

THE POLITICS^{OF} THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

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The Politics of the Administrative Process

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
An "Administrative State"? 1	
<i>The Bureaucracy Problem</i> 3	
<i>Bureaucracy and Size</i> 4	
"Public" and "Administration" 6	
<i>Public versus Private Administration</i> 8	
The Critical Role of Public Authority 9	
Characteristic Public Processes 9	
<i>Policy Execution versus Policy Formation</i> 11	
Policy Execution 11	
Policy Formation 12	
The Policy/Administration Dichotomy 14	
<i>Administrative Responsibility</i> 15	
The Study of Public Administration 16	
<i>Time and Space: Critical or Noncritical Variables?</i> 16	
Woodrow Wilson and Comparative Administration 17	
<i>Complexity and Simplicity</i> 20	
 2. What Government Does	 23
The Functions of Government 24	
<i>The Growth of Government</i> 25	
<i>What the Federal Government Does</i> 27	
<i>What State Governments Do</i> 28	
<i>What Local Governments Do</i> 29	
<i>Appearances versus Reality</i> 30	
The Tools of Government 32	
<i>Direct Administration</i> 33	
Grants 34	

<i>Contracts</i>	34
<i>Regulations</i>	34
<i>Tax Expenditures</i>	35
<i>Loan Programs</i>	36
<i>Implications for Public Administration</i>	36
Conclusion	38

3. Organization Theory

39

The Structural Approach to Large Organizations	39
<i>Authority and Hierarchy</i>	41
Administrative Implications	42
<i>Two Models</i>	43
The Classical Model	44
The Bureaucratic Model	45
Systems Theory	47
<i>System Boundaries</i>	49
<i>System Purpose</i>	49
The Humanist Challenge	51
<i>Jobs, Productivity, and Happiness</i>	51
<i>Ideology</i>	52
<i>Sensitivity Training and Organization Development</i>	54
The Pluralist Challenge	55
<i>Organization Culture</i>	56
The Challenge of Third-Party Administration	58
Conclusion	58

4. The Executive Branch

61

Executive Branch Components	63
<i>Bureaus</i>	63
<i>Departments and Major Agencies</i>	64
Independent Regulatory Commissions	67
Government Corporations	68
<i>Field Offices</i>	69
Direction of the Executive Branch	71
<i>The Executive Office and White House</i>	73
<i>Office of Management and Budget</i>	76
<i>National Security Council</i>	78
<i>Office of Policy Development</i>	80

5. Organization Problems

83

The Search for Effective Organization	84
<i>Organizational Criteria</i>	84
<i>Interagency Conflict</i>	86
Purpose versus Clientele	86
Function versus Area	87
Conflicts among Purpose-Based Agencies	89
<i>Interagency Coordination</i>	90
Horizontal Cooperation	90
Vertical Coordination	92
<i>The Role of Staff</i>	94
Pure Staff Role	95
Auxiliary and Control Roles	96
Power-Building Propensities	96
Solutions?	98
Reorganization	99
<i>Comprehensive Reorganization</i>	100
<i>Obstacles to Reorganization</i>	101
Conclusion	103

6. The Civil Service

104

Public Employment	105
Managing the System	108
Position Classification	111
Problems	111
Reform?	113
Staffing	114
<i>Recruitment and Appointment</i>	114
The Process	114
Veterans' Preference	116
Affirmative Action	117
PACE	119
Status and Prospects	120
<i>Promotion</i>	122
<i>Separation</i>	123
Pay	125
<i>Matching Pay Rates to Labor Markets</i>	127
<i>Comparable Worth</i>	128
<i>Pay within a Grade</i>	128
Employee Rights and Obligations	129

<i>Unionization and Collective Bargaining</i>	130
The Strike	130
Who Are the Bargainers?	131
Collective Bargaining and the Civil Service System	132
Scope of Issues	133
Collective Bargaining in the Federal Government	133
<i>The Right to Privacy</i>	134
<i>Political Activity</i>	136
The Hatch Act	136
Constitutionality	137
Hatch Act Revision	138
Patronage Restrictions	138
Conclusion	140

7. The Higher Public Service

141

How Elite Is the Elite?	142
<i>Representativeness</i>	142
<i>A Multiplicity of Elites</i>	144
Educational Specialization	144
Occupational Specialization	144
Single-Agency Careers	145
Striking a Balance	145
<i>Outsiders and Insiders</i>	146
The Mix of Political and Career Officials	147
An American Department	149
The Foreign Service	149
Political Executives	150
<i>Recruitment and Qualifications</i>	150
<i>Tenure and Turnover</i>	153
<i>Senate Confirmation</i>	155
<i>How Many Are Too Many?</i>	157
The Senior Executive Service	158
<i>Structure</i>	159
<i>Operation</i>	161
Entry	161
Reassignment, Performance Appraisal, and Removal	161
Bonuses	163
Executive Development	164
<i>Prospects</i>	166
Pay	168

<i>Comparability with the Private Sector</i>	169
<i>Executive-Congressional Pay Linkage</i>	172
Conclusion	174
8. Decision Making	176
Basic Problems	177
Information	177
Values	178
Rational Decision Making	179
Basic Steps	180
Example: Planning-Programming-Budgeting System	181
Appraisal	183
Information	183
Values	184
Bargaining	186
Example: Cuban Missile Crisis	187
Appraisal	189
Information	189
Values	189
Participative Decision Making	191
Example: Federal Level	192
Example: Local Level	193
Farmers and Graziers	193
City Dwellers	194
Appraisal	195
Information	195
Values	195
Public Choice	196
Example: Banks and Bubbles	197
Appraisal	198
Information	198
Values	199
Limits on Decision Making	200
Uncertainty	201
Information Pathologies	203
Crisis	204
Conclusion	206
9. Budgeting	208
The Role of the Budget	209

<i>The Economic Role</i>	209
The Budget's Effect on the Economy	209
The Economy's Effect on the Budget	212
<i>The Political Role</i>	213
First Steps	214
The Rise of Presidential Power	214
Budget Making	215
<i>Budgeting: Top-Down</i>	215
<i>Budgeting: Bottom-Up</i>	217
Attempts to Reform Incrementalism	218
The Rise of "Uncontrollables"	220
Budget Appropriation	221
<i>Congressional Budget Decisions</i>	222
<i>Shrinking Power for Authorizers and Appropriators</i>	225
<i>Gramm-Rudman-Hollings</i>	227
<i>Reforming the Budget Process</i>	229
Procedure versus Substance	231
<i>Back-Door Tactics for Increasing Spending</i>	232
Budget Execution	234
<i>Controls on Executive Action</i>	234
Legislative Controls on Execution	234
Impoundment	235
Management Control	236
Conclusion	238

10. Implementation

239

Judging Program Success and Failure	240
What Are "Success" and "Failure"?	240
Problems of Performance	243
Uncertainty	243
Inadequate Resources	244
Money	245
Staff	245
Organizational Problems	246
Leadership	247
Dependence on Others	248
Intergovernmental Relations	248
Administration through Grant Programs	249
Function	250
Breadth	250

Distributing Funds	251
Administration through Regulation	252
Administration through Off-Budget Programs	253
Implementation Problems	254
Inequity	254
Fragmentation	254
Functionalism	255
Lax Federal Control	255
A Cornerstone of Implementation	256
Contracting	256
Advantages	257
Reduce Costs	257
Obtain Special Expertise	258
Avoid Red Tape	258
Problems	258
Choosing Contractors	259
Overspecification	259
Underperformance	260
Overregulation	260
Sanctions	260
Corruption	261
The Government's Dilemma	262
What Goals?	263
What Information?	263
A Program That Works	264
The Importance of Feedback	266
Administrative Feedback	266
Formal Program Evaluation	267
Backward Mapping	268
Conclusion	268

11. Legislative Control of Administration

270

The Paradox of Oversight	270
Purposes of Oversight	272
Committee Oversight of Administration	273
Varieties of Committee Review	274
The Need for Information	276
Barriers to Information	277
Secrecy	277
Executive Privilege	278

Administrative Confidentiality	278
Other Considerations	278
<i>Staff Support</i>	279
The General Accounting Office	281
<i>Era of Detailed Control</i>	282
<i>Reorientation</i>	283
The Legislative Veto	285
<i>Early Forms</i>	285
<i>Chadha and Its Aftermath</i>	286
Conclusion	288

12. Regulation and the Courts

290

The Regulatory Task	292
<i>Kinds of Regulations</i>	292
<i>State and Local Regulations</i>	295
<i>Statutory Mandates</i>	296
<i>Expertness</i>	297
Regulatory Procedure	300
Rulemaking	301
Judicial Review of Rulemaking	302
<i>Administrative Adjudication</i>	302
Judicial Review of Adjudicative Decisions	303
Courts' Regulation of the Regulators	303
<i>Access to the Courts</i>	304
Class-Action Suits	305
Private Attorneys General	306
Tort Liability of Governments and Officials	307
Costs of Litigation	309
<i>Systems and Values</i>	309
The Judicial and Administrative Systems	309
Values: Conflict or Harmony?	311
Presidential Regulation of the Regulators	313
<i>The Review System</i>	314
Conclusion	315

13. Conclusion

317

Bureaucratic Accountability	317
<i>Theoretical Approaches</i>	318
Complications	319
Control Systems	321

Elements of Control	322
Interrelations	324
Control Objectives	327
Who Is to Be Controlled?	327
Solution?	328
Ethics	329
Screening Prospective Appointees	329
Monitoring On-the-Job Behavior	332
Postgovernment Activities	333
The Dilemma	334
The Public Service	335
Notes	337
List of Acronyms	427
Index of Names	431
Index of Subjects	441
About the Authors	457

Figures

1.1	GOVERNMENT SECTOR'S TOTAL OUTLAYS AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT	2
2.1	GOVERNMENT SPENDING	26
2.2	FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPENDING	27
2.3	STATE GOVERNMENT SPENDING	28
2.4	LOCAL GOVERNMENT SPENDING	31
2.5	FEDERAL SPENDING BY TOOL	33
3.1	SYSTEMS THEORY	48
5.1	FIELD ADMINISTRATION PATTERNS	88
6.1	PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT	106
9.1	RELATION OF BUDGET AUTHORITY TO OUTLAYS	224
10.1	FEDERAL PROCUREMENT BY CATEGORY	257

Tables

1.1	LARGE ORGANIZATIONS BY CORPORATE SALES AND GOVERNMENTAL OUTLAYS	5
1.2	LARGE ORGANIZATIONS BY NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	6
2.1	NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTAL UNITS BY TYPE	30
2.2	CONCENTRATION OF GOVERNMENT SPENDING	32
4.1	FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES, AND BUREAUS WITH OVER 10,000 CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES	62
4.2	OUTLAYS BY DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES	65
6.1	PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT BY FUNCTION	107
6.2	GENERAL SCHEDULE GRADES, EMPLOYEES, AND PAY RATES	112
6.3	FEDERAL CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT BY SEX AND RACE	118
6.4	FEDERAL WHITE-COLLAR PAY INCREASES	126
7.1	NONCAREER POSITIONS, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	148
7.2	MEMBERS OF THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE	160
7.3	EXECUTIVE SCHEDULE: ACTUAL AND PROPOSED SALARIES	173
8.1	APPROACHES TO DECISION MAKING	206
9.1	CONTROLLABILITY OF FEDERAL OUTLAYS	220

1

Introduction

Our subject is large, complex, and important. It embraces a significant part of government in action. So pervasive has government's role in society become and so much of government is administrative that some see the arrival of "the administrative state." Some fear the bureaucratization of our lives as a consequence of the many ways in which we encounter administrative constraints and even beneficial programs wrapped in administrative red tape. Some plead for "businesslike" public administration and doubt that public administration and private administration are, or should be, different in character. If they are different, and we think they are, we then face the problem of how to study public administration. Because both its central features and ways of studying it are variously perceived, we set forth a smorgasbord from which readers may make choices. Though the aspects of our subject are many and the approaches to its study vary, one issue remains dominant: administrative responsibility within the American constitutional system. If that issue is resolved satisfactorily, the issues about big government, bureaucracy, administrative discretion, and modeling of public administration on business practice will lend themselves to more accurate analysis than now prevails in public debate.

An "Administrative State"?

The marked increase in what citizens demand of government has led to a multiplicity of administrative agencies, a large number of civil servants, and swelling governmental budgets to pay for what citizens want and for the administrative work by which such expectations are met. This has brought us, it is said, into a new era, one characterized by "the administrative state."¹ The term is meant to emphasize bigness and to suggest that administrators now exercise so much discretion that constitutional arrangements have been disrupted.

The phenomenon of bigness needs to be put in perspective lest a parochial view of the American scene distort our assessment. As figure 1.1 reveals, the combined dollar outlays of all American governments—national, state, and local—amount to little over a third of the society's gross domestic product. In six of the listed nations the governmental sectors spend over half of their countries' GDPs.² Ranking tenth among the eleven nations, the United States seems less likely than most others to have achieved the status of an "administrative state," if such a status is a consequence of the size of government.

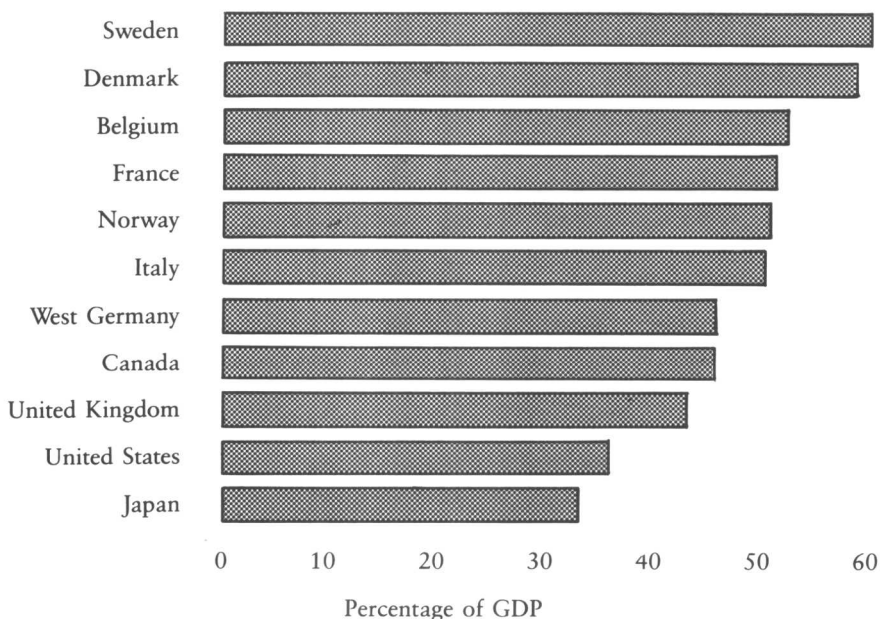


Figure 1.1
GOVERNMENT SECTOR'S TOTAL OUTLAYS, AS A PERCENTAGE OF
GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

SOURCE: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Economic Outlook* 46 (December 1989): 179, table R-14. Data presented for 1987.

A separate issue is whether and how far administrative decision making has superseded decision making by the constitutionally empowered branches of government. Unquestionably, administrators exercise discretionary judgments to a greater degree than in eras of more restricted governmental responsibilities. Yet legislative bodies, courts, chief executives, and political appointees exer-