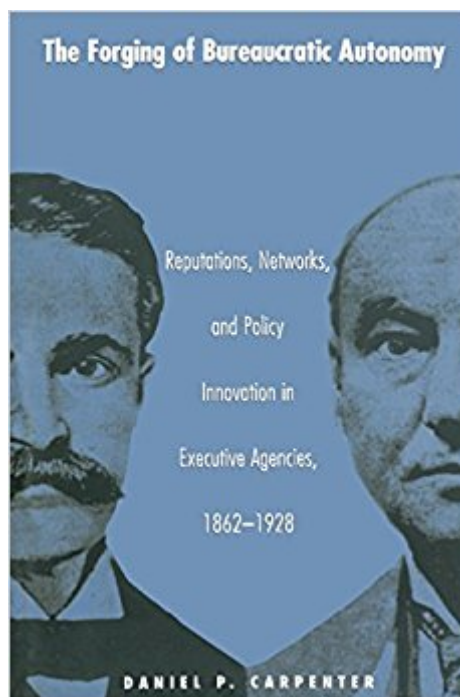




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# **The Forging Of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, And Policy Innovation In Executive Agencies, 1862-1928.**



## 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

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Winner of the Levine Memorial Book Prize Winner of the Gladys M. Kammerer Award "Carpenter's book is intellectually arresting--weaving quantitative and qualitative empiricism through an impressive array of theoretical propositions toward an attractive theory of bureaucratic autonomy in the administrative state . . . [A]dmirably successful in adding to our narrative of the development of the American administrative state."--Anthony Bertelli, *Public Administration Review*

"The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy is a major work sure to influence future understandings of progressivism, state-building, and American political development. Carpenter delves into the highly variable world of bureaucratic entrepreneurship and innovation in organization to explain the emergence of scattered pockets of administrative autonomy within the executive branch of American government. His carefully crafted analysis of the conditions under which administrators have gained control over the political authorities that ostensibly control them presents a formidable challenge to the assumptions of political scientists, and it should prompt some equally careful rethinking of the operations of American democracy more generally."--Stephen Skowronek, Yale University "Although we tend to discuss the strength, or weakness, of state autonomy as though it were the same for every agency, the fact of the matter is that autonomy varies considerably from agency to agency. In this excellent book, Daniel Carpenter is among the first to make this observation and explore its implications."--Graham K. Wilson, University of Wisconsin-Madison "Whether we regard the modern state as fair as Athena, stepping fully formed from the brow of Zeus, or as foul as Frankenstein, sutured on a scientist's table, there had to be a time of quickening when the limbs began to twitch and the brain began to spark. In a splendid reinterpretation of the classic period of American state formation, Dan Carpenter demonstrates that a self-conscious mentality emerged because career bureaucratic officials created overlapping networks between their agencies and forged public reputations that secured support from the citizenry. Thus freed them from the influence of political parties, these officials then turned on the very politicians who had created them."--Richard Bense, Cornell University --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 century 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.

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.

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.

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.

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