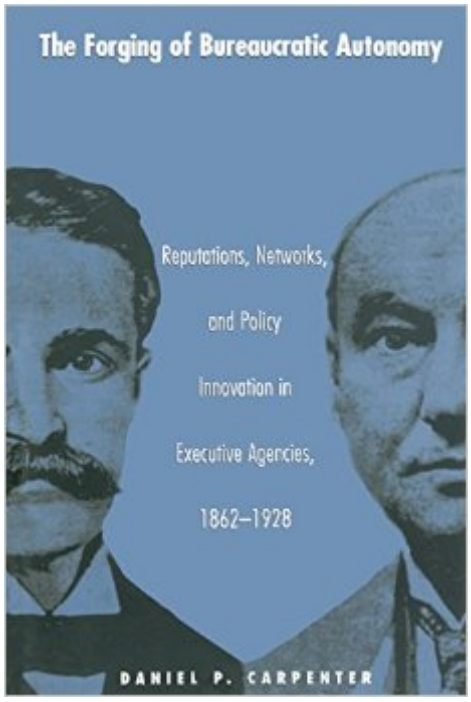
The Forging Of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, And Policy Innovation In Executive Agencies, 1862-1928.



Synopsis

Until now political scientists have devoted little attention to the origins of American bureaucracy and the relationship between bureaucratic and interest group politics. In this pioneering book, Daniel Carpenter contributes to our understanding of institutions by presenting a unified study of bureaucratic autonomy in democratic regimes. He focuses on the emergence of bureaucratic policy innovation in the United States during the Progressive Era, asking why the Post Office Department and the Department of Agriculture became politically independent authors of new policy and why the Interior Department did not. To explain these developments, Carpenter offers a new theory of bureaucratic autonomy grounded in organization theory, rational choice models, and network concepts. According to the author, bureaucracies with unique goals achieve autonomy when their middle-level officials establish reputations among diverse coalitions for effectively providing unique services. These coalitions enable agencies to resist political control and make it costly for politicians to ignore the agencies' ideas. Carpenter assesses his argument through a highly innovative combination of historical narratives, statistical analyses, counterfactuals, and carefully structured policy comparisons. Along the way, he reinterprets the rise of national food and drug regulation, Comstockery and the Progressive anti-vice movement, the emergence of American conservation policy, the ascent of the farm lobby, the creation of postal savings banks and free rural mail delivery, and even the congressional Cannon Revolt of 1910.

Book Information

Series: Princeton Studies in American Politics: Historical, International, and Comparative Perspectives
Paperback: 504 pages
Publisher: Princeton University Press (July 1, 2001)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0691070105
ISBN-13: 978-0691070100
Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.2 x 9.2 inches
Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (4 customer reviews)
Best Sellers Rank: #99,486 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Communication Policy #21 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science > Public Affairs #51 inÂ Books > Politics &

Customer Reviews

This book narrates several episodes of executive leadership in the USPO, the USDA, and Department of the Interior during the last decades of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th centuries. The author shows how post office and agriculture department bureau chiefs effectively managed upward, outward, and through their organizations to create public value and thereby gained considerable operating discretion for themselves and their departments and how managerial failures in interior's reclamation bureau resulted in its loss. For students of public management, this book provides case evidence for many of Mark Moore's strongest normative claims. It is first rate, well written, plausible historical narrative. Its weaknesses are too little attention to the creation of public value (perhaps because that would smack too much of normative economics) and far too much attention to issues that could only be of interest to academic political scientists.

This is a must read book for anyone interested in American political development, as long as you don't mind the academic language and narrow focus. As a study on statebuilding it is too narrow, but as a study of the development of bureaucratic autonomy it is a major achievement. In my opinion, Carpenter also shortchanges the antebellum era. It is an excellent compliment to Skowronek's book "Building a New American State." For a different perspective on the 19th centutry American state, see Jensen's book "Patriots, Settlers, and the Origins of American Social Policy" and "Shaped by War and Trade" edited by Katznelson and Shefter.

I was assigned this book for a paper in a Master's level Public Policy course, and it was surprisingly interesting. The book gives a detailed account of the bureaucracy involved with the creation and early operations of the United States Postal Service and United States Department of Agriculture, and the process by which the departments gained autonomy within the federal government. Similarly, it also points out the steps which led to the eventual loss of bureaucratic autonomy by the Department of the Interior. The book is long, but it's a relatively easy read, and it made for a pretty interesting paper, if I may say so myself.

Carpenter's study of bureaucratic autonomy is innovative in a few respects. First, he takes seriously intra-country differences in bureaucratic autonomy. As he shows, some agencies are more autonomous than others. Second, he looks at agency autonomy before the New Deal revolution,

removing that as an intervening variable. Finally, the book uses historical narratives of the Postal Office, USDA, and Interior. At times, the book contains too much a history of the agencies and not enough theory-building. However, the book does produce interesting theoretical arguments about how bureaucracies gain autonomy in large part through outside interest-groups and networks. Definitely worth reading for scholars of bureaucracies.