

# The Interplay of Political Ideology and Bureaucratic Behaviour: An Ethiopian Localised Study

Bruk Gonfa<sup>1</sup> & Govada Veerraju<sup>2</sup>

1. Research Scholar, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, College of Arts & Commerce, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam -530003, Andhra Pradesh, India.

2. Assistant Professor, Former Head of Department of Political Science and Public Administration College of Arts & Commerce, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam – 530003, Andhra Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author:

Bruk Gonfa

Address: Department of Political Science and Public Administration, College of Arts & Commerce, Andhra

<sup>1</sup>[Email: brukarrow@gmail.com](mailto:brukarrow@gmail.com) or bruk.gonfa@ambou.edu.et

<sup>2</sup>Email: [veerrajudl@gmail.com](mailto:veerrajudl@gmail.com) <sup>1</sup>Mobile Number: +917337591059

## Abstract:

Research on bureaucracy has raised significant apprehension over the potential exploitation of the bureaucrats, who possess an informational edge over politicians, enabling them to sway policy choices. Nonetheless, the processes that govern this impact remain mostly unexamined. We define and evaluate three processes essential for policy knowledge to serve as a conduit for political impact. As well as, data from politicians and bureaucrats from three separate political systems used. In this regard, survey and experimental methodologies to mitigate variability and social desirability bias. Consequently, the evidence we have obtained corroborates all three paths. Bureaucrats commonly employ policy information to influence political decisions; politicians rely on this information from bureaucrats when forming judgments, and the manner in which policy information is presented profoundly affects politicians' policy preferences. We analyze the results and the critical components necessary for the effective execution of the mechanisms.

**Key Words:** Governance, Political Information, Policy and Street Level Bureaucrat

## 1. Introduction

For more than a hundred years, scholarly discourse on bureaucracy has highlighted the tension between specialized knowledge and the oversight of political authority. However, policy knowledge is crucial in contemporary political systems. Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (1981) illustrate that politicians rely on bureaucrats for knowledge and competence in the political-administrative relationship. In this context, competence forms the basis of bureaucrats' power, as defined by Weber (1922).

Remarkably, the persistent inquiry revolves around the capacity of non-expert politicians to effectively manage a specialized and enduring bureaucracy. However, according to Goodnow 1900; Meier and O'Toole 2006; Niskanen 1971; Olsen 2005; Simon 1976 [1945], 45-60; Weber 1970 [1922]; Wilson 1887; Wilson 1989) bureaucrats regulate the dissemination of information to politicians, thereby controlling or at least influencing the array of issues and solutions that politicians contemplate. Therefore, more precisely, we research the bureaucratic dissemination of information that serves as the foundation for political choices about policy issues leaning to Ethiopian Local Community.

## 2. Objective of the Study

The study analyses one mechanism by which bureaucrats' specialized knowledge shapes policy outcomes to provide causal evidence on how bureaucratic expertise influences political decision-making and improve understanding of their role in political governance.

## 3. Literature Review

The literature on bureaucracy has not yielded a definitive solution to this topic, however it concurs that bureaucrats possess a privileged position in information dissemination and play a crucial role in policy advising. However, the relationship between policy information and political influence is not inherently direct. Politicians have the autonomy to utilize policy information at their discretion, frequently obtaining insights from sources beyond the permanent bureaucracy, such as interest groups or the media.

On the other hand, some classic literature on public administration thoroughly examines the gap between bureaucrats and politicians. Max Weber (1970 [1922], 232) notably articulated apprehension over the inherently dominant power of a fully established bureaucracy. The 'political master' occupies the role of the dilettante in contrast to the 'expert.' Gulick (1937) observed the dual function of bureaucrats: although governments depend on their expertise, these officials frequently exploit their privileged status. He coined the expression "Caveamus expertum" as a warning (Gulick 1937, 10).

After a decade, Simon (1976 [1945], 45-61) arrived at a comparable result in his examination of fact and value in policy decisions. Values pertain to politicians, but the obligation of integrating facts into policy choices lies with bureaucrats. Simon harbored profound skepticism toward bureaucratic allegiance, apprehensive that the bureaucrat possessed "his

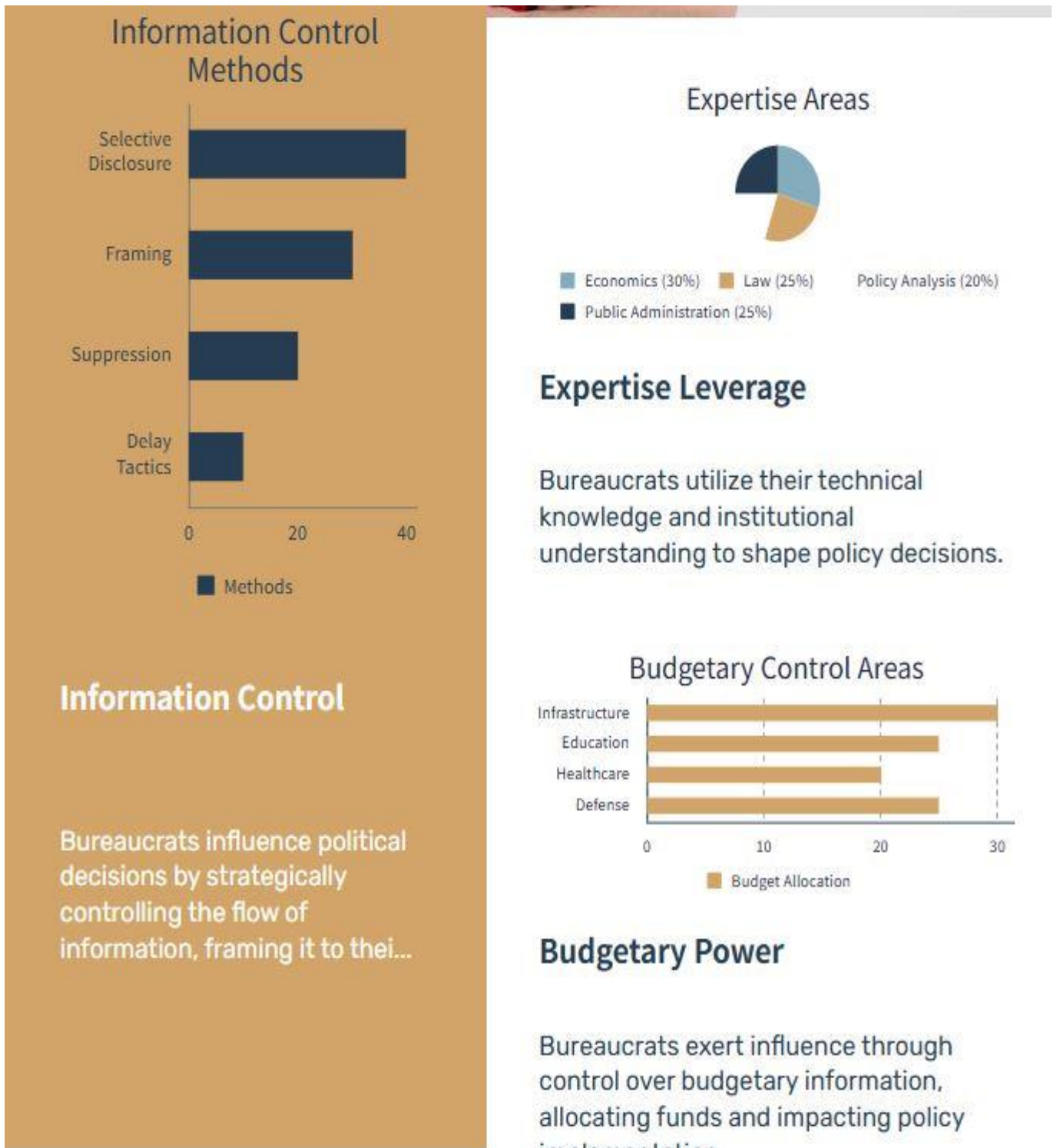
own very definite set of personal values that he would like to see implemented” (Simon 1976 [1945], 58).

Aberbach et al. (1981) executed the inaugural significant empirical investigation of the connection between politicians and bureaucrats. It was determined that policy decisions globally stem from a “creative dialogue” (p. 260) between politicians and bureaucrats, wherein “against the politician’s zeal, bureaucrats counter with facts and caution” (p. 114). In addition, a summary of the literature reviews that were examined for the purpose of this study can be seen:

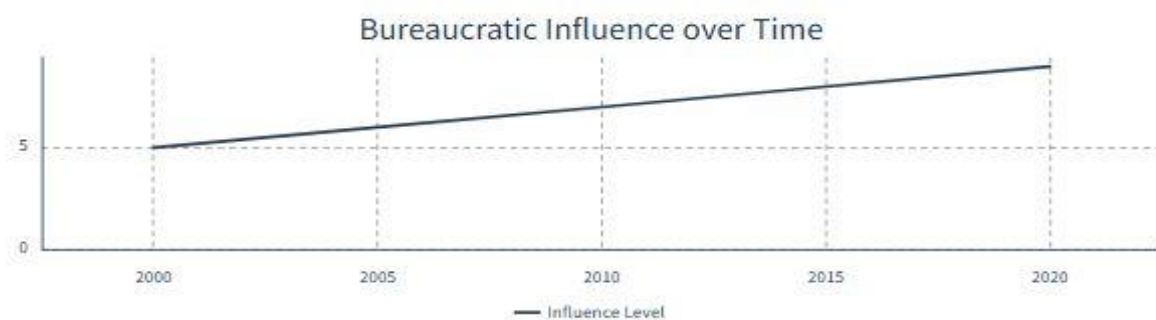
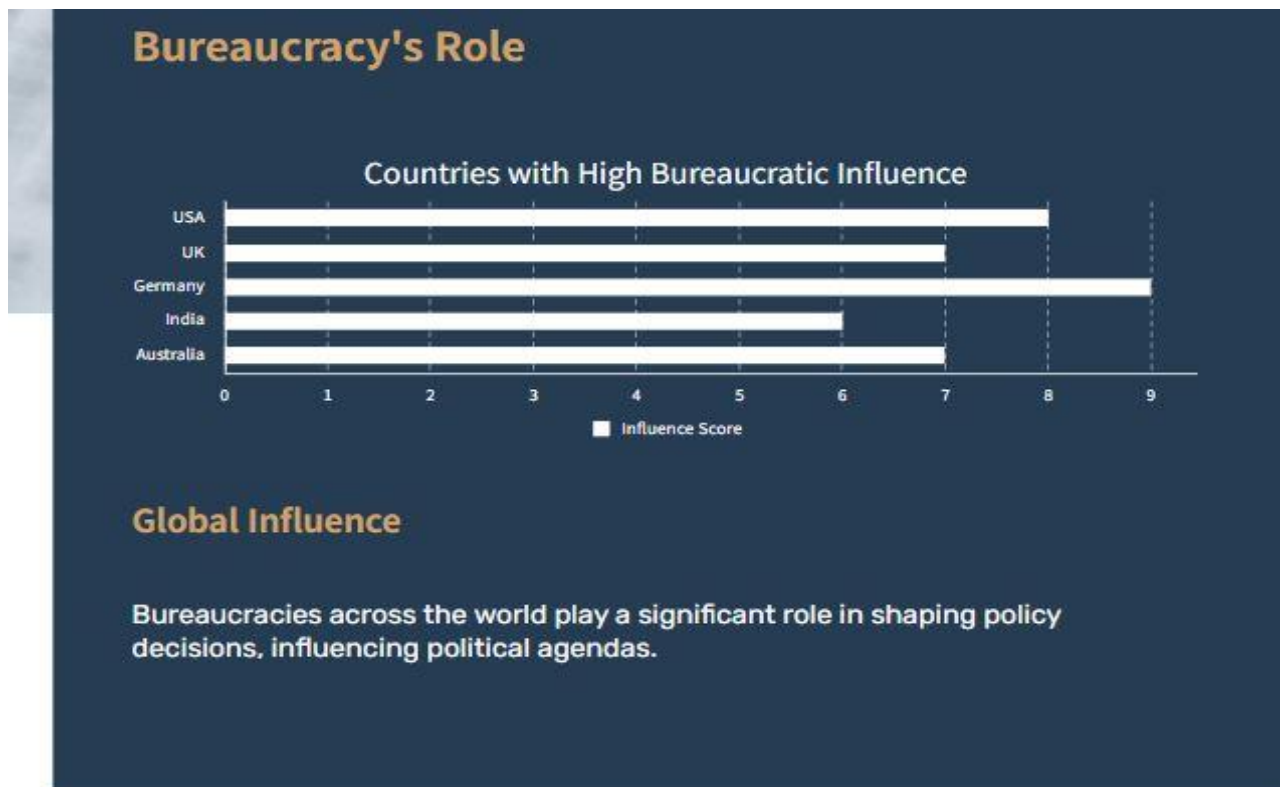
An examination of empirical research about the impact of bureaucratic knowledge on political decision-making and its contribution to the comprehension of their function in political government. In this regard, researchers review and synthesize findings from various studies across different countries, highlighting the critical role bureaucrats play in influencing political decisions through their expertise, institutional knowledge, and operational capacity. The studies span multiple regions and time periods, offering a comprehensive perspective on the interplay between bureaucracy and politics.

Table 1 and the accompanying figures in Informatics present an examination of empirical studies regarding the influence of bureaucratic information on political decisions and elucidate its significance in the context of political governance.

Major Findings	Period	Country	Author(s)
Politicians are affected by equivalence framing or negative labeling of information which activates negative associations (Equivalence framing ) effects result from seemingly uncontroversial changes in information and involvement orientations.	2019	USA	Baekgaard
Bureaucrats in India play a critical and multifaceted role in shaping political decisions, particularly in the context of globalization and evolving governance	2021	INDIA	Bidyut Chakrabarty .
Bureaucratic expertise underpin agencies' autonomy	2001	USA	Carpenter D.
Bureaucrats influence political decisions through information control.	2017	UK	Christophe r Hood
information needs to be relevant, not only in a political-tactical sense, but also for practical policy. Therefore, bureaucracy is allegedly uniquely positioned to deliver this type of information.	2021	DENMARK	Jens Blom-Hansen, Martin Bækgaard,
Bureaucrats in Rwanda play a pivotal role in shaping political decisions, particularly in the context of the country's ambitious development agenda and post-conflict reconstruction. He argues that while Rwanda's political leadership provides a clear vision and strategic direction, bureaucrats are instrumental in translating these visions into actionable policies and	2022	RWANDA	Jean-Paul Kimonyo
Bureaucrats influence political decisions through budgetary information	2020	AUSTRALIA	John Wanna
Information framed by bureaucrats has dramatic effects on the preferences of politicians.	2022	ISRAEL-EL-AMER-	Kahneman D.
While political leaders in Ethiopia often dominate the policymaking process, bureaucrats exert influence through their technical expertise, institutional	2022	ETHIOPIA	Meheret Ayenew
Bureaucrats, particularly those with specialized knowledge and experience, often act as key gatekeepers and influencers in the policymaking process.	2023	NIGERIAN	Oluwatobi Ayodele
Bureaucrats exert considerable influence through their expertise, institutional knowledge, and ability to navigate complex administrative systems	2021	GERMANY	Patrick Le Galès
Political leaders set the overarching policy direction, bureaucrats play a crucial role in shaping the implementation and outcomes of these policies through their expertise, institutional knowledge, and operational capacity.	2022	SOUTH AFRICA	Robert Cameron



**Informatics Figure 1: Analyzed from empirical literature of table one**



### Strategic Control

Bureaucrats possess expertise and control over information, allowing them to shape political decisions.

#### Informatics Figure 2: Analyzed from empirical literature of table one.

It is broadly recognized as it seen in the informatics figure, for policy information to serve as a conduit for political influence by bureaucrats, three processes must be operational: Mechanism one, Bureaucrats utilize policy knowledge to sway political decisions. Mechanism two, Politicians depend on policy information provided by bureaucrats when making political decisions.

Mechanism three, The presentation of policy information influences the preferences of politicians. In this regard, policy information has gained significant focus within the public

administration literature as a crucial component in the political decision-making process, and there exists a common apprehension in the literature that policy information confers significant authority to the permanent bureaucracy. Although these empirical studies explore the role of bureaucracy in problem definition and solving in general, our study focuses on Weber's concern about bureaucrats abusing their information advantage and addresses this exact question by prioritizing the provision of causal evidence.

The analytical part demonstrates that, Principal themes is bureaucrats utilize their technical competence and institutional knowledge to impact political decisions, frequently exercising a certain level of autonomy. In this regard, bureaucrats influence political outcomes by regulating and structuring information, so affecting politicians' perceptions and responses to policy matters. Policy Implementation: Bureaucrats are essential in converting political visions into executable policies, guaranteeing successful execution. The impact of bureaucrats differs globally, influenced by local governance frameworks, political systems, and historical settings. Thus, the literature highlights the essential role of bureaucrats in influencing political decisions in many circumstances. Their proficiency, command of information, and operational capability render them pivotal participants in policy formulation and execution. Comprehending their impact is essential for examining the dynamics of governance and policy results worldwide.

#### **4. Methodology**

The empirical assessment of the three mechanisms encounters methodological challenges, specifically social desirability bias and heterogeneity issues. It is essential for both politicians and bureaucrats to address these issues. We employ experimental methods across five distinct political systems. Social desirability bias arises from the involvement of mechanisms that can be classified as illegitimate behavior. Interviews or survey responses from bureaucrats and politicians are likely to exhibit underreporting. This challenge is addressed through two methods: list experiments and decision board experiments. This study examines the initial mechanism through the participation of a group of bureaucrats in a list experiment. This experiment was designed to examine sensitive topics, allowing respondents to express potentially offensive opinions without concern for researcher identification (Glynn 2013).

This study examines the second mechanism by incorporating politicians into a decision board experiment, measuring their reliance on policy information relative to other information sources. Due to the low ecological validity associated with decision board experiments, this analysis is supplemented with survey responses regarding the perceived influence of and interaction with the bureaucracy. Endogeneity represents the second methodological challenge. It is essential to establish the causal effects of how bureaucrats present information. This represents a critical component of our third mechanism. This study examines the impact of information framing on the preferences of politicians. To mitigate the risk of reverse causality, it is essential to generate exogenous variation in framing. Therefore, we utilize randomized survey experiments. Obtaining an adequately large sample

size for these experiments poses a challenge.

Collecting survey responses from elected politicians is notoriously challenging, resulting in prominent studies often relying on a limited number of respondents. A recent study comparing politicians and citizens utilized six samples, with the number of MPs  $18 \leq N < 113$  (Sheffer et al. 2018, 305). Aberbach et al. (1981) conducted a seminal cross-national study examining the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats, utilizing interviews with 44 regional MPs and 104 bureaucrats in a specific regional state (Aberbach et al. 1981, 26). The limited population sizes in these studies primarily arise from their emphasis on elected officials at the national level.

Therefore, the study concentrates on local government, where the population of elected officials in each regional state of the country is in the thousands. The involvement of local politicians from the Oromia regional state yields a substantial pool of respondents who are actual elected officials. These individuals are accountable for significant decision-making affecting a considerable population and are likely to depend on information from their respective administrative structures during the decision-making process and monitoring the implementation of policies.

The survey data were collected in late 2024 and 2025 through email-based questionnaires. A total of 345 responses were received from the Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Addis Ababa officials in higher departments, representing 55% of the overall total. In East Bale, there were 150 responses from local politicians, representing 27 % of the total. West Shewa contributed 135 responses, accounting for 23% of the total. And received 345 responses, constituting 8% of the total. The respondents were explicitly informed that the scenarios presented were fictitious, adhering to ethical standards. A debriefing and a report outlining the primary findings were also provided to them.

## **5. Discussion**

Do bureaucrats make use of policy information to impact political decisions? The initial mechanism examines the conduct of bureaucrats tasked with advising politicians. Inquiring about bureaucrats' readiness to utilize policy information for influencing political decisions may be significantly affected by social desirability bias and non-response, given the sensitive nature of the inquiry. Our study employs a list experiment with random assignment to treatment and control groups, as outlined by Blair and Imai (2012), to address these concerns. In the list experiment, respondents receive a series of statements.

Subsequently, participants are requested to indicate the total number of items they concur with, without specifying the particular items. This procedure ensures that respondents' confidentiality is maintained, as it is impossible to determine their specific agreements or disagreements with the items presented. Participants in the control condition are exposed to items that exhibit lower sensitivity. Participants in the intervention The researcher provides

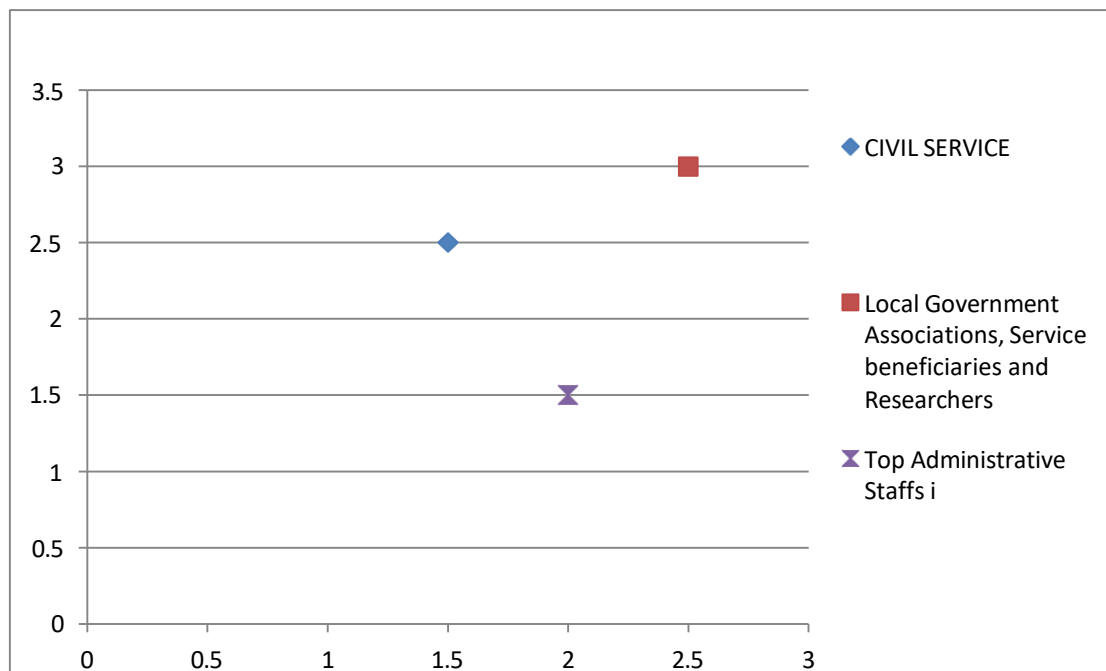


the identical list to the treatment group, supplemented by an additional item of interest. Comparing the number of affirmative responses between treatment and control groups provides an estimate of the average agreement regarding the sensitive item of interest. The control group of bureaucrats (N=74) received a list of items pertinent to case preparation along with written information intended for politicians

Additionally, we utilize two treatment groups: One included control items and an additional item regarding the influence of expectations about political decisions on the information emphasized by bureaucrats during preparation (N=73). In the alternative treatment condition, the control items were also incorporated. A controversial assertion posits that bureaucrats curate information to assist politicians in identifying their preferred solutions (N = 74).

Figure 1 reveals a comparable scenario. The local bureaucracy box ranks among the initial three boxes consulted across three zones of the region, though not necessarily as the highest priority, gaining emphasis Overall, while only a subset of the differences is statistically significant and feedback from service users and employees is gathered with similar frequency and speed as that from the bureaucracy, the average results from the decision board experiment lend support to the assertion that the bureaucracy serves as a crucial source of information.

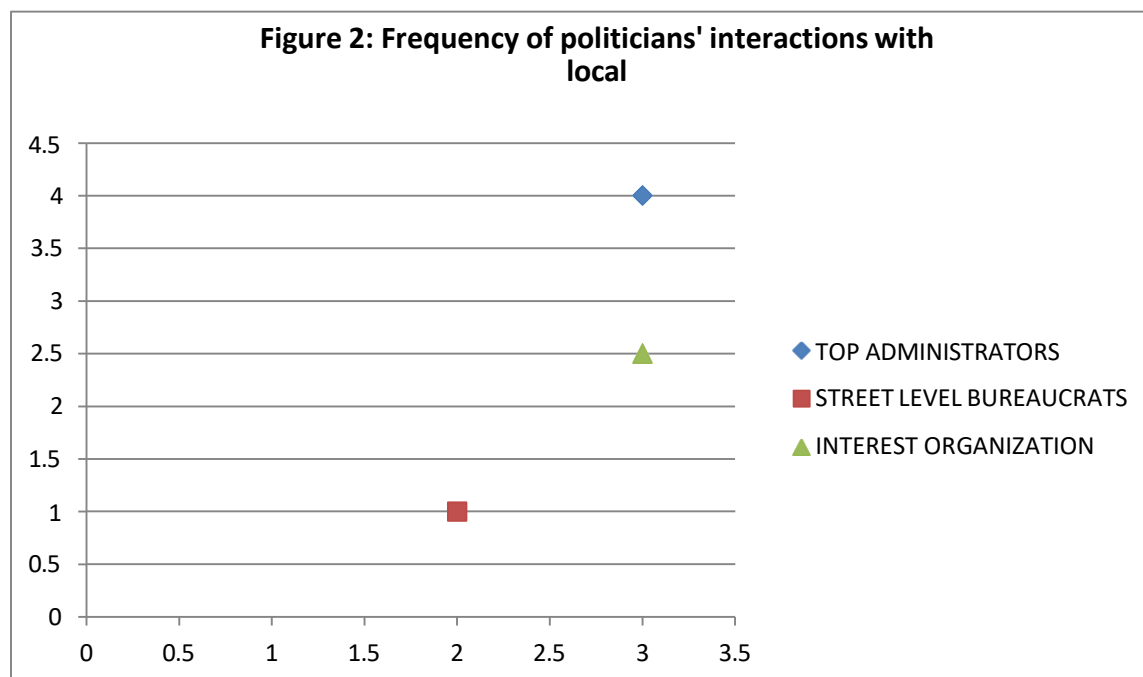
**Figure 1: Depict ranges between street level bureaucrats and higher officials accesabilty**



Figures 2 utilize observational data from surveys of politicians to examine the extent to which they depend on information from bureaucrats in their political decision-making processes. Figure 2 illustrates the degree of contact politicians have with the local bureaucracy in comparison to other actors. Responses indicate that 37% of individuals in

BALE and 74% in WEST SHEWA maintain contact with local administrative staff at least biweekly. This ratio positions the local bureaucracy as one of the two most frequently engaged entities, only marginally exceeded by the respondents' own political parties.

In this regard it illustrates the degree to which local bureaucracy is regarded as a significant source of information relative to other sources. The local bureaucracy emerges as a critical source across all countries, with its significance comparable to that of relevant ministries, local government associations, and research institutions in Bale and West Shewa.



Responses to the inquiry, “How frequently do you communicate with the following individuals?” Response categories: daily; 2-4 times per week; weekly; 1-3 times per month; infrequently/never. The illustration represents the proportion of respondents who report daily contact or contact 2-4 times per week. Which is 95% is confidence intervals.

Overall, our findings across the statistics indicate that local bureaucracy serves as a significant source of information, but likely to a lesser extent in Bale compared to the Special Zones surrounding Addis Ababa and West Shewa. This supports the secondary mechanism: In which Politicians depend on policy data from bureaucrats to guide their political decisions.

## 6. Conclusion

The literature on bureaucracy suggests many ways in which bureaucratic competence may impact political decisions. This study examined the significance of policy information, namely data from the bureaucracy that underpins political choice and its correlation with the

local communities. This is but one of several methods by which bureaucratic competence is associated with politics, however it has been emphasized in various studies of political-bureaucratic relations.

Thus the study addresses the methodological challenges inherent in designing a causal study of these mechanisms and presents the execution of such a study. Challenges encompass identifying necessary mechanisms for bureaucrats to utilize policy information in altering political preferences and subsequently implementing these mechanisms. Additionally, we identified three mechanisms that are essential for functionality. We discussed social desirability and endogeneity as critical methodological issues, proposing experiments as the optimal approach to demonstrate the functionality of the three mechanisms. This methodology enables an empirical examination of the functionality of the three mechanisms. Consequently, the inquiry emerges regarding the capacity of bureaucrats to affect political decisions via information dissemination.

Our experimental analyses provided substantial support for each of the mechanisms. A list experiment conducted with higher civil servants in the special zones around Addis Ababa demonstrated that bureaucrats are inclined to utilize policy information to affect political decisions. Secondly, an experiment with a decision board comprising local politicians from Bale and West Shewa indicated that they regard policy information from the bureaucracy as one of the most significant sources when making political decisions. Survey data from politicians regarding the perceived influence of various actors further substantiates this interpretation. Third, survey experiments involving the same politicians indicated that their preferences are susceptible to manipulation through straightforward methods, including equivalence and issue framing techniques.

We have also established an empirical causal chain linking policy information from the bureaucracy to political preferences. Our findings contribute to the ongoing discourse regarding the mechanisms by which politicians exert control over the permanent bureaucracy. Bureaucratic power, as recognized by Weber, represents both a strength and a weakness within modern bureaucracy. Bureaucratic expertise is essential for effective governance; however, it may also pose challenges to democratic processes.

Moreover, the findings underscore the crucial function of local bureaucracy as a primary source of information and interaction for communities in Bale and West Shewa. In Bale, 37% of residents and in West Shewa, 74% maintain contact with local administrative personnel at least fortnightly, indicating that local bureaucrats are among the most frequently involved institutions, surpassed only by political parties. This highlights the significant confidence and dependence that community people have on local administrators.

The importance of local bureaucracy is further underscored by its comparison to other vital sources of information, including pertinent ministries, local government groups, and

research institutes. This illustrates that local bureaucrats serve not just as administrative agents but also as essential intermediates connecting communities with higher levels of administration. Their regular involvement demonstrates their capacity to meet local demands, provide information, and promote effective communication between individuals and governmental entities.

In conclusion, local bureaucracies are essential for promoting openness, accountability, and responsiveness in government. Their ongoing involvement with communities establishes them as a fundamental element of local development and an essential connection in the framework of efficient public service delivery. Policymakers and development practitioners must acknowledge and enhance the capabilities of local bureaucrats to maintain their efficacy in addressing community demands.

## Reference

- Aberbach, J. D., Putnam, R. D., & Rockman, B. A. (1981). "Bureaucrats and politicians in Western democracies." Harvard University Press.
- Aberbach, J. D., & Rockman, B. A. (2006). "The past and future of political-administrative relations" *International Journal of Public Administration*, 29\*(12), 977–995. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900690600854716>
- Allison, G. T. (1971). "Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis." HarperCollins.
- Ayenew, M. (2022). "Bureaucrats exert influence through their technical expertise, institutional knowledge, and role in policy implementation: Ethiopia" *Ethiopian Journal of Development Research*, 44 (2), 89–104.
- Baekgaard, M. (2019). "Politicians are affected by equivalence framing or negative labeling of information which activates negative associations" *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration*, 2\*(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.30636/jbpa.22.42>
- Baekgaard, M., Bellé, N., Serritzlew, S., Sicilia, M., & Steccolini, I. (2019). "Performance information in politics: How framing, format, and rhetoric matter to politicians' preferences." *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration*, 2\*(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.30636/jbpa.22.42>
- Baekgaard, M., Blom-Hansen, J., & Serritzlew, S. (2015). "When politics matters: The impact of politicians' and bureaucrats' policy preferences on salient and non-salient policy areas. *Governance*, 28(4), 459–474." <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12123>
- Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (2015). "The politics of information: Problem definition and the course of public policy in America." University of Chicago Press.
- Bellé, N., Belardinelli, P., & Cantarelli, P. (2018). "Prospect theory goes public: Experimental evidence on cognitive biases in public policy and management decisions." *Public Administration Review*, 78\*(6), 828–840 <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12960>
- Blair, G., & Imai, K. (2012). "Statistical analysis of list experiments" *Political Analysis*, 20 (1), 47–77. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpr048>
- Carpenter, D. P. (2001). "The forging of bureaucratic autonomy." Princeton University

Press.

- Carpenter, D. P. (2001). "The forging of bureaucratic autonomy: Reputations, networks, and policy innovation in executive agencies: 1862–1928." Princeton University Press.
- Hood, C. (2017). "Bureaucrats influence political decisions through information control." *Public Administration Review*, 77(4), 567–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12789>
- Kahneman, D. (2022). "Information framed by bureaucrats has dramatic effects on the preferences of politicians." *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 35(2), 123–135. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.2250>
- Niskanen, W. A. (1971) "Bureaucracy and representative government." Chicago, IL: Aldine- Atherton.
- Olsen, A. L. (2015). "Citizen (dis)satisfaction: An experimental equivalence framing study". *Public Administration Review*, 75(3), 469–478. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12347>
- Olsen, J. P. (2005). "Maybe it is time to rediscover bureaucracy" .*Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 16(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mui027>
- Page, E. C., & Jenkins, B. (2005) "Policy bureaucracy: Government with a cast of thousands." Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quattrone, G. A., & Tversky, A. (1988). " Contrasting rational and psychological analyses of political choice." *American Political Science Review*, 82 (3), 719–736. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1962491>
- Rhodes, R. A. W. (2011). "Everyday life in British government." Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rhodes, R. A. W., 't Hart, P., & Noordegraaf, M. (Eds.). (2007). "Observing government elites: Up close and personal." Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Wanna, J. (2020). "Bureaucrats influence political decisions through budgetary information. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 79(3), 321–335." <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467- 8500.12445>
- Weber, M. (1970) and H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (Eds.), "From Max Weber: Essays in sociology" (pp. 196–244). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1922)
- Willemsen, M. C., & Johnson, E. J. (n.d.). "MouselabWEB: Monitoring information acquisition processes on the web." Accessed June 19, 2017. <http://www.mouselabweb.org>
- Wilson, J. Q. (1989). "Bureaucracy: What government agencies do and why they do it." New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Workman, S. (2015). "The dynamics of bureaucracy in the U.S. government: How Congress and federal agencies process information and solve problems." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.