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## **MINISTERIAL ADVISORS IN EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT: OUT FROM THE DARK AND INTO THE LIMELIGHT**

*Ministers increasingly rely on advisors for support and advice. In many countries, these political aides have various names, but all generally serve as close confidantes to their political masters and operate in the ‘shadowland’ between politics and bureaucracy. Scholars have dragged the ministerial advisors out of the dark and described their background and functions. Still, the field has a Westminster-bias, is characterised by single case studies, and remains under-theorised. The lack of comparative focus and theoretical underpinnings can be explained by the complex nature of ministerial advisors. This introductory article suggests a definition for ministerial advisors and reviews the extant literature on these important actors. The main argument is that the extent and relevance of ministerial advisors in executive government merits integration into mainstream public administration and political science theory and research.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Behind every politician in the limelight, advisors lurk in the dark. They are perceived as essential by and for their political masters, and almost all ministers or heads of government include advisors in their domains to provide support and advice. Such ministerial advisors have long attracted scientific interest. Since the 1990s, however, these advisors have received renewed attention, predominantly in Westminster systems. A growing scholarship has emerged that empirically assesses their advent, numbers, relationship to the permanent bureaucracy, and concomitant accountability concerns about them (Dahlström 2009; Eichbaum and Shaw 2010c; Maley 2000). After having dragged ministerial advisors out of the dark, scholars now argue for a ‘theoretical turn’ in the study of ministerial advisors (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015a: 1; 2015b: 66). So far, comparative studies and integration of advisors into the realm of public administration research have proven difficult due to advisors’ diverse

nature across jurisdictions (Shaw and Eichbaum 2017). What these variants of the species all have in common, however, is that they are close confidantes to their political masters, operating in the ‘shadowland’ of politics and bureaucracy. Besides that, ministerial advisors differ across a range of individual properties, such as educational and professional backgrounds, formal positions, and the actual work they do. Despite this diversity, few attempts have been made to find common ground for the systematic analysis of ministerial advisors.

This symposium responds to the calls for more systematic, comparative research on ministerial advisors through established theoretical and conceptual lenses within public administration and political science research. This introduction puts forth and elaborates on a definition of the term ‘ministerial advisor’ and identifies some dimensions in which advisors vary. This exercise demonstrates the complex nature of ministerial advisors and aims to establish some common ground to avoid any aspects becoming ‘lost in translation’ when empirical knowledge of advisors informs future theorising. We consider this step a necessary precondition to advance the scholarship on ministerial advisors and integrate this into the realm and mainstream of public administration.

At least two arguments speak for such integration. First, although ministerial advisors are a comparatively new phenomenon in some governmental systems (but a well-established one in others), they are institutionalised today in the executive governments of most Western democracies. Second, this renewed scientific attention clearly reveals that ministerial advisors often perform crucial roles, even beyond intimate advisory functions, in the machinery of governments, such as brokering, networking, or coordinating policy. Although the implications of their work are not yet fully understood, their extent and importance merit their integration into mainstream public administration and political science research. The contributions to this symposium share an interest in investigating ministerial advisors as vested actors in executive government and support such integration by (1) expanding the empirical domain beyond Westminster systems, (2) shifting attention to various implications of advisors in core government functions and dynamics, such as political control, coordination, and policy-making, and (3) studying advisors through established theoretical or conceptual lenses within public administration and political science research, such as core executive studies, public service bargains, and coordination theory.

To introduce this symposium and to contribute to the theorising on ministerial advisors, this article first discusses the term and offers a definition of ‘ministerial advisors’. Second, the article reviews research on ministerial advisors, with its inherent ‘Westminster bias’ and the

predominant functional and personell background perspective (for other recent state-of-the-art research on ministerial advisors, see Shaw and Eichbaum, 2015a). Third, the article assesses existing research on the implications of ministerial advisors. Fourth, we briefly present the contributions to the symposium. In the final section, we point to avenues for further research on ministerial advisors.

## **DEFINING MINISTERIAL ADVISORS**

Political aides have been given various titles across different jurisdictions: ‘political advisors’, ‘ministerial advisors’, ‘exempt staff’, ‘special advisors’, etc. One strategy to distinguish them simply would be to refer to them by name (Yong 2014: 5). However, for comparative purposes, a common definition of ‘advisors’ is necessary. We suggest defining a ‘ministerial advisor’ as *a person appointed to serve an individual minister, recruited on political criteria, in a position that is temporary*. The term ‘ministerial advisor’ and the definition offered provide several advantages.

First, the term ‘advisor’ suggests these actors have someone’s ear when providing advice. While political, responsive competence is usually their main imperative, it remains an empirical question as to how much policy competence ministerial advisors have. Second, the term ‘ministerial’ implies they serve an (individual) minister. While the names ‘political advisors’ and ‘political appointees’ refer to recruitment based on political criteria, these names fail to convey that these actors under study work within the ministerial domains of the executive. There might be ‘political advisors’ in parliamentary parties, but ministerial advisors, by definition, serve their ministers and direct their attention and activities toward the ministers’ political well being and success. Furthermore, this highlights the fact that they operate in the blurred world between politics and administration. Third, defining ‘ministerial advisors’ as actors recruited on ‘political criteria’, and not on merit, separates ministerial advisors from ordinary civil servants, although not all political systems distinguish formal appointment conditions. Political criteria do not necessarily refer to party-political criteria, but would include personal trust. Fifth, it also follows from the closeness to the minister that the position of ministerial advisor is ‘temporary’, in that ministerial advisors leave their positions when their ministers so decide, or when their ministers leave office. It should be noted that in some systems, ministerial advisors’ terms in office are linked formally to those of the ministers they serve, while in other political systems, no such regulations exist.

As indicated, these advisors empirically vary across several qualitative dimensions. Here, we briefly specify two: their formal positions in executive governments and the functions they perform, as these dimensions refer to the basic challenge in comparative research: to ensure that the phenomena subject to comparison are indeed comparable, which can be ensured by applying the criteria of formal or functional equivalence (Przeworski and Teune 1970).

Although all formal arrangements are supplemented by informal structures regulating behaviours, formal positions grant or delimit hierarchical authority, guide orientations, and place formal responsibility (Egeberg 2007). *Formally*, ministerial advisors might be part of the formal ministerial hierarchy. In other countries, ministerial advisors have no authority over civil servants. While some countries have several ministerial advisors at the centre of government (e.g., the U.K.'s Prime Minister's Office), others staff the periphery of the executive (e.g., in DK and U.K.). The formal regulation of their positions also varies considerably. While they are appointed as a particular legal category in some systems, they are appointed under ordinary public-sector regulations in others. Moreover, in some systems, ministerial advisors are civil servants that can be seconded to the advisory position for a particular period, such as for career motives (e.g., France).

*Functionally*, ministerial advisors range from bag carriers and personal assistants to trusted advisors, with some even having delegated responsibilities within the ministry. This variation not only can be identified across several countries, but also even within the same government. These different formal and functional configurations underline the complex nature of ministerial advisors and might explain why truly comparative research on ministerial advisors has been scarce. Hence, ensuring formal and functional equivalence when investigating advisors is not a trivial, but rather a vital endeavour. This becomes particularly important when moving beyond mere descriptions of advisors and their behaviour, toward identifying explanations for their behaviour or the consequences thereof. In some cases, the formal positions of ministerial advisors might determine their behaviour or mediate the relationships between ministers, ministerial advisors, and civil servants. In other cases, their formal positions will have less to say, but rather their function will be of vital importance, e.g., to help ensure the quality of governmental policies. Thus, neglecting such differences in formal and functional equivalencies runs the risk of comparing actors with major differences in their ability to influence policy and the functions of executive government, thereby highlighting different explanatory variables across countries.

The differences in formal positions and functions also may render different theoretical perspectives relevant when studying ministerial advisors. For example, if positioned in staff functions or extra-ministerial units, theories on staff-line relations within formal organizations are relevant (e.g., Blau and Scott 1962/2003). Differences between the centre of government and the periphery call for integration into core executive studies (Shaw and Eichbaum 2014).

### **DRAGGING MINISTERIAL ADVISORS OUT OF THE DARK**

Research on ministerial advisors so far has been predominantly empirical and has focused mainly on Westminster systems. Ministerial advisors in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, in particular, have raised academic curiosity (e.g., Aucoin 2010; Connaughton 2010; Craft 2013, 2016; Maley 2000, 2011; Eichbaum and Shaw 2007, 2010a; Shaw and Eichbaum 2014). Although subject to some (dispersed) research in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, the renewed scientific interest in ministerial advisors was triggered by the observation of 'significant changes in the conventional, if not formal, terrain inhabited by those who occupy executive and political roles' (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010b: 198). Starting near the turn of the millennium, ministerial advisors began to attract considerable media attention in some countries – partly because of scandals they were involved in, and partly because they actively engaged in public debates. Some – with Tony Blair's top aide, Alistair Campbell, the most prominent example – even became celebrities in their own right (Blick 2004: xvi). Yet, what they all shared, before systematic academic light was shed on them, was a considerable degree of opacity and secrecy around their origins, roles, and influence. As Andrew Blick famously wrote, they were the 'people who live in the dark' (2004). In particular, their proximity to power opened up speculation, if not conspiracy talk, about their influence, roles, rights, and duties. Without a doubt, their advent raised severe controversy across a range of countries (Blick 2004: 1, Eichbaum and Shaw 2010a).

Studying the drivers behind the advent and growth of ministerial advisors was a central part of the reemerging scholarship on ministerial advisors. Several drivers have been identified across multiple jurisdictions, all of which view the advent and growth of ministerial advisors in functional terms, e.g., 'a particular form of adhocatic response to the challenges of governing' (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010b: 213). More specifically, two main drivers prevailed: First, ministerial advisors are seen as a response to the increasing complexity of

public policies and the exigency of contemporary government, intensified by societal changes, such as globalisation, Europeanisation, and 24/7 media attention (Eichbaum and Shaw 2011; Johansson and Tallberg 2010; Strömbäck 2011). Second, scholars have argued that the advent and growth of ministerial advisors accommodate the needs of political leaders to increase the steering capacity of government and regain political control of the governmental apparatus, which had become fragmented through New Public Management (NPM) reforms (Aucoin 2010; Eichbaum and Shaw 2010c, Dahlström, Peters and Pierre 2011; Lodge and Gill 2011; Peters 2004). Hood (1991) has noted that NPM reforms were not only about control, but also about getting alternative sources of advice into the public sector.

In addition, the ministerial-advisor scholarship, at first, was characterised by a dual personell and functional perspective. In other words, the two core questions have been ‘Who are they?’ and ‘What are they doing?’ Early studies of ministerial advisors focused on their professional experience and party background (Forward 1977; Walter 1986). While these actors often were attached to their ministers’ political parties or had a professional media background, the concrete patterns of who they are vary – both within and across jurisdictions (see the contributions in Eichbaum and Shaw 2010c, Salomonsen 2004, Tiernan 2007). The type of advice provided also varies across different countries, with some advisors focusing on media advice, some on substantial policy advice, and others on political advice. It is the latter type that represents the core functional distinction between civil servants and ministerial advisors: Ministerial advisors give advice, a function that civil servants either cannot provide, are reluctant to provide, or are even prohibited by some statutes or conventions from providing (Page and Wright 2007). They are allowed, and often explicitly required, to enter the sphere of party politics, whereas civil servants are not allowed and/or are reluctant to enter that realm. The extant scholarship on the advisory function of ministerial advisors provides various conceptualisations of advice. Craft and Howlett, for instance, distinguish between the policy content of advice (2012), and between the content (procedural/substantive advice) and the time frame (short-term/long-term) of advice (2012: 91).

Regarding the work of ministerial advisors, the existing literature offers overviews of their tasks and assignments in various countries. In Australia, for instance, ministerial advisors help their ministers and Cabinet generate policy ideas and formulate policy (Maley 2000). In New Zealand, ministerial advisors read, interpret, and forward advice from civil servants; attend meetings with civil servants; and participate in meetings with other ministers (Shaw and Eichbaum 2014). Various empirical studies show considerable variety, both within and

across jurisdictions (e.g., Eichbaum and Shaw 2010c; Tiernan 2007; Connaughton 2015; Maley 2015; Rice, Somerville and Wilson 2015; Christiansen et al. 2016).

The Westminster bias in the scholarship on ministerial advisors is not a coincidence. In actuality, the advent of ministerial advisors can be perceived as a ‘break’ with the core fundamentals of Westminster – the normative stronghold of the neutral bureaucracy, providing free, frank, and fearless advice – spurring renewed scientific interest. In European continental systems (with the exception of Denmark), political aides with privileged access to ministers and heads of government have long been institutionalized in various organizational units – the most famous of which are the ministerial Cabinets in France, Belgium, and the European Commission. While the French and Belgian ministerial Cabinets have been objects of early academic scrutiny in particular (e.g., Suleiman 1973; van Hassel 1978; Searls 1978; Gaffney 1991), the emerging research on ministerial advisors appears to have had a reviving impact on the study of ministerial Cabinets in nations such as France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Greece, and, to a lesser extent, Spain (Brans et al. 2006; Eymeri-Douzans 2015; Gouglas 2015; OECD 2007, 2011; Walgrave et al. 2007; Vancoppenolle and Brans 2010). The advisors in the European Commission also have started to attract some scientific interest (Gouglas et al. 2015). While the institution (ministerial Cabinets as such) has long been studied, it is only relatively recently that ministerial advisors, as *specific actors* within that institution, have been scrutinized. In contrast to countries with ministerial Cabinets, advisors in non-Westminster countries, where new political positions recently have been established (such as Denmark) or functional equivalents have silently emerged (such as Germany), have not attracted the same degree of scholarly attention (but see: Christiansen et al. 2016; Derlien 2003; Grønnegaard Christensen 2006; James 2007; Salomonsen and Knudsen 2011; Hustedt 2013). Thus, the need still exists to widen the scope of research on ministerial advisors beyond Westminster systems, and to carry out truly comparative research.

## **INTO THE LIMELIGHT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Some research contributions have taken steps in theorising ministerial advisors by abstracting the various tasks and assignments into more generic roles, understood as patterned behaviour among individuals. Maley (2000) identifies five policy roles: Some advisors are agenda-setters; some link ideas, interests, and opportunities; some mobilize; some bargain; and some deliver (implement) measures. Connaughton identifies four roles: experts, partisans, coordinators, and minders – being a minder involves looking out for ‘issues that may be

potentially harmful to ministers' (Connaughton 2010, p. 352). Research from the U.K. has identified three roles performed by British ministerial advisors: policy wonks (who provide advice on how policies could and should be developed), enforcers (who ensure that policies are implemented), and fixers (who perform political tasks such as meeting with party colleagues and writing political speeches) (LSE GV314 Group 2012, p. 5). Other sources have said advisors may even serve as mere 'sherpas' or 'stand-ins' (Shaw and Eichbaum 2014; Askim, Karlsen and Kolltveit 2017).

Besides harvesting empirical data on their background and work duties, the advent and institutionalisation of ministerial advisors also has triggered some scientific interest in the potential 'risks' of having such advisors (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010a: 3). More specifically, a strain of research has discussed ministerial advisors in relation to potential politicisation, as well as accountability mechanisms and regulatory regimes governing their position (Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014; Peters 2013).

Regarding politicisation, a core question has been the impact ministerial advisors have on the relationship between ministers and civil servants. Here, two main implications have been highlighted.

*First*, by introducing the concept of administrative politicisation, scholars have suggested that ministerial advisors might act as filters between ministers and civil servants (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007c: 624), hindering the free and frank advice of civil servants. Simply put, they might not always pass the advice along. Ministerial advisors also might colour the (substantial policy) advice provided by civil servants. The fact that ministerial advisors might both restrict ministers' access to civil-servant advice, or even colour the advice, has been called administrative politicisation (Eichbaum and Shaw 2008: 343). Although there is limited empirical evidence of ministerial advisors spurring administrative politicisation, some evidence has been found in Belgium (De Visscher and Salomonsen 2013) and Sweden (Öhberg et al 2016). Hence, whereas the interference of ministerial advisors in the bureaucracy appears to cause tension and conflicts in some countries, the relationship is characterised as cooperative and complementary in others. However, so far, the factors accounting for either a conflict-laden or cooperative relationship still appear to be relatively opaque (e.g., De Visscher and Salomonsen 2013).

*Second*, the presence of ministerial advisors might affect the political behaviour of bureaucrats and thus affect the degree of functional politicisation (Mayntz and Derlien 1989; Pierre 2004). Functional politicisation refers to political responsiveness by the advisory bureaucracy by anticipating and factoring crucial political aspects into advice given to a



minister (see Putnam 1973, Aberbach et al. 1981, Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014). Although civil servants might provide political-tactical advice, ministerial advisors are better positioned to give advice on party-political character. Thus, ministerial advisors might, in fact, imply a de-politicisation of the involvement of the bureaucracy in party-political issues (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007, p. 635), thereby providing for an ‘insulation-effect’. Recent research shows, for example, that the relative intense introduction of ministerial advisors into Swedish government offices (compared with the Danish experience) has prevented a ‘crowding out’ effect of the traditional policy advice by permanent civil servants, thereby hindering extensive functional politicisation (Christiansen et al. 2016). Overall, there is no uniform picture across countries regarding the implications of ministerial advisors in their relationship between ministers and civil servants.

The (lack of) accountability of ministerial advisors has been a central issue for much of the research, especially from the Westminster systems (see the contributions in Eichbaum and Shaw 2010c; Tiernan 2007). Regulating their formal position in detail was seen as a response (or even a solution) to a lack of accountability, criticism of silent patronage patterns through ministerial advisors, and their sometimes opaque relation *vis-à-vis* the career bureaucracy. Ministerial advisors in various countries have been involved in political and administrative scandals, and there have been several high-profile cases in which the actions of ministerial advisors have raised questions regarding their accountability (for an overview of various cases, see, for instance Connaughton 2015; Eichbaum and Shaw 2011; Ministry of Finance 2003; Shaw and Eichbaum 2015b: 66–67). As a response, governments in countries such as Australia, Canada, Ireland, the U.K., and Denmark established commissions or committees to look into the formal position of ministerial advisors, including their employment conditions, functions, and legal status. Over time, the position of ministerial advisor was regulated in more detail in these various countries through codes of conduct, model contracts, and publication requirements with regard to salary and personal background. While these efforts clearly enhanced the transparency of the position and thereby clarified accountability relations, it has been argued that their sheer existence aggravates accountability. Ministerial advisors might hide behind their ministers as an *éminence grise*, exerting influence, but still escaping parliamentary control and thereby blurring accountability arrangements within the executive (Eichbaum and Shaw 2008).

Although ministerial advisors have been dragged out of the dark, and their impact concerning politicisation and accountability has been discussed, not much is yet known about the implications of ministerial advisors for core government dynamics. Existing research

shows that ministerial advisors in various jurisdictions actually are deeply involved in core governmental tasks and functions, such as coalition governance or coordination. For example, Eichbaum and Shaw show that ministerial advisors in New Zealand help solve disagreements between parties in a coalition by improving the communication flow (2011; Shaw and Eichbaum 2014: 594). However, coalition scholars tend to overlook the actual work of ministerial advisors, viewing them as an oversight mechanism (Strøm et al. 2010). The scholarship on ministerial advisors, on the other hand, has paid limited attention to the effects of multi-party dynamics, and how ministerial advisors actively can help Cabinets survive. Neither has there been much research on the impact that ministerial advisors have on public policy output. Dahlström (2011) suggests investigating this issue more deeply because he finds that the content of advice from ministerial advisors differs systematically from that of career bureaucrats and that this influences the distribution of welfare state cuts.

Although some early steps have been taken by classifying advice and conceptualising roles, so far, two theoretical frameworks mainly have been suggested: core executive studies (CES) and the public service bargain (PSB). CES emerged mainly from the U.K., implying broad considerations of the central government (Elgie 2011) -- the institutions, networks, and practices surrounding the prime minister, Cabinet, and Cabinet committees, i.e., the heart of the executive machinery (Rhodes 1995). Rhodes has formulated a resource-dependency perspective, which emphasises that actors must exchange resources to achieve their goals. Therefore, power is relational and more dispersed than structural arrangements would suggest (Rhodes 1995, 1997, 2007). As an adaptation of Rhodes' perspective, others have advocated that power is asymmetrical. The asymmetric power model asserts that power within the executive is locational and a function of structural or institutional attributes (Heffernan 2003; Marsh *et al.* 2003). Although the role of advisors rarely has been featured in CES, some scholars have used these studies to interpret the work of ministerial advisors. For example, Maley (2011) shows how the horizontal relationships between ministerial advisors in policy-making and in executive coordination form part of the networks within the core executive in Australia. Shaw and Eichbaum (2014) interpret why ministers in New Zealand appoint advisors through the lens of CES. They find that ministerial advisors constitute a resource both in themselves (having specialised expertise or knowledge of policy networks) and 'in the sense that they can be strategically deployed to leverage resources located elsewhere' (2014: 604). Connaughton (2015) shows how Irish advisors are placed inside of institutional settings. Craft (2015) argues that ministerial advisors are an important mechanism for policy coordination in the core executive. Craft (2015) has argued for updating the 'gospel', i.e.,

broadening which actors should be seen as members of the core executive. To include these actors would make the framework better suited for understanding policy coordination within the executive (Craft 2015, p. 64).

Exploring the heuristic and explanatory potential offered by the PSB framework for studying ministerial advisors is still in its early stages, though it had been suggested almost a decade ago (Lodge 2010, p.106-107), and some early work has been done (De Visscher and Salomonsen 2013). Richard Shaw and Chris Eichbaum pick up this suggestion in their contribution to this symposium (see below).

## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SYMPOSIUM**

The contributions to this symposium continue to expand the empirical scope of research on ministerial advisors in two respects: First, the country sample goes beyond the Westminster systems. The articles in the symposium include a group of European countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Portugal), as well as the European Commission and two representatives of Westminster systems (Canada and Australia). Second, the issues of empirical investigation go beyond the functional and personnel dimension by focusing on various implications of ministerial advisors within the dynamics of executive government. The articles by Craft, Askim, Gouglas et al. study the roles of advisors in policy-making, and these contributions emphasise that ministerial advisors are deeply involved in the political aspects of policy processes. The contributions by Silva, Hustedt, and Salomonsen investigate the potential for political control through ministerial advisors. Maley's article studies the movement of staff between ministers' offices and the civil service. Theoretically, the contributions to this symposium continue to expand the scope of established theories of relevance for research on ministerial advisors, such as public service bargains (PSB), core executive studies (CES), policy failure avoidance, and coordination. The symposium consists of seven contributions, starting with a suggestion to integrate ministerial advisors in the PSB perspective, followed by five empirical studies, all of which include different innovative ideas in conceptual and empirical terms, based on novel empirical insights.

*Richard Shaw* and *Chris Eichbaum* apply the PSB lens to minister-ministerial advisor relationships in new ways. Representing a type of agent who is personally loyal to a specific minister (as opposed to demonstrating a serial loyalty to successive ministers) (Hood and Lodge 2006, pp. 53–55), advisors introduce a new dynamic into the advisory domain. This dynamic not only unfolds with respect to policy advice to ministers, but also with respect to

the minister's position within both the party and government. Shaw and Eichbaum argue that the Political Advisor Bargain (PAB) is a particular type of PSB. In other words, the advent of ministerial advisors merits 'an expansion in the vocabulary, but not a fundamental revision of the grammar of PSBs' (Shaw and Eichbaum 2017: 13).

In his contribution, *Jonathan Craft* studies the work of ministerial advisors in Canada through the policy-failure avoidance framework and core executive studies. Based on elite interviews, Craft shows how Canadian ministerial advisors provide types of advice that civil servants are precluded from providing. They supplement policy advice from civil servants with political overlay and evaluate how their proposals relate to the party platform and political priorities, as well as tactical considerations on how to make the proposals successful. The lesson for the policy-failure avoidance literature is to not only make ex post evaluations of policy, but also to study the whole process, as it is political from start to finish, with ministerial advisors as active contributors. Furthermore, there are several venues and spaces within government, such as Cabinets and Cabinet committees, where politics and policy-making intersect.

The core executive framework is utilized by *Jostein Askim, Rune Karlsen, and Kristoffer Kolltveit* (2017) in their analysis of ministerial advisors in Norway. Drawing on factor analysis of their tasks and assignments, they find three distinct roles: 'stand in', 'media advisor', and 'political coordinator'. They then test what might explain why ministerial advisors perform one role or another: their formal affiliation, their background, or what the minister needs. They find that the role of ministerial advisors within the core executive depends on where they sit, i.e., they have different roles in different ministries. They also find that roles are relational, i.e., they depend on appointees' personal backgrounds and experience.

*Athanassios Gouglas, Marleen Brans, and Sylke Jaspers* expand the literature on ministerial advisors in systems with ministerial Cabinets (Brans et al. 2006; James 2007; Walgrave et al. 2007; Vancoppenolle and Brans 2010; Gouglas et al. 2015). Going further than just mapping the work of European Commissioner Cabinet advisors, Gouglas et al. apply Connaughton's typology of four advisor types and Maley's framework of three arenas. Empirically, they find that most of these EC Cabinet advisors provide strategic advice to their ministers and are involved in policy coordination within and across departments. Commission advisors also have bodyguard functions, preventing the Directorate Generals, as bureaucratic instruments, from doing something that is politically harmful, and they are (pro)active toward stakeholders. Conceptually, the insight from their study is that existing typologies derived

from Westminster systems work adequately in the ministerial Cabinet tradition of the European Commission, although the partisan role is less relevant, given the supranational context. In such contexts, the nation, rather than the party affiliation, might be of special interest.

Drawing on research on party government and ministerial advisors, and through quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews, *Patricia Silva* studies the appointment of ministerial advisors in Portugal. Silva finds that motives to reward loyalists and control policy-making are intertwined. While parties select advisors to control policy processes, this selection, in turn, adds loyalty and responsiveness to policy-making. Overall, this selection strategy allows political parties to control policy processes, facilitates government coordination, and enables government parties to bypass the Portuguese ministerial bureaucracy. Silva's study emphasises the links between political parties and ministerial advisors, and fruitfully links the study of ministerial advisors with research on party government.

*Thurid Hustedt* and *Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen* study the importance of ministerial advisors in government coordination. While few contributions on ministerial advisors have looked into their actual role in coordination processes (Connaughton 2010; Eichbaum and Shaw 2011; Maley 2011), the coordination literature has focused exclusively on the ministerial and bureaucratic level, ignoring the importance of ministerial advisors. Applying a similar systems design, Hustedt and Salomonsen study the political control of government coordination provided by ministerial advisors in Sweden and Denmark. Swedish ministerial advisors exercise political control of the civil service's coordination process, vested in their hierarchical authority. Danish ministerial advisors, on the other hand, have no such authority and act more indirectly and in an ad hoc fashion. This study underlines the notion that the role of ministerial advisors is affected by differences in the political-administrative system. While the rule of collective government creates strong pressure for government unity in Sweden, the system of ministerial governance in Denmark directs the attention of both civil servants and ministerial advisors more exclusively toward their own ministers.

With some exceptions, there has not been much scholarly interest in the career patterns of ministerial advisors (Sellers 2014; Walgrave et al. 2007). In her contribution, *Maria Maley* sheds important light on one aspect of the work that ministerial advisors might take up after leaving the ministerial offices: when they move back to their departments as civil servants. Maley studies the historical rule-building and actual re-integration of advisors into departments in Canada and Australia, countries with large numbers of ministerial advisors. In

Australia, re-entry is guaranteed, but the reintegration process is now under the control of department heads and subject to informal practices. Ministerial advisors in Australia returning to their departments with a new minister might be seen as ‘tagged’, while advisors returning to their departments under the same government may be suspected of favouritism. In Canada, there is more public concern about protecting the civil service from the ‘contagion’ of political actors, and ministerial advisors are no longer entitled to re-enter the public service.

Overall, the contributions in this symposium underline the notion that ministerial advisors have become an established and institutionalized actor across jurisdictions, deeply involved in the core processes of everyday work in executive government. In contrast to what is sometimes assumed or alleged, they are not just spin doctors manipulating media coverage or suspicious lone wolves embroiling ministers in all kinds of conspiratorial or risky endeavours. Rather, they are deeply integrated into the machinery of government and affect policy making in various respects. The contributions collected here show that above and beyond the particulars of each nation, ministerial advisors in and beyond Westminster share in common a role that is essentially and legitimately political. It is this political sense and ability that enable political advisors to serve as sparring partners, early-warning systems, and clearinghouses for their ministers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The ministerial advisor scholarship has been building up in a first wave (empirical, Westminster-centred), sparking calls for a second wave (more comparative, theoretical) (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015a). Waves might dissipate or gather momentum. We expect the latter to happen with regard to scientific interest in ministerial advisors. As scepticism grows toward media and politicians, and spin-doctoring seems to be increasing, it seems high time to scrutinise and understand ministerial advisors more closely. Dragging these actors out of the dark and putting them into the academic limelight of existing theories and frameworks within political science and public administration would help us better understand the functioning of governments in contemporary societies.

Overall, the research on ministerial advisors shows that they are vital actors in executive government. It underlines the close intertwining of politics and administration – a reality that is by no means captured by a Weberian or Wilsonian dichotomy, but is much more diverse and complex in contemporary government. The contributions collected in this symposium emphasise that ministerial advisors have important roles in executive government and perform a wide range of everyday activities. Still, overall systematic knowledge of the implications of

ministerial advisors' work remains scarce and patchy. The contributions collected here point to four venues for further research. *First*, the impact of ministerial advisors on public policy-making should be further assessed. Although their overall contributions might be difficult to discern, analysing single policies could prove promising. Such case studies could investigate who initiated specific policy initiatives and how ministers, ministerial advisors, and civil servants interacted in the formulation and decision-making process. Another way to address the issue of influence could be to distinguish between politically salient and more routine policy issues to demarcate the relative impact of the involved actors. *Second*, the importance of ministerial advisors for ministers and the Cabinet as a whole should be studied. If ministerial advisors are as vital and crucial as alluded here, their role should enhance ministers' political success and the overall survival of the Cabinet. This question could be investigated through studying ministerial terms of office, intensively scrutinising scandals, or studying ministers' views on these questions. *Third*, the relationships between ministers and their ministerial advisors remain somewhat unexplored and underexplained. What accounts for a close relationship and for far-reaching delegation of power to ministerial advisors? And what decides the tasks and assignments of advisors? Although the literature until now has focused on the complexity of contemporary government and the need for increased steering capacity, public and scientific interest in ministerial advisors' work also might affect who's appointed and what they end up doing. In other words, societal and academic interest in ministerial advisors will be reactive to the activities of advisors who, in turn, may lead to different types of advisors. *Fourth*, future research should disentangle the relationship between various politicisation mechanisms. While some efforts have been made (Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014), more research is needed to explore the links between different politicisation mechanisms, and to determine the conditions under which ministerial advisors increase or decrease politicisation. This could be studied comparatively, either across countries with different political-administrative systems, or through longitudinal studies to investigate how politicisation mechanisms unfold over time.

So far, existing scholarship overwhelmingly relies on interview and survey data. Some of the contributions to this symposium have taken novel steps in using statistical analysis on such material to explain the work of ministerial advisors (Askim et al. 2017). Some of the aforementioned venues of future research also could be explored through bibliographical and particular archival research. Another promising direction would involve (semi)experimental research designs simulating a range of decision-making situations and varying them across a range of actors (see, for example, Grohs et al. 2016, Doberstein 2016).

This symposium demonstrates the added value of studying ministerial advisors through established theories. The contributions collected here emphasise the integration of ministerial advisors in a range of core government activities that can be captured by existing theoretical perspectives in public administration and political sciences research. In turn, other parts of public administration and political science also may benefit from including ministerial advisors and their implications in both their theoretical and empirical research designs. An integration of the study of advisors into mainstream public administration and political science points to the fact that established strands of research, such as party government, coalition government, or policy coordination also would benefit from acknowledging the involvement of ministerial advisors. To put it differently, this symposium wants the renewed scientific interest and ‘wave’ to spill over into other strands of research in public administration and political science.



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