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**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast that is provided for you by the Department of Government at Minnesota State University, Mankato located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson the chairperson of the Government Department. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics about government. Some may be surprising to you and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to episode five of the Let's Talk Government podcast. Today, we are going to discuss in defense of bureaucracy. I am joined by Dr. Josh Berkenpas Dr. Scott Granberg Radmacher Dr. Amelia Pridemore and Dr. Amelia pride more from the political science program at MSU, Mankato, Dr. Josh Berkenpas passes in his fifth year as an assistant professor of political science at Minnesota state university Mankato Dr. Josh Berkenpas focuses on political theory, American politics and women in politics in his research doctors that Granberg Rademacher is in his 16th year as a professor of political science at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He serves as a graduate coordinator for the master's in public administration and community leadership program and is also serving as the department chairperson on the economics department. His research focuses on public policy, public administration and American government. Dr. Eiji Kawabata is in his 16th year as a professor of political science at Minnesota State University, Mankato and has served as a past director of the international relations program. He focuses on comparative government, international relations and Asian Pacific rim politics in his research, Dr. Amelia Pridemore is in her second year as an assistant professor of political science at Minnesota State University Mankato and is joining us for a second podcast. She focuses on public administration, American government and media and politics and her research. So, thank you for joining me today before we get too far along, Scott, would you like to start us off on defining bureaucracy?

**Dr. Scott Granberg-Rademacker:** Sure. Um, these are, this is ground that many people have tread before me. So, um, uh, I'll do my best, um, what bureaucracy is at least the way that I think of it is, um, it's an aspect of government that consists of a body or bodies of non-elected government officials. Um, by and large, they're in charge of implementing the, um, the laws of the land. And, um, there are some, I think common aspects to a lot of bureaucracy, um, you know, uh, in terms of specialization and they also tend to be somewhat hierarchical nature. Um, and so they tend to have a fairly common structure to them. Um, but in general, I think that's, that's kind of what your ocracy consists of.

**Dr. Eiji Kawabata:** Can I just jump in? Can I just jump in? Okay. Uh, yeah. In, in the United States, yes. Implementing. Okay. I know, uh, but I'm talking about the formulation. Of course, she and I, I'm a friend who was walking at the Senate office and he told me when he makes no, he has to go to ... products because, you know, but if they don't implement it, then obviously it doesn't work. So, in that sense, but still you, you are right. Uh, but in other countries usually, uh, bureaucrats, at least thereafter Rose. Okay. And, uh, ... system, uh, basically like would stay in Australia. Uh, I think I, the only general, but anyway, so they make rovers and of course, uh, they don't make decisions, but they make the content of blogs and, uh, or maybe France, um, maybe not in France or Japan, bureaucrats have a much, much more up by hand, but it's not dominant because some people misunderstand. So anyway, I just like Jack for you to add some competitive parts.

**Dr. Nelson:** You're good. Josh, how about if I swing it to you for a minute? So how do bureaucrats work maybe like in the legislative process, why do we need them there a cue unmute there?

**Dr. Josh Berkenpas**: Yup. Uh, so when I think of bureaucracy, I think, uh, first and foremost of the us political system, which I think of as a set of institutions within which actors, uh, individuals act, all of those institutions are rule-bound organizations change the rules, change behavior. Um, and the bureaucracy is an extension of those rules founded first in the constitution. Uh, and then later through, uh, statute laws passed by Congress, state legislatures, uh, et cetera, uh, to empower, uh, essentially the state to carry out some action. Um, a big part of American democracy, or I'm sorry, American bureaucracy thinking about democracy, uh, American bureaucracy and other, I would say liberal States has been to take certain ideas, uh, and try to make them reality. For example, int quality is, is the big one, um, especially in the United States, but in other Western liberal democracies, uh, trying to make equality, uh, a reality, right. It's ideal that many Americans share. Um, so we use the state, uh, and in particular, the bureaucracy to try to bring about that reality.

**Dr. Nelson:** So Amelia, let's jump to you and started thinking about maybe what is it not, what do we, what are some things that we might think of a bureaucracy that really is not part of that.

**Dr. Amelia Pridemore:** I would think too. Um, I think of, I think that, um, a lot of times that negative image is of the paper pusher, um, and that kind of non-elected, um, accountable, um, person that'll, uh, that basically is just there to abuse people and tie them up with red tape. And they're, they're looked at as the opposite of democracy. A lot of times they're looked at, uh, um, what makes government not work, um, kind of to, uh, kind of to, um, show, uh, kind of, uh, uh, converse way from what Josh said about reality. A lot of times the image of the bureaucracy is that it keeps affective policy from becoming a reality sometimes when actually it, it is what Josh has had to say. It's how the, uh, how the policies that we need to make things better, such as in, as such as, as Joshua said, equality, um, this is how it bureaucracy is what actually makes it a reality. But I think a lot of times what happens is we wind up with this image of this horrible person that's tying us up in red tape and keeping reality from actually happening. And so I think that's a huge misconception right there.

**Dr. Nelson:** So Scott, as someone who really studies public administration, why do you think there is such an image that your accredits have so much power in our system here in the United States and worldwide?

**Dr. Scott Granberg-Rademacker:** Well, um, part of it is, is that it's, um, but there's, there's probably several reasons why part of it is, is that people don't really know what, what bureaucrats do. I mean, they don't fully understand, um, what, what bureaucrats do on a day-to-day basis. Um, and th and I'm painting broadly here, but much like Pat, as, you know, people don't always know what department chairs do either, right? And so people tend to attribute more power to these positions than they actually might have. But at the end of the day, though, the bureaucrats are the ones that make the wheels turn. I mean, they're the ones who, who do, who peddled the machine. And so, um, in that sense, they do have a lot of power and going back to Eiji's point, Eiji is absolutely right. Policy formation, and the formulation of policy is really important. Um, bureaucrats tend to be experts in their field. And so there's a lot of times, um, people in the legislature, legislative AIDS, they'll talk to the bureaucrats to see, um, you know, what they think about legislations coming up, or have ideas for how to deal with, um, how to deal with issues or problems.

**Dr. Nelson:** How about you, would you like to add to that at all? Or even maybe give us a little international perspective about why does it seem like people think you're across has so much power.

**Dr. Eiji Kawabata:** Okay. So much for, I think it's more like a perception on the side of people. Uh, again, like one possible definitely scope is right. They don't know, and they may call a huge relation with the power. So if they find this something, uh, they don't have what you wish, then they feel like it's a power. And if they agree with that, that's not okay. That's, it's, it's like, what's going on. Right. Basically, you know, if you feel like I don't want to wear a mask, then that's for me, exercise a port or something like it's the same parts of may say a, something like abortion or something. They don't think it's about exercise of power. So somehow it's a yes. So yeah, weights there's misunderstanding. And the other thing is probably, I don't know how America it is, democracy needs, but maybe, I mean, as I said, he's somebody who open it. Okay. They are expert. They need to have a summit, uh, or sorry. Okay. So the question is, the question is the question you have to make, we have to see is how legitimate, right? How is it, uh, authorized? So that's a question it's not about, I don't like that. That's why, uh, there are, uh, bullies or something. Okay. So that's, that's a hideaway. I would, uh,

**Dr. Nelson:** Was fun. All right. I'm going to throw this question out to anybody that wants to answer. So you see, we see in the media, are we seeing in movies are news stories about corrupt bureaucrats, right. That you can go in and pay them so you can get your permit to build your house at the local level, or even at the national level, paying off people are getting favors through bureaucrats to meet with a Senator. You know, how prevalent do you think that is? And how do you think that really impacts the perception of the aircraft in the United States? And I'll open that up to anybody to jump in on that corruption. Go ahead a Amelia.

**Dr. Amelia Pridemore:** So, one thing that I noticed, especially when I was doing my field research in new Orleans, which, uh, elected officials, bureaucratic officials alike have for years had a really agregious history of corruption. Um, one thing that I often find is that, um, basically it just takes one sometimes, um, it just takes one person to do something terrible, but all, and then what, but what happens is, is that view gets, um, you know, well, they're all crooks, um, winds up getting placed on that whole agency or, um, or just government as a whole, um, even the elected officials, basically, it just takes one and all of a sudden everybody's terrible, um, which, which can kind of distort things, um, in a lot of ways in people's minds.

**Dr. Scott Granberg-Rademacker:** I mean, in the star Wars movies, chancellor Powell team became the emperor on the belief that the, that it was the bureaucrats who really controlled everything. Right. Um, you know, and I don't want to stray too far into Josh's territory here as he's the, he used the theorists, not me, but, um, you know, I wonder if it's, if the idea of corruption is just something ingrained in human nature. I mean, because we, it's not, like we only see corruption in the bureaucracy. Right. We see it in the private sector. We see it in people's personal lives. We see it all over the place. So, um, I'm personally, I'm not convinced that there's more corruption in the bureaucracy than there is in like the private sector. I just think it comes to light more often in the public sector, and that's what we hear about it. And we think of it more.

**Dr. Josh Berkenpas:** I think that's a good point, particularly about human nature. I think Amelia was touching on that as well. Right. Uh, human nature being what it is, uh, the, uh, Madison and the other, uh, writers in, uh, the Federalist papers. We talk about the corruption of human nature. Um, and that's, we're all sort of self interested in the point of government, right. Is to try to sort of take that reality seriously and to create checks and balances, separation of powers, um, so that, um, we can keep corruption basically to a minimum. All right. And to extend the longevity of the Republic, um, try to make, uh, you know, the country of photos where everyone can pursue, um, as the declaration put it right, the right to life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Um, but I think part of what's going on in a moment, and one of the reasons bureaucracy needs defending, uh, is because of this populous moment we're having right now. Um, and one of the reasons populism is resurgent right now, um, is because the people are at least the folks who are participating in this pipeline moment, both on the left and the right, although the, uh, the conservative movement managed to elect a president. So we tend to focus on, uh, populism on the right at the moment. Um, a lot of that is due to a feeling of disconnect, right? Feeling a lack of accountability, Ryan, to a lack of responsibility, uh, a lack of responsiveness on of the state in general government in general. Um, and oftentimes the bureaucracy in particular. And of course that starts with, I suppose, citizen contact with the bureaucracy, which is often, uh, or can be, I imagine negative, or I'm getting pulled over by a police officer, um, trying to go to the DMV on a busy day, uh, things like this. Um, so lots of reasons why I think it does need, uh, defending it, but,

**Dr. Nelson:** Oh, hold on a second. Hold on. Before we go on here, Josh, for those that maybe don't understand that term, can you just quickly define populism to maybe someone that's listening?

**Dr. Josh Berkenpas:** So a populism is moving that recurs, um, throughout, um, I suppose American political history also, uh, in Western liberal democracies. Um, and it tends to emerge as a movement, uh, against bigness Ryan trolleys. It is in the moment, uh, against some big corporations, big media, big university, if you will. Um, and a response to feelings of, uh, non-responsiveness right. We're supposed to participate in this electoral system and we elect officials into office and then our, um, sort of interests and desires are not being, um, accounted for, right? The neo-liberal program of pushing jobs, overseas, downsizing of government, um, particularly the social safety net has left a lot of Americans feeling as though, um, you know, Donald Trump was the best choice in 2016, for example.

**Dr. Nelson:** Thanks, Josh. And I know both Eiji and Amelia want to comment, we're going to do ag first and then Amelia, go ahead.

**Dr. Josh Berkenpas:** So I think, uh, Paglini expects more from, you know, government ovations, uh, like corruption happens anywhere, right? That you use so money for your personal benefit. Okay. And it's a little bit, what are you? The money is much, much bigger than the PR uh, private sector like banks and bod. What it tells us is, uh, it's a good thing. You know, you don't crowds should not have a dime, you know, that's out of a question and, uh, it's, uh, in the private sector. Yeah. All that sounds up about or something, you don't feel that well anyway, but one point that's my point. And then, then in that sense, uh, I anyway, let me stop stop here. Okay. So that's what I feel. Okay.

**Dr. Nelson:** Amelia?

**Dr. Amelia Pridemore:** To echo, Scott's point about star Wars, um, I think media and particularly entertainment and pop culture really have, uh, an influence on, uh, the negative view of the bureaucracy. I mean, they think to yourself about any unelected scene, whether it's somebody's quote unquote real, like, um, like a police officer, for example, or a fictional bureaucracy, like, uh, like, you know, the, the death star. Right. Um, think about it. How many of them were the hero and how many of them were the villains? Um, just to give one example, um, the Laura's umbrage from the Harry Potter series, um, Stephen King, who created Pennywise the clown, uh, for, you know, I mean he called Dolores Umbridge, the scariest fictional villain since Hannibal Lecter, um, and Dolores Umbridge was a S it was portrayed as a stereotypical yes. Woman bureaucrat. Um, look at some of the, um, quote unquote, real bureaucrats, like, uh, Ron Swanson from parks and recreation, you know, old Solon kind of guy. And then, and then you get to the really super dangerous ones like those, um, portrayed in the hunger games. Um, I think what happens is kind of like what pop culture does to us in general is that these of become embedded in our mind as what reality is.

**Dr. Nelson:** All right. So you actually kind of look with all the great media references. Now you've got a bunch of movies to go watch, but how about this, think about this then is if we're going to be defending bureaucracy, doesn't bureaucracy seem to go against the ideas of democracy. I mean, I was supposed to elect the people that take care of us and run the government. So how do they work together? Josh? You're smiling. Let's go with you first.

**Dr. Josh Berkenpas:** So that brings me to one of my favorite points that I make in a U S gov every, uh, semester is that, um, the United States constitution founds a Republic, not a democracy. Um, and part of that Republic against separation of powers checks and balances crabs, first and foremost, to check the power of the laws, right. To act the power of the majority, um, in society to protect minority rights, uh, and things like this. Um, and that sort of thinking also, um, those ideas also got implemented, um, in the development of the modern bureaucracy here in the United States, coinciding with the rise of a liberal democracy. And I suppose, um, creating a situation where, where it was thought it was better, um, to have, um, you know, a bureaucracy executing the laws, um, that was, you know, neutral, efficient, nonpolitical, nonpartisan, um, staffed by experts, et cetera. Um, rather than having of course political appointees and folks who were making decisions based on their personal values and interests rather than the common good.

**Dr. Nelson:** Eiji, what are your thoughts on that? Yeah, uh, sure. I think I I'm, what for,

**Dr. Eiji Kawabata:** Let me say I'm realistic. So Democrat, she just has a heart. I think any democratic system has some kind of a thing like Monarch president who has more power. And I just took [inaudible], uh, uh, you know, up a little bit bureaucrats, carte Chapman at members. However, then of course we have a people, the question is, you know, what the element is the most important. Okay. So as allies, if you say democracy means people their side, it doesn't work in this complex organizations that we have. So the question, but I, on the other hand that makes it very difficult to define democracy. I understand, but to me, the attitude is we have some sort of, you know, hierarchy in terms of power. Then, then the question is, of course we know what democracy, what system is not the democracy. Okay. But the question, I think as much to me, well continue. Okay. But I'll be going back to my point, but the thing is, uh, if you ask me what democracy is in terms of principle, you should ask George, but the question is in thousands of institutions, uh, to me, uh it's then that's, that's my understanding. That's why mistakes happens because you know, some people have power then that's, anti-democratic in modern democracy. That's not how it works. That's okay. That's my point.

**Dr. Nelson:** Amelia, you have any comments on this?

**Dr. Amelia Pridemore:** Um, kind of to echo some of what Josh has said about James Madison and some of the ideals of the founders, you know, I'm, I I'm brought to, uh, the Federalist number 10, which was authored by James Madison. And one of the things that he points out is the, uh, possible rise of factions. And basically what that can be is, um, as he put it, it could be the majority, it can be just a really loud minority, or he can, as he put it at obnoxious individual. Um, and the thing, the thing that, that he feared was that basically a faction, and even if it's the majority could basically in a pure democracy, um, absolutely overtake the rights of other citizens, unless there are controls. And so basically under Madison's view, if democracy doesn't have some form of control on it, democracy dies, um, as a result. Um, so the, the thing that's, uh, that should be, uh, that should be noted is a lot of times the view on the bureaucracy, even though this wasn't exactly what Madison was writing about is sometimes what, uh, what bureaucracy can do is sort of put the brakes on factions. Um, and, uh, kind of like what Josh said, this is, this is a Republic, right? A lot of times, if the noise becomes too loud, a lot of times the noise shouts over somebody, uh, who may not have as much power, but still deserves to be heard.

**Dr. Nelson:** All right, Scott, I'm gonna point to you kind of as a question here. So, so how does bureaucracy make our government work? Even if an elected person has no government experience or ahead of an organization has no experience within the organization? How does the bureaucracy make that work?

**Dr. Scott Granberg-Rademacker:** Yeah, that's a very good question. Um, and, and that, that happens from time to time. Um, so there's a, there's a, there's a top, the top administrators in the, in a bureaucracy that these are individuals who are appointed and, um, usually they have to be, um, confirmed by the Senate. Um, but they're below, below that kind of top crust in a bureaucracy of management. There's, um, you know, there's lots of different layers of, um, of professional bureaucrats. These are people who have gotten hired for the job that they have based on their qualifications. And so, uh, you know, the, a lot of times they're, they're the ones who make the, the agency go on a day to day basis. And so, um, if you have, you know, if the agency's been is being headed by someone who doesn't really understand or is incompetent to run the agency, um, a lot of times those bureaucrats, um, kind of know what to do anyway, um, just based on the inertia of what they have them doing. And so they're able to keep the organization going, and it might seem like it's running smoothly, even though, I mean, the upper management may be causing a lot of turmoil internally.

**Dr. Nelson:** All right. So as we're coming near the end here, our whole title was in defense of your accuracy. We already kind of talked about the why you don't may not like it. So who wants to start with defending it? Why do we need it? Why do we need these people that know what they're doing and make sure the government doesn't collect?

**Dr. Scott Granberg-Rademacker:** I'd love to, I'd love to. Um, so I mean, whether we, whether we like it or not, we have a fourth branch of government in this country, and that is the bureaucracy. Um, there's a system of checks and balances that incorporate the bureaucracy in with other the other three branches of government. And, you know, a lot of the frustration that you hear elected officials talk about the bureaucracy is based on the fact that they, that they're being checked or they're able to check and the powers of bureaucracy, um, you know, unless we're in an, you know, an Athenian city state, our country's just too big. Our governments are just too big for the people who make the laws to actually enforce them. And so, you know, the executive needs help enforcing the laws and that's where the bureaucracy comes into play. And, um, you know, I think Vince it's, uh, it's the best and, you know, w whether we like it or not, it's the best system for implementing a public policy that we've discovered so far.

**Dr. Eiji Kawabata:** Yeah. Uh, we need the bureaucracy, but my, uh, definition of bureaucracy is basically experts they know for the sheet. So if we probably, sometimes I hear you, you can, you know, anyone can do government jobs. I don't think so. Uh, you know, and currently, you know, the same as like a lot of governmental of sharers are ugly, and I understand, uh, state department, you know, diplomats and as our members are leaving, because they do not, I mean, like probably I'm not going to say food, but, uh, basically the political leaders, uh, to not, uh, appreciate their expertise, they only talk about their political views. Oh, I've got him saying, Hey, uh, you know, I always say to my students, if that happens, I, we just, society is going to go down. Meaning, you know, we jump up to anything, anyone in government positions, so we need to be beraucracy and, and we need experts. Okay. I'm not saying you have to be super experts. No, you, you, you have to get, you know, you have a knowledge so that as allies, you know, society does not want that's, that's why in that sense, that's a hard life. We need a bureaucracy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Josh, what are your thoughts on this?

**Dr. Josh Berkenpas:** Yeah, so I think we were actually definitely in need of defense. When I first saw the title. I immediately thought of, uh, Bernard Crick, a British political scientist, political theorist, who in the early sixties, came out with a book called in defense of politics. Right. Politics also, uh, always in need of defending, um, speaking of, uh, icons, I suppose we should, somebody should mention, uh, the German sociologist max WebVR, right. Uh, who saw bureaucracy as the most advanced form of human organization? Uh, it had both pros and cons, um, among the cons, right? Uh, the process of rationalization leading to, um, an iron cage and, um, a, a, what does he say? A polar night of icy darkness, right. A society run on objective procedure does not need human judgment or the participation of citizens in decision-making freedom is lost. Independent Bach is lost. Um, we all basically just become part cogs in the machine. Uh, if you will, are all familiar, I think, uh, with this sort of, uh, negative view of bureaucracy, but as we've been highlighting, uh, we do need bureaucracy. Um, but bureaucracy isn't perfect. Right? So it can be improved. We can, um, participate in the political process to bring about reform. Um, so a couple of, uh, ideas there, one probably more realistic than the other, uh, the first would be more citizen input and participation, um, at all levels. Um, you know, we can think of, for example, the university, right? Part of the bureaucracy or law enforcement, uh, as other examples, um, and they routinely seek public input or nonconformance where public opinion and things like this. Um, but I, I believe more, uh, is needed more actual participation, um, by citizens in decision-making, um, that affects their daily lives, right? There's no better way to feel that government or bureaucracy is responsive than by participating. Of course, we all have busy lives and lots of Americans are not sort of loath to participate even in voting and election. So I don't know how realistic that one is. Uh, the second one would be, um, something along the lines of, uh, a more responsible bureaucracy, right? Um, finding a way to, again, allow the day moments that allow the democratic elements, society, more ways to have input to control, uh, to ensure that, um, you know, they are actually living up to their charge, which is to, uh, promote, uh, the public. Good.

**Dr. Nelson:** Amelia, what do you think?

**Dr. Amelia Pridemore:** One of the mantras that I always say is that government cannot just open the door. It needs to walk out of the door. And one thing that I've found through my research, especially when I was out in the field, was that what, what are typically called street level bureaucrats, meaning the ones who actually have the most contact face to face with the public were the ones who were accomplishing, uh, this connection with the citizens, uh, probably much more than, than elected officials. Um, so, and a lot of that was because as Josh and Scott have met and, and Eiji has mentioned is, uh, because of that expertise. So for example, uh, one group that I worked with a lot worse, um, with my entertainment policy research was, uh, professional musicians and a lot of members of the bureaucracy that I, that I was in contact with were extremely familiar with some of the particulars of the con uh, commercial music industry. And we're able to not only relate, uh, relay information to the elected officials, but also be able to speak the language when it came to that particular group. Um, so that, that expertise and that face-to-face contact really did in some cases, not only build relationships with the public, but it also sometimes repaired relationships with the public and building on what Josh said about, uh, citizen participation. One of the things that I found with my research was that a lot of times people do want to participate in government, but a lot of times they can't and a lot, and kind of like what he said about busy lives. A lot of times it's because of work schedules, um, childcare issues, et cetera. One of the things that I've found in my research was time and place were keys in trying to improve, uh, citizen input and citizen interaction. And so one of the things that was either desired or very effective when done was the members of the bureaucracy, namely street-level bureaucrats, going to the locations where the target population would gather. And at the times it would gather even if it was even if it would be 3:00 AM. Um, like if you're talking about nightclub crowds, right. Um, and that's where the, they were able to reach those populations that hadn't been able to participate before. It hadn't been heard before. And likewise continue to build those much more constructive relationships.

**Dr. Nelson:** So it sounds like really our bureaucracy is making sure that we have stability in the government that it keeps running. Because every time we have an elected official, we can't have a shutdown and restart. Right. Um, it's brings in experts and enacts policy and helps write policy that really, if we didn't have bureaucracy, we wouldn't have a government because things would just be stopping and starting the entire time. So, all right. So maybe anybody else have any closing thoughts on, in defense of bureaucracy? And honestly, would we want to have a citizens meeting every time we needed to change the way the water billing came to your house, right. It's things like that, that they also take care of pretty well. So, all right. Well, thank you everybody. Thanks for talking about in defense of bureaucracy. I know we can go on different levels of this, and we might be talking about different levels here in the spring, but it's really easy to see that we do need it. And if we didn't, we wouldn't have the government that we do or the country, and it's all across the world. You have to have bureaucrats as well. So thank you.

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