

T05P05 / Into the Light: Political Advisers in Contemporary and Comparative Perspective

Topic : T05 / Policy Formulation, Administration and Policymakers

Chair : Richard Shaw (Massey University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

There was a time when they stood in the shadows of executive government but political advisers – variously known as special advisers, ministerial advisers or exempt staff – have long since stepped (or been dragged) into the light.

The scholarship on political advisers has also emerged into the light. Early contributions typically concerned arrangements in Westminster contexts; they also tended to comprise empirical descriptions of specific country cases, and/or to zero in on the issues of accountability raised by various *causes célèbres*.

A second wave of scholarly work on political advisers has since arrived, characterised by empirical studies from beyond Westminster, and deeper theoretical engagement with the core issues in the field and with proximate literatures. At least some of the roots of this new generation scholarship lie in ICPP 1 (Grenoble) and ICPP 2 (Milan). Clearly, impetus has also come from other sources, but both conferences featured panels bringing together researchers from Westminster and continental European jurisdictions and have generated – including through special editions of journals and a forthcoming comparative volume – considerable momentum behind the second wave literature.

In that context the core **objectives** of the panel we are proposing for ICPP 3 are to:

(1) Assess the empirical and theoretical progress made since ICPP 2. We wish to evaluate the extent to which the broad aims of (i) enriching the empirical palette; (ii) deepening the theoretical bases of the literature on political advisers; and (iii) building connections with proximate policy theories (e.g. policy advisory activity, the construction and management of policy agendas, and implementation studies) are being advanced.

(2) Chart the next phase of the research agenda. Without wishing to foreclose on other avenues, our sense is that the scholarly trajectory could usefully include (iv) empirical work from countries – including from Asia – that are not yet represented with regularity in the published record; (v) richer theoretical elaboration of political advisers in situ (drawing on literatures such as historical institutionalism, core executive studies, public service bargains, etc.); (vi) theory building in the wider public administration/public policy oeuvre drawing on the work of those researching political advisers; and (vii) comparative analyses which build on and extend country case-studies.

The **scientific relevance** of the panel includes deepening understanding of a significant and consequential element of the landscape of contemporary government and governance; contributing to theory-building (both within the specific field of policy advisers and in the wider literatures); furthering the impetus for comparative research; and fostering the epistemic community that is coalescing around the study of political advisers.

CALL FOR PAPERS

There was a time when they stood in the shadows of executive government but political advisers – variously known as special advisers, ministerial advisers or exempt staff – have long since emerged (or been dragged) into the light.

The scholarship on political advisers has also, in its own way, emerged into the light. Early contributions typically concerned arrangements in members of the Westminster community of nations (particularly Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand); they also tended to comprise empirical descriptions of specific country cases, and/or to zero in on the issues of accountability raised by various *causes célèbres*.

A 'second wave' of scholarly work on political advisers has since emerged, characterised by empirical studies from well beyond Westminster, and deeper theoretical engagement both with the core issues in the field and with proximate literatures. In that context the core objectives of this panel are to assess the empirical and theoretical progress of the second wave of scholarship on advisers, and to chart the next phase of the research agenda.

To those broad ends we invite papers that:

- enhance empirical understandings of political advisers in situ – especially from scholars working in non-European or Anglo-Westminster jurisdictions;
- establish or deepen connections with proximate policy theories (e.g. those concerning policy advisory activity, the construction and management of policy agendas, implementation studies, etc.);
- bring insights from proximate literatures (e.g. historical institutionalism, core executive studies, public service bargains, etc.) to bear in theorising political advisers' roles and work, including in the interplay between different actors – administrative, political, and non-governmental – in the context of the core executive and/or the policy process;
- draw on the empirical study of political advisers to reappraise or refine either extant policy theories (e.g. policy learning, policy failure, etc.) and/or theoretical understandings of significant issues within the wider public administration/public policy fields (e.g. accountability and politicisation);
- advance the comparative analysis of political advisers (including via papers which establish frameworks for such analyses).

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Session 1

Friday, June 30th 10:30 to 12:30 (Manasseh Meyer MM 3 - 4)

The collaboration of civil servants with political advisers. What are the characteristics of in-house advice suppliers in Belgium?

David Aubin (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Marleen Brans (KU Leuven Public Governance Institute)

Gouglas Athanassios (University of Exeter)

Lev Lhommeau (Université catholique de Louvain)

The second wave of studies on political advisers defends a larger view of policy advisory systems where political advisers rely on a multitude of knowledge and advice providers. Policy advisory systems are understood as “the interlocking set of actors and organizations, with a unique configuration in each sector and jurisdiction, that provides recommendations for action to policy-makers (Craft and Wilder 2015). Even if governance reforms enlarged the advisory system to a multitude of participants, mainly external (e.g. consultants, scientists, NGOs, or think tanks), public officials working within government remain major providers of political advice. A significant part of their policy work consists in providing policy notes and more or less processed information to the ministerial cabinet members. This communications aims at identifying the characteristics of the public officials who are the most intensively involved in advice provision to political advisers. It relies on a survey conducted in Belgium in both the federal and regional government on in-house policy work by graduated public officials (N=3,481). This survey is in many points similar with previous enquiries conducted in e.g. Canada and the Czech Republic (Howlett et al. 2014; Vesely 2016; Nekola and Kohoutek 2016). An index of advice giving to political advisers is first built to assess the contribution of individual respondents to the request and needs of ministerial cabinet members on the basis of the kind of policy tasks conducted and the contribution to policy documents. Then a linear multiple regression is used to identify the characteristics of the civil servants who are the most involved in supply of advice to political advisers. Among these characteristics, the assessment will show the profile of these civil servants, their initial and professional training, their analytical skills, the kind of information they use, the persons they consult, and the policy analytical capacity of their unit. Empirically, this communication deepens the analysis of a Napoleonic system of politico-administrative relations, and theoretically it relates the literature on political advice with policy work and policy analytical capacity.

References

Craft, J., and M. Wilder (2015). “Catching a second wave: Context and compatibility in advisory system dynamics”. *Policy Studies Journal*, in preview.

Howlett, M., S. L. Tan, A. Migone, A. Wellstead and B. Evans (2014). “The distribution of analytical techniques in policy advisory systems: Policy formulation and the tools of policy appraisal”. *Public Policy and Administration* 29: 271-291.

Vesely, A. (2016). “Policy advice as policy work: A conceptual framework for multi-level analysis”. *Policy Sciences*, online first.

Nekola, M., and J. Kohoutek (2016). “Policy work at the sub-national level: Analytical styles of Canadian and Czech directors and managers”. *Canadian Public Administration* 59: 289-309.

Who's serving whom? Public service bargains between ministers, minders and mandarins

Richard Shaw (Massey University)

Chris Eichbaum (Victoria University of Wellington, NZ)

Talk of a ‘second wave’ of scholarly work on political advisers has recently emerged, presaging a research

agenda characterised by empirical studies from the span of administrative traditions, a deeper theoretical engagement with both the core issues in the field (politicisation, advisers' policy work and roles, etc.) and with proximate literatures, and by deeper and wider comparative research.

In that context, we have set ourselves two objectives in this paper. First, drawing on Hood and Lodge's seminal work on Public Service Bargains (PSB) we seek a richer theoretical elaboration of the relationships that inhere between ministers, political advisers and civil servants. Second, we test the utility of this model using empirical materials from the New Zealand context, and on that basis offer some preliminary comments regarding the capacity of the PSB heuristic to fully illuminate interactions between the three parties to the contemporary core executive.

Experienced counsellors or adolescent claqueurs? Exploring the professional backgrounds of Australian ministerial staff

Maria Maley (Australian National University)

Australian federal ministers have large, politicised and powerful ministerial offices. Yet the advisers who work in these offices are also largely anonymous; their names have not been published in public documents since 2002. The secrecy about their identities breeds a curiosity and a concern about what skills and experiences they bring to the job. Drawing on a dataset of ministerial staff working for the conservative Coalition government headed by Prime Minister Tony Abbott in 2014, the paper explores the professional backgrounds and career paths of a cohort of contemporary Australian political staff. It considers whether it is true that many politicians, as Allan Behm recently lamented, 'surround themselves with adolescent claqueurs rather than experienced counsellors'. (A claqueur is a professional applauder).

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Session 2

Friday, June 30th 13:45 to 15:45 (Manasseh Meyer MM 3 - 4)

The cabinetisation of the minister's court in Australia and Canada. What is it and why is it happening?

Gouglas Athanassios (University of Exeter)

By Athanassios Gouglas and Marleen Brans

It has been recently argued that 'we may be observing a process of cabinetisation in non-ministerial cabinet systems, which started in the 1980s and continues till today' (Gouglas, Brans, Jaspers 2015, p.1). Gouglas and Brans (2016) defined 'cabinetisation' as 'a process by which that part of the 'internal to government' policy advisory system (as defined by Halligan 1995), which comprises ministerial offices, evolves towards or fully develops into a ministerial cabinet system'. The above claim requires further investigation. The concept of cabinetisation remains theoretically undeveloped and empirically untested. Moreover, there is no theory as to why such a phenomenon is happening or not? In view of this, the present paper has a threefold aim. First, to theoretically develop the concept of cabinetisation. Second, to provide empirical evidence of systems where the phenomenon is actually happening. Third, to speculate on explanations as to why this is the case? The present research is designed as a small N internationally comparative study, employing a most similar system, different output design (MSMDO). Our cases are three countries in the Westminster tradition with different cabinetisation records: Australia, Canada, and the UK. We show that for cabinetisation to evolve three conditions need to be at play. First, a critical juncture in the form of a critical or watershed election that leads to a new government majority. Second, a need for political control over the public administration. Third, a need for more political responsiveness and policy capacity on behalf of the administration. While the third is a necessary condition, the first and second are sufficient ones for cabinetization to evolve.

Cohabiting the executive summit: Ministerial advisers and Top civil servants in The Netherlands

Caspar VAN DEN BERG (Leiden University)

This paper focusses on the working relationship between ministerial advisers and top civil servants in The Netherlands. Drawing on the recent theoretical and empirical results of scholarship in the field of ministerial advisers (Eichbaum and Shaw, Connaughton, Gouglas, Maley, Hustedt, Salomonsen, Craft), the paper contributes to the so-called second wave of research into the role of ministerial advisers, more specifically into the question how they formally and informally relate to the most senior members of the permanent civil service staff. Empirically, the study is based on document analysis and recently gathered primary survey data among Dutch ministerial advisers who served between 1994 and 2016. Survey questions that will be analyzed in this paper in particular are how much ministerial advisers work(ed) together with top civil service as a team; how much trust there is/was between ministerial advisers and top civil servants; how cooperative or antagonistic their working relationship is/was; how distinct ministerial advisers' contribution in the policy process is/ was from that of the permanent top civil servants; and how ministerial advisers perceive(d) their hierarchical position vis-à-vis top civil servants. Variation in this working relationship will be explored and if possible explained by variation across policy sector, political party, time, experience on the job, and prior professional background. Thus, the paper sheds new light on the question of political-administrative cohabitation of the summit of the executive in a parliamentary system.

Developing an Accountability Framework: Political Advisers in the Westminster System of Governance

Yee-Fui Ng (RMIT University)

This paper adopts a comparative approach in analysing the legal and political regulation of political advisers in the Westminster jurisdictions of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

In particular, the following aspects are considered for each country:

- legal and political framework regulating political advisers;
- tensions within the Westminster system, e.g. interaction with the bureaucracy or party factionalism leading to political advisers sabotaging their minister; and
- significant controversies and scandals.

The situations in each jurisdiction are compared and contrasted to discern common themes or systemic issues that emerge.

This paper will develop an accountability framework for regulating political advisers. It is argued that the traditional Westminster vertical accountability mechanism of ministerial responsibility to Parliament has become less effective in contemporary times. The multi-faceted nature of a Minister's role, combined with a 24 hour news cycle, mean that horizontal accountability mechanisms, such as the Ombudsman, Auditor-General and the media, have become increasingly important.