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The Bureaucracy

Chapter 9

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In this chapter we will learn about

- The definition of bureaucracy
- The evolution, organization, and roles of the federal bureaucracy
- Politics inside the bureaucracy
- The relationship between the federal bureaucracy and the other branches of the federal government
- How citizens relate to the bureaucracy

What is bureaucracy?

- An organization characterized by hierarchical structure, worker specialization, explicit rules, and advancement by merit
- Goal is neutral competence: the principle that bureaucracy should be depoliticized by making it more professional

What is bureaucracy?, cont'd.

- Classic definition from Max Weber highlights
 - Hierarchy: clear chain of command and responsibility
 - Specialization: tasks divided by expertise
 - Explicit rules: rules rather than preferences govern decisions; have standardization, predictability
 - Merit: hiring based on exams and experience, not politics

The spoils system

- Nineteenth-century practice of rewarding political supporters with public office
 - Patronage was undone by civil service reforms, such as the Pendleton Act (1883) and the Hatch Act (1939)
 - Bureaucracies no longer staffed by patronage

Why is bureaucracy necessary?

- Large tasks require organization and specialization
- Bureaucracies exist in private sector too
- Because expertise is required in many decisions, democracy not the best way to make every decision



Possible drawbacks of bureaucracy

- Consequences in a rule-based system
 - Decisions are fair, but there is a lot of red tape
- Accountability with rules, but less clear in public bureaucracy

Evolution of American federal bureaucracy

- Design of federal bureaucracy less like a coherent structure and more like a patchwork quilt
- First departments served essential government functions
 - State, War, Treasury
- Newer departments were responses of changing public needs, for example,
 - Western territories = Interior
 - Industrialization = Labor

Evolution of American federal bureaucracy, cont'd.

- Departments created to respond to demands of clientele groups
 - Clientele groups: groups of citizens whose interests are affected by an agency or department and who work to influence its policies
 - E.g., agricultural interests pushed for Dept. of Agriculture and veterans for Dept. of Veterans Affairs

Organization of the federal bureaucracy

- Departments: major subdivisions of the federal government, represented in the president's cabinet
 - E.g., Defense, State, Treasury, Homeland Security
- Independent agencies: government organizations independent of the departments but with a narrower policy focus
 - E.g., EPA, CIA, Peace Corps

Organization of the federal bureaucracy, cont'd.

- Independent regulatory boards and commissions: government organizations that regulate various businesses, industries, or economic sectors
 - E.g., FDA, FCC, National Labor Relations Board
- Government corporations: companies created by Congress to provide goods or services to the public that private enterprise cannot or will not profitably provide
 - E.g., Amtrak, Postal Service, FDIC

Roles of federal bureaucracy

- Bureaucracy as administrator
 - Implement laws passed by Congress
- Bureaucracy as rule maker
 - Congress relies on bureaucratic discretion
- Bureaucracy as judge
 - Interprets laws within department or agency

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Who are the federal bureaucrats?

- Rank-and-file members of agencies and departments; not department or agency heads
- Usually reflect public accurately

Politics inside the bureaucracy

- Bureaucratic culture: the accepted values and procedures of an organization
- Policy commitment
 - Believe agency's issue is most critical facing country
- Bureaucrats speak bureaucratese and defer to authority

Politics inside the bureaucracy, cont'd.

- Specialization and expertise
 - Know more about policy than politicians and public
- Identify with agency
 - Committed to and protective of agency
- Consequences of bureaucratic culture
 - Positive: commitment helps agency to make policy
 - Negative: resistant to suggestions of change, even to the extent of covering up problems
 - Whistle blowers are often the only check against these negatives

Presidential appointees vs. career civil servants

- Conflicting agendas
 - “True believers” in agency’s mission may conflict if appointees’ ideology is different
- Conflicting timeframes
 - Appointees have short-term outlooks, so civil servants can just wait until appointee leaves office
- Presidents often start new agency rather than change existing one

External bureaucratic politics

- Interagency politics: competition between agencies for budget and resources
- Constituency building
 - Build groups of supporters in public and Congress
- Guarding the turf
 - Guard own programs and don't let others duplicate traditional responsibilities

The bureaucracy and the president

- Appointment power
 - Presidents appoint heads and next layers of departments
- Budget proposal
 - OMB can cut a department's budget
- Presidential veto of agency funding
- Power of persuasion

The bureaucracy and Congress

- Iron triangles
 - Alliance of congressional committees, interest groups, and agencies working together for mutual benefit
 - Issue networks: more complex relationships
- Congress controls bureaucracy through committees that have influence, and bureaucracy responds

The bureaucracy and the courts

- Courts may deal with cases against agencies or departments, but rarely
- Congress often protects agencies and departments from courts

The citizens and bureaucracy

- Public seems unable to check bureaucracy.
- Avenues for citizens to control bureaucracies:
 - Citizen advisory councils, but typically people are biased toward the policy
 - Sunshine laws allow citizens to see when meetings are held
 - Freedom of Information Act – get copies of agency info
 - Privacy Act (1974) – access to agency files on oneself



The citizens and the bureaucracy, cont'd.

- Does the United States have a better bureaucracy than we deserve?
- Given public disfavor and inattentiveness, bureaucracy performs relatively well.