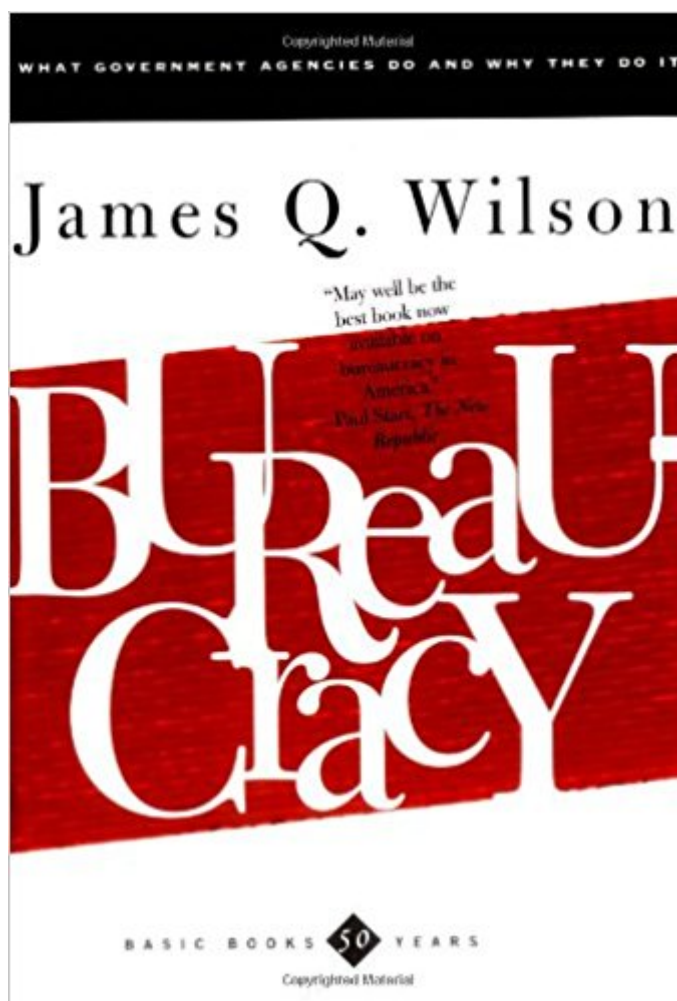


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# Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do And Why They Do It (Basic Books Classics)



## Synopsis

Bureaucracy is the classic study of the way American government agencies work and how they can be made to work better. Examining a wide range of bureaucracies, including the Army, the FBI, the FCC, and the Social Security Administration, James Q. Wilson provides the first comprehensive, in-depth analysis of what government agencies do, why they function as they do, and how they might become more responsible and effective. With a new introduction by the author.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wilson (management, UCLA) attempts to explain bureaucratic behavior, beginning with a contrast of similar institutions (armies, prisons, and schools) that have succeeded and failed. He finds that neither the liberal view (more money, new programs) or the conservative ideology (smaller government) provides the single answer. Wilson's key contribution here is his emphasis on the "bottom" of the bureaucracy--those who do the work. Policy, he says, is developed by those with no understanding of its implementation. In addition, Wilson suggests that bureaucracy can be made "efficient" by giving bureaucrats more incentives and flexibility, a strategy, he concludes, that conflicts with our political culture. For academic libraries.- Jeffrey Kraus, Wagner Coll., Staten Island, New York Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"A gold mine of interesting, even unique observations about bureaucratic government on all levels."  
-- Christian Science Monitor  
"A gold mine of interesting, even unique observations about bureaucratic government on all levels." -- R. Cort Kirkwood, Christian Science Monitor  
"Immediately takes its place as the indispensable one-volume guide to American national administration." --  
-- Aaron Wildavsky, Los Angeles Times Book Review  
"The synthesis is shrewd and creative. The prose is uncommonly swift. The fresh insights are abundant and compelling." -- Martha Derthick, University of Virginia

This book is a classic study of bureaucracies and is well worth the time and effort needed to try to understand bureaucratic behavior. Wilson does a good job with the parts of this topic I am most familiar with and their controversies. He is on target discussing the various armed forces positions on the close air support issue and correct about Navy community differences. He makes excellent points about the frequent comments that the military fights the last war with sharp rebuttals of this view. Some aspects of the book are relevant to current controversies. The consulate bombing in Libya is an outgrowth of his views of the importance of organizational culture in the State Department and its tendency to downplay security concerns. Anyone who wants to try to understand the differences between public and private sector actions and goals should read this book. It is rich in meaningful examples throughout the text.

I've worked with USAID for 20 years and my immediate research interest was narrow, but I found the stories and insights to be most very illuminating. You would think a book about bureaucracy to be dreadfully dull but in fact it is a book about people, motivations, success and failure, about organizations dealing with war, education, poverty, justice, and other topics of vital social interest. For anyone working with public or private organizations, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. From first hand, I can tell you that the observations about state department are spot-on, really useful. How organizations are created, and then how they develop and change, is very interesting. This book is right up there with ..., I think that only Drucker is in the same rank.

James Q. Wilson was one of the country's premiere political scientists. His years of insight in dealing with bureaucracies has resulted in this classic about bureaucracies and how they work. His numerous examples show that organizations without a "bottom line" can't compare in effectiveness and efficiency as their counterparts in the private sector. This is a must read for government staffers and any aspiring government worker. This book-as well as many of the numerous books he's

written - will serve as a lasting legacy to the man.

I have a master's degree in public administration and am working on a PhD in political science, so I have read a lot of stuff on government and bureaucracy/public administration. This is by far my favorite book! It is long and takes time to get through and really get all the points, but it is worth the effort. Love this book.

It is a good source of information, however it is mainly based in the American bureaucratic experience, so the analysis cannot be generalized to the entire world. But, it is useful to use his categories to try to explore different bureaucratic systems worldwide. Really well written, and structured. Easy to read, easy to understand. A must for anyone studying PolSci, Politics, Political Theory, Political Philosophy, History, and Public Policy and Government.

I just finished a masters program in public policy, and though this book was not used in any of my classes, it was recommended reading. I have to say that it provides a great introduction to bureaucracies and why they are the way they are. (Spoiler: it's not, as many believe, because bureaucrats are idiots) Coming from a background of small, private-sector organizations, this was especially useful for me. I appreciate Wilson's taxonomies of various organizations. Every political scientist has to have a 2x2 matrix to divide the world, but one of Wilson's, that divides organizations into "production," "coping," "craft," and "procedural" is particularly useful. If you are planning a career in public service, you'd do well to take some time to match your personality to the type of organization you're thinking of joining.

This book thoroughly explains the ways of bureaucracy a.k.a. known as the "system" or I call it the 'beast'. The beast touches every aspect of our existence so understanding its inhuman and bizarre behavior is critical for a chance at human survival. Don't be an easy victim for the beast. Learn its ways and give it a good fight.

Wilson, as usual, writes amazingly well in this comprehensive book covering bureaucracies, how they operate, and why bureaucrats act the way they do. He discusses the different organizational features that persist across all bureaucracies, and why it is that once a bureaucracy is created it's almost impossible to get rid of. This may pique your interest if you've been following the recent attempts to solve our intelligence problems by adding more layers of bureaucrats, as if that will

somehow solve the problem. Highly recommended to all students of American politics.

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