P233 / Ministerial politics: The causes and effects of administrative capacities and preferences

Topic : Bureaucracy, Administration and Policy Process

Chair : Jon Valgermo (University of Oslo)

Second Chair : Jens Jungblut (University of Oslo)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Governments rely on ministries to draft public policies, and while bureaucracies are expected to be loyal to their political leadership, they continue to have discretion over parts of the policy-making process. This is due to bureaucrats' informational advantage vis-à-vis politicians stemming from their day-to-day work and specific expertise. Recent studies (see e.g. Garritzmann and Siderius, 2025) have highlighted that ministries give differing policy suggestions and emphasize different issues when tasked with drafting policies. Such differences matter due to their impact on policy output and in turn policy outcomes, such as redistributive profiles of policies or countries' carbon emissions (Limberg et al., 2024; Siderius, 2026; Tosun, 2018).

However, the preferences of ministries do not appear in a vacuum but can be manipulated by cabinet through portfolio reform or instructions to the bureaucracy in accordance with their own policy goals (Hernes, 2019). While ministerial traits and capacity shape policy outcomes, the way in which they do so are themselves the result of political preferences (see e.g. Fleischer et al., 2023). The purpose of this panel is to tackle this puzzle and explore how the interconnected dynamics of political and administrative preferences shape policy outputs. To do so, the panel seeks to answer:

How does political interference into the structure and capacity of ministries alter how ministerial preferences influence public policies?

The politics of bureaucracy serves as a fitting theoretical basis of the panel as it provides important insights into the political influence of bureaucratic organizations. It highlights how organizations and individuals within them have ideas about policy, but also how organizational structures hinder or help coordination (Peters, 2019, p. 471). Importantly, the politics of bureaucracy framework allows research to account for the relation between bureaucratic organizations and political preferences, as it highlights ministries' reliance on support from politicians. The framework can thus seamlessly be supplemented by recent insights into the politics of government re-organization and strategies to control ministries, such as appointing junior ministers or cutting funding to ministries (Askim et al., 2017; Dahlström and Holmgren, 2023; Fleischer et al., 2023; Kuipers et a., 2021). Combining insights from these research traditions is also an appropriate way to account for alternative hypotheses of policy influence as it may highlight circumstances where political control trumps administrative influence, as well as which policy processes are distanced from political interference.

The panel brings together scholars who investigate the influence of ministries on policy-making while acknowledging the relevance of their overarching political environment. It invites papers that explore how policy outputs or outcomes change due to ministerial restructuring. Additionally, papers that explore the consequences of shifts in bill assignments or the coupling of issues within ministries are welcome. Moreover, papers that investigate less drastic forms of political interferences into the ministerial bureaucracy, such as how the policy leeway of bureaucrats depends on the preference and profile of junior ministers, would also fit well into the panel. Finally, papers that explore how politicians adapt to different policy advice by e.g. strategically allocating ministerial responsibility are also particularly encouraged.

References

Askim, J., Karlsen, R. and Kolltveit, K. (2017) Political appointees in executive government: Exploring and explaining roles using a large-N survey in Norway. Public administration, 95(2), p. 342-358. doi: 10.1111/padm.12272

Dahlström, C. and Holmgren, M. (2023) Loyal Leaders, Affluent Agencies: The Budgetary Implications of Political Appointments in the Executive Branch. The Journal of politics, 85(2), 640-653. doi: 10.1086/717756

Hernes, V. (2021) Policy preferences and ministerial structures: Immigrant integration governance in Western Europe, 1997-2017. Governance, 34(1), p. 127-146. doi: 10.1111/gove.12481

Kuipers, S., Yesilkagit, K. and Carroll, B. (2021) Ministerial influence on the machinery of government: insights on the inside. West European politics, 44(4), p. 897-920. doi: 10.1080/01402382.2020.1768737

Limberg, J., Steinebach, Y and Nyrup, J. (2024) Dedicated climate ministries help to reduce carbon emissions. Climate Action, 3(1), p. 70-78. doi: 10.1038/s44168-024-00147-9

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Peters, B.G. (2019) The Politics of Bureaucracy after 40 years. British journal of politics & international affairs, 21(3), p. 468-479. doi: 10.1177/1369148119866220

Siderius, K. (2026) Who benefits from public sustainable finance in the EU? Journal of European public policy, 33(6), p. 1654-1679. doi: 10.1080/13501763.2025.2452276

Tosun, J. (2018) Investigating Ministry Names for Comparative Policy Analysis: Lessons from Energy Governance. Journal of comparative policy analysis, 20(3), p. 324-335. doi: 10.1080/13876988.2018.1467430

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