

Bureaucracy and democracy

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Democracy is a term with several meanings and this has led to a genuine misconception as to its real meaning. To some, bureaucracy is red tape, to others it is officialdom and to some it is an organizational form (Cole p25). Observation and studies on bureaucracy have been done by many academicians among them Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber wanted to find out why people in many organizations obeyed those in authority over them. Weber observed that people obeyed legitimate authority and he identified three types of legitimate authority as traditional authority, charismatic authority and rational-legal authority.

It is the rational-legal form of authority that exists in most organizations today and this is the form to which Weber ascribed the term 'bureaucracy'. Weber outlined the main features of bureaucracy as a continuous organization of functions bound by rules, specified spheres of competence, a hierarchical arrangement of offices, appointments to offices made on grounds of technical competence, the separation of officials from the ownership of the organization, official positions exist on their own right and finally rules, decisions and actions are formulated and recorded in writing (Cole p 26).

Weber felt that bureaucracy was indispensable for large organizations and there is no doubt that this form organization has been adopted in one way or another virtually in all forms of enterprises the world over. Government bureaucracy: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary" James Madison and for governments bureaucracy is form of governance that is practicable.

However this form of governance has critics and the views of Amy are that bureaucracy is a governance structure that is often perceived negatively by a number of people but he says that most criticisms of government bureaucracy are based more on myths than reality (Amy 2007 p1-8). Amy's observation is that people normally associate bureaucracy to massive waste, inefficiency, poor service, ever-growing organizations, mindless rules and realms of useless forms. For these people there is nothing good about bureaucracy as those working in such systems are considered to be lazy, hostile, overpaid, imperious and inflexible.

In his arguments, Amy dismisses what he terms the four myths about bureaucracy; 1. Myth no 1: Bureaucracies are immensely wasteful. Tax payers wrongly or rightly believe that much of the tax increases are a result of wastefulness arising from bureaucracies. Government agencies are considered not only wasteful but enormously wasteful. A survey carried out revealed that Americans believe that 48 cents of every tax dollar going to bureaucracies such the Social Security Administration are wasted (Amy 2007).

Amy says that investigations by the Government Accounting Office and various blue-ribbon commissions have found that waste amounts to a small fraction of that figure. 2. Myth no 2: Business is always better than bureaucracy. As per Amy, there have been many empirical studies examining government bureaucracies versus business in many areas, including refuse collection, electrical utilities, public transportation, water supply systems and hospital administration. The findings have been mixed.

Some studies of electric utilities have found that publicly owned ones were more efficient and charged lower prices than privately owned utilities. Several other studies found the opposite while many others found no significant difference. 3. Myth no 3: We want the government to act like a business. The main concern of the government is quality of the service not its costs unlike the business who are obsessed with the bottom-line and hence looking for the cheapest way to make a product or deliver as service.

For example it will be imprudent to spend the least amount of resources in the air traffic control system or to look for the cheapest workforce to take charge of security at the airports. 4. Myth no 4: Bureaucracy is major cause of government growth. Conservatives argue that government bureaucracies have an inherent tendency to expand. However figures show that federal agencies have not been growing at an alarming rate. For example in 1970, about 2997000 civilians worked for the federal government at that time.

By 2007 that figure had actually gone down to 2695000. An article in published by the Suburban Emergence Management Project (2006 home page) states that the Hurricane Katrina response by the federal, state and local governments in August-September 2005 caused some people to lose faith in the bureaucratic approach used by traditional government hierarchies to organize the provision of services to users who desperately needed them. For example, at the local level, New Orleans Mayor told the U.

S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security that he could not commandeer the dozens available school buses to evacuate people because the school boards owned buses, he had no authority over the boards and there was no agreement for the use of the buses. At the state level, the Governor delayed

<https://assignbuster.com/bureaucracy-democracy/>

use of military forces to begin reconstitution of the stricken localities until she could validate her authority to rule the troops by disallowing federal National Guards in her state.

At the federal level, the President, the Homeland Security Secretary and Federal Emergency Management Agency director could provide services to users of New Orleans during Katrina only at the discretion of the governor of Louisiana. Conclusion: There are areas where government bureaucracy is more effective while in other cases it is counterproductive as evidenced during the Hurricane Katrina crisis. Works cited Amy, D. J. (2007). ' The case of Democracy, The government is Good We the People; An unapologetic Defense of vital institution'.

Available at accessed on April 2, 2009. Pages 1-8 Cole, G. (2004). Management Theory and Practice, 6th Edition published, by Thomson Learning 2004. 25-28. Suburban Emergency Management Project (2006), ' Government Bureaucracy and Two Newer Cultural Approaches to Provide Services Delivery to the Citizenry during Disasters', Biot Report #411: November 07, 2006. Available at < http://www.semp.us/public/biot_reder.php?BiotID=411 > accessed on April 3, 2009.