

14

The Federal Bureaucracy

□ Chapter Overview

Bureaucracies are probably the most misunderstood system of the American government. Most of the public views bureaucracies in negative terms, yet the work of the bureaucracy is essential to meeting all of the needs and requirements demanded by the American public. In this chapter, we examine the role and functions of the federal bureaucracy and consider the growth and evolution of the bureaucracy over time. Next, we evaluate the role of the bureaucracy in public policymaking. We conclude by exploring contending approaches for overseeing and reforming the federal bureaucracy. By the end of the chapter, students should have a solid understanding of the historical and contemporary nature and debates surrounding the federal bureaucracy.

□ Study Outline

14.1 Learning Objective 14.1: Describe the federal bureaucrats and the ways in which they obtain their jobs. (p. 475)

The Bureaucrats

Bureaucrats are hired in one of two ways:

- Bureaucrats are hired through the **civil service system**. The system relies on entrance exams, and civil servants are promoted by merit rather than **patronage** (**Pendleton Civil Service Act**).
- Civil servants must be politically impartial and treated as such (**Hatch Act**).

- The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 created the **Office of Personnel Management (OPM)**, which recruits and recommends individuals and oversees promotions and other employee issues.
- **Bureaucrats are hired through presidential recruitment.** Each new administration fills about 3,000 of the top posts; the president chooses people who will support the administration's policies.
- Cabinet department heads are presidential nominees who must be **approved by the Senate.**
- The **Department of Defense** has the largest number of civil employees, followed by the U.S. Postal Service.
- Overall, federal civilian employment has not increased in decades, indicating that the federal bureaucracy is not actually growing.

14.2

Learning Objective 14.2: Differentiate the four types of agencies into which the federal bureaucracy is organized.
(p. 480)

How the Federal Bureaucracy Is Organized

- Fifteen cabinet departments oversee and administer various policy areas, and each is supervised by a secretary (with the exception of the Justice Department, which is headed by the attorney general).
- **Regulatory agencies** oversee a particular aspect of the economy, creating regulations that protect people.
- They can enforce regulations by judging disputes, and are usually headed by a commission (confirmed by Congress) rather than a secretary and they are often closely involved with interest groups that want to influence regulations.
- **Government corporations** perform services for a fee, like a private business; the U.S. Postal Service is the largest; other examples include Amtrak and the Tennessee Valley Authority.
- **Independent executive agencies** include all other executive bodies and most are created for specific purposes, such as the national Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

- Heads are appointed by the president, so these usually have some partisan motivation.

14.3 Learning Objective 14.3: Identify the factors that influence the effectiveness of bureaucratic implementation of public policy. (p. 484)

Bureaucracies as Implementers

- Bureaucracies enact and enforce rules and procedures for putting Congress's policy decisions into practice.
- Bureaucracies work out details and guidelines, assign responsibilities among bureaucrats, and oversee the day-to-day operation of the federal government.
- **Policy implementation** is not always successful for various reasons.
 - Program design is sometimes flawed or Congress may not be clear enough about policy goals.
 - A department may lack staff or resources to carry out implementation.
 - An agency is sometimes so mired in its **standard operating procedures** that it fails to see what else needs to be done.
 - Administrators use their discretion differently when the standard operating procedures do not sufficiently address a particular situation.
 - There can be confusion when several departments are involved in the implementation of a particular policy.
- Reorganization of the bureaucracy for the sake of efficiency is unlikely, because this would disrupt well-established **iron triangles** of congressional committees, the agencies they oversee, and the affiliated interest groups.

14.4 Learning Objective 14.4: Describe how bureaucracies regulate and assess deregulation and alternative approaches to regulation. (p. 493)

Bureaucracies as Regulators

- Bureaucracies oversee policies once they are in place through regulation.

- They establish guidelines for a program or project, and enforce guidelines through a combination of complaints registered by the public, inspections, and by issuing permits and licenses to people who meet the guidelines.
- Bureaucratic institutions have the authority to change rules of a policy and apprehend violators.
- All products, and even many daily activities, are shaped by regulation.

14.5 Learning Objective 14.5: Identify the means of controlling the bureaucracy and assess the role of iron triangles. (p. 496)

Controlling the Bureaucracy

- The governmental bureaucracy hires the most civilians but is not elected by the public.
- Ultimately answering to the president, who appoints agency heads that will support his or her policies, the governmental bureaucracy issues **executive orders** to change or implement statutes, manage the budget of each agency (at least in his budget proposal), and can reorganize an agency.
- The governmental bureaucracy is partially controlled by Congress.
- Congress ultimately determines each agency's budget, can refuse to confirm a presidential appointment, performs legislative oversight through hearings, and can change the legislation behind a program.
- In 1996, Congress introduced special procedures in the Congressional Review Act, allowing them to express disapproval of the actions of agencies.
- The governmental bureaucracy is full of **iron triangles**, which may produce conflicting guidelines or regulations.
- The president and Congress can control the bureaucracy, including appointments, budgets, reorganization, investigations, and direct orders and specific legislation.

Learning Objective 14.6: Assess the role of unelected bureaucrats in American democracy and the impact of the bureaucracy on the scope of government. (p. 500)

Understanding Bureaucracies

Bureaucracy and Democracy

- Although bureaucrats are not elected, bureaucracies may be controlled by elected decision makers.
- Bureaucrats are competent and reasonably representative of Americans.
- The role of government and the size of the bureaucracy ultimately depends more on voters than bureaucrats.

For Additional Review

Create a timeline of the bureaucracy. On this timeline, put the history and goals of the bureaucracies within the government departments under the executive office. Use this timeline when studying and reviewing this material for the unit test and for the AP Government and Politics Exam.

Create an organizational chart of the bureaucracy. Be sure to include the individual members and sub-departments, committees, or bureaus. Use this visual depiction of the bureaucracy to aid your understanding of the organization of the bureaucracy and refer to this when studying and reviewing for the unit test and the AP Government and Politics Exam.

□ Review Questions

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. All of the following are important official services performed by the federal bureaucracy EXCEPT
 - a. implementing laws passed by Congress.
 - b. implementing the president's policy initiatives.
 - c. solving disputes between the executive and legislative branches of government.
 - d. distributing information about public programs and services.
 - e. issuing rules and regulations.