PSCI 8310 – Politics of Bureaucracies

Vanderbilt University
Spring 2021

Instructor:	Guillermo Toral (he/him)	**Meeting time:**	Wednesday 2.10 − 4.40pm
Email:	guillermo.toral@vanderbilt.edu	**Room:**	Gillette House 103
Office:	Commons 359	**Zoom:**	972 5891 8481
Office hours:	Wednesday 5 − 7.30pm	**Course page:**	Brightspace link

1   Course description

Governments around the world spend in average a quarter of their revenue in salaries for millions of bureaucrats, who work throughout the territory in service delivery and public administration. Bureaucrats are, most days and for most citizens, the *face of the state*. Despite their frequent representation as cold gatekeepers, bureaucrats are the ones "getting things done" for governments; they are thus the *hands of the state*. Their work can boost the economic, human, and social development of societies, but also drive undesirable outcomes like repression and corruption. How does politics shape bureaucracies and their impact on human life? And how can we leverage what we know about the politics of bureaucracies to boost bureaucratic effectiveness, accountability, and development?

This graduate seminar provides an overview of both classic and cutting-edge research on the politics of bureaucracies, with an emphasis on the political foundations of bureaucrats' effectiveness and accountability. Readings draw from multiple fields (including comparative politics, political economy, development economics, public administration, and sociology), use a variety of research methods (e.g., field and natural experiments, case studies, ethnographies), and examine bureaucracies in different policy areas (healthcare, education, security, public works, diplomacy, etc.) and different environments (democratic and autocratic, wealthy and poor, urban and rural). Through an examination of the politics of bureaucracies, this seminar will build students' ability to engage critically with scholarly arguments and to make original contributions to them. Students will read and critique research by leading scholars in the field, analyze data, identify knowledge gaps, and propose strategies to fill them. Ultimately, this seminar will provide students with skills useful for careers in research and/or policy.

The sections below detail the course's learning objectives, expectations, and schedule. A final section reminds students about important campus resources.

2   Learning objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Analyze the merits of scholarly arguments about bureaucracies, and offer reasoned and constructive critiques thereof.

2. Reflect on the achievements and gaps in the study of bureaucracies, and suggest directions for expanding the knowledge frontier.

3. Productively participate in discussions about the politics of bureaucracies, with respect for others, ability to engage with different points of view, and synthesis capacity.

4. Propose (and if possible execute) original, empirical research on the politics of bureaucracies.

3 Course expectations

3.1 Prerequisites

This class assumes that students have some prior exposure to political science at the graduate level, and some familiarity (both theoretical and practical) with quantitative research methods.

3.2 Requirements

Participation (20%). Students are expected to attend all sessions (in person or over Zoom) and *actively* participate in the discussions therein. In-class discussions are designed to help students assimilate key concepts, connect ideas, build their ability to critique empirical research, and propose original projects of their own. In so doing, participation will help students achieve all learning objectives (starting with learning objective 3). Actively participating in class requires doing the readings in advance.

Literature memo (10%). Students are expected to write a literature memo on all the readings for one week. The memo should not consist of summary but rather critical discussion of the readings, highlighting the achievements and gaps of the literature and suggesting avenues for future research. The author of the memo will circulate it to seminar participants in advance and will be expected to play a major role in leading the discussion. Each student will be assigned a week, after taking into account their preferences. Literature memos are due by 11.59pm of the Monday before we discuss those readings, and should also be circulated to the whole class by that deadline.

Referee report (10%). Students are expected to write a referee report on a recently published article. The report should synthesize the paper; offer a well-reasoned, constructive critique of the paper's theory and empirics; and discuss some of its implications for future research on the politics of bureaucracies. The synthesis of the paper and the discussion of implications should take only one paragraph each – the bulk of the report must be dedicated to critique. Paper reviews should have between 2 and 3 pages of text using a 12-point font, single-spaced, and 1-inch margins. Writing paper reviews will help students achieve learning objectives 1 and 2. Each student will be assigned one of the papers marked with a star (⋆) in the reading list, after taking into account their preferences. Referee reports are due by 11.59pm of the Monday before we discuss that paper.

Replication memo (10%). Students are expected to reanalyze the quantitative data of a recently published article, and write a replication memo that (i) reports on the reproducibility of the main results, reproducing main tables and figures; and (ii) uses the authors' dataset to extend their analyses (e.g. through relevant alternative specifications or test of additional hypotheses). Replication memos should have between 2 and 3 pages of text using a 12-point font, single spaced, and 1-inch margins, followed by an appendix with figures and tables. This replication exercise will help students achieve learning objectives 1 and 2. Each student will be assigned one of the papers marked with a diamond (◇) in the reading list, after taking into account their preferences. Replication memos are due by 11.59pm of the Monday before we discuss that paper.

Research paper / grant proposal / pre-analysis plan (50%). Students are expected to work on an original research project related to the politics of bureaucracies. Students can work on three alternative formats: a research paper, a grant proposal, or a pre-analysis plan. The choice of format is partly personal and partly driven by the nature of the project a student wants to work on. In any case, I encourage students to take this as an opportunity to do work that "flies" beyond the limits of this seminar. That is, to produce a paper that they eventually include in their dissertation (and publish), a grant proposal that they eventually submit to funders (and get approved), or a pre-analysis plan that they eventually pre-register and implement. Students will be assessed on both the content of their research project (its originality, rigor, and relevance) and the

form in which it is presented (with a strong motivation, clear prose, and compelling visuals). The final project should have between 10 and 20 pages (including main figures and tables) using a 12-point font, single spaced, and 1-inch margins. References and appendices do not count towards the page limit. To help students make progress towards the final deliverable, there will be three intermediate milestones. First, a check-in at office hours with the instructor (no later than March 3) to discuss their ideas. Second, a proposal of between 2 and 3 pages, single-spaced. This proposal will be circulated to all seminar participants, who will in turn share written feedback with the author. Third, an in-class mini conference where we will spend at least 15 minutes discussing each student's project. Discussions will build on the written feedback from peers, which I will circulate to all participants before the mini conference. Each student will therefore receive three types of feedback: one-on-one feedback from the instructor at office hours, written comments from every other participant, and group feedback at the mini conference. I expect students to provide thoughtful, constructive comments to their peers both before and during the mini conference. The research project will help students achieve learning objective 4.

3.3 Grading

Grading scale. Assignments will be graded in a 0-100 scale. Students who do not submit a given assignment will receive a 0 for it. Final numeric grades will be calculated through a simple weighted average, using the weights detailed in 3.2, and then transformed to letter grades using the following system: 94 or above → A; 90 to 93.99 → A-; 87 to 89.99 → B+; 83 to 86.99 → B; 80 to 82.99 → B-; 77 to 79,99 → C+; 73 to 76.99 → C; 70 to 72.99 → C-; 67 to 69.99 → D+; 63 to 66.99 → D; 60 to 62.99 → D-; 59.99 or below → F.

Late submission policy. Assignments submitted after the deadline will incur in an automatic penalty. 10 points will be deducted if the delay is shorter than 24 hours, 20 if it is between 24 and 48 hours, and so on. Students who submit any assignment late due to extenuating circumstances may send me an email, with documentation for the delay's motives, to request a penalty waiver. Such requests should be sent in advance whenever possible.

Grade revisions. If a student is unhappy with their grade on an assignment, they should feel free to email me or come to office hours. I am happy to explain the grade and suggest ways to get a better grade next time around. Students may also request a review of any graded assignment. To do so, they must send me an email with a reasoned argument to motivate the request no later than 3 days after the assignment has been returned. I will examine the argument and determine whether the grade should be revised. As a result of the review, the grade may be raised, lowered, or left unchanged. Any revised grades will be final.

3.4 Important dates

These are the seminar's most important milestones. All hours are in Nashville time (CT).

Preferences for assignments due . . . . February 1, 11.59pm
Research project draft due . . . . March 16, 11.59pm
Written feedback on student projects due . . . . March 22, 11.59pm
Mini conference on student projects . . . . March 24, in class
Final paper / grant proposal / pre-analysis plan due . . . . May 5, 11.59pm

3.5 Academic integrity

While students are allowed (and indeed encouraged) to discuss the readings and their ideas with each other, all submitted work must be entirely individual and use standard citation practices. Any case of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty would be taken very seriously, in agreement with Vanderbilt policy.

3.6   Diversity and inclusion

I am committed to making this course a safe and productive learning environment for all students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, abilities, or religion. I see people's diverse backgrounds and worldviews not merely as differences to tolerate but as valuable assets to recognize and celebrate. When in the classroom, I expect students to treat each other with kindness, openness, and respect. Any student who feels they need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should email me as soon as possible to discuss their needs. We will work with Vanderbilt's Student Access Services to accommodate their needs.

3.7   One-on-one support

Students are welcome to meet with me me to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. I hold office hours on Wednesday between 5 and 7.30pm over Zoom – to sign up, simply choose an available slot at www.calendly.com/guillermo-toral/office-hours. Students who cannot find a slot that suits them should feel free to email me so we can find an alternative time. Students are also welcome to email me with any questions or concerns; I typically respond within 48 hours.

3.8   Brightspace and syllabus

The course's Brightspace page is https://brightspace.vanderbilt.edu/d2l/home/273485. I will post readings, grades, and announcements on Brightspace, All assignments will be submitted through Brightspace. This syllabus remains the main guiding document for the class. I reserve the right to amend the syllabus throughout the semester, but I will alert students of any changes should they be necessary. This version of the syllabus is dated January 25, 2021.

4   Schedule and readings

We will be reading academic papers and book chapters from political science, economics, public administration, and sociology. These readings use a variety of methodological approaches (from experiments to ethnography) to study the politics of bureaucracies. All required readings (listed in 4) will be available on Brightspace. I expect students to do all required readings before class and to come prepared to discuss them in depth. Some key questions to consider while reading and to prepare for in-class discussions are:

- *On theory*. How compelling is the author's theory? Is it internally consistent? How is it different from, or how does it contradict, other important theories? Ultimately, what is at stake? What other theories could the author's argument be connected to? How specific is the theory with regards to mechanisms? Is the theory lacking necessary scope conditions?

- *On empirics*. To what extent is the empirical case chosen by the author adequate to test their theory? Are the empirical measures well aligned with the theory and valid? How appropriate is the research design to test the author's claims? Is there evidence in support of important assumptions of the design? Is the evidence internally valid and compelling? What potential concerns could one raise, and what kinds of empirical evidence would assuage them? Are there parts of the theory that are not sufficiently tested? What other empirical implications of the theory could be tested?

- *On implications*. How convinced are you that the authors' conclusions or implications are granted, given their empirical evidence? Do their findings suggest other implications (for theory, methods, or policy) that the authors do not consider? Based on this contribution, what would be promising avenues for future research?

4.1   Introductions (January 27)

- No readings for this week.

4.2   Approaches to the politics of bureaucracies (February 3)

- Pepinsky, Thomas B., Jan H. Pierskalla, and Audrey Sacks. "Bureaucracy and service delivery." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20 (2017): 249-268.

- Gailmard, Sean, and John W. Patty. "Formal models of bureaucracy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 353-377.

- Finan, Frederico, Benjamin A. Olken, and Rohini Pande. "The personnel economics of the developing state." *Handbook of Economic Field Experiments*. Vol. 2. North-Holland, 2017. 467-514.

- Bierschenk, Thomas and Olivier de Sardan, Jean-Pierre. "How to study bureaucracies ethnographically?" *Critique of Anthropology* 39.2 (2019): 243-257.

- Zacka, Bernardo. "Street-Level Bureaucracy and Democratic Theory." In *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy*, Peter Hupe (ed.), Edward Elgar, 2019.

4.3   Classics on the politics of bureaucracies (February 10)

- Wilson, Woodrow. "The study of administration." *Political Science Quarterly* 2.2 (1887): 197-222.

- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. University of California Press, 1968 [1921]

- Crozier, Michel. *The bureaucratic phenomenon*. University Press of Chicago, 1964.

- Lipsky, Michael. *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public service*. Russell Sage Foundation, 1980.

- Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What government agencies do and why they do it*. Basic Books, 1989.

4.4   Selection I: Patronage, meritocracy, and beyond (February 17)

- Grindle, Merilee S. *Jobs for the Boys: Patronage and the State in Comparative Perspective*. Harvard University Press, 2012.

- ⋆ Colonnelli, Emanuele, Mounu Prem, and Edoardo Teso. "Patronage and selection in public sector organizations." *American Economic Review* 110.10 (2020): 3071-99.

- ◇ Brierley, Sarah. "Combining patronage and merit in public sector recruitment." *The Journal of Politics*, 2021.

- Guardado, Jenny. "Office-selling, corruption, and long-term development in Peru." *American Political Science Review* 112.4 (2018): 971-995.

- Sances, Michael W. "The distributional impact of greater responsiveness: Evidence from New York towns." *The Journal of Politics* 78.1 (2016): 105-119.

4.5   Selection II: The politics of reform (February 24)

Note this is a Vanderbilt-designated in-class reading day

- Geddes, Barbara. *Politician's dilemma: Building state capacity in Latin America*. University of California Press, 1994.

- ⋆ Pierskalla, J. H., Sacks, A. (2016). "Personnel Politics: Elections, Clientelistic Competition, and Teacher Hiring in Indonesia." *British Journal of Political Science*, 1-23.

- ◇ Jiang, Junyan, Zijie Shao, and Zhiyuan Zhang. "The Price of Probity: Anticorruption and Adverse Selection in the Chinese Bureaucracy." *British Journal of Political Science*, 2020.

- Cruz, Cesi, and Philip Keefer. "Political parties, clientelism, and bureaucratic reform." *Comparative Political Studies* 48.14 (2015): 1942-1973.

- Ujhelyi, Gergely. "Civil service rules and policy choices: Evidence from US state governments." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 6.2 (2014): 338-80.

4.6   Motivation (March 3)

- Schneider, Ben Ross. *Politics within the state: Elite bureaucrats and industrial policy in authoritarian Brazil.* University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992.

- ⋆ Bertrand, M., Burgess, R., Chawla, A., Xu, G. (2020). "The glittering prizes: Career incentives and bureaucrat performance." *The Review of Economic Studies*, 87(2), 626-655.

- ◇ Ashraf, N., Bandiera, O., Davenport, E., Lee, S. S. "Losing prosociality in the quest for talent? Sorting, selection, and productivity in the delivery of public services." *American Economic Review* 110.5 (2020): 1355-94.

- Acemoglu, Daron, Leopoldo Fergusson, James Robinson, Dario Romero, and Juan F. Vargas. "The perils of high-powered incentives: Evidence from Colombia's false positives." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 12, no. 3 (2020): 1-43.

- Esteve, Marc, and Christian Schuster. *Motivating public employees*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.

4.7   Deployment and promotion (March 10)

- Soifer, Hillel David. *State Building in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

- ⋆ Brierley, Sarah. "Unprincipled Principals: Co-opted Bureaucrats and Corruption in Ghana." *American Journal of Political Science* 64.2 (2020): 209-222.

- ◇ Scharpf, Adam, and Christian Gläßel. "Why underachievers dominate secret police organizations: Evidence from autocratic Argentina." *American Journal of Political Science* 64.4 (2020): 791-806.

- Khan, Adnan Q., Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Benjamin A. Olken. "Making moves matter: Experimental evidence on incentivizing bureaucrats through performance-based postings." *American Economic Review* 109, no. 1 (2019): 237-70.

- Aman-Rana, Shan. "In Self Interest? Meritocracy in a Bureaucracy." Unpublished, 2020.

4.8 Monitoring (March 17)

- Ang, Yuen Yuen. *How China escaped the poverty trap*. Cornell University Press, 2016.

- ⋆ Callen, M., Gulzar, S., Hasanain, A., Khan, M. Y., Rezaee, A. (2020). "Data and policy decisions: Experimental evidence from Pakistan." *Journal of Development Economics*, 146, 102523.

- ◇ Rasul, Imran, and Daniel Rogger. "Management of bureaucrats and public service delivery: Evidence from the Nigerian civil service." *The Economic Journal* 128.608 (2018): 413-446.

- Gulzar, Saad, and Benjamin J. Pasquale. "Politicians, bureaucrats, and development: Evidence from India." *American Political Science Review* 111.1 (2017): 162-183.

- Cilliers, Jacobus, Ibrahim Kasirye, Clare Leaver, Pieter Serneels, and Andrew Zeitlin. "Pay for locally monitored performance? A welfare analysis for teacher attendance in Ugandan primary schools." *Journal of Public Economics* 167 (2018): 69-90.

4.9 Mini conference on student projects (March 24)

- For this session, students will read each others' research projects (which will be circulated on March 17) and provide constructive comments (critiques, suggestions, ideas) by March 22.

4.10 Accountability from above (March 31)

- Hassan, Mai. 2020. *Regime Threats and State Solutions: Bureaucratic Loyalty and Embeddedness in Kenya*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- ⋆ Raffler, Pia. "Does political oversight of the bureaucracy increase accountability? Field experimental evidence from an electoral autocracy." 2020, Unpublished.

- ◇ Dasgupta, Aditya, and Devesh Kapur. "The political economy of bureaucratic overload: Evidence from rural development officials in India." *American Political Science Review* 114.4 (2020): 1316-1334.

- Oliveros, Virginia. "Working for the Machine: Patronage jobs and political services in Argentina." *Comparative Politics*, Forthcoming.

- Honig, Dan. "When reporting undermines performance: The costs of politically constrained organizational autonomy in foreign aid implementation." *International Organization* 73.1 (2019): 171-201.

4.11 Accountability from below (April 7)

Note this is a Vanderbilt-designated in-class reading day

- Evans, Peter B. *Embedded autonomy: States and industrial transformation*. Princeton University Press, 1995.

- ⋆ Erlich, Aaron, Daniel Berliner, Brian Palmer-Rubin, and Benjamin E. Bagozzi. "Media Attention and Bureaucratic Responsiveness." Forthcoming at *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.

- ◇ Bhavnani, R. R. and A. Lee (2018). "Local embeddedness and bureaucratic performance: Evidence from India." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (1), 71–87.

- Xu, Guo, Marianne Bertrand, and Robin Burgess. "Social Proximity and Bureaucrat Performance: Evidence from India." 2020, Unpublished.

- Raffler, Pia, Daniel N. Posner, and Doug Parkerson. "Can Citizen Pressure be Induced to Improve Public Service Provision?" 2020, Unpublished.

4.12   Accountability from within (April 14)

- Kaufman, Herbert. *The forest ranger: A study in administrative behavior.* Resources for the Future, 1960.

- ⋆ McDonnell, Erin Metz. "Patchwork Leviathan: How pockets of bureaucratic governance flourish within institutionally diverse developing states." *American Sociological Review* 82.3 (2017): 476-510.

- Bersch, Katherine, Sérgio Praça, and Matthew M. Taylor. "State capacity, bureaucratic politicization, and corruption in the Brazilian state." *Governance* 30.1 (2017): 105-124.

- Mangla, Akshay. "Bureaucratic norms and state capacity in India: Implementing primary education in the Himalayan region." *Asian Survey* 55.5 (2015): 882-908.

- DiIulio, John D. "Principled Agents: The Cultural Bases of Behavior in a Federal Government Bureaucracy." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 1994.

4.13   Diversity (April 21)

- Krislov, Samuel. 1974. *Representative Bureaucracy.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: PrenticeHall.

- ⋆ Pierskalla, J. H., Lauretig, A., Rosenberg, A. S., Sacks, A. (2020). "Democratization and Representative Bureaucracy: An Analysis of Promotion Patterns in Indonesia's Civil Service, 1980–2015." *American Journal of Political Science*.

- ◇ Bhavnani, Rikhil R., and Alexander Lee. "Does Affirmative Action Worsen Bureaucratic Performance? Evidence from the Indian Administrative Service." *American Journal of Political Science* (2018).

- Fernandez, Sergio, Samuel Koma, and Hongseok Lee. "Establishing the link between representative bureaucracy and performance: The South African case." *Governance* 31.3 (2018): 535-553.

- Hoekstra, Mark, and CarlyWill Sloan. "Does race matter for police use of force? Evidence from 911 calls." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, 2020.

4.14   Turnover (April 28)

- Akhtari, Mitra, Diana Moreira, and Laura Trucco. "Political turnover, bureaucratic turnover, and the quality of public services." 2020. Conditionally accepted at *American Economic Review*.

- Dahlström, C. and M. Holmgren (2019). "The political dynamics of bureaucratic turnover." *British Journal of Political Science* 49, 823–836.

- Iyer, Lakshmi, and Anandi Mani. "Traveling agents: political change and bureaucratic turnover in India." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 94.3 (2012): 723-739.

- Doherty, Kathleen M, David E Lewis, and Scott Limbocker (2019). "Executive control and turnover in the senior executive service." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 29 (2), 159–174

- Malis, Matt. "Conflict, Cooperation, and Delegated Diplomacy." Accepted at *International Organization*.

5 Campus resources

5.1 Academic writing

Writing well is by no means an innate skill. It takes practice, feedback, and reflection to become a good writer. This class will provide students with an opportunity to improve their writing through those three channels. Additional support can be obtained from Vanderbilt's Writing Studio.

5.2 Mental health

Staying emotionally and mentally healthy is critical for personal, academic, and professional success. The ongoing public health, economic and political crises can make this more of a challenge. I encourage students who are struggling with any mental health issues, and/or want to build their emotional and mental wellbeing, to consider using the resources offered by the office of Vanderbilt's Dean of Students, including the University Counseling Center and the Center for Student Wellbeing. Any student who is dealing with difficulties that hinder their ability to succeed in this class should feel free to reach out to me by email or in office hours to discuss their situation.

5.3 Equity, diversity and inclusion

I am committed to making this class an open and inclusive environment for all. I am available to discuss matters of equity and diversity and will keep those conversations as confidential as possible. Students should be aware however that all faculty are "mandated reporters" who are legally obligated to report any allegations of sexual misconduct and any suspected discrimination to Vanderbilt's Title IX Coordinator. In addition, Vanderbilt has a number of centers that can provide useful resources, including the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the Black Cultural Center, the Women's Center, and the Office of LGBTQI Life.