

1. Introduction: ministers, minders and mandarins

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INTRODUCTION

On 13 April 2016 Liberal Party MP David Speirs launched a stinging attack on Australia's political adviser class from his seat in the South Australian state parliament, describing them as a lazy, overweight and arrogant species, spawned from a reduced gene pool and badly in need of culling back. Even by the usual criticisms of political advisers, the standard for which (at least in Australia) was set by Weller's reference to the 'junk yard attack dogs of the political system' (2002, p. 72), this was an impressive slew of invective.

Speirs may be little known outside of South Australia but he is far from alone in holding intemperate views on ministers' partisan staff. Advisers who are appointed to inject a partisan dimension into policy and political processes are now an established feature of executive government in parliamentary democracies and have attracted their fair share of negative attention. But over time some of the more fanciful claims made about and accusations levelled at this third element in the executive branch have been tempered by scholarship – including by the contributors to this book – demonstrating that there is rather more to the matter than crude accusations of tawdry behaviour. That is not to deny that there are legitimate public-interest concerns regarding the conduct and regulation of ministerial advisers, nor that some advisers in a number of jurisdictions have engaged in egregious actions: it behoves us all, however, to approach these issues as empirical as much as normative phenomena.

Some years ago we edited a comparative volume on the place of ministerial advisers in executive government (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010). That collection had two main objectives: to consolidate the emerging empirical record in countries in the Anglo-American administrative tradition and to extend the scholarly debate from an overriding concern

with accountability issues to a broader consideration of advisers' contributions to the policy process.

Since then the literature on ministerial advisers has evolved in several respects. For one thing, there is a need to bring into closer orbit the work being done in Anglo-American contexts – and especially in the Westminster community of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK) – and the scholarship grounded in the parliamentary democracies of continental Europe. In each there is an established oeuvre but the traffic across the borders – less so amongst the Napoleonic, Germanic and Scandinavian traditions perhaps, but certainly between those groups and Westminster – has been fairly light. Remedying that situation is a major aim of this publication.

A second feature has been a more explicitly theoretical turn in the field in recent times. New empirical contributions continue to be offered, but they are increasingly complemented by attempts to theorize material particulars drawing on the broader public administration, public policy and political science canons.

These trajectories call for a second publication on advisers, one which differs to our first in that it is motivated by the desires to profile scholarship from a wider range of parliamentary democracies and to more explicitly theorize empirical circumstances. The remainder of this chapter expands on these motives and explains the structure of the book. First, we define the core unit of analysis, the ministerial adviser, and provide a capsule history of the initial burst of research on this political actor in Westminster contexts. We then make the case for what we have previously called a 'second wave' of research on advisers (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015, p. 1), the defining elements of which underpin the case for this volume, at which point we incorporate the scholarship from continental Europe. Finally, we provide an overview of the book's chapters.

DEFINING THE TERRAIN

The chapters that follow make clear that there is considerable cross-jurisdictional variety in the roles political advisers play, the institutional environments in which these roles are located and the bases of advisers' relations with political and administrative actors in and beyond the core executive. Unsurprisingly, then, the quest for an inclusive, meaningful definition of the core unit of analysis remains ongoing. While we leave it to our contributors to determine their own position on the matter of nomenclature, our preference, both in this and the concluding chapter, is

for ‘ministerial adviser’. We are mindful that – as both Maria Maley and Jonathan Craft note in their respective chapters – there is a case for a functional definition of the role rather than one tied to institutional location; for a designation capable of accommodating the reality that political counsel is also provided by advisers who are not located in the core political executive. However, for us the adjective ‘ministerial’ speaks to the defining feature of the type of adviser with which this book is chiefly concerned: those who operate in close proximity to executive ministers at the confluence of the political and administrative tides.

Nonetheless, establishing who counts as a ministerial adviser is an inexact science, calling to mind Cunningham’s observation that ‘policy is rather like the elephant: you recognise it when you see it but cannot easily define it’ (1963, p. 229; cited in Hill 1997, p. 6). Attempts to delineate the function typically rest on the basis of appointment (political rather than technical/expert), location of the role (at the interface between politics and administration but firmly within the political executive), basis of tenure (temporary and at the minister’s discretion) and exemption from any impartiality (but not ethical, honesty or integrity) requirements that may apply to permanent officials.

And yet, as will become clear in the chapters that follow, there are jurisdictional exceptions to each of these that muddy the definitional waters.¹ Nonetheless, for present purposes we need to settle on a sufficiently accommodating conception of the ministerial adviser. For us, then, a ministerial adviser is a temporary public servant appointed to provide partisan advice to a member of the political executive and who is exempt from the political impartiality requirements that apply to the standing bureaucracy.

While we accept that this definition is open to debate it serves our purposes here. Part of its appeal is that it contains both locational and functional dimensions. Apropos the former, while it seems trite to observe that ministerial advisers operate in close proximity to members of the political executive, closer attention to the question of location reveals a range of institutional habitats: Greece has its ministerial cabinets and Australia its ministers’ offices, but in Germany the partisan function is situated in leadership staff units in federal ministries. Moreover, in the case of the first two options (cabinets and offices) there is the matter of precisely where advisers are based. In Wellington and Canberra they are in dedicated executive buildings while in virtually all of the other countries surveyed here advisers are co-located with civil servants. As Maley points out in her chapter, both aspects of this locational question – institutional and physical – have implications for the manner

in which relationships between ministers, ministerial advisers and the permanent bureaucracy play out.

As to the second dimension of our definition, it is useful to pose the questions ‘Who does what?’ and ‘With what resources?’ This enables scholars to avoid the locationally determinist thinking to which core executive studies is a rejoinder (Elgie 2011). Moreover, it enables us to pursue more fluid analyses of the resource exchanges and inter-dependencies which are the *sine qua non* of the relationship between political principals and ministerial advisers.

SETTING THE STAGE: EARLY RESEARCH ON MINISTERIAL ADVISERS IN WESTMINSTER

Ministerial advisers are now ubiquitous in parliamentary democracies. However, while the partisan function has long been institutionalized in the ministerial cabinets of the Napoleonic tradition (Brans et al. 2017; Di Mascio and Natalani 2016), it is a relatively recent innovation in the Westminster community. To a degree, the scholarly imperative in the latter coincided with sundry causes célèbres: the 2001 Children Overboard affair in Australia, the Gomery Commission in Canada and, in the UK, the unfortunate events in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the political contamination of civil service advice in the lead up to the Iraq War. In these and other cases the public gaze was drawn to a new type of political actor whose behaviour was often portrayed as distasteful at best and reprehensible at worst. Such conduct – and highly charged contexts – framed the early agenda amongst researchers in Westminster contexts.

Unsurprisingly, then, a focus on accountability arrangements characterized much of the initial scholarship (Gay and Fawcett 2005; Tiernan 2007). A second feature of the first generation of research undertaken in Westminster conditions was forensic attention to the risks that ministerial advisers allegedly pose to civil servants (King 2003; Maley 2000a; Mountfield 2002). Ministerial advisers rattle bureaucratic cages. This case is perhaps best made by Walter (2006), who observes that the asymmetric advantage advisers enjoy over public servants by virtue of their institutional proximity to ministers can produce a ‘funnelling’ effect, politically tainting – if not contaminating – policy options as they make their way from a department to a minister’s desk. The casualties may include the quality and integrity of the policy process, the capacity of officials to furnish advice in a full, frank and fearless manner, and the impartiality of the public service.

Other aspects of ministerial advisers' roles also attracted researchers' attention. Advisers are often perceived as a challenge to the orthodox bilateral relationship between the political and administrative executives, questioning established rules of the game. And so the research agenda broadened out to incorporate advisers' impacts upon and contributions to other aspects of governing in the core executive. Mapping the empirical terrain was a critical first step. Maley (2000b), for instance, charted the increase in political staff in federal government in Australia, while our own early work tested the claim that ministerial advisers are politicizing the public service (Eichbaum and Shaw 2008) and illuminated the different contributions advisers make throughout the policy process (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007b).

New theoretical contributions also emerged from and alongside these empirical studies. They tended to focus on the roles advisers play and the relationships within which these roles are situated. Apropos the former, building on her own empirical work, Maley (2000a, 2011) developed a typology of ministerial advisers' roles, while Connaughton (2010) crafted a complementary classificatory system. As to the latter, Dahlstrom (2009), Eichbaum and Shaw (2007a), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) and the LSE GV314 Group (2012) all delved into the nature and import of relationships within 'the balanced triangle' (Trehitt et al. 2014) of executive government.

A SECOND ACT: THE NEXT GENERATION OF RESEARCH

This body of work contributed to a change in the tone of the scholarship on ministerial advisers: Weller's pithy description of Australia's 'junk yard attack dogs' was complemented by assessments of the contribution advisers have to offer that were either more positive or at least less explicitly normative.

Recently, two developments have occasioned a stocktake of the state of the literature. First, there has been a more explicitly theoretical turn in the study of advisers. That is not to say that the early published record consisted solely of descriptive studies: early on, for instance, Maley provided both empirical and conceptual contributions (2000a, 2000b). Neither is it to detract from the importance of empirical studies. Quite the reverse: as the following chapters demonstrate, material particulars always need refurbishment and extending.

There has, however, been a concerted push in recent times from scholars across jurisdictions to theorize empirical specifics using material

drawn from beyond the field. Advisers have been conceived as policy workers (Craft 2015, 2016); their place in policy advisory systems has been analysed (Craft and Halligan 2016; Di Mascio and Natalini 2013; Silva 2017); they have found their way into perennial debates in public administration including those apropos politicization (Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014; Öhberg et al. 2016) and public service bargains (De Visscher and Salomonsen 2012; Shaw and Eichbaum 2017); and there are new analyses of the historical trajectories of advisers' institutional environments (Di Mascio and Natalini 2016; Maley 2017).

Second, those working in Westminster contexts began to engage with the research grounded in non-Westminster environments, and vice versa. It is unclear why there has not been more regular congress between the Westminster and continental European scholarships. A possible reason is that the literature on advisers in European parliamentary democracies did not loom large amongst early publications in the English language – which is not remotely to suggest that it did not feature in the published record per se (see below). (Furthermore, in recent years that matter has been well and truly rectified.) Or, on the Westminster side of matters, it may be that empirical matters needed attending to before the influence of differing political-administrative traditions on advisers and their activities could be explored. It might reflect the relatively recent emergence of a dedicated scholarship on advisers in some European countries, a point Caspar van den Berg makes in Chapter 8. Or it may have something to do with the focus of the literature on European ministerial cabinets. As Gouglas et al. (2015) have pointed out, much of that work has concentrated on the institution of the ministerial cabinet itself; the concern with the institution's actors, and specifically political advisers, is relatively recent (see Brans and Aubin 2017; Gouglas 2015; Gouglas et al. 2017; Pelgrims et al. 2008).

Whatever the reasons, the need to systematically engage with the rich research palettes of our European colleagues is clear. Ministerial cabinets have been major empirical foci in that work, including those in France (Rouban 2007; Schrameck 1995), Belgium (Brans et al. 2017; Goransson and Eraly 2015), Italy (Agosta and Piccardi 1988; Di Mascio and Natalini 2013, 2016), Greece (Gouglas 2015; Sotiropoulos 2007) and at the level of the European Union (Gouglas et al. 2017).² Continental scholars have also explored ministerial advisers' influence on fiscal policy (Dahlstrom 2011), the policy process generally (Öhberg et al. 2016) and the structuring of advice to ministers (Christiansen et al. 2016). There are empirical contributions (Gouglas 2015), attempts to locate advisers within the network of core executive resource dependencies (Askim et al. 2017) and analyses

of advisers' impact on the politicization of bureaucracies (Dahlstrom and Niklasson 2013; De Visscher and Salomonsen 2012; Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014).

In aggregate, these developments amount to what we think is a 'second wave' of research on ministerial advisers (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015, pp. 1–2). This generational shift, the chief features of which are a broad empirical base, closer attention to matters of theory, and more comparative research, has since gained momentum. In 2015 a special edition of the *International Journal of Public Administration* appeared dedicated to new directions in studying ministerial advisers (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015), while in June 2017 *Public Administration* published a special issue consistent with second-wave imperatives (Hustedt et al. 2017). More recently, the Ministerial Advisers Research Group – which includes scholars from European and Westminster parliamentary democracies (including all who feature in this volume) – has begun to coalesce with the aim of building a research community engaged in comparative research on ministerial advisers.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This publication sits squarely within this second generation of work. Primarily, we wish to contribute to the consolidation of ties between researchers working across parliamentary contexts. It might be stretching matters to characterize the book as a merging of the European and Anglo streams in a ministerial advisers' version of Kingdon's primordial soup (see Gains and Stoker 2011), but there is much to be gained by bringing together scholars from Copenhagen to Canberra who are working on proximate issues in different administrative traditions.

A second objective is to shine some light into 'the dark' of the title of Andrew Blick's seminal 2004 publication by providing a precis of empirical arrangements across a range of parliamentary democracies. For the purposes of establishing a common base we asked each contributor to briefly outline the institutional context within which ministerial advisers operate in their country, the history of the emergence of advisers and the role(s) they play in the policy process. The chapters provided by Maria Maley (Australia), Jonathan Craft (Canada), Bernadette Connaughton (Ireland), Andrew Blick (UK) and ourselves (New Zealand) update and extend Westminster cases that appeared in our 2010 volume. However, the empirical sweep of this iteration has been significantly expanded with the addition of studies of five European parliamentary democracies in the form of chapters from Peter Munk Christiansen and Heidi Houlberg

Salomonsen (Denmark), Thurid Hustedt (Germany), Athanassios Gouglas (Greece), Caspar van den Berg (the Netherlands) and Birgitta Niklasson and Patrik Öhberg (Sweden).³

Third, we want to explore points of theoretical liaison between research on ministerial advisers and the wider public administration, public policy and political science literatures. To those ends we asked contributors to theorize either a pressing issue associated with the emergence of ministerial advisers or a significant feature of the interactions between advisers, officials and ministers. This theoretical work seems to us to be particularly pressing: the widespread institutionalization of the ministerial adviser's role in policy advisory systems and the agency that advisers exhibit in different policy-making arenas (Maley 2015) demands a corresponding expansion in scholars' (and perhaps practitioners') repertoire of sense-making tools.

The structure of the remainder of the book and the focus of each chapter are as follows. In Chapter 2 Maria Maley charts the historical development of the institutional habitat of the ministerial adviser in Australia, identifying critical junctures at which consequential choices were made that led to the statutory establishment of ministerial advisers as a discrete category of public employee. A feature of the chapter is the deployment of historical institutionalism as an heuristic: Maley is one of the few to have explicitly theorized the emergence and historical trajectory of the institutional arrangements in which the political and administrative imperatives converge.

Jonathan Craft adopts a functional orientation in Chapter 3, looking at different aspects of the policy-related work undertaken by exempt staff in Canadian prime ministers' and ministers' offices. One of the insights Craft offers is that ministerial advisers do not simply advise: his conceptual framework distinguishes between the advisory and non-advisory functions of advisers' policy work, and provides a frame for future research on the mobilization of policy-relevant resources in exchanges between core executive actors.

Chapter 4, by Peter Munk Christiansen and Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen, focuses on the loyalty dimension of relationships between ministerial advisers and various political principals (the minister, the prime minister, the political party) in Denmark. Drawing on the literature on public service bargains Christiansen and Salomonsen explore the multiple and sometimes conflicting bargains between advisers and these principals. In so doing they question to compelling effect the standard assumption that a political adviser is simply an extension of her minister, and contribute to the growing stream of theoretical work on the bases of intra-executive relationships.

Thurid Hustedt brings institutionalism to bear in her analysis of the leadership staff units of Germany's federal ministries in Chapter 5. Two aspects of Hustedt's account stand out. One concerns the somewhat unusual institutional features of the German case, in which the functional equivalent of the ministerial adviser has no formal appellation and is located within the federal bureaucracy (rather than in a ministerial office or cabinet). The second is her subtle recounting of the 'smooth and silent' emergence of the partisan role: contra Maley's, Hustedt's is a narrative of how significant institutional evolution need not require decisive interventions during critical junctures.

In Chapter 6 we turn to Greece, where Thanassis Gouglas ventures inside the black box of the relationship between Greek ministers and their advisers. Here the context is set by change in the party political system and by the recent colonization of Greece's policy advisory system by foreign advisers from the European Union, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund and the International Labour Organization. Against this backdrop Gouglas explores the determinants and dimensions of the circles of trust that exist between political principals and administrative agents located in ministerial cabinets. The critical contribution is the elaboration of an ecology of trust, a crucial ingredient in minister/adviser relations that has, until now, been largely undertheorized.

Ireland's particular historical, political and constitutional circumstances comprise the context for Chapter 7. Bernadette Connaughton's gaze is on ways in which advisers contribute to governments' efforts at better political and policy coordination. She gives conceptual shape to this endeavour by proposing a scale for capturing and thus assessing the nature and extent of such contributions, and then applies the scale to two empirical examples and assesses its utility as a means of accurately gauging the part advisers play in securing coordination objectives.

Caspar van den Berg recounts the story of ministerial advisers in the Netherlands in Chapter 8. The recency of the advent of the political adviser in Holland stands out in this account. In most of the countries in this volume ministerial advisers have been a feature since the 1970s and 1980s (if not well before that); in the Dutch case, however, the first reference to ministerial advisers in formal documentation appears as late as 1994. Relatively little has hitherto been published regarding Dutch ministerial advisers. Van den Berg's chapter – based on the innovative use of advisers' LinkedIn sites as a source of empirical particulars – fills this lacuna, mapping and describing the 'who, what, where and how many' of the Dutch ministerial adviser.

In our own case study, Chapter 9, we explore the empirical and institutional arrangements in New Zealand. We then use Hood and

Lodge's seminal work on public service bargains as the basis of an attempt to empirically specify the political adviser bargain (i.e. the compacts negotiated by ministers and their partisan advisers). Our focus differs to that taken by Christiansen and Salomonsen insofar as we look at all three dimensions of public service bargains (reward, competence and loyalty), but both chapters presage further work on the nature of the bargains struck between ministerial advisers and their civil service counterparts.

Birgitta Niklasson and Patrik Öhberg analyse the Swedish case in Chapter 10, assessing the extent to which B. Guy Peters' adversarial model explains the state of the relationship between civil servants and ministerial advisers. However, rather than assuming that any distemper is necessarily a function of the partisan disposition of ministerial advisers, they propose an alternative causality in which it is politicization on the part of civil servants that is at the root of competition between career bureaucrats and their non-partisan colleagues.

In the penultimate chapter, Chapter 11, Andrew Blick explores arrangements in the UK. The primary empirical focus concerns the tensions that stem from the incorporation into the British civil service of a category of bureaucratic actor, the special adviser, the bases of whose appointment diverge from long-standing civil service principles of impartiality, merit-based appointment and so forth. The broader narrative, however, is that of an ambiguous – and as yet unresolved – relationship between a venerable institution (the civil service) and a recent innovation (the special adviser): for Blick, the significance of the impact of the latter on the former lies in their consequences for the quality of democracy and its institutions.

The purposes of Chapter 12 are to bring the contents of the book together and to chart a future research agenda. Of the various dimensions of the second wave of research on ministerial advisers the matter of comparative research receives the least attention in the country cases. In the concluding chapter, therefore, we propose an approach to comparative research centred on the institutional environments in which ministerial advisers operate. We describe the model, assess its possible applications and limitations, and use it to sift for patterns of similarity and dissimilarity in the country cases contained in earlier chapters.

CONCLUSION

The Speirs' outburst with which this chapter began is an example of the behaviour Lord Turnbull had in mind when he offered a 'gentle

admonition' of those who uncritically condemn advisers (2014, p. 219). It is also a reminder of the importance of the sort of thoughtful, balanced and empirically informed research profiled in this book.

Each of the chapters here contributes to the ongoing process through which we make sense of the role of the ministerial adviser; each assists with the process of puzzle solving that Thomas Kuhn identified as being at the heart of 'normal [social] science' (2012, p. 25). The puzzle of the ministerial adviser will never be completed, of course: as political circumstances change, actors enter and exit the executive stage and institutions evolve, the configuration of the puzzle shifts and the challenge of solving a slightly new conundrum must be taken up anew.

But taken collectively, the chapters here extend our understanding of the third element in executive government empirically (through a richer palette of case studies), theoretically (by connecting the empirical with the theoretical and conceptual) and methodologically (by profiling different research designs and attending to issues of comparative research). In so doing, they put several more pieces of the puzzle of the ministerial adviser into place.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to Maria Maley for her thoughts on the challenges associated with operationalizing the role of the ministerial adviser. Maley has also ventured helpful observations regarding the nature of the core unit of analysis which we return to in Chapter 12.
2. We would like to thank Marleen Brans and Lev Lhommeau for their advice regarding the published record in ministerial cabinet systems.
3. We are conscious of the imbalance in the number of Westminster cases and those of countries that are part of the Napoleonic, Scandinavian and Germanic traditions. Future editions will address that imbalance, and are likely to extend to other liberal democratic polities that also place value on the capacity of administration to speak truth to power.

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