

STV44XX – The Politics of Bureaucracy

Level: Master

Credits: 10

Teaching: Spring 2023

This course is not given on a regular basis.

Teaching language: English

Course content

The study of bureaucracy is the study of politics. Political decisions affect bureaucracies, and decisions inside bureaucracies affect politics. Politicians depend on different types of bureaucracies – ministries, agencies, local authorities – to prepare and implement public policies. Sometimes politicians deliberately seek to influence bureaucratic organizations, their personnel, and their decisions to their favour. They influence bureaucratic decisions through selecting personnel or structural reorganization, or they design bureaucracies in way that makes it difficult to pin down responsibility when something goes wrong. They may also seek to delegitimize and deconstruct bureaucracies. Yet political decisions may also have inadvertent consequences for how bureaucracies work, such as when bureaucracies need to implement ever more policies.

A different sort of politics takes place inside bureaucratic organizations. They are not simply following political directions, but they pursue distinct institutional interests. Like any other organization, bureaucracies strive for the continuous pursuit of their goals (“organizational survival”). This is much easier for organizations with a favourable reputation among relevant stakeholders such as politicians and interest groups. Policy bureaucracies such as ministries also influence political decisions more directly. They bring distinct professional perspectives into the policymaking process. Moreover, coordination inside policy bureaucracies is characterized by conflict and compromise and has a crucial role in shaping policy proposals developed by policy bureaucracies.

This course introduces students to multiple middle-range theories about the interrelation between politics and administration. It covers theoretical approaches and empirical applications. The course features guest lectures from researchers at universities cooperating with the University of Oslo in the Circle U. university alliance.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

After completing this course, you will:

- Have a solid understanding of the complex interrelations of politics and bureaucracy
- Know about different theoretical explanations for bureaucratic behaviour
- Be familiar with different empirical approaches to study the politics of bureaucracy

Skills

After completing this course, you will:

- Have improved your academic writing skills
- Be able to identify and distinguish different types of political and bureaucratic behaviour
- Have improved their ability to critically evaluate academic texts

Competences

After completing this course, you will know how to:

- Synthesize and compare theoretical arguments
- Critically evaluate different types of empirical evidence
- Provide empirical examples of theoretical arguments

Teaching

Lectures

Compulsory activities

Response papers

- are to be handed in three times
- should be 800-1000 words of length
- should be a reflection of the readings of one lecture
- should apply theoretical insights to an empirical example

Students have to pass all the response papers to sit for the exam. All response papers have to be submitted in the same semester.

Examination

Term paper

- is due one week after the last lecture
- has a self-chosen topic that is approved by the lecturer
- should be 3500-4500 words of length

- can include literature not discussed in the course
- can include original empirical analysis
- must meet the formal requirements for submission of written assignments

Language of examination

The examination text is given in English, and you submit your response in English.

Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail. Read more about the grading system.

Schedule (tentative)

Course conveners: Tobias Bach & Pierre Squevin

1.	How politics shapes bureaucracy and how bureaucracy shapes politics	Tobias Bach
2.	Politicization of bureaucracy and its consequences	Pierre Squevin
3.	The politics of agency termination and reorganization	Tobias Bach & Jostein Askim (tbc)
4.	What do policy bureaucrats want?	Tobias Bach & Amalie Trangbæk (Aarhus University) (tbc)
5.	Coordination in policy bureaucracies	Tobias Bach
6.	The politics of regulation	Tobias Bach & Francesca Vantaggiato (King's College)
7.	Blame avoidance in executive politics	Tobias Bach
8.	Bureaucratic reputation management	Tobias Bach & Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen (Aarhus University)
9.	Policy Accumulation	Yves Steinebach
10.	Populist politics, democratic backsliding, and bureaucracy	Tobias Bach