

American Bureaucracy in Comparative Perspective

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This article poses two basic questions: (1) What are the central differences and similarities that exist across the state bureaucracies of industrialized democracies? and (2) To what extent, in what ways, and why is the United States' Federal bureaucracy distinctive?

The article argues that in spite of large conceptual problems, it is only through the comparative analysis of administrative systems, processes, and behavior that we can develop the means by which to see what is common and what is precisely distinctive about particular systems. The article notes, for example, that complexity of decisionmaking and issues of politicization of the administration exist everywhere; only their forms differ.

Several dimensions of comparative analysis are discussed: (1) personnel and personnel systems; (2) political culture and environment; (3) decision-making processes; (4) the power of the bureaucracy; and (5) within federal states, uniformities and nonuniformities in implementation.

Each of these dimensions presents complex problems for comparison. Ways of developing them further for comparative inquiry are discussed, as are particular aspects of the distinctive character of both American bureaucratic structure and bureaucratic linkage to the political system.

While the article summarizes ways in which particular dimensions of analysis can be fruitful in comparing administrative systems, its function is mainly to provide a map to guide further explorations.

I. American Bureaucracy in Comparative Perspective;

Conceptual Issues

In contrast to the Korean state, the American state is generally regarded to be less influential in guiding the economy and in systematically planning adaptations to economic changes. One of the most prominent theories to explain why the Korean state would be stronger in this regard than the American one is that of Alexander Gerschenkron who argued that the structure, organization, and interventionist character of the state is affected by the timing of its industrial development.¹⁾ In this regard, the United States, being an

early industrializing nation, did not develop state organization appropriate to an active interventionist role in economic guidance. Korea, being a later industrializer, did. Other factors, of course, also are influential. The proximity of military threat and terrorism from the communist North Korean government stands in contrast to the great separation historically of the United States from the potential of threat.

At the heart of the modern state and its capabilities is the bureaucracy. In some respects, the bureaucracy is sometimes regarded as the essence of *stateness*—a durable and permanent apparatus of authority, more durable certainly than any regime it serves.

If the bureaucracy—its relative independence, autonomy, and capability—is indicators of stateness, then it is not surprising that the American state is regarded as weak. Even though high level American civil servants, as a group, are highly expert and technically well-qualified, their role is regarded as a limited one in directing policy adaptations. The capabilities of the Korean bureaucracy, in contrast, are well-regarded, if not necessarily its democratic instincts.²⁾

A number of the broad assertions about the so-called weakness of the American state or of its bureaucracy can be properly challenged in more specific terms. Yet, the imagery of the American state and bureaucracy is a relative absence of capability for guidance. And while this imagery is not altogether true, it does not fundamentally belie reality.

My focus in this article, then, is on the bureaucratic apparatus of the state and its intersections with the political apparatus. The anchor of my analysis is the American bureaucracy, but that is a subject illuminated best by a comparative perspective. In that regard, I especially want to emphasize two related questions:

- (1) What differences and similarities exist across the state bureaucracies of the industrialized democracies, and how may we conceptualize and discover them?
- (2) To what extent, in what ways, and why is the United States' Federal bureaucracy "exceptional" or distinctly anomalous?

These two questions, when pondered at length, raise numerous conceptual ambiguities mostly because we often look at a single system at a particular point in time. When we try to draw comparisons, however, many differences that we think are very stark tend to

1) Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962).

2) Chung, Chung-Kil, "The Political and Administrative Relationships Including Central and Local Administrative Units." A paper presented at the Conference on *The Role of the State in Economic Development in the Republic of Korea*, UCLA Center for Pacific Rim Studies, Los Angeles, August 14-16, 1987.

melt away.

Of the two questions that I have just raised, the first one, which also is the more general question of comparative inquiry, arises in my personal experience from having tried to provide answers to the second or more specific question regarding differences between the U.S. bureaucracy and the bureaucracies of other advanced industrial democracies. Although my research colleagues, Professors Joel Aberbach, Robert Putnam, and I have emphasized the notion of American "exceptionalism" in our book on high civil servants in the United States and six West European states (*Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies*),³⁾ some of the factors that are reputed to make the American Federal bureaucracy unique are to be found also in other systems but often in forms that are concealed to all but the most acute and astute observers. Allow me to illustrate this particular complexity in regard to two issues: (1) the problem of politicization of the bureaucracy, and (2) the problem of making non-routine and non-incremental decisions.

1. The politicization of bureaucracy

In regard to the problem of politicization, in his classic essay on bureaucracy, Max Weber portrayed the American state administrative structure as bureaucratically underdeveloped while the real power structure was to be found in the party organizations which Weber believed were becoming increasingly bureaucratized themselves.⁴⁾ Weber was not so accurate regarding the structure of U.S. party organizations which at the time were very strong but *never* bureaucratized. He was, however, totally perceptive in his commentary about the situation of the U.S. state administration which was then very much fed by party patronage. Not until 1883 did the basis for a permanent civil service come into being through the Pendleton Act. There is also a cynical interpretation as to why the Pendleton Act was passed. This interpretation stresses the idea that for politicians the burdens of the patronage system began to outweigh its virtues as the proportion of disappointed job-seekers rose well beyond the available positions. Consider also that at the time of the Pendleton Act, the administrative apparatus of the American federal government was exceedingly modest. Almost all of what government did, except for postal services and the military, was done at the local and state levels.

Still, Weber's point about the bureaucratic underdevelopment of U.S. public administr-

3) Joel D. Aberbach, Robert D. Putnam, and Bert A. Rockman, *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

4) Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" in H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 77-128.

ation is well-taken. American public administration is heavily influenced by partisan and political considerations. It always has been and, in different form, still is. Yet, it is clear that the U.S. is not alone in moving to place the permanent government (the administrative apparatus) under the thumb of the temporary governors (the political officeholders in power). In recent times, for example, in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Britain, the claim that the senior civil service is in risk of becoming a mere political tool of the leadership has been voiced in some places. In West Germany, this claim has been made during the past two changes of governing coalitions during 1969 and 1982~83.⁵⁾ In Britain, the Thatcher Government has taken great strides to ensure civil service support for her policies among the top officials of the administrative class. In Whitehall, there is some concern that "American" style government is becoming a role model for the redoubtable Mrs. Thatcher.

Numerous other examples could be discussed in regard to political filtering of the bureaucracy. The forms and the motivations for such filtering are often very diverse. They range in form the extraordinarily blatant to the extraordinarily subtle, and in motivation from gaining support for policy goals, to paying off elements of winning coalitions, to ensuring the stability of political arrangements in multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic states. Considering that such conditions influence a considerable number of countries, one must ask, how unique is the United States' system?

I believe that it is unique when it comes to the ways in which administration and politics have been forced to relate to one another, but not unique in the regard that most everywhere politicians have an interest in having civil servants be responsive to them. Politicians, of course, have such an interest because of the growth of the state, their own democratic vulnerability (the possibility that they or governing partners may lose electoral support), and the enlargement of public expectations. While I shall say more a bit later about how administration and politics have been forced to relate to one another in the U.S., my basic point is that exploration of political influence over the administrative apparatus is one that must begin with concepts about forms and motives that are relevant across different political systems, yet also relevant to historical change within a given country. Even talking about one country's historical past in this way is complicated. Is the American federal bureaucracy in the middle 1980s, for example, more

5) Hans-Ulrich Derlien, "Repercussions of Government Change on the Career Civil Service in West Germany: The Cases of 1969 and 1982." *Governance* 1 (1988), 50-78.

politicized than it was a quarter of a century ago? Although even this question does not admit to a simple answer, many observers would say yes. Is the appropriate baseline, then, 1960 or 1870? If it is the latter, the same observers would probably say the U.S. bureaucracy is today less politicized than it had been in 1870.

2. Problems of decision making

Another example of the conceptual problems attached to comparative inquiry has to do with the difficulty of making decisions that are interdepartmental, interjurisdictional, or which cut across vested interests. Supposedly, the United States represents the epitome of this form of immobilization because of the many constituted and competing centers of influence. This is an aspect, one might say, of the American constitutional design. A few years ago, however, West German sociologist Fritz Scharpf and his colleagues also wrote about great strains on the decision-making capacities of the Federal Republic placed on it by initiatives lacking in great consensus.⁶⁾ Another West German sociologist, Renate Mayntz, has observed more generally that broad-scale, but often necessary, initiatives are unlikely to be consummated in any democratic government.⁷⁾ Assessments of the Japanese administrative system also describe tendencies toward a complex, common denominator style of conflict avoidance.⁸⁾ Even in Britain where the political machinery seems so relatively simple and uncomplicated, the notion of "directionless consensus" describes similar difficulties in energizing government.⁹⁾

In short, is the problem of immobilization a problem of political and administrative structure as those who claim the problem is a largely American one would suggest?

Alternatively, is it a problem of all democratic states as Renate Mayntz seems to suggest? If so, though, how does one explain the considerable difficulties attached to generating, or at least implementing, new policy directions in one-party Socialist states such as Poland, the Soviet Union, or Yugoslavia? Equally, how then, does one explain the concerted efforts of both Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the U.S. to imprint policy

6) Fritz W. Scharpf, Bernd Reissert, and Fritz Schnabel, "Policy Effectiveness and Conflict Avoidance in Intergovernmental Policy Formation." Discussion Paper Series, International Institute of Management, Wissenschaftszentrum, Berlin, 1977.

7) These comments were made by Professor Mayntz during a discussion that took place at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California, November 1983.

8) See, for example, Kataoka Hiromitsu, "The Administrative System of the Japanese National Government: The Macro-Micro Systems." *Waseda Political Studies* 15 (1980), 1-52; and John C. Campbell, "Bureaucracy," in Ishida Takeshi and Ellis S. Krauss (eds.), *Democracy in Japan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming).

9) Richard Rose, *The Problem of Party Government*. (New York: The Free Press, 1974),

initiatives that are radical in their departure from existing directions and durable in their impact into the foreseeable future?

How can we get a conceptual grip on the problem of decisional immobilization, of vested interests, and of bureaucratic resistances to broad-scale central direction? When we look at one system at a time—usually the one we are citizens of—we tend to see indecision and immobilization. Lacking perspective on this, we are, thus, inclined to think that somewhere, somehow, in some other setting, important non-incremental decisions are being made and implemented.

As in the previous example dealing with the politicization of bureaucracy, the problem once again is to identify the right concepts and data for pinpointing the forms that decisional bottlenecks take. That is necessary for realistic comparison.

These examples illustrate a great paradox. First, they show just how difficult it is to do analytically useful and comparable cross-national analysis of administrative systems and roles. But second, they also illustrate how essential it is to do such comparative analysis in order that our analyses and judgments of any given system will be properly anchored.

II. Dimensions of Comparative Analysis

I want to emphasize five dimensions for comparing bureaucratic systems. I believe that these will assist us to focus better on the American system in comparative perspective. The dimensions I would like to suggest are: (1) Personnel and Personnel Systems; (2) Political Culture and Environment; (3) Decision-Making Process; (4) the Power of the Bureaucracy; and (5) Uniformities and Non-Uniformities in a Federal State.

1. Personnel and Personnel Systems

There are many highly distinctive characteristics of both the officials of the upper reaches of the U.S. federal bureaucracy and also the system that organizes personnel.

First, we need to start with the *level of responsibility* accorded to top level civil servants. Strictly speaking, the American conception of a civil servant (at the highest level, of course) is that he is a public manager, not a counselor or adviser to department ministers. This means that the top level American civil servants in the Washington bureaucracy begin at a level of responsibility significantly below that accorded to their peers in other advanced industrialized democracies. In New York City, there are twin

office towers (the World Trade Buildings) of about 100 floors each. If we think of these as equivalent to how close the civil service elite is to the top of their ministries, the Americans would probably have to locate their offices somewhere between the 70th and 75th floors while the civil service elite in the other advanced industrial democracies probably would settle in somewhere in the vicinity of the 95th floor. Top civil servants in the U.S. do not often get to see their own ministers directly—and, in fact, the American ministers are not really equivalent to cabinet ministers in parliamentary systems because the American cabinet officers, quite literally, are employees of the president.¹⁰⁾ In roughly the last twenty years or so, the growth of political insulation between department heads and top civil servants has been impressive. The process of creating new positions through discretionary political appointment is a phenomenon that is referred to as “layering in” which, in essence, also means pushing the career civil service farther and farther back.¹¹⁾ Although no generalization here is an especially safe one, the officials (often called “in and outers”) who staff the positions between the department head and the top civil servants are rarely party politicians, but are usually people with correct political credentials *and* expertise or experience in the substance of the post they are offered. Many have previously served in the Federal Executive.¹²⁾

A second defining characteristic of officials in the higher reaches of the bureaucracy is their *lack of cohesion*. A better way to state this, perhaps, is absence of communality. A common saying in regard to the disparateness of the American Federal Executive is that the only thing that American civil servants have in common is the source of their salary checks.¹³⁾ It is the nature of modern government, of course, that responsibilities are segmented and, because of that, problems of coordination and cooperation are, thus, created. In the U.S., however, competition across segments is especially fierce in part because there is neither political structure to promote compromise (no real cabinet, for instance) nor is there emphasis on conflict avoidance. Indeed, an adversarial posture is often ado-

10) In this regard, see Aberbach, *et al.*, *Bureaucrats and Politicians*, Chapter 7; Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, *The Administrative State in Industrialized Democracies*. (Washington: American Political Science Association, 1985), and Bert A. Rockman, “The American Presidency in Comparative Perspective: Systems situations, Leaders,” in Michael Nelson (ed.), *The Presidency and the Political System*, second edition. (Washington: CQ Press, 1988), pp. 55-79.

11) Hugh Helco, *A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington*. (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1977); and Aberbach and Rockman, *The Administrative State*.

12) Dean Mann, David T. Stanley and Jamison W. Doig, *Men Who Govern*. (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1965).

13) Harold Seidman, *Politics, Position, and Power: The Dynamics of Federal Organization*, third edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

pted. In other words, norms reinforce political structure.

The Civil Service Reform Act passed in 1978 under the Carter Administration was intended to combat these strong tendencies toward incohesion by, among other things, creating a Senior Executive Service (SES) which, similar to the British administrative class, designates status by service rather than by job. Nearly all higher civil servants are now in the SES. One objective is to combat departmental parochialisms by making it easier to move officials across jobs and even departments. Another, more concealed, objective which has been followed up with special skill by the Reagan Administration, has been to make political control easier by shuffling unwanted officials to equally unwanted posts, oftentimes outside of Washington altogether. Another control tactic is provided by an aspect of the law setting up the SES. It permits 10% of officials in the SES, and up to 25% within a given department, to come from outside the career service. For a set of positions that a presidential administration deems particularly desirable to staff with people to its liking, the 10% and 25% openings can be used to politically control the appointments.

A third characteristic in which American higher civil servants contrast with their peers elsewhere lies in the selectivity of their *social profiles and backgrounds*. In most systems top civil servants tend to possess substantially higher socio-economic status backgrounds and achieved attainment than do parliamentary politicians. This is not so in the U.S., however. American civil servants do come from somewhat more modest social backgrounds than their peers in other settings, but the real difference here is that American legislative politicians tend to come from somewhat higher status backgrounds and especially have more substantial attainment than their peers elsewhere. Consequently, from the standpoint of social profile, there is greater similarity between top level civil servants and congressional politicians in the U.S. than elsewhere.¹⁴⁾ There are other similarities of even greater importance that I shall touch on a bit later between the top civil servants and congressional politicians in the United States. Not surprisingly, because these jobs are more prestigious, it is the appointed officials of the "political" or noncareer component of the executive whose social profiles are most comparable to the eliteness of the European high level civil servants who were part of our earlier study.¹⁵⁾

14) Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, "The Overlapping Worlds of American Federal Executives and Congressmen." *British Journal of Political Science* 7 (1977), 1-27; and Aberbach, *et al.*, *Bureaucrats and Politicians*, Chapter 3.

15) Aberbach, *et al.*, *Bureaucrats and Politicians*.

A fourth departure of the American case from the international norm, until recently at least, is in the realm of the *political tendencies* of the U.S. federal civil service elite. In most countries, the senior civil service, without a great deal of variance, represents a centrist or slightly right of center perspective. In the U.S., overall, the senior civil service is more politically polarized, yet also has been, on average, farther left relative to the system in which it is situated than European civil servants, at least, have been relative to their systems. The higher reaches of the American civil service vastly under-represent the Republican Party; that is especially true in the agencies dealing with social welfare functions and in the foreign service. Republican control of the White House, not unexpectedly, means conflict with the civil service. This is so even while there has been some shifting to an overall more centrist outlook among senior American civil servants by 1986~87. The reason is because the Republican presidential administration, and its operatives in the executive, have also shifted even more homogeneously to the Right.¹⁶⁾

Since, on the whole, the senior civil service is more predisposed to government programs than the Republican political leadership is, the latter has tried to push civil servants farther and farther into the background and to develop centralized tools of technical management and budgetary analysis to give greater power to the central agencies that are more intimately connected to the White House than are the departments. Such tools have diminished, however, with the deterioration of the Reagan administration's political position and the need to stem budget deficits even if this requires non-discriminatory cuts.

A fifth characteristic that we might use to compare U.S. civil service personnel at the senior levels with other civil service elites has to do with the *mix of professional skills* within the bureaucracy. There is a wide assortment in the U.S.. In sharp contrast, for example, to the Japanese, Italian, and German systems, legal training is an evident but not predominant path to the senior civil service. The American bureaucracy has significant proportions of natural scientists and social scientists, especially economists. The nature of the skill mix is a reasonably good predictor to the use of technical instruments of policy analysis within the executive. A fairly high percentage of economists in the administrative system probably is a good indicator of the role of analytic policy evaluation.

Let us imagine in this regard a table of two variables and four cells. One of these

16) Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, "A Changed U.S. Federal Executive: Did Reform Do It?" A paper presented at the Conference on *The Policy Significance of Structural and Organizational Change*. IPSA Research Committee on the Structure and Organization of Government, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia, January 20-23, 1988.

variables is the use of technical instrumentation within the bureaucracy for purposes of policy planning and evaluation. The other variable is the degree of policy consensus that is likely to be found within the executive system. If we look then at the cell in which the technical tendencies are high and intra-executive policy consensus is high, we are likely to see Sweden and Korea clearly in this cell, and France perhaps a bit less clearly. Looking now at the cell in which technical tendencies are high but intra-executive consensus is low, we are likely to clearly come across the United States and, a little less clearly, Canada. The cell in which technical tendencies within the bureaucracy are low but intra-executive consensus is high would most evidently contain Britain and, perhaps slightly less evidently, Japan and Germany. The cell containing low tendencies toward technical instrumentation and also low intra-executive policy consensus likely would contain Italy and Spain.

<Table 1>

		Intra-Executive Policy Consensus	
		High	Low
Technical Instrumentation	High	e.g. Sweden Korea France	e.g. United States Canada
	Low	e.g. Britain Japan West Germany	e.g. Italy Spain

Such a preliminary effort as this is simply a way of thinking about what a given mix of skills within a bureaucracy means for how it is apt to operate.

2. Political Culture and Environment

Having already touched on the dimension of political culture and environment, I want now to discuss and to try to explain attitudes that exist in the United States toward the bureaucracy. I also want to take note of the critical influence of American political and governmental institutions at the federal level in determining the behavior of the senior civil service.

It is difficult to assess the factor of prestige and the factor of controversiality in regard

to the American bureaucracy. Contradictions are often evident. One study by Daniel Katz and his associates discovered that positive reactions on the part of people who have had to deal with federal agencies did not affect their more generally formulated negative attitudes toward the bureaucracy.¹⁷⁾ On the other hand, Euro-barometer surveys show that Americans, among citizens of OECD countries, display the highest confidence in government, including the highest ratings of the civil service.¹⁸⁾ Similar evidence also had been uncovered in the surveys of citizens of five countries undertaken over 25 years ago by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba.¹⁹⁾

In regard to both the prestige and controversiality factors, however, it is advisable to keep in mind the notion that the United States is actually a late developing state and is historically anomalous. The U.S. does not fit the Gerschenkron model of development, however, because it had both a developed economy and a developed public before it had a well-developed state. The origins of the modern state bureaucracy in the United States are only of about fifty years' duration. The origins of the administrative state at the federal level are to be found in two factors: (1) the regulatory and social program functions principally associated with the "New Deal" reforms of the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s, and (2) the mobilization for war in the 1940s. Unlike a number of other administrative states, the American bureaucracy is not associated with playing a major role in the economic transformation of society. The American bureaucracy is instead often associated with controversial social reform and regulatory functions begun during the 1930s. There is a pervasive anti-big government norm in the United States. While this norm fluctuates in its prominence, this is a time during which it happens to be more dominant. The view of the bureaucracy as a dispensable source of social regulation and irritation stems from the absence of the bureaucracy in state-building and its creation as the agent of controversial social policies.

One also cannot forget the role of political institutions in determining how American senior civil servants operate and the steps taken by presidential administrations to assert their control over the bureaucracy. One must begin here with arguably the most important

17) Daniel Katz, Barbara A. Gutek, Robert L. Kahn, and Eugenia Barton, *Bureaucratic Encounters: A Pilot Study in the Evaluation of Government Services*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute of Social Research, 1975).

18) Richard Rose, "The Capacity of the President: A Comparative Analysis." (Strathclyde: Centre for the study of Public Policy, 1984).

19) Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963),

of all political institutions—the role of a very powerful independent legislature with powerful legislative subunits in the form of committees and subcommittees which authorize programs and appropriate funds for them.

The presence of this powerful institution, wholly separate from the presidency, means that civil servants are legally as accountable to the Congress as to their hierarchical superiors within the Executive Branch. Because of this, U.S. civil servants are often more involved with members and staff personnel of the congress than with their putative superiors in the Executive. The implication is that American civil servants are not necessarily more political than their peers elsewhere but rather that the difference of institutions means that the political game played by the senior civil servants in the U.S. is a visible and overt one that ranges outside of the executive system. Because of the layers of political insulation, the chances of success at influence within the executive are often perceived as less than the chances of such success in working with the legislature. So, while bureaucrats everywhere play a fairly well concealed game of politics inside the bureaucracy, their American peers have a clear incentive to work outside as well as inside.²⁰⁾ Appearing so overtly political, the American senior civil servants are thus distrusted by presidential administrations, especially Republican ones.

3. Decision-Making Processes

Governmental and political structure combine in the United States in such a way that there is no formal meeting ground for decision making except possibly in the White House. Since the American constitutional structure was designed to deter the natural emergence of a unified government, this is not surprising. Whereas the cabinet is often the setting in parliamentary governments through which issues of importance are in some form settled and bargained, no such forum exists in the American government. The American cabinet is a mere collection of presidential subordinates, not a collectivity of the president's peers. Under the circumstances, it makes little sense for senior civil servants to try to gain the ear of their ministers. First, the ministers (department secretaries) are often seen by the President and his White House associates as extensions of the permanent bureaucracy, making demands upon the budget without sharing in government-wide responsibility. This, of course, has to do with the deficiencies of the American cabinet as a decision-making body—a function, however, that the constitutional design of American

20) Aberbach *et al.* *Bureaucrats and Politicians*, Chapter 7; and Aberbach and Rockman, *The Administrative State*, pp.19-21.

government never intended it to perform. Second, as previously noted, the frequency of ministerial contact with senior civil service officials is very low, with numerous sets of officials mediating between them. Moreover, the ministers often have their own political agendas and their own tests of political loyalty that may or may not be met by senior civil servants.

Consequently, to reemphasize this point, senior civil servants in the U.S. are at a disadvantaged position in playing the role of advisers, but they do extend their efforts at policy influence outside to the legislature and occasionally the news media. The availability of these outside sources of influence is an advantage of American bureaucrats contrasted to their peers elsewhere. However, this reflects largely defensive maneuvering in order to protect the status quo from White House or Ministerial exertions.²¹⁾ The openness of political maneuvering in the U.S.—the relative boundlessness of bureaucratic politics—suggests that decision making is certainly less contained in the United States. Does that mean, however, that it is also less coherent?

4. Power of the Bureaucracy

The real power of the bureaucracy is a very difficult issue to address because the concepts "power" and "bureaucracy" are both elusive and neither is conducive to a great deal of analytic clarity. In part, this is because "power" often is defined in terms of the defense of a social role or elite status rather than as influence on policy. It may be necessary to distinguish analytically the idea of the defense of an elite and its special status, on the one hand, and the more active notion of influence in policy decisions, on the other hand. In regard to the first conception, the U.S. senior civil servants in a society with an anti-statist ideology have relatively little status to protect. They do not command entry to other channels of power in commerce or in politics as, say, French and Japanese civil service elites are reputed to do. Influence in policy making, though, is a different matter.

The problem of discerning "influence" is connected to the idea of "bureaucracy" as a concept. Except possibly in the defense of a social status, it is not evident that there can be a "bureaucratic interest" because analytically there is no "the bureaucracy." Administrative units tend to pursue their missions and defend their interests in the most micro

21) See, in this regard, Joel D. Aberbach, Ellis S. Krauss, Muramatsu Michio, and Bert A. Rockman, "Comparing Japanese and American Bureaucratic Elites." A paper prepared for presentation at the Workshop on *Patterns of Elite Transformation in Western Democracies* at the ECPR Joint Session, Rimini, Italy, April 5-10, 1988.

form.

Because of the common view that the U.S. civil service and the American state are lacking in prestige, and because of the obvious enormous fragmentation of the U.S. Federal bureaucracy, the American bureaucracy is reputed to be weak and lacking in influence. This view is both correct and incorrect.

It is correct certainly in the sense that U.S. civil servants lack an assured channel of influence to executive decision-makers above them. This means that they work harder for influence than civil servants in parliamentary systems have to, but they are rarely shut off from attaining some influence in some part of the U.S. political system. Notably, in this regard, the British political scientist, Vincent Wright, observed that in some important respects civil servants in the Fourth Republic of France were able to exercise more independent influence than in the Fifth Republic precisely because political power was more fragmented in the Fourth than in the Fifth Republic.²²⁾

Ironically, therefore, despite having to work very hard to attain influence and perhaps precisely because of the extraordinary lack of integration, American senior civil servants often exert considerable, and not unobtrusive, influence over policy. The fragmented nature of the American political system means that the system operates like a market (several different types of markets, to be sure). Far more, I suspect, than European, Japanese and Korean senior civil servants whose tracks to influence are better greased and far more straightforward, American civil servants must be policy entrepreneurs and advocates. They must find willing buyers—whether to advance their own ideas or, as is now especially the case, to retard the proposals of their putative superiors. It is the nature of the American system of government that under normal circumstances buyers can usually be found but no single set can dominate the shape of market demand.

5. Uniformities and Non-uniformities in a Federal State

It has been said that in the U.S. commerce unites that which government and politics divide. Uniformities in American law and administration, indeed, are generally constructed around commercial needs and conveniences.

Our focus up to this point has been at the level of the U.S. Federal administration. Yet, it is at the state and local governmental levels that most administrative growth has occurred, and it is here that real implementation takes place. There is, in this regard,

²²⁾ Vincent Wright, "Politics and Administration Under the French Fifth Republic." *Political Studies* 22 (1974), 44-65.

certainly some uniformity, much of that imposed by the Federal Government. But there is even more impressive heterogeneity.

Overall, the most impressive uniformity is that virtually all of the American states replicate the institutional form of the Federal Government—the so-called separation of powers involving an independently elected chief executive officer, an independent bicameral legislature, and an independent judiciary operating under some variant of Anglo-Saxon common law. One state (Nebraska) has a unicameral legislature and another (Louisiana) operates under Napoleonic code. For the most part, administrative structures look similar across the states, but there is wide divergence in personnel practices.

The overall picture, however, is one of highly diverse environments and political cultures which usually are reflected in administrative personnel practices, among other things. There are various regional compacts among states and cooperation in regard to various natural resources as well as in shared public goods. Still, the main paradigm, especially from a regional standpoint, is competitive and entrepreneurial with much effort expended to influence allocative decisions made in Washington. This form of competitive Federalism can readily be contrasted with the German Federal Republic. Over time, also, strong sectoral administrative relationships have emerged between Federal bureaucrats and state and local governments. This places yet further emphasis, because of these interdependencies, for state and local governments to influence decisions in Washington. The single biggest lobby in Washington is not any single private or sectoral interest, but instead *other* levels of government. The Reagan administration has devoted much effort to eliminating this lobby by eliminating from the province of the Federal Government the activities that spawned it.

III. In Sum

I began this article with the question of what is similar and what is different across administrative systems. The question is disarmingly simple for it is not answerable in any simple fashion. I have tried in this discussion to set forth my understandings in particular as to how American public administration tends to deviate from the norms of other advanced industrialized democracies, though the latter themselves reflect diverse traditions and practices. In the process of this discussion, I have tried to point to some dimensions of analysis that might be fruitful in the comparison of administrative systems. Such a summation inevitably is to say that we have merely begun.