

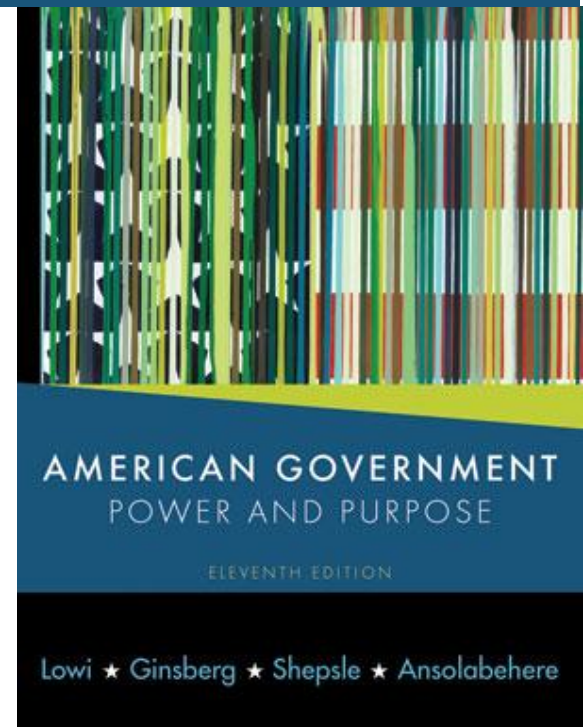
# 7

## The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy in a Democracy

### AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

#### POWER AND PURPOSE

Lowi ♦ Ginsberg ♦ Shepsle ♦ Ansolabehere



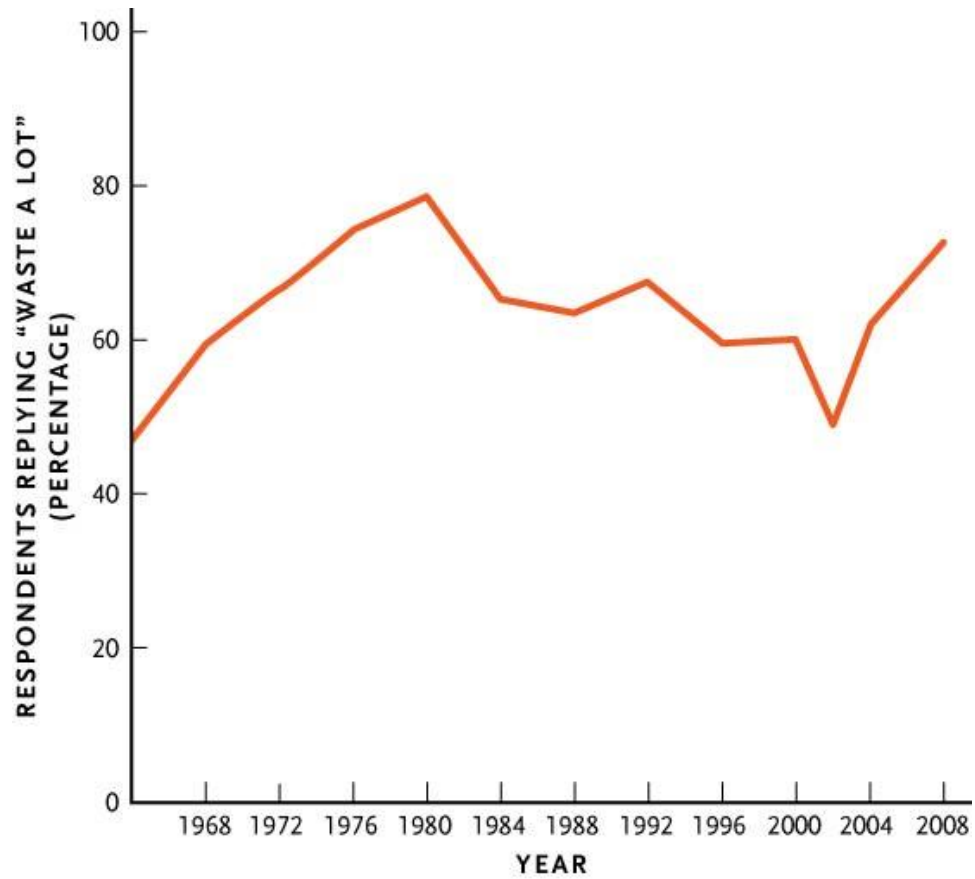
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# The Paradoxes of Bureaucratic Politics

Americans generally have negative views of bureaucracy and tend only to focus on it when it breaks down.

Still, executive agencies and departments perform essential functions in American society and the American economy. We benefit daily from programs administered and services provided by the U.S. Weather Service, the Transportation Department, the Postal Service, the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and so on.

## The Public Thinks there is a Lot of Waste in Government

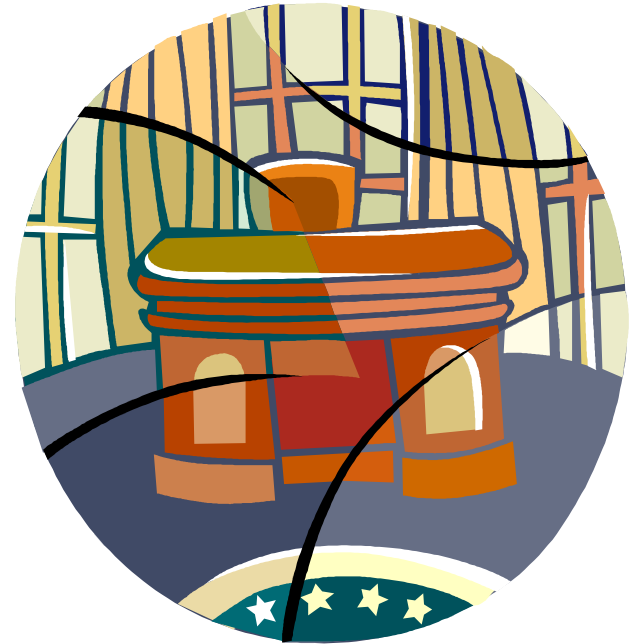




In recent years, presidents of the United States have argued that the federal government has grown too large.

- Republican Ronald Reagan declared that government is often the problem.
- Democrat Bill Clinton proclaimed that “the era of big government is over.”

Accepting the 2000  
Republican presidential  
nomination, George W. Bush  
echoed Reagan, saying, “Big  
government is not the  
answer!”

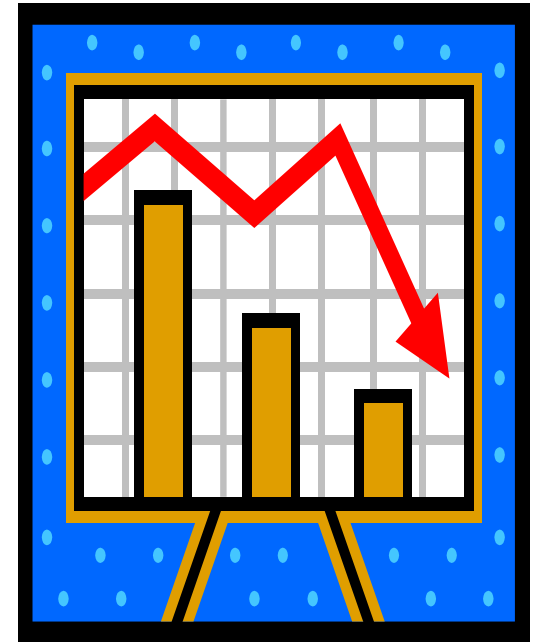


And when campaigning for the Democratic nomination in 2008, Barack Obama acknowledged that Ronald Reagan's conservative ideology and policies changed the "trajectory" of America.

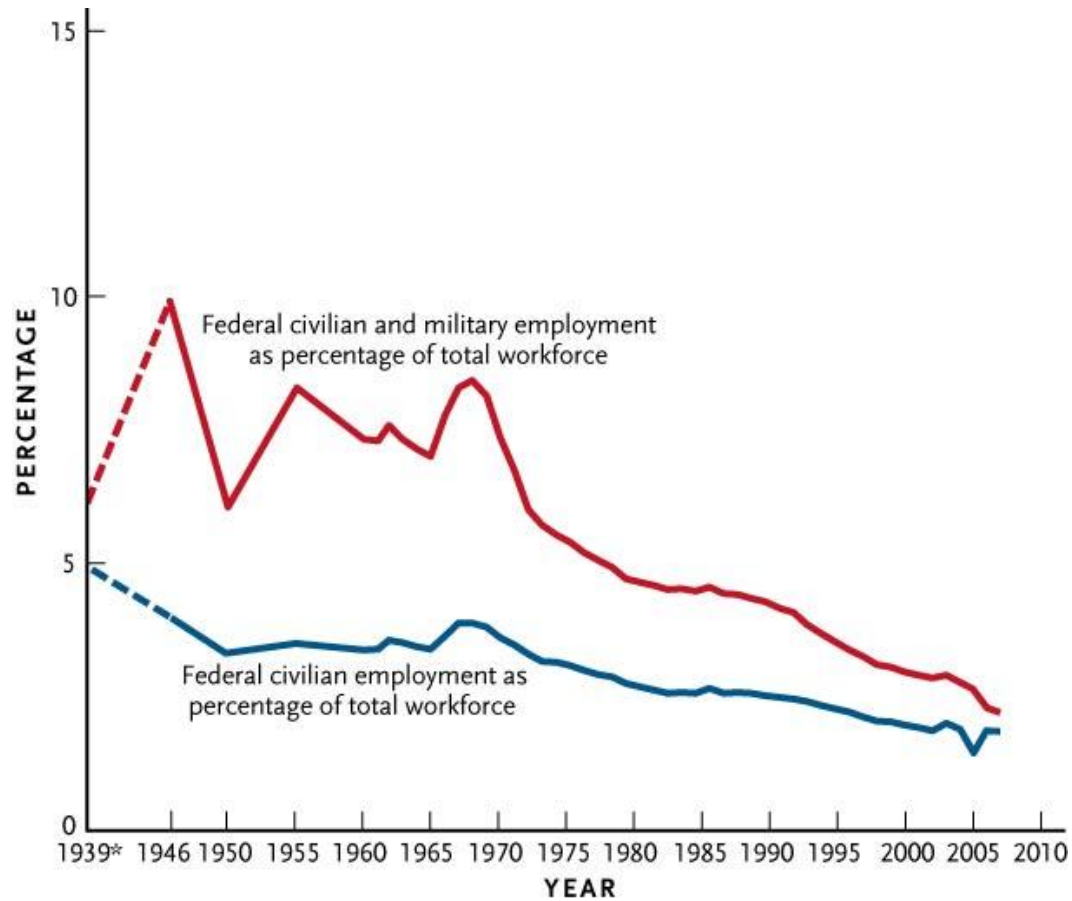


Despite bureaucratic unpopularity and general fears of “big government,” it turns out that the federal bureaucracy has hardly grown at all during the past quarter-century.

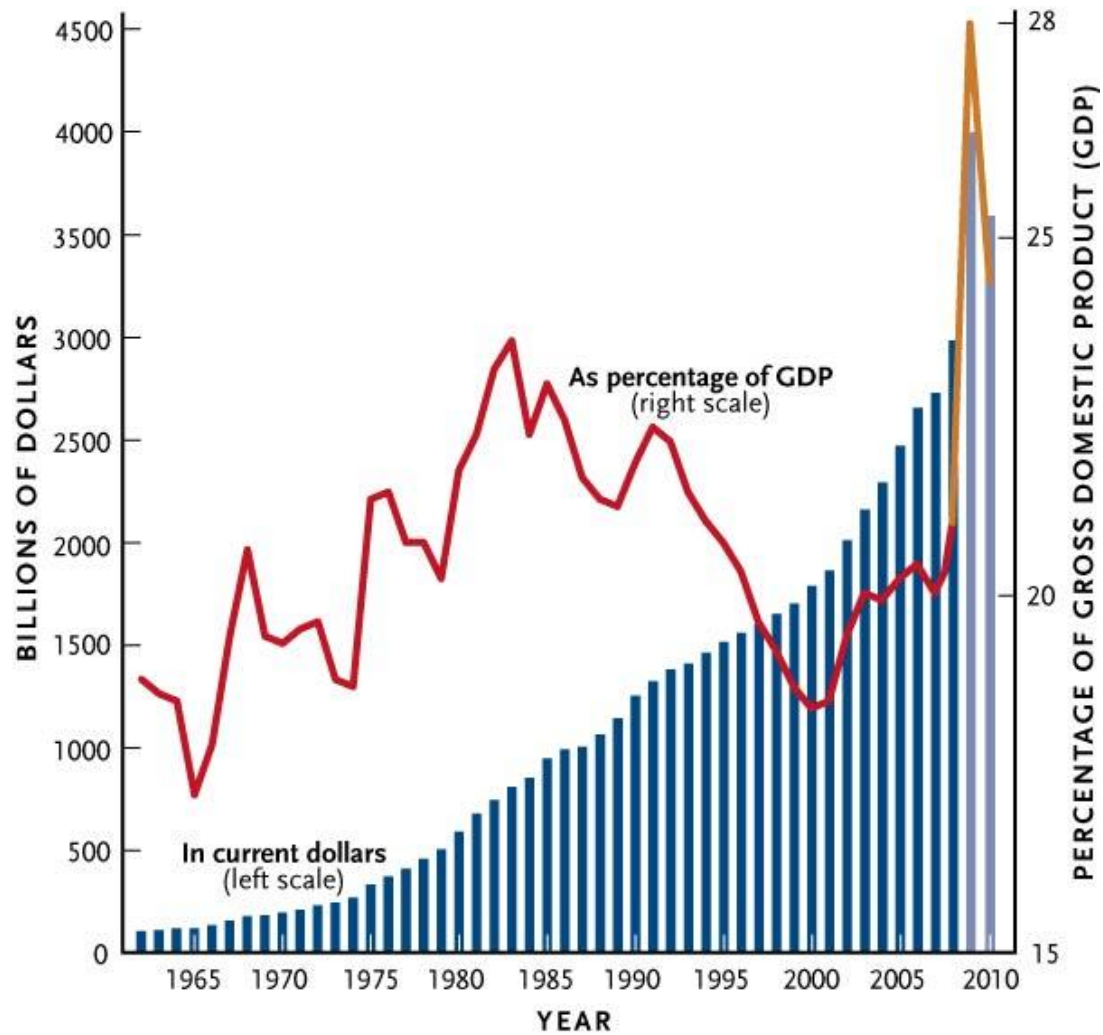
- The size of the federal workforce as a percentage of the total workforce has declined; and
- The size of the federal budget as a percentage of the overall economy has remained largely unchanged since 1960.



## Employees in The Federal Service: Total



## Annual Federal Outlays



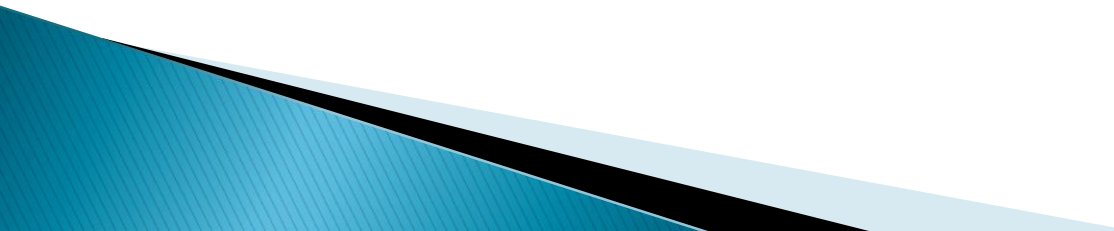
# Bureaucracy in a Democracy



Though necessary and even valuable, the federal executive branch suffers from an image problem. Bureaucratic procedures are often inefficient and frustrating.

*Bureaucracy* itself is a pejorative term that means “government run by desks.” We use this term to refer to the principles of organization in governmental administration.

Bureaucracies—executive branch departments and agencies—are where the authoritative decisions of government are implemented. Examples include:

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
  - The Department of Agriculture (USDA)
  - The Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
  - The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
- 



**“Bureaucrat”** is the term used to describe the employees in public bureaucracies who are selected based on **merit** through the **civil service system**.

Bureaucrats implement public policy, make administrative rules, and apply those rules in specific cases, making, as we say, quasi-judicial decisions.



Police officers, public school teachers, soldiers, and even professors at public universities are bureaucrats in the sense that they are state actors who implement public policies.



# Bureaucratic Development over Time

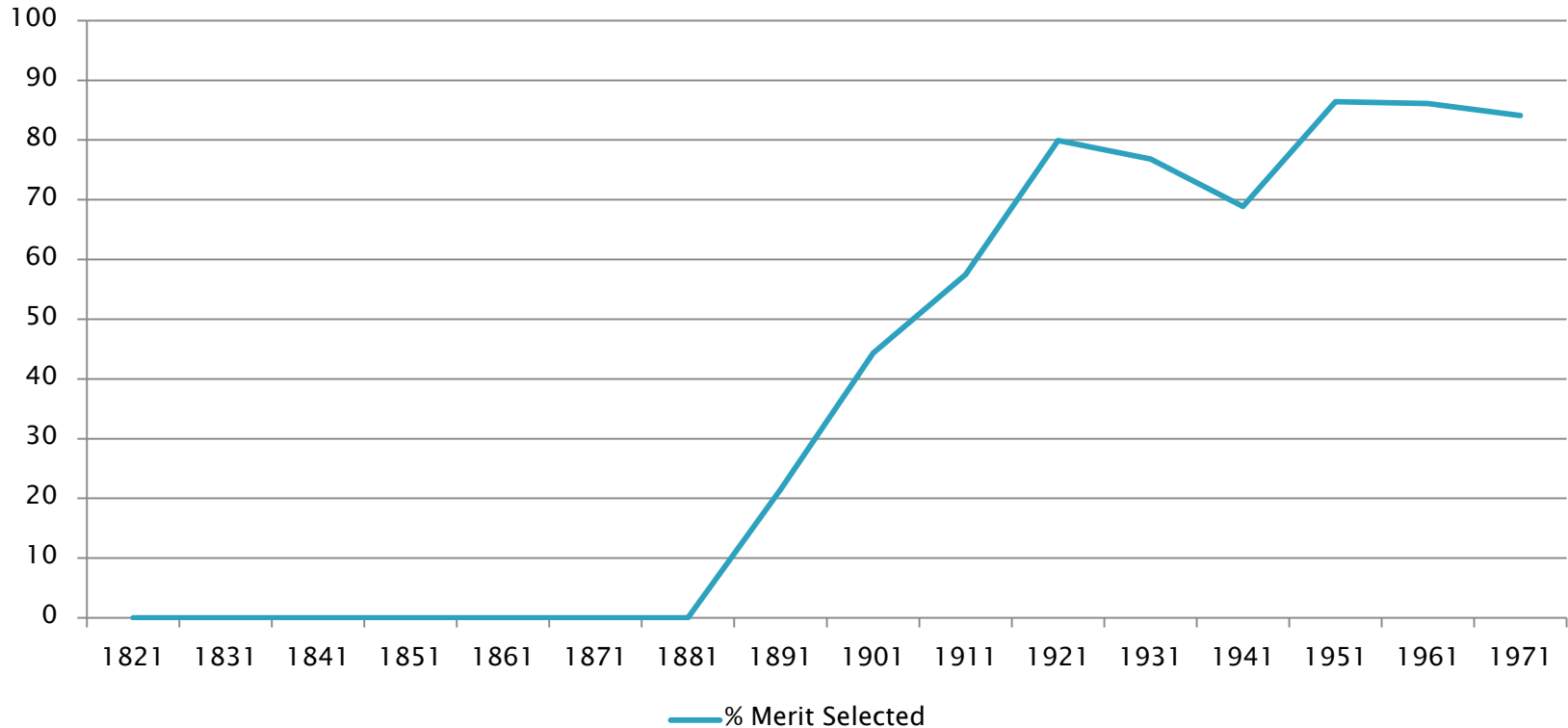
## Nineteenth-Century Bureaucracy

- ▶ Politicized;
- ▶ Government jobs were “patronage” jobs given to political supporters;
- ▶ This made bureaucracy more representative and accountable to people.

## Twentieth-Century Bureaucracy

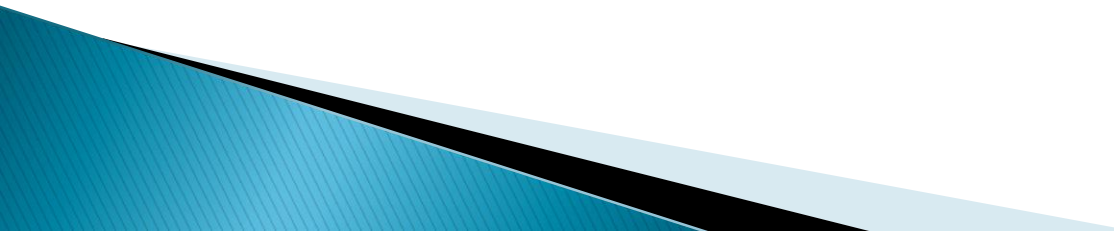
- ▶ Professionalized;
- ▶ Most government jobs were “civil service” jobs awarded on merit;
- ▶ This decreased the potential for cronyism and the political administration of policy.

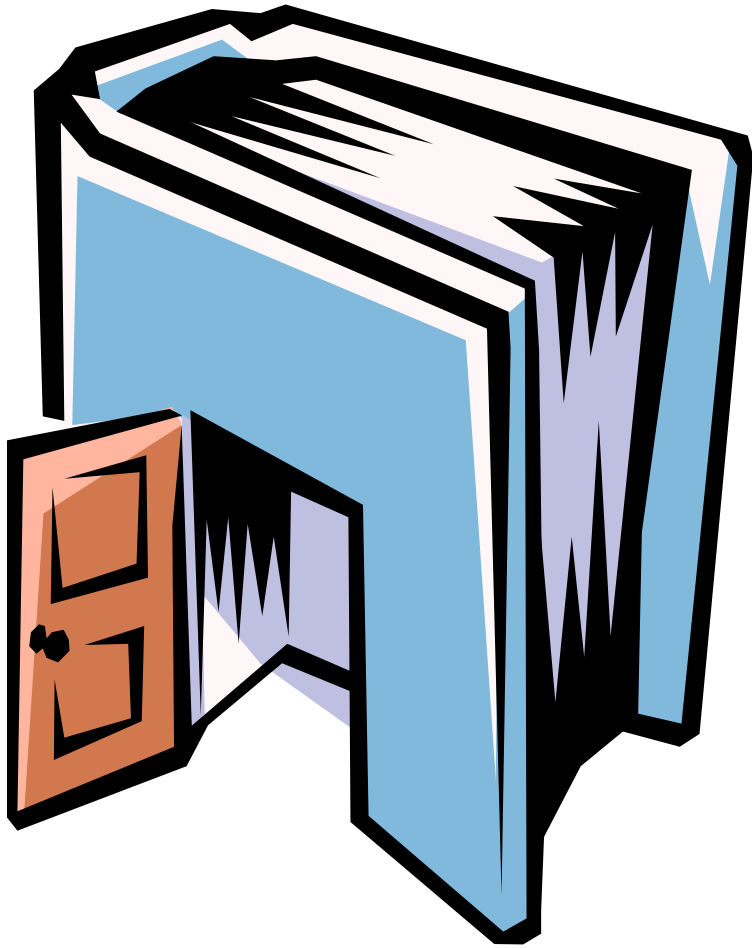
## Percentage of Civilian Federal Employees Selected under the Merit System, 1821–1971



Source: Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics in American Politics*, 5th edition (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1995), pp. 250–1. Note that the chart stops at 1971 because the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 (which would take effect by 1972) significantly altered the percentage of employees under the merit system without altering the president's ability to control the executive branch.

In 1885, political scientist (and future president) Woodrow Wilson wrote “The Study of Administration” outlining the role of a bureaucracy in a democracy. He argued:

- Politics too often gets in the way of efficient administration.
  - Bureaucracy could (and should) be run on principles of expertise and sound management.
  - Democratic policy makers should set broad policy goals, while professional administrators should be entrusted to efficiently implement those policy decisions.
- 



What are the advantages to having a bureaucracy made up of “non-political” experts?

What are the potential costs of such a system?

# Bureaucratic Institutions

Bureaucracies:

- ▶ Are hierarchical; and
- ▶ Benefit from a division of labor.

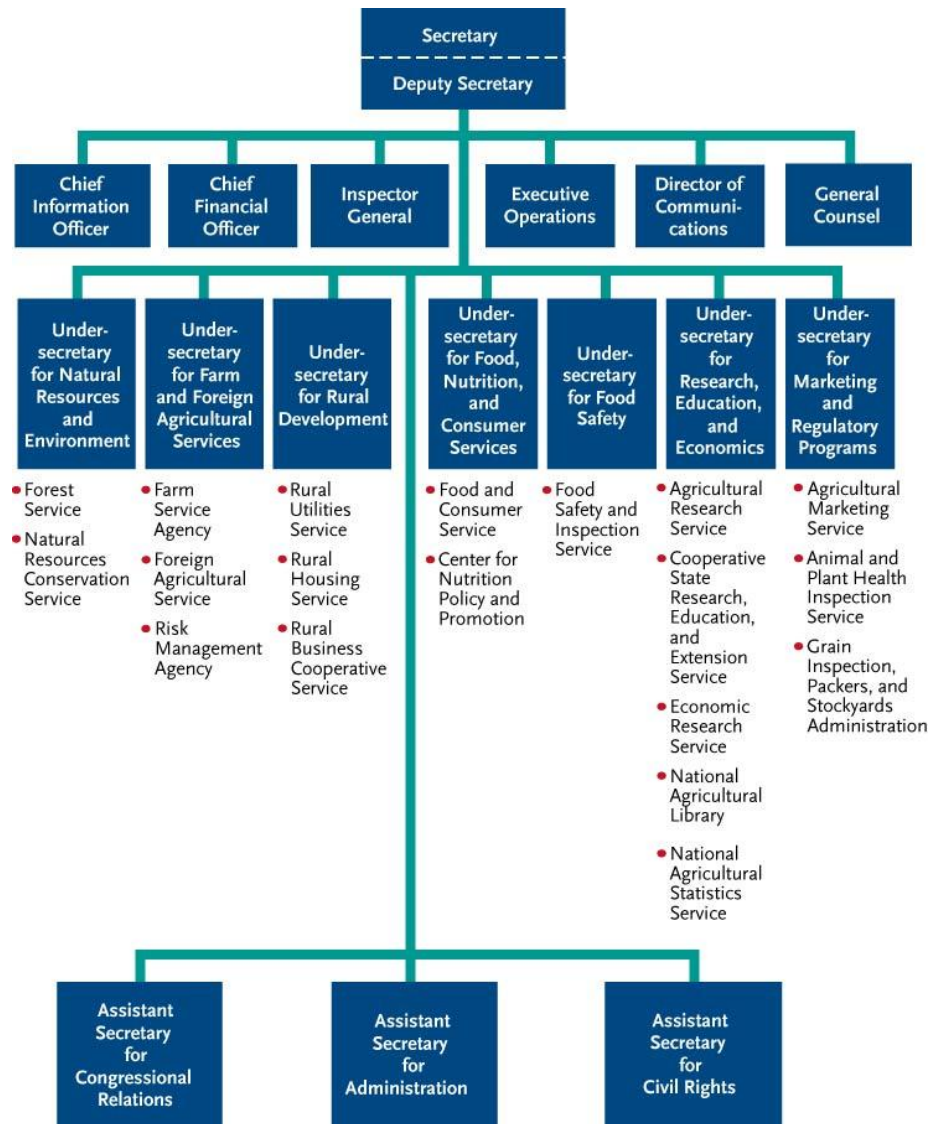
Bureaucratic hierarchies and division of labor promote the development of expertise and efficiency.

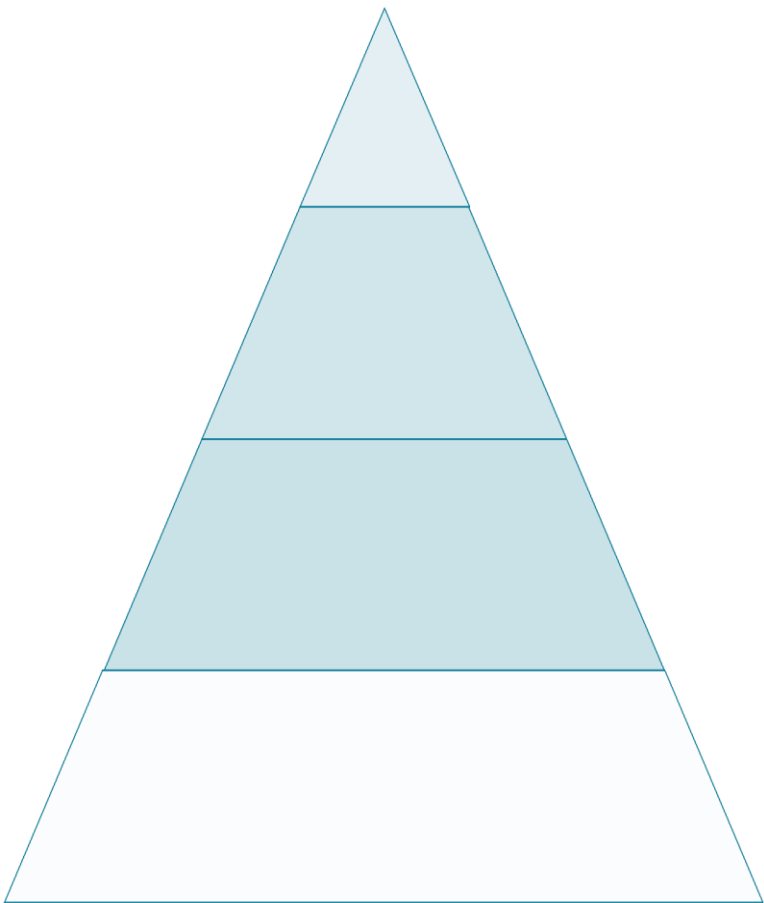
The bureaucracy is organized into **departments** and **independent agencies**.

Departments are organized into tiers:

- First Tier → Secretary
- Second Tier → Undersecretaries
- Third Tier → Bureau level

## Organizational Chart of The Department of Agriculture





Bureaucratic hierarchies—the “chain of command”—must be obvious to political actors inside and outside a bureaucracy.

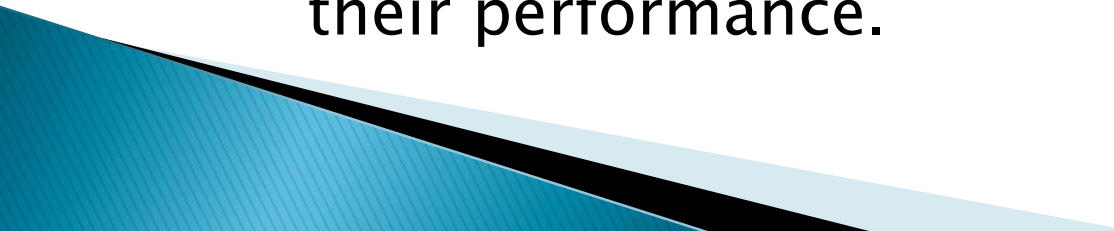
Such a clear hierarchy facilitates the flow of information in a bureaucracy, enhancing both responsiveness and accountability.

Once authoritative policy makers surrender authority to bureaucracies, the task is to maintain both **responsiveness** and **accountability**.

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**Responsiveness** refers to the efficiency with which bureaucrats respond to signals from authoritative policy makers.

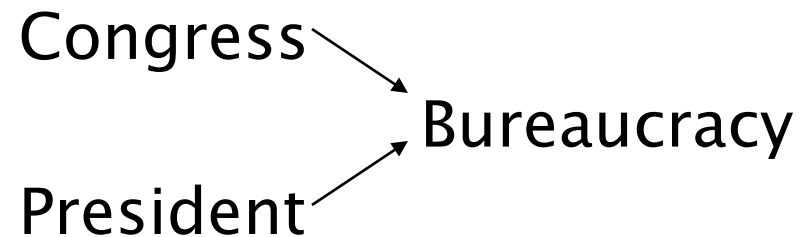
**Accountability** refers to the need to reward and punish individual bureaucrats on the quality of their performance.



# Democratic Control

Bureaucrats are political actors who, as agents of Congress and the president, seek to implement authoritative policy decisions.


*Principal → Agent*



*The Rationality Principle: All political behavior has a purpose.*

Bureaucrats have their own goals and perspectives, which they may substitute for the goals of official policy makers.

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- Bureaucrats seek to maximize their budgets.
  - Bureaucrats sometimes are responsible for policies “drifting” from the original intent of Congress and the president.
- 

*The Policy Principle: Political outcomes are products of individual preferences and institutional procedures.*

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To overcome the tendencies of bureaucrats to substitute their own goals, institutional arrangements can be put in place to ensure a more “faithful” bureaucracy:

- Before-the-fact direction and control;
  - After-the-fact monitoring and correction.
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## Before-the-Fact Controls

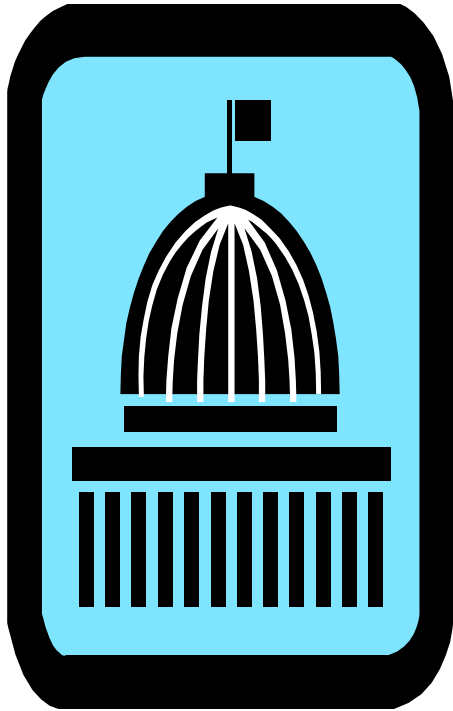
Presidential appointment of agency and department heads allow presidents to control the executive by “casting” the right appointees.

## After-the-Fact Controls

Presidents use executive orders, reorganization plans, influence over bureaucratic budgets, and “clearance” of administrative decisions to control bureaucratic activities.



Congress, too, controls the bureaucracy.



### Before-the-Fact Control

- ▶ Legislative language specifies policies to be implemented.

### After-the-Fact Control

- ▶ Congress's "power of the purse" is a tool to ensure bureaucratic compliance.
- ▶ Congress engages in oversight and investigative hearings to monitor bureaucratic activities.

# Can Bureaucracy Be Changed?



Some politicians have sought to “reinvent” bureaucracies to make them more efficient, accountable, and effective.

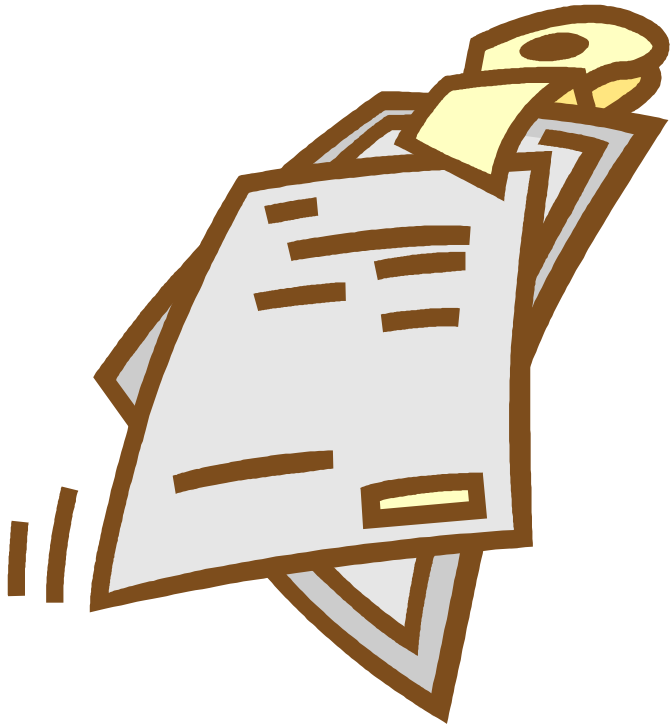
Politicians have also sought to downsize the federal bureaucracy through

- Termination
- Deregulation
- Devolution
- Privatization

**Termination** refers to the strategy of eliminating programs and departments.

Some have sought to reduce the budgets and policy scope of regulatory agencies to forward a policy of **deregulation**.

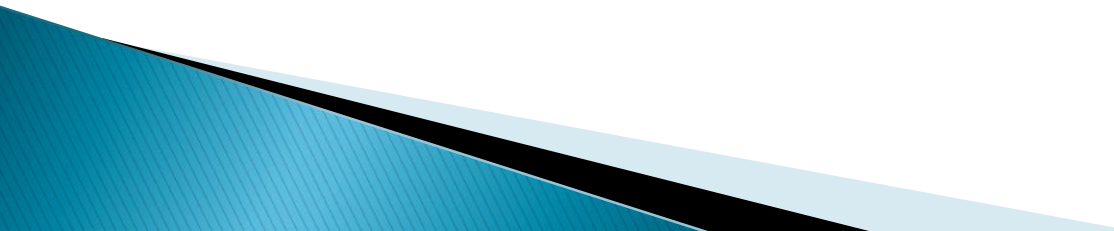
**Devolution** refers to an attempt to take power away from the national government bureaucracy and “devolve” it down to the state and local levels.



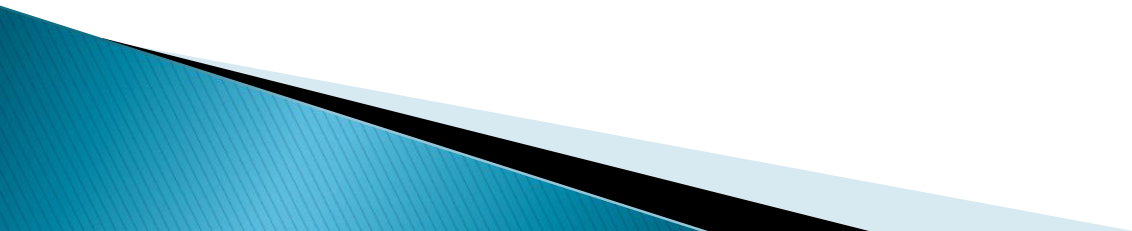
**Privatization** is a strategy of replacing government control or implementation of a program by contracting with private-sector companies.

# Bureaucratic Trade-Offs

There are necessary trade-offs of democratic control and bureaucratic efficiency.

- ▶ Bureaucratic leeway can either be put to good use to enhance bureaucratic efficiency, or it can be abused as bureaucrats become “faithless” agents of authoritative policy makers.
  - ▶ Elected officials (the president and the Congress) must be ever-vigilant in order to maintain democratic control over the bureaucracy.
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# Additional Art for Chapter 7



## The Shape of A Domestic Security Department

Department of Homeland Security	Agencies and Departments Now Part of the Main Divisions of the DHS	Previously Responsible Agency or Department
Border and Transportation Security Directorate	U.S. Customs Service Immigration and Naturalization Service* Federal Protective Service† Transportation Security Administration Federal Law Enforcement Training Center Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service* Office for Domestic Preparedness	Treasury Justice  Transportation Treasury  Agriculture  Justice
Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate	Federal Emergency Management Agency‡ Strategic National Stockpile and the National Disaster Medical System Nuclear Incident Response Team Domestic Emergency Support Teams National Domestic Preparedness Office	Health and Human Services   Energy Justice FBI
Science and Technology Directorate	CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) Countermeasures Programs Environmental Measurements Laboratory National BW (Biological Warfare) Defense Analysis Center Plum Island Animal Disease Center	Energy  Energy  Defense
Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection Directorate§	Federal Computer Incident Response Center National Communications System National Infrastructure Protection Center Energy Security and Assurance Program	Agriculture  General Services Administration Defense FBI  Energy
Secret Service		Treasury
Coast Guard		Transportation

\*Only partially under the aegis of DHS; some functions remain elsewhere.  
†New.  
‡Previously independent.  
§Established to analyze information provided by the CIA, the FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and other agencies.  
SOURCE: Department of Homeland Security, "History: Who Became Part of the Department?," [www.dhs.gov/xabout/history/editorial\\_0133.sht](http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/history/editorial_0133.sht).

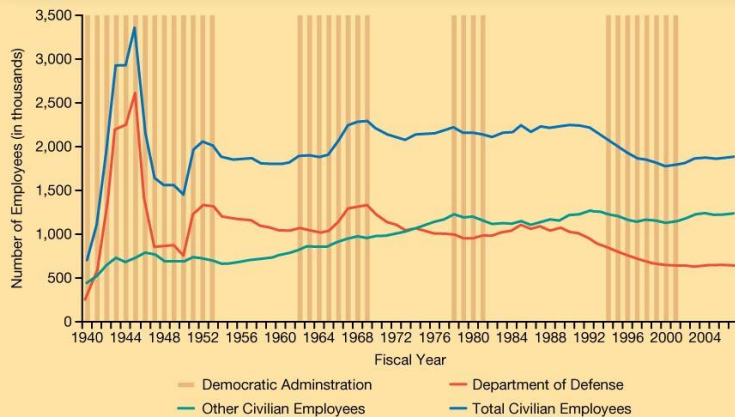
## ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

## Keeping a Growing Bureaucracy in Check

The federal government is the United States's largest employer, with over 1.8 million civilian employees. This graph shows how the overall size of the federal bureaucracy has changed from 1940 to the present. During World War II, the number of civilian employees vastly increased, although the growth was largely concentrated in the Department of Defense. Since the war ended, the number of other civilian employees has steadily increased.

We can also use this graph to evaluate the views of the two political parties on the size of government. Generally speaking, Democrats are in favor of more government intervention and programs, while Republicans support a more limited role for the federal government. If this translates into policy, we should observe an increased number of federal employees during Democratic administrations. However, based on the figure, there does not seem to be a distinct pattern for either party. The total number of non-military federal employees ("other civilian employees") has risen steadily since the 1940s, regardless of which party was in power.

GROWTH OF EXECUTIVE BRANCH CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES, 1940–2007



As the size of the government increases, it may become more difficult to make sure the bureaucrats are doing their jobs. Although we often think of the Congress as a lawmaking body, it also carries out another important task—checking the executive branch through the oversight process. If Congress thinks the bureaucracy is no longer serving the public's interest as defined by the legislative branch, it can use its oversight powers to pull the agency back where it belongs. The political scientists Mathew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz (1984) define two types of oversight: Police-Patrols and Fire-Alarms.

Under the police-patrol method, Congress systematically initiates investigations into the activity of agencies. The goal is to catch and punish enough violators so that the rest of the bureaucracy will be discouraged from straying too far from legislative intent. However, Congress cannot monitor all agencies at once. Police-patrol oversight is especially difficult because of the vast number of employees spread out over many government departments and agencies. The table below lists the number of employees in each of the fifteen executive Cabinet departments and the six largest independent agencies.



## EXECUTIVE BRANCH EMPLOYEES

Executive Departments		Independent Agencies	
Defense	623,000	Social Security Administration	62,000
Veterans Affairs	239,000	National Aeronautics and Space Administration	18,000
Homeland Security	149,000	Environmental Protection Agency	18,000
Justice	105,000	Tennessee Valley Authority	12,000
Agriculture	92,000	General Services Administration	12,000
Treasury	109,000	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	5,000
Interior	66,000		
Health and Human Services	60,000		
Transportation	53,000		
Commerce	39,000		
Labor	16,000		
Energy	15,000		
State	14,000		
Housing and Urban Development	10,000		
Education	4,000		

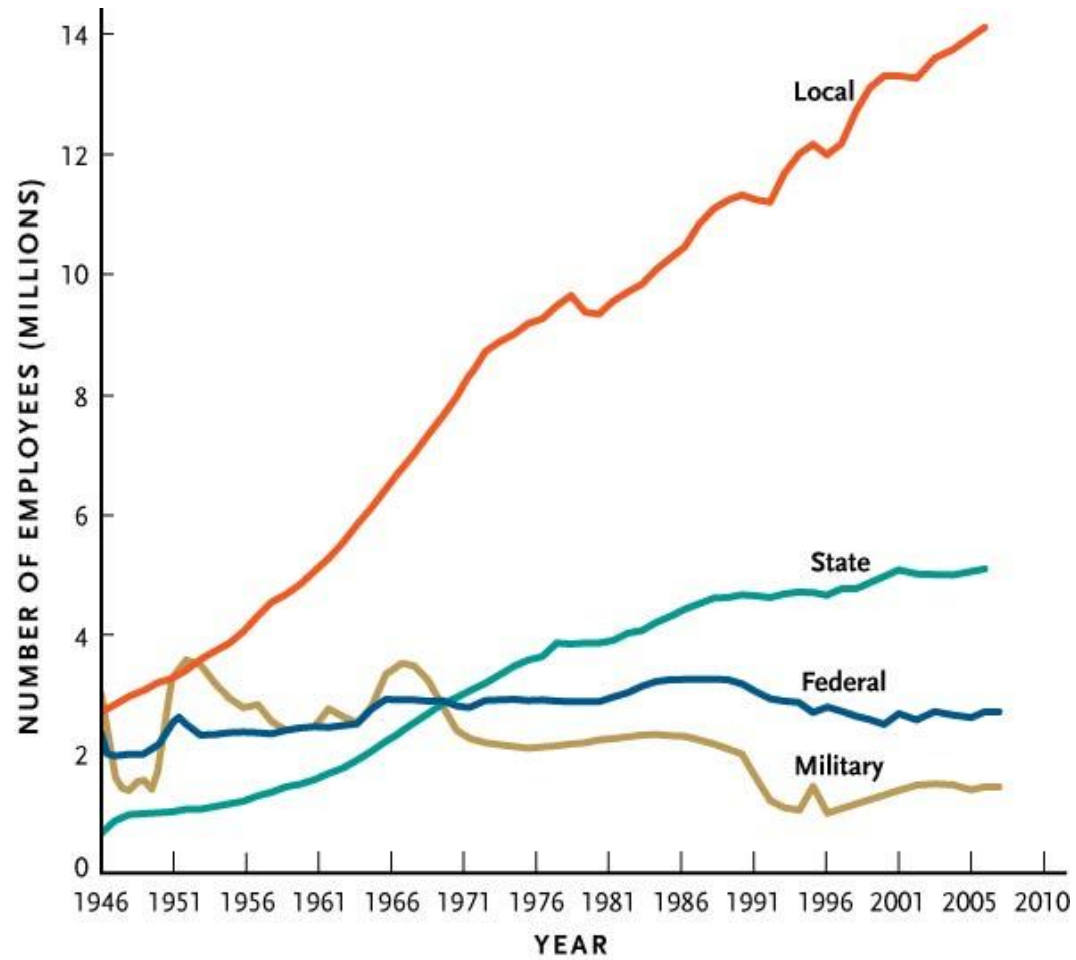
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Career Guide to Industries*, Federal Government, Excluding the Postal Service, [www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs041.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs041.htm) (accessed 4/28/09).



The fire-alarm method relies on the public. Members of Congress do not initiate investigations but wait for adversely affected citizens or interest groups to bring bureaucratic perversions of legislative intent to the attention of the relevant congressional committee. McCubbins and Schwartz argue that this method is more effective because, "Instead of sniffing for fires, Congress places fire-alarm boxes on street corners, builds neighborhood fire houses and sometimes dispatches its own hook-and-ladder in response to an alarm."<sup>1</sup> Since concerned citizens are out looking for bureaucratic fires, members of Congress will have more time to engage in other activities, such as securing reelection.

<sup>1</sup>Mathew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols and Fire Alarms." *American Journal of Political Science* 28(1): 165–179.

## Government Employment



# This concludes the presentation slides for Chapter 7: The Executive Branch

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