

Bureaucracy in the Algerian Administrative Apparatus: Between Theory and Practice

البيروقراطية في الجهاز الإداري الجزائري: بين النظرية والتطبيق

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Abstract

This paper explores the realities of bureaucracy in Algeria's administrative system by tracing its historical development, examining its current modes of operation, and identifying the main factors that have shaped its transformation. Although Max Weber conceptualised bureaucracy as a rational and efficient form of administration, the study argues that the Algerian experience has gradually diverged from these theoretical foundations. While the bureaucratic model emerged in the early twentieth century as a pioneering administrative structure, its application in Algeria has faced substantial obstacles that have distorted its intended principles. As a result, bureaucracy is often perceived less as an instrument of efficiency and more as a source of dysfunction, largely because of weak alignment with Algeria's institutional arrangements and cultural specificities.

Keywords

Bureaucracy; Administrative Apparatus; Western Models.

ملخص

يستكشف هذا البحث واقع البيروقراطية في النظام الإداري الجزائري، حيث يهدف إلى تتبع تطورها التاريخي، وفحص آليات عملها الحالية، وتحديد العوامل الرئيسية التي ساهمت في تحولها. فعلى الرغم من أن البيروقراطية صيغت أصلاً من قبل عالم الاجتماع الألماني ماكس فيبر كنموذج للإدارة الرشيدة والفعالة، إلا أنها في السياق الجزائري قد انحرفت تدريجياً عن أسسها النظرية. ويُجادل البحث بأن النموذج البيروقراطي، الذي نشأ في أوائل القرن العشرين كهيكل إداري رائد، واجه عراقيل كبيرة عند تطبيقه في الجزائر. وقد أدت هذه التحديات إلى تشويه مبادئه المقصودة، مما جعله يُنظر إليه على أنه مصدر للقصور واللافعالية، بدلاً من كونه أداة للفعالية، وذلك إلى حد كبير بسبب ضعف توافقه مع الخصوصيات المؤسسية والثقافية في الجزائر.

الكلمات المفتاحية

البيروقراطية؛ الجهاز الإداري؛ النماذج الغربية.

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Introduction

The administrative apparatus is regarded as a fundamental pillar in driving progress and development across various sectors. It plays a central role in executing the public functions of the state and its institutions, given its access to critical information derived from its direct involvement in implementing policies and decisions. To effectively fulfil its duties, the administrative system employs a range of organizational methods, among which the bureaucratic model holds a prominent position.

When the term "bureaucracy" is mentioned, many people immediately associate it with negative connotations, despite the fact that, at its inception, the term carried a positive meaning. These negative perceptions typically refer to routine and administrative complications that lead to delays and sluggishness in transactions and tasks, as well as corruption, bribery, and nepotism. Consequently, inefficiency in work performance becomes evident (Darwish & Takla, 1976, p. 214).

Max Weber identified the bureaucratic model as the ideal framework for ensuring efficiency in task execution and for maintaining the administrative body's focus on delivering public services. However, in some societies, the misinterpretation and misapplication of this model have led to its distortion, transforming it into a perceived obstacle to achieving intended goals and outcomes.

In Algeria, as in many other countries, the administrative apparatus has undergone successive transformations of its bureaucratic structure across different historical periods, from the Ottoman era through the colonial period to the post-independence era. This historical evolution has shaped the current administrative framework, illuminating the persistent challenges in aligning theoretical models with practical realities.

Statement of the Problem

To comprehensively understand the subject, we raise the following questions:

- What is the nature of Weber's organizational model?
- What factors hinder its application in the Algerian context as theoretically designed?

This research paper aims to explore Weber's organizational model to highlight the key historical stages of bureaucratic development in Algeria and to elucidate the reasons and manifestations that led to its negative perception within Algerian institutions. At the end, it will present the Algerian strategy for reducing bureaucracy through reforms undertaken in this context.

1. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on a topic that is of great interest to researchers and scholars, whether in relation to the administrative apparatus or bureaucracy. The importance of studying bureaucracy in the Algerian administrative

apparatus is tied to the fact that immediately after independence, the state was managed, like most developing countries by civil and military bureaucracies, with the absence or weakness of representative institutions. This situation allowed bureaucracy to assert itself during this phase, even surpassing its initial role to become an obstacle to the administrative apparatus in fulfilling its administrative duties and achieving general objectives. Therefore, it is essential to highlight the problems facing the administrative apparatus, with bureaucracy being one of the primary issues, which the German sociologist Max Weber regarded as the ideal model. Over time, it has evolved into a dilemma hindering the tasks of the administrative apparatus in developing countries, including Algeria.

2. The Concept of Bureaucracy

When the term "bureaucracy" is mentioned, many people immediately associate it with negative connotations, despite the fact that, at its inception, the term only carried a positive meaning. Therefore, before presenting the linguistic and technical definitions of bureaucracy, it is prudent to first address this prevalent negative connotation.

The common usage of the term "bureaucracy" is often characterized by negative perceptions, which typically refer to routine and administrative complications that lead to delays and sluggishness in transactions and tasks, as well as to corruption, bribery, and nepotism. As a result, inefficiency in work performance becomes evident (Darwish & Takla, 1976, p. 214). In this context, bureaucracy becomes synonymous with organizational and administrative inefficiency, all due to its negative application and reality, which manifest in the complexity of its structures.

The word "bureaucracy" is derived from the French term "bureau," which originally referred to a dark, somber color that connotes dignity and seriousness. Over time, it evolved to mean a desk or office. The word "carcy" is derived from the Greek root "kratia" which means power or rule. Thus, linguistically, bureaucracy refers to the rule or authority of the office (Al-Shamaa & Hamoud, 2000, p. 33).

The scientific use of this term was first highlighted in the writings of the German sociologist Max Weber, who identified the main characteristics of modern bureaucracy as an "ideal type." According to Weber's perspective, this type of organization reached its peak in urban and political communities within the framework of the modern state and in an economy based on private ownership within the context of the most advanced capitalist institutions compared to other economic systems (Weber, 1978, p. 956). According to Weber, bureaucracy is embodied in large-scale organizations that strive to achieve goals aligned with those set by the state and is characterized by features such as hierarchy and the presence of rules and procedures regulating work.

In the Dictionary of Sociology, bureaucracy is defined as a term used to refer to the administrative tasks, functions, and systems overseen and managed by

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administrative employees. It sometimes indicates the practice of tasks carried out by these employees (Al-Johari, 1983, p. 53).

As a social concept, bureaucracy is a form of civilized and administrative behaviour that plays a role in the administrative process as a comprehensive cycle of activities encompassing planning, communication, organization, and control. This is done according to a purposeful plan executed by a disciplined organization that facilitates communication, implements, monitors, and follows up on development processes to ultimately achieve the plan's objectives.

Therefore, we can conclude two meanings for bureaucracy:

- The first meaning reflects the common perception of bureaucracy as a negative image of administrative routine, rigidity, and complexity, which leads to lengthy procedures in achieving administrative tasks. This widespread understanding of bureaucracy is almost synonymous with a set of administrative complications that contain processes that hinder the completion of transactions.
- The second meaning is the scientific definition of the concept of bureaucracy, which refers to the phenomenon of formal organizations that operate according to rational, formal rules and regulations aimed at achieving administrative efficiency to produce optimal results.

3. The Ideal Bureaucratic Model of Max Weber

Weber presented his bureaucratic model of organization as the most rational one, which leads to increased productive efficiency due to its reliance on objectivity and prioritizing expertise and competence over personal considerations. Weber's analysis centered on the changes in social organization, particularly focusing on government bureaucratic structures, and highlighted the power and authority relationships in society. He defined authority as the power relationship between the ruler and individuals, and power as the ability to impose will. He identified three forms of authority in society: traditional authority (inherited), charismatic authority (inspirational), and legal authority (official). He based his ideal bureaucratic model on the concept of rational legal authority, stating, "The entire process of rationalization, whether in the factory or elsewhere, and especially when operating within the state's bureaucratic apparatus, is analogous to the concentration of material tools or organizational means in the hands of the leader" (Al-Tayeb, 2006, p. 99).

4. Development of Bureaucratic Organization in Algerian Administration

4.1 The Ottoman Era

During this period, Algeria's administrative organization was based on a military model, characterized by weaknesses in management and oversight. The

inability to manage expenditures contributed to bureaucratic corruption (Al-Madani, This is Algeria, 1956, p. 130).

4.2 Bureaucratic Administration of Colonial Institutions

French colonial authorities dismantled existing structures, establishing a bureaucratic system that prioritized colonial interests. This created a dominant bureaucratic class that controlled the lives of Algerians (Al-Madani, The Book of Algeria, 1931, pp. 259-260).

4.3 The Independence Era

Post-independence, Algeria retained many colonial administrative frameworks, leading to a bureaucratic bourgeoisie that monopolized decision-making. This perpetuated inefficiencies and a disconnect between citizens and the administration (Laareit, 2013-2014, pp. 81-82).

5. The Impact of Bureaucracy on the Algerian Administrative Apparatus

Bureaucracy has significantly influenced the functioning of the Algerian administration, leading to challenges such as:

- Ambiguity of legal texts.
- Incompatibility of imported Western models.
- Lack of resources and insufficient training.

These challenges highlight the need for integrated efforts to enhance performance and achieve sustainable development.

5.1 Causes of Bureaucratic Shortcomings

The historical context of Algeria has contributed to bureaucratic shortcomings, including the widespread corruption and the influence of French culture on the administrative class.

5.2 Negative Aspects of Bureaucracy

Administrative Routine: The aim of administrative routine is to facilitate work performance by establishing general rules that apply to recurrent situations, thereby reducing the mental strain on employees, avoiding chaotic work environments, and increasing efficiency in completing tasks. However, if the routine does not align with the spirit of applicable laws, it becomes a serious issue threatening the organization. Routine can distract the administration from its tasks and increase public dissatisfaction. Additionally, it induces feelings of anxiety and boredom among employees, weakening their commitment to professional integrity. The abundance of instructions issued by top leadership, which characterizes most large bureaucratic

systems, fosters rigid routines and transforms administrative vitality, initiative, and flexibility into slow and stagnant procedures, instilling a sense of lethargy among employees and leading to insular behaviour (Saidan, 1981, p. 47).

6. Modern Methods and Approaches to Reduce Bureaucracy

6.1 Electronic Management

Electronic Management refers to the transformation of manual administrative tasks into digital and modern technology-driven processes (Minzar & Belkawas, 2020, pp. 36-37). Electronic Management plays a prominent role, contrasting with traditional administration, in combating widespread bureaucratic ailments in most government sectors such as bribery and administrative corruption. In recent years, the widespread use of Electronic Management has significantly reduced bureaucratic procedures due to the implementation of a national strategy called the "Electronic Algeria Project"

6.2 Re-engineering

Re-engineering focuses on defining organizational goals and improving institutional performance through data-driven decision-making. The concept of re-engineering emerged as a mechanism adopted by managers and administrators to introduce fundamental changes and improve institutional performance. The main principles of re-engineering are (Hujabra, 2019, p. 19).

- Clearly defining the organization's goals and strategies.
- Rethinking the status.
- Focusing on processes rather than functions.
- Gathering the necessary data, information, and justifications for making sound decisions

6.3 Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM seeks to enhance public services and address bureaucratic challenges through comprehensive development initiatives

Governments increasingly seek comprehensive development leading to a revolution in traditional concepts and old management models. TQM has become one of the most relied-upon alternatives for improving and enhancing public services and the performance of the administrative apparatus. Environmental changes pose major challenges to the effective performance of administration in serving citizens. The key reasons for the government's adoption of TQM are as follows:

- Complex bureaucratic procedures during service delivery.
- The variety and abundance of problems faced by citizens.
- Low work motivation among public employees.
- Blocked communication channels between administration and citizens (Hujabra, 2019, p. 19).

Conclusion

This text concludes that the bureaucratic model developed by Max Weber has not proven effective in all contexts, particularly in Algeria, where it has led to the spread of corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency. The problem lies not so much in the model itself, but in how it has been applied. Imitating Western models without considering local specificities has produced negative outcomes. Additionally, Algeria's historical context contributed to the formation of a rigid administrative apparatus that became disconnected from citizens, deepening their sense of alienation from public administration. These factors, whether combined or in isolation, have contributed to the prevalence of pathological phenomena within the Algerian administrative system. This situation called for a reassessment of its structure and performance in order to keep pace with deep economic, social, and cultural transformations, especially in light of globalization and technological advancements. As a result, a series of reforms were introduced aiming to modernize administration and improve the quality of public service delivery on the condition that these reforms are adapted to Algeria's specific context to avoid misapplication.

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