

Politics of Bureaucratic Organizations

Instructor: Brian Libgober

Location: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/99256641207>

Synchronous Class Meeting Time: Wednesdays 3:30-5:30 PM

Asynchronous Pre-Recorded Lectures: Posted to Canvas by Saturday of Week Prior, usually 30-50 minutes.

Instructor Email: blibgober@ucsd.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment

Overview

From the local police to federal regulators, governmental agencies are important policy actors. If politics is fundamentally about who gets what, when, and why, then surely agencies are also *political* actors. Yet agencies are seldom as public about their decision-making as other kinds of policymaking bodies, for example legislatures or courts. The opacity of agencies leads to questions, even suspicions, about the motives of faceless, unelected “bureaucrats” making important political decisions affecting the lives of citizens in what is supposed to be a democracy. This course is a thematic introduction to the subject of bureaucratic politics. The introduction is “thematic” in the sense that we explore the topics, ideas, concerns, tradeoffs that often occur in research on bureaucratic politics, without necessarily aiming for a comprehensive account of this vast literature. For the most part readings will focus on topic from the U.S. perspective, although the themes are largely present in related literatures on bureaucratic politics in developing countries and in comparative context.

Students who are interested in a more comprehensive reading list for the bureaucratic politics literature, from the Americanist or comparative perspective, are encouraged to reach out for some syllabi.

Course Readings

Most course readings will be PDFs available on Canvas. However, we will read several chapters of the following book, so I have recommended you buy it.

Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books, 1989.

Course Assignments

There are four major assignments in this course.

- **Discussion Leadership & Memo** – For one class over the course of the semester, you will co-lead discussion with me and possibly another student or student(s), depending on enrollment.

The week that you are discussion leader, you will submit to me by the Sunday before class one page summary of the discussion reading, a paragraph discussing the relationship between the discussion and theoretical readings, and 3-5 questions for the class. I will share

with you my own list of questions.

- **Bureaucratic Policy Paper** – Describe a policy decision made by a government agency in the past year. Where the agency get the authority to make this decision? What were the political considerations that the agency faced in making the policy? What was the reaction to the policy from the media, public, or elected officials? 3-5 pages.
- **Historical Agency Paper** – describe the history of a no longer existing agency or bureau in the United States federal government. When and why was it founded? How was it been structured? What were been its policy responsibilities? When and why was it shut down (if it has been shut down)? 5-7 pages.
- **Final Exam** – I will submit to you a policy proposal related to bureaucratic politics and you will evaluate the proposal in light of the concepts introduced in this course. The format of the exam will be a 72 hour take-home exam, and there will be an 8 page limit.

Grading Rubric

- Participation – 15%
- Discussion Leadership & Memo – 15%
- Bureaucratic Policy Paper – 15%
- Historical Agency Paper – 25%
- Final Exam – 30%

Due Dates

- Bureaucratic Policy Paper: Sunday at Noon between Week 3 and Week 4.
- Historical Agency Paper: Sunday at Noon between Week 7 and Week 8.
- Final Exam. TBD

Schedule

Week 1 – Turf – March 31, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Halperin, Morton H. “Why Bureaucrats Play Games.” *Foreign Policy* 2, no. 2 (1971): 70–90.
- **Theoretical Reading:** Wilson (1989) Chapter 10, “Turf.”

Week 2 - Expertise and Politics – April 7, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Wilson (1989), Chapter 2, “Organization.”
- **Theoretical Reading:** Wilson, Woodrow. “The Study of Administration.” *Political Science Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1887): 197–222.

Week 3 – Loyalty – April 14, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Tom Wainwright, *Narconomics*, “The People Problems of a Drug Cartel” p. 53-76
- **Discussion Reading:** Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (1948): 280-315.
- **Theoretical Reading:** Ouchi, William G. “Markets, Bureaucracies, and Clans.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1980): 129–41.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2392231>.

Week 4 – Shirking – April 21, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Tina Lee, “Decision Making and Risk Assessment,” *Catching a Case: Inequality and Fear in New York City's Child Welfare System* (2016) pp. 117-139.
- **Theoretical Reading:** Michael Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucracy*, Introduction, pp. 1-26.

Week 5 - Information and Processing – April 28, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Heimann, C.F. Larry. “Understanding the Challenger Disaster: Organizational Structure and the Design of Reliable Systems.” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 2 (1993): 421–35. www.jstor.org/stable/2939051.
- **Theoretical Reading:** Cohen, Michael D., James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. “A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1972): 1–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2392088>.

Week 6 - Career Concerns – May 5, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Makkai, Toni and Braithwaite, John, “In and out of the Revolving Door: Making Sense of Regulatory Capture.” *Journal of Public Policy* 12(1) (1992), 61-78.
- **Theoretical Reading:** Wilson, “People” (1989).

Week 7 - Credible Commitment – May 12, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Geithner, Timothy, “The Fall.” In *Stress Test: Reflections on the Financial Crisis* (pp. 162-210).
- **Theoretical Reading:** Miller, G., & Whitford, A. (2016). Political Moral Hazard and Credible Commitment. In *Above Politics: Bureaucratic Discretion and Credible Commitment* (Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions, pp. 53-76). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139017688.004

Week 8 - Political Control – May 19, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Binder, Sarah & Spindel, Mark, “The Great Inflation and the Limits of Independence,” *The Myth of Independence* (2017) 165-200.
- **Theoretical Reading:** McCubbins, Mathew D. "Common agency? Legislatures and bureaucracies." *The Oxford handbook of legislative studies* (2014): 567-590.

Week 9 – Reputation – May 26, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Carpenter, Daniel P. “Structure, Reputation, and the Bureaucratic Failure of Reclamation Policy, 1902-14.” In “The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy.”
- **Theoretical Reading:** Carpenter, Daniel P., and George A. Krause. “Reputation and Public Administration.” *Public Administration Review* 72, no. 1 (2012): 26–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02506.x>.

Week 10 – Reform – June 2, 2021

- **Discussion Reading:** Dylan Matthews, “Can technocracy be saved? An interview with Cass Sunstein. <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/10/22/18001014/cass-sunstein-cost-benefit-analysis-technocracy-liberalism>
- **Discussion Reading:** Wilson (Chapter 20) “Bureaucracy and the Public Interest”