discretion, more recently critics have charged that bureaucrats need more flexibility to be able to tailor their solutions to fit the specific context.

Reforming the Bureaucracy: More Control or Less?

Because organization makes a difference in a bureaucracy’s ability to achieve its goals, people in government often tinker with organizational designs to make bureaucracy more effective. Three different reform strategies have emerged in recent years: deregulation, competition and outsourcing, and performance standards. The use of performance standards was mandated when Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act. The act requires each agency to develop strategic plans describing overall goals, objectives, and performance plans, and to publish reports with performance data on each measure.
KEY TERMS

bureaucracy
bureaucrat
department
independent agency
regulatory commission
government corporation
civil service
administrative discretion
rule making
regulations
incrementalism
norms
implementation
regulation
deregulation
competition and outsourcing
Government Performance and Results Act of 1993

RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

The U.S. government bureaucracy is large and complex, but there are some good reference tools to help you make sense of it. The United States Government Manual, published annually and billed as the official handbook of the federal government, contains detailed information on all three branches of government as well as extensive material on departments and agencies. Typically, each agency description provides a list of the principal officials, a summary of the purposes and role of the agency, an outline of the legislative or executive functions, and a description of the agency’s activities. In the back, the manual offers organizational charts of each agency it describes. It is now available on the Internet in searchable form at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/gmanual/index.html>. For links to home pages of individual federal departments and agencies, check out: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/agencies.html>

Congressional Quarterly’s Federal Regulatory Directory, 11th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press 2003) contains much of the same information found in the United States Government Manual, though this work is not updated as frequently. It does have some other useful features, however. It opens with an introductory essay on the regulatory process, exploring the history of regulation and current trends and issues. There are detailed profiles on major regulatory agencies, including analyses of their past histories, current issues, and future prospects. Biographical sketches of major administrators within each agency are included also.
USING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Using the Federal Regulatory Directory and the United States Government Manual, prepare a profile of at least two government departments. Outline the functions, present status, and future prospects of each. How large are their budgets? How many persons does each employ? Have these figures increased or decreased? Have its responsibilities grown or decreased recently?

2. Visit the websites for the agencies you profiled in question 1. Describe the information presented. Note the similarities and differences between the sites. What types of users would each site serve best?

GETTING INVOLVED

As the chapter noted, the national government employs people all over the country in virtually every field imaginable. If you are interested in government, you may want to consider a career working in one of the many departments, bureaus, or agencies of the federal system. As we noted in the text, all federal government employees (except for a very few political employees at the highest levels) are part of the civil service merit system. What should you do if you are interested in joining their ranks?

In the past, the Office of Personnel Management played the biggest role in the hiring process, but now the process is more decentralized. This means that in addition to visiting the Federal Job Information Center in your area and filling out Standard Form 171 (SF 171), the basic résumé form required in order to apply for most federal jobs, you’ll also want to contact particular agencies where you think your talents and interests could be put to use. If you are interested in positions in the area of international affairs, be sure to look at the Getting Involved section in Chapter 20.

There are many useful resources to help you learn more about the federal job-seeking process. Here are two:


Be warned: despite the title of the Krannich and Krannich book, getting a government job is not always a quick process.

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. How many agencies and employees were merged together to form the new Department of Homeland Security?
   a. 8 agencies and over 55,000 employees
   b. 11 agencies and over 60,000 employees
   c. 18 agencies and over 120,000 employees
   d. 22 agencies and over 170,000 employees
   e. 25 agencies and over 230,000 employees
2. How large is the U.S. government compared to other western democracies?
   a. relatively large
   b. relatively small
   c. offers a more extensive array of services
   d. imposes a higher tax burden on citizens
   e. employs a higher proportion of the nation’s workers

3. What do we call the practice of filling government jobs with political allies or cronies?
   a. norms
   b. rule making
   c. civil service
   d. patronage
   e. deregulation

4. What do we call the large units of the executive branch, whose heads are the members of the president’s cabinet?
   a. government corporations.
   b. bureaus.
   c. regulatory commissions.
   d. independent agencies.
   e. None of these

5. Why did we create the regulatory commissions?
   a. They were created solely due to political pressure.
   b. Congress needed to control consumers and businesses.
   c. To give more power to interest groups.
   d. To police unfair business practices or protect integrity of markets.
   e. They were needed to protect new market monopolies.

6. Generally, how does our government usually reduce government?
   a. It cuts specific programs.
   b. It cuts personnel.
   c. It cuts funding.
   d. It combines agencies into one department.
   e. It splits departments into specific agencies.

7. What new program was created in response to the bankruptcies of Enron and WorldCom?
   a. the Security and Exchange Commission
   b. the Transportation Security Administration
   c. the Accounting Regulation Board
   d. the Citizen-Company Oversight Commission
   e. the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board

8. How has our national government been able to meet the service and benefits needs of a growing population while shrinking the size of the national government?
   a. deregulation
   b. patronage
   c. analytical budgeting
   d. implementation
   e. incrementalism
9. What term do we use to describe the formal administrative procedure that results in the issuance of regulations?
   a. adjudication
   b. rule making
   c. reorganization
   d. implementation
   e. incrementalism

10. In most situations, how does our bureaucracy create the “best” policy?
   a. outsourcing
   b. common sense
   c. asking Congress
   d. asking the president
   e. None of these

11. What do we call the informal and unwritten rules of behavior in government agencies?
   a. incrementalism
   b. patronage
   c. norms
   d. civil service
   e. deregulation

12. Why don’t administrative decisions follow the “rational comprehensive” model?
   a. Policymakers have precise goals and values.
   b. Policymakers typically consider only a limited range of feasible solutions.
   c. Administrative decisions are rarely incremental.
   d. Administrative decisions are never guided by evaluations of efficiency.
   e. Congress controls most administrative decisions.

13. In which area does Congress tend to allow the broadest discretion?
   a. domestic and international security
   b. regulation of food and drugs
   c. environmental regulation
   d. education
   e. regulation of the media

14. Why do policies sometimes fail at the implementation stage?
   a. Policy directives are unclear.
   b. Coordination among implementing agencies is weak.
   c. Policymakers have unrealistic expectations about an agency’s capabilities.
   d. Government functions are technically complex.
   e. All of the above

15. When policies change slowly, bit by bit, step by step, over time, policymaking is said to be characterized by what?
   a. a planning-programming budgeting system
   b. total quality management
   c. management by objective
   d. incrementalism
   e. merit criteria
16. What have recent efforts to reform the bureaucracy tended to emphasize?
   a. less reliance on the mechanisms of free market.
   b. more reliance on the mechanisms of free markets.
   c. regulation.
   d. centralization of power in Washington, D.C.
   e. the elimination of clear performance standards.

17. Where do departments, agencies, and corporations receive their official mandates from?
   a. the Constitution
   b. the president
   c. Congress
   d. organized interests
   e. citizens

18. In comparison with citizens in western European democracies, Americans spend _____________
   a. a higher percent of GNP and receive roughly the same benefits and services.
   b. a higher percent of GNP and receive more benefits and services.
   c. a lower percent of GNP and receive roughly the same benefits and services.
   d. a lower percent of GNP and receive fewer benefits and services.
   e. roughly the same percent of GNP and receive the same benefits and services.

19. According to the text, which of the following did not spur the growth of bureaucracy?
   a. scientific and technological change
   b. the desire to regulate business
   c. the decline of the belief in progress
   d. the belief that government should play a role in social welfare programs
   e. ambitious and powerful bureaucrats

20. What was the civil service merit system supposed to reduce?
   a. patronage
   b. competence
   c. decentralization
   d. pork barrel politics
   e. incrementalism

21. What did the Reinventing Government initiative propose?
   a. to expand the power and influence of presidential appointees
   b. to give Congress more oversight control
   c. to run government like a business and outsource more
   d. to adopt Total Quality Management philosophy
   e. to diminish administrative discretion for agencies

22. What was the major problem with relief efforts after Katrina from a bureaucratic position?
   a. No problem—it just takes time to organize large relief efforts.
   b. There were equipment delays and foul ups in scheduling.
   c. Congressional oversight got in the way because they kept changing directives.
   d. State and local officials interfered and slowed down federal relief efforts.
   e. No clear chain of command, which made coordinating relief much more difficult.

23. What is the new major initiative that holds agencies accountable for their performance?
   a. the Pendleton Act
   b. the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993
   c. the Reinvention of Government Act of 1996
   d. the America First and Foremost Initiative
   e. the Accountability Act of 1998
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24. Which of the following is an example of an independent agency?
   a. the National Endowment for the Arts
   b. the Office of Management and Budget
   c. the U.S. Postal Service
   d. National Aeronautics and Space Administration
   e. the Department of Education

25. Devolution is associated with what changes in the delivery of government services?
   a. More government programs at the state and local level
   b. Fewer nonprofit organizations involved in delivery of services
   c. Fewer block grants
   d. Fewer private contracts for delivery of services
   e. More government programs at the federal level

Essay Questions
1. Why was the civil service system introduced? Why might the system be frustrating to presidents?
2. What recent efforts have tried to reform the bureaucracy? Explain the objectives and content of each reform strategy.
3. What does it mean to act “bureaucratically”? How do “by-the-book” bureaucrats actually advance democratic values?
4. What is devolution? How has devolution affected the delivery of government services in the United States?
5. Compare and contrast the successes and failures of the new Homeland Security Department.
ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS
1. d
2. b
3. d
4. e
5. d
6. b
7. e
8. a
9. b
10. e
11. c
12. b
13. a
14. e
15. d
16. b
17. c
18. d
19. e
20. a
21. d
22. e
23. b
24. d
25. a