

Does bureaucratization promote government performance? Previous research, pioneered by Max Weber, hypothesizes that bureaucracy is a public, impersonal organization that makes the government functions in rule-enforcement and tax collection stronger than the patrimonial office typically held as a personal possession. In this paper, I argue that bureaucratization does not always improve political performance by drawing on early-modern France. Beginning in the 1640s, France introduced the institution of intendancy, in which royally-commissioned officials were dispatched to many provinces as governors to oversee local administration and revenue-raising. In the historiography, intendancy plays a crucial role in accelerating bureaucratization. The position, for instance, was defined by functions as opposed to individuals, had a time limit in each place of assignment, and opened a path to more senior positions in Paris. I test whether intendancy functioned as bureaucracy by using a new panel dataset of over 430 individuals who received the commission for the entire duration from 1640 to 1789. Based on highly-detailed data on attributes such as date of birth, date of death, and the duration and place of appointment, I show how young and under-trained these officials were when appointed as governors and how they created local attachments through marriage. My findings imply for the difficulty of establishing modern bureaucracy in pre-modern times by reducing political patronage.