

8 Bureaucrats, Policy Attitudes, and Political Behaviour: A Reappraisal

JAMES C. GARAND AND PING XU

The size of the public sector in democratic political systems has long drawn the attention of both scholars and political observers. While a wide range of theoretical arguments have been considered in explaining variation in the size of government, most explanations can be grouped into two broad categories (Lowery and Berry 1983). On one hand there are the *responsive government* explanations, which suggest that the size of the public sector is best explained by the preferences for government goods and services in the mass public. Here government size is seen as a reflection of the level of government activity (and the associated costs of that level of activity) that is preferred by some aggregation of mass preferences, often as represented in the preferences of the median voter. On the other hand, the *excessive government* explanations suggest that the growth in the size of the public sector is a function of actions by government officials to expand the size of government beyond what the mass public would prefer. Scholarly advocates of excessive government explanations paint a less benevolent view of the public sector, suggesting that government officials use a combination of political power, deception, or obfuscation to secure greater support for government programs than would normally be supported by voters.

Public-sector employees play a major role in some of the excessive government theories.¹ For instance, Niskanen (1971) proposes what has been termed the *bureau information monopoly* theory, in which he contends that government bureaucrats are motivated by self-interest to seek larger budgets for their government agencies. According to Niskanen, public-sector employees use their near-monopoly over policy-relevant information to press political decision-makers for larger budgets. In Niskanen's formulation, most of the influence exerted by