

CHAPTER 1

APPROACHING THE STUDY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

KEY POINTS

- A. Public administration and bureaucracy have been prominent features of American government and society since the founding of the Republic. Levels of public trust and confidence in governmental solutions to public problems have varied, especially since the post-World War II era. Beginning in the 1970s, popular support for "big government" and bureaucracy declined even though public agencies were given greater responsibility and were demonstrating greater technical competence and professionalism. As economic conditions improved in the 1980s, faith in government increased, but to levels below that of the 1960s. Public faith and trust in government fluctuated during the 1990s, but throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, public confidence and trust in both the president and the congress declined significantly. (See Figure 1-1.) This resulted from increased government spending for unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the energy crisis, economic recession, greater public debt, and weak executive leadership. As economic conditions worsened, trust in government declined. Recent congressional and presidential elections suggest greater reluctance to entrust critical decisions to politicians and public administrators. To reduce budget deficits, many governments are being forced to make drastic cuts in budgets, lay off career employees, and rethink processes for delivering services.
- B. *Bureaucracy* has been traditionally characterized as a formal organizational arrangement with an internal division of labor, specialization of work processes, a vertical hierarchy, well-defined routines for completion of tasks, reliance on past decisions (precedent) to resolve problems, and a set of rules about managerial control over organizational activities. Bureaucracy has been blamed for many of society's current problems. Discontent rises from its *discretionary authority* and perception of mismanagement of scarce resources.
- C. *Public administration* is defined as *all processes, organizations, and individuals (the latter acting in official positions) associated with carrying out laws and other rules adopted or issued by legislatures, executives, and courts*. Public administrators also help formulate rules and are increasingly involved in reciprocal relationships within and outside formal public organizational structure. Participants are referred to as *stakeholders* who occupy key appointed and elected positions. Other areas of concern for public administration are managerial efficiency in the operation of public agencies, improving the effectiveness (or results) of programs, and maintenance of ethical standards in decision making. *Public administration* also applies to an academic field of study and to the training of non-elected public officials.

- D. There are five principal administrative structures at the national government level: (1) fifteen cabinet-level departments, (2) numerous independent regulatory agencies, (3) government corporations, (4) units of the Executive Office of the President, and (5) other independent executive agencies. (See Fig. 1-2.) Most of the agencies working within these structures are organized by function; some are organized according to geographic area, clienteles, and work processes. Most administrative personnel are specialists hired according to "merit"; some top officials are political "generalists" appointed through political processes. Most elected officials (mayors, commissioners, governors, and so on) serve at the state and local levels, as do nearly 90 percent of all public administrators.
- E. The bureaucratic structures of states and larger local governments are roughly comparable to those of the national government. There are some differences, however, such as more direct legislative control over agency budgets in state governments and greater impact of public employee unions in many local governments. Local government is oriented more toward providing essential services, such as public safety, education, and sanitation. Smaller local governments sometimes lack bureaucratic development and professional expertise. The larger the unit of local government, the more likely it is to resemble the structures of state and national agencies. Local political party politics play a prominent role in municipal policy making. Budget cuts resulting from lower income and property and sales tax revenues are forcing many government agencies to reduce staff and services. Table 1-2 shows the number of governments and elected officials in the United States.
- F. Decisions about structural arrangements carry with them major implications for the distribution and delegation of power. Structural changes within formal organizational arrangements can have very beneficial or detrimental consequences. Because the organizational structures of agencies are products of particular majority coalitions, they may promote certain interests and initiatives over others. Organizational structure also reflects a commitment to one set of policy initiatives over others, orders priorities for some programs over others, provides greater access to some interests making them more influential, and results in the reallocation of access and *jurisdiction* to a program's advantage or disadvantage.
- G. *The West Wing* was an award-winning television series that aired on NBC from 1999 to 2006; the series took a close look at the organizational structure of American bureaucracy and the politics involved in running the United States of America. Tying the show's topics to current American events demonstrated the difficulties that arise in getting administrators and politicians to work together toward a common goal. The series presented viewers with a realistic view of politics and bureaucracy and created a positive view of public service. Shifting coalitions and political struggles over power and administrative jurisdiction lead to major implications for the distribution of political power. Question for discussion: How would you determine the best organizational structures for an administration and for a nation?
- H. Governmental power and authority in America were designed by the framers of the Constitution to be highly fragmented and decentralized. To ensure this separation of

power, each branch (legislative, executive, and judicial) was given various means of checking the power of the other two, the concept now referred to as *checks and balances*. As centers of power are so disbursed, public policymaking is characterized by a lack of centralization that creates an absence of legislative and executive control. Thus, decisions about structural arrangements carry with them major implications for the distribution and delegation of power. This could encourage a non-neutral (partisan) stance within some bureaucracies, which would contradict assumptions about the neutrality of traditional bureaucracy. *Bureaucratic neutrality* is central to the concept of traditional bureaucracy and relies on assumptions that (1) bureaucratic behavior follows *legislative intent*, (2) there is *legislative oversight* supervising the work of the bureaucracy, (3) program implementation is subject to direction by the chief executive, and (4) competent bureaucracies respond to the initiatives of executives and legislators in a politically neutral and non-partisan manner.

- I. There are several explanations for the growth of public bureaucracy. One stresses the increasing technological complexity of government services; another attributes the growth to public pressures from diverse interests and clientele groups; a third suggests that governmental responses to crises such as World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the September 11th attacks have expanded bureaucracies; and a fourth links growth with greater public acceptance of the need for economic and social regulation. Technological complexity has had an important effect on bureaucracy, but whether it alone triggered bureaucratic growth is not certain. Technological innovations such as the widespread availability of electronic government are designed to increase access to information about government and decrease citizen dependence on bureaucracy.
- J. Changes in American society during the past 60 years led to new, unforeseen, and complex pressures on government at all levels. Several *social-demographic* changes have been particularly important in shaping contemporary public administration. In addition, they have posed new challenges for administrators. Social-demographic changes refer to population and economic shifts in various regions that impact the delivery of public services. Of particular importance in this regard is population growth; the concentration of people in and near cities and coastal areas; regional redistribution of population (including the Sun Belt migration); *technological change*; the emergence of the Internet; growing specialization; and the recognition of new, complex social problems. Thus, there are continuing controversies over the nature and extent of these new problems and how to deal with them. Administrative agencies that address these new problems are consistently caught up in controversy. The spread of technology has led to decision making that is more informed and less centrally directed, as specialists accumulate more knowledge and top executives are no longer able to comprehend all of the specialties of the employees in their organizations. Specialists thus gain more decision-making influence and administrative discretion, and decision making becomes more fragmented and compartmentalized.
- K. Public and private administrations have both similarities and differences. Although they share many activities in common, their differences are critical and may limit the ability of public administrators to adopt techniques from the private sector. A private organization centralizes responsibility in its executives, controls its markets, defines its customers,

and lets managers set their own goals. Moreover, private firms are profit-oriented, provide products or services for payment, and can be evaluated by profits or losses—the “bottom line.” In the public sector, responsibility is widely distributed within the organization and even outside it. Administrators must try to reach goals set by legislatures, which often confuses the questions of what to do and how to act in the public’s “best interest.” Public agencies provide services paid for with taxes and user fees and are often evaluated in nebulous terms by outside forces. Furthermore, some public agencies often hold monopolies in providing essential services, yet they cannot deny services to “customers” who are unwilling or unable to pay. Public agencies have traditionally been more concerned with procedures than results; they often have less time to reach their goals and are subject to greater scrutiny, conflicting incentives, and greater public criticism. Nevertheless, the two sectors are increasingly interdependent.

- L. Over the past century, the field of public administration has been characterized by numerous themes and ideas that overlap and sometimes conflict. Among these are the *politics-administration dichotomy*, a focus on economy and efficiency, the search for “principles” of administration, a rejection of these “principles,” expansion of academic perspectives on administrative behavior to include disciplines such as sociology and psychology (among others), and a trend toward disciplinary independence from political science and business administration.
- M. Of increasing importance are ethical guidelines concerning decision making, the accountability of public agencies in the context of the political system, increasing the economy and efficiency of government agencies, improving the effectiveness of programs, and securing resources necessary for future survival. Three different levels of analysis of these themes focus on (1) the role and function of government bureaucracy in society, (2) the management challenges confronting public organizations, and (3) the role of the individual administrator.
- N. Most of those working in a bureaucracy are professionals in their specialties and their occupational loyalties generally rest with their organization rather than with a political party or other external affiliation. Because much of public management in American governments occurs within bureaucratic structures, however, there is a tendency for political perspectives to factor into decisions at times. The Point/Counterpoint addresses the issue of the extent of political involvement among bureaucrats. Encourage students to discuss arguments *for* and *against* greater political involvement of bureaucratic professionals. Consequences of such involvement should also be addressed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. How has public support of government bureaucracy changed in recent years? In the past, what has accounted for public support of bureaucracy? What actions can be taken to restore trust and confidence in bureaucracy?
- 2. How is the American structure of government and public administration different from that of other nations with a parliamentary form of government? Why is it different?

3. How can organizational structure be politically significant? Discuss and cite recent examples. What are public administration's intellectual links to economics? To political science? To sociology? To psychology? To business administration?
4. Discuss the changing roles of public, private, and nonprofit agencies in addressing public problems. What difficulties might a public manager face in trying to implement management techniques borrowed from the private sector?
5. How have technological changes affected government in general and public administration in particular? Discuss the effects of electronic government (e-gov) on bureaucracies. Be sure to describe changing public expectations as well as the size and structure of bureaucracies in your discussion.
6. What elements of social change have contributed to the expansion of administrative responsibilities in American government? Discuss specific impacts of social change on the scope and activities of administrative agencies.
7. A fundamental assumption of administrative reformers in the late 1800s and early 1900s was that politics could have only adverse effects on administration. How valid is that belief? Why? How, and to what extent, do current administrative structures and practices reflect that assumption?
8. Discuss the contributions to the academic field of public administration made by the following individuals: (a) Woodrow Wilson, (b) Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick, (c) Herbert Simon, and (d) Alan Altshuler.
9. During the early 2000s, state and local governments faced severe fiscal constraints. How has this trend affected the field of public administration? If this trend continues, how will it affect the field of public administration? If growth declines, what are the implications for public employment?
10. In recent years, how has the role of the bureaucracy become more apparent in the daily lives of Americans? Is there anything in your own personal or career experience that shows a similar expression of public sentiment? Can you think of areas or agencies in which the public has shown a positive attitude toward government and public administration? Discuss.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following does not belong with the others?
 - a. Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
 - b. Environmental Protection Agency
 - c. Amtrak
 - d. Tennessee Valley AuthorityANS: B
2. A president whose patronage practices caused some academics to question their acceptance of the politics-administration dichotomy was

- a. Woodrow Wilson.
- b. Harry S Truman.
- c. Dwight D. Eisenhower.
- d. Franklin D. Roosevelt.

ANS: D

3. The entity with the major responsibility of overseeing the program and management activities of other federal bureaucratic agencies in the national executive branch is the
- a. Office of Management and Budget.
 - b. National Security Council.
 - c. White House Office.
 - d. Council of Economic Advisors.

ANS: A

4. The academic who criticized the "principles" approach to public administration was
- a. Frank Goodnow.
 - b. Herbert Simon.
 - c. P. W. Willoughby.
 - d. Alan Altshuler.

ANS: B

5. Which of the following is not an independent regulatory entity?
- a. Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
 - b. General Services Administration (GSA)
 - c. Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
 - d. National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)

ANS: B

6. Among the most important differences in the respective working environments of public and private managers are, first, the "goldfish bowl" of publicity facing the public manager and, second, the public manager's
- a. ability to control subordinates' careers.
 - b. ability to employ precise evaluation measures.
 - c. exclusive power to set agency goals.
 - d. having to operate under much tighter time constraints.

ANS: D

7. Public managers are likely to face conflicting incentives from all of the following *except*
- a. elected representatives.
 - b. unionized workers.
 - c. Citizens.
 - d. administrative supervisors.

ANS: D

8. Merit systems apply to approximately _____ proportion of the national government's bureaucratic employees?
- a. 75 percent
 - b. 45 percent

- c. 90 percent
- d. 65 percent

ANS: C

9. The following national government executive departments all reflect the phenomenon of "clientelism" *except*
- a. State.
 - b. Commerce.
 - c. Labor.
 - d. Agriculture.

ANS: A

10. The growth of bureaucracy can be explained by all the following *except*
- a. increasingly complex technology.
 - b. public pressures.
 - c. economic crises and natural disasters.
 - d. divided government.
 - e. acceptance of regulation.

ANS: D

11. During its earliest period, a major theme of the academic field of public administration was
- a. the search for "principles".
 - b. the application of sociology and psychology to the field.
 - c. political neutrality.
 - d. questioning the connections between public administration and political science.

ANS: C

12. What level of government has the largest number of elected officials?
- a. State
 - b. Federal
 - c. Local
 - d. Regional

ANS: C

13. What is the acronym popularly used to characterize important administrative principles?
- a. POSDCORB, Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, Budgeting
 - b. FEMA, Federal Emergency Management, Agency
 - c. POPCORN, Planning, Organizing, Practice, COoperation, Responding, Networking
 - d. POTDCORB, Patronage, Organizing, Taking responsibility, Direction, Compromising, Reaching out, Budgeting

ANS: A

14. In Parliamentary forms of government,
- a. The legislature is made up of only top-level public administrators.
 - b. The executive branch makes its own laws that override ones made in the legislature.

- c. The officials that parallel our executive branch (the chief executive and top-level ministers) are also influential members of the legislature.
- d. There are six different and equally powerful branches.

ANS: C

15. The concept of *bureaucratic neutrality* by definition refers to
- a. the rule that members of a bureaucracy are not allowed to have held a previous position in another branch of government.
 - b. the idea that a bureaucracy should act to implement and serve government directives, but not become a political force in its own right.
 - c. the idea that bureaucrats should not fraternize with elected officials or private interests.
 - d. the rule that if one branch should conflict with another in its directives for the bureaucracy, the judicial branch decides which branch's policy the bureaucracy should implement

ANS: B

16. A significant example of the public negatively viewing a bureaucracy after a national crisis
- a. occurred when the unclear ballots in areas of South Florida impacted the results of the Presidential Election of 2000.
 - b. occurred in 2004 when the Terry Schiavo case was brought into the public eye.
 - c. occurred in 2005 with the delayed response to Hurricane Katrina's destruction of the gulf coastal region.
 - d. All of the above

ANS: C

17. George W. Bush was successful implementing policy changes in which of the following?
- a. Social Security
 - b. Immigration
 - c. Emergency relief
 - d. Healthcare
 - e. None of the above

ANS: E

18. The academic discipline of public administration has been characterized by all the following *except*
- a. the politics-administration dichotomy.
 - b. the principles approach.
 - c. empirical methods of research.
 - d. macro economics.

ANS: D

TRUE-FALSE QUESTIONS

1. Bureaucrats are often thought to be "scapegoats" for societal problems.

ANS: T

2. The study of public administration is limited to government employees.

ANS: F

3. The level of government most involved with the provision of essential public services is the state level.

ANS: F

4. "Clientelism," as a distinct political pattern, did not emerge in bureaucratic politics until after World War II.

ANS: F

5. Charles Goodsell maintains that America's public bureaucracies perform quite well in comparison with bureaucracies elsewhere, whether measured by objective standards or in terms of overall citizen satisfaction.

ANS: T

6. Public management has virtually nothing in common with private management.

ANS: F

7. Public employees can be categorized as either "generalists" or "specialists" and also as either "political" or "merit" employees.

ANS: T

8. Variations in the public's faith in the president are associated with more general feelings of confidence in government.

ANS: T

9. The larger a unit of local government, the more likely it is that its bureaucracy will resemble state and national administrative agencies.

ANS: T

10. Federal efforts to "reinvent government" ignored the role of public employees as frontline service providers.

ANS: F

11. A challenge faced by *only* private administrators is that they must pursue broad goals set by others and their efforts will be evaluated by outside forces.

ANS: F

12. Although public trust in government increased slightly during the 1990s, it is still below the levels of previous decades.

ANS: T

13. Modern bureaucracy has undergone so many changes that all influences from the past have been lost.

ANS: F

14. The phenomenon of administrative discretion (when lower ranking executives are able to personally affect the implementation of law) arises from a lack of centralized authority.

ANS: T

15. The politics surrounding structural rearrangements within public agencies tend to be very low profile and neutral.

ANS: F

16. Electronic government was originally designed to make citizens more dependent on bureaucratic agencies.

ANS: F

17. Bureaucratic structures at the local level are generally more prevalent and sophisticated than those at the national level.

ANS: F

18. Most Americans are NOT affected by the actions and decisions of public administrators on a regular basis.

ANS: F

19. The size of the federal government significantly decreased during the administration of George W. Bush (2001–2009).

ANS: F

20. Social-demographic changes in economic activity, population, technology, and the workforce have had little affect on public administration

ANS: F