The Bureaucracy

What is the federal bureaucracy and why should we care?

- Bureaucracies are particular government units established to accomplish specific goals and objectives outlined by a legislative body.
  - Cabinet Departments
    - Major executive offices directly accountable to the president.
    - Headed by Cabinet Secretaries. Oversee a huge network of offices and agencies.

Cabinet of the United States of America

What is the federal bureaucracy and why should we care?

- Bureaucracies are particular government units established to accomplish specific goals and objectives outlined by a legislative body.
  - Cabinet Departments
  - Independent Agencies and Regulatory Agencies
    - Focused agencies on specific tasks. Not subject to authority of specific department (EPA, NASA, CIA)
    - Often insulated from partisan politics in order to independently manage specific regulatory areas. (ex: FCC-– which regulates TV and Radio)

What is the federal bureaucracy and why should we care?

- Bureaucracies are particular government units established to accomplish specific goals and objectives outlined by a legislative body.
  - Cabinet Departments
  - Independent Agencies and Regulatory Agencies
  - Government Corporations
    - Maintain vital services for government
    - Generate profit to be self sustaining
      - Amtrak. US Postal Service.

Why should we care about the federal bureaucracy?

- *Implementation:*
  - Putting law passed by Congress and signed by president into practice through bureaucratic routines.
- *Agenda Setting:*
  - Recognize problems, propose solutions, and alert Congress to emerging and existing problems.
- *Rule making:*
  - Rules and regulations issued by government agencies that carry weight of law.
  - "Quasi-legislation" where bureaucrats issue rules to "fill in the details" and add additional regulations needed to successfully implement policy
  - Regulated through notice and comment process inviting public feedback

Why should we care about the federal bureaucracy?

- Bureaucracies manage long term programs and work to prevent unlikely but costly crises.
  - Maintain policies with long time horizons.
  - Identify emerging threats.
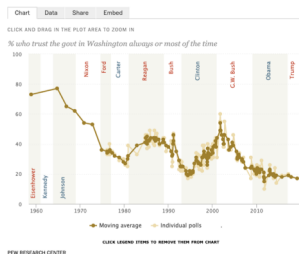 - Implement solutions
  - Communicate to elected officials.

The paradox of preparation.

- Bureaucracies best work is costly but invisible when successful.
  - Preventing nuclear accidents, pandemic disease, collapse of food supply.
  - Extreme crises are "tail risk events" Unlikely but extremely costly if they occur.
  - Politicians have short term incentives….
  - Bureaucracies manage long term threats.
- Seeing value and maintaining support for bureaucracy can be challenging.

Trends in American bureaucracy

- Tension between public skepticism/dislike of "the bureaucracy" and public support for effective government programs.
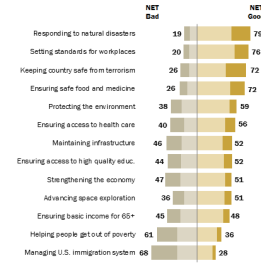
Public trust in government near historic lows

Evaluating the performance of the federal government

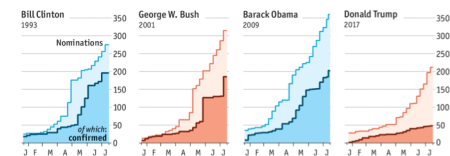## Cyclical pushes for expansion and contraction of bureaucracy

- Pressures for creation of new government programs
  - Reorganization of Department of Homeland Security after 9/11
  - Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act
  - Creation of the Space Force

- Pressures to reduce cost and perceived inefficiency/over reach of of government
  - Deregulation and devolution of federal programs
  - Privatization of government programs

The Trump Administration and the Bureaucracy

- Trump administration has targeted the federal bureaucracy
  - Push to "resize" the bureaucracy, "drain the swamp" and combat the "deep state."
- Pursued policies to change personnel and priorities of bureaucracy
  - Hiring freezes
  - Suppress scientific reports related to climate, environmental protection, and health.
  - Hollowing out of bureaucracy by not replacing civil servant departures.

Step up
United States, presidential nominations submitted to Senate in first six months of term*

Bill Clinton 1993 / George W. Bush 2001 / Barack Obama 2009 / Donald Trump 2017
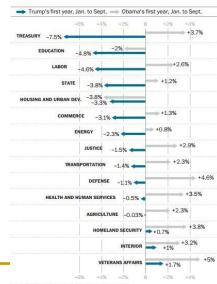
Source: Partnership For Public Service   *Excludes military and judicial appointments as well as hold-overs
Economist.com

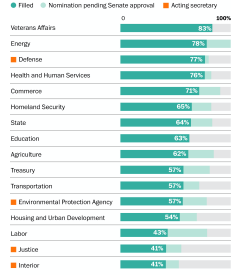**Most agencies shrink under President Donald Trump**
All but three of the 15 Cabinet agencies had smaller staffs by the end of September, according to an analysis of federal employment data by The Washington Post. Only two agencies shrunk during the same time period under then-President Barack Obama.

Large federal departments lack permanent leadership
Share of key positions filled, by department or agency as of Jan. 28

What has influenced the Trump Administration's response to Covid-19?

- Background assumptions:
  - Distrust and disregard for bureaucratic expertise.
  - Downsizing of the bureaucracy.
  - Strong electoral pressures influence policy responses.
  - Strong existing public health bureaucracy.
  - Pandemic preparedness plans across agencies.

What has influenced the Trump Administration's response to Covid-19?

- Pandemic threat– recognition and response.
  - ❑ Diverse agencies sound the alarm (proliferation of information).
    - ■ Department of State, CDC, Veterans Affairs, Council of Economic Advisors
- Limited public health mobilization and response
  - ❑ Failure to develop and produce tests
  - ❑ Lack of federal programs for contact tracing
  - ❑ Failure to anticipate and ramp up production of PPEs and ventilators.
- Primacy of economic rather than public health deliberations.

Why the disorganized Covid-19 response?

- Electoral politics over bureaucratic/public health policy?
- Failure of bureaucracy to communicate effectively to elected officials across branches?
- Distrust in expertise? Distrust of bureaucracy?

Moving forward: Principal agent dilemmas

- What is a principal agent dilemma?
- What do principal agent dilemmas teach us about government behavior and the relationship of executive agencies to government?
- How does government solve (or mitigate) principal agent dilemmas?