

CHAPTER 26

POLITICIANS AND BUREAUCRATS IN EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT

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26.1 INTRODUCTION

WITHOUT a permanent administrative apparatus that prepares and implements public policy, political executives are unable to exercise political authority. They depend on the analytical, regulatory, coordination, and delivery capacities of public organizations to effectively and legitimately address pressing societal challenges and to pursue their political agendas (Lodge and Wegrich 2014). This chapter focuses on the relationship between political executives (presidents, prime ministers, cabinet, and junior ministers) on the one hand and policy bureaucracies on the other hand. We use the term policy bureaucracies for those organizations variously labelled departments, ministries, or central agencies primarily tasked with developing and maintaining public policy (Page and Jenkins 2005).

In constitutional terms, the relationship between political executives and policy bureaucrats—public officials working in policy bureaucracies—is hierarchical in nature, and there is usually no doubt about who should be calling the shots. The fact that political executives are either democratically elected into office or selected by the head of government authorizes them to set the policy agenda within their sphere of responsibility and to direct the administrative apparatus to pursue this agenda. At the same time, political executives crucially depend on policy bureaucracies, which have both substantial policy expertise and in-depth knowledge about the policy-making process. Moreover, political executives' information processing and conflict resolution capacities are limited, which means they can only concentrate on a few flagship policies and handle the most pressing

problems (Scharpf 1994). This combination of information asymmetries and capacity limitations potentially turns actual power relationships between political executives and policy bureaucracies upside down. In consequence, political executives face a permanent challenge to ensure that bureaucrats are responsive to their policy preferences.

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the relations between political executives and policy bureaucrats, highlighting theoretical perspectives and empirical findings on how the tension between political control and bureaucratic power is addressed in different contexts. To this end, the next section elaborates on three major research topics that have been asked addressed by political scientists about the relationship between political executives and policy bureaucracies, providing an overview of substantial findings and research designs. This is followed by an overview of key theoretical perspectives in the literature. The chapter then moves on to discuss emerging topics in the contemporary literature. The chapter's final section sketches directions for future research on politicians and bureaucrats in executive government around the world.

26.2 POLITICIANS AND BUREAUCRATS IN EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT: MAJOR RESEARCH TOPICS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This section discusses three interrelated, but analytically distinct topics that constitute the core of political science research on political executives' relations to policy bureaucracies. The first two topics—the recruitment and replacement of top officials, and the organization and power of policy bureaucracies—share an analytical focus on how political executives deal with the fundamental problem of ensuring the permanent bureaucracy's responsiveness to their policy preferences, but emphasize different means (politicization, centralization) employed to achieve this objective (Rudalevige 2009; Dahlström et al. 2011). The third topic, in contrast, is more concerned with understanding and explaining what happens in the 'machine room' of executive government, asking how political and administrative policy-makers interact, and what those processes tell us about the relative power of political executives and policy bureaucrats (Aberbach et al. 1981; 't Hart and Wille 2006; Page 2012; Christensen and Opstrup 2018).

26.2.1 The Recruitment and Replacement of Top Officials

A first major topic in the study of political executives and bureaucrats addresses the balance of political control and bureaucratic power, yet focuses on a specific instrument of political control, namely the authority (or its absence) of political executives to appoint and replace top officials. The influence of politicians on personnel decisions in the public sector is a long-standing topic in the study of public administration as evidenced by a

comprehensive literature on ‘politicization’ and ‘patronage’ (Derlien 1996; Peters and Pierre 2004; Hollibaugh et al. 2014; Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014; Kopecký et al. 2016). The starting point of much of this literature is the well-known politics-administration dichotomy, which goes back to the writings of Max Weber and Woodrow Wilson (Sager and Rosser 2009). Although addressing different problems, both Weber and Wilson concluded that politics and administration, or more precisely the careers of politicians and bureaucrats, should be separated. Although often mistaken as an advocate of bureaucratic organization, Weber argued that politicians are needed to curb a potentially all-too-powerful permanent bureaucracy. In contrast, Wilson was concerned with the detrimental effects of the spoils system the United States in which administrative positions were filled according to political rather than competency criteria, which resulted in an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy. There is now good empirical evidence that a close connection between administrative and political careers has detrimental effects on good government (Dahlström and Lapuente 2017). However, this literature primarily focuses on bureaucrats outside policy bureaucracies.

The most obvious manifestation of politicization of the bureaucracy is the existence of positions within policy bureaucracies for which political executives have some degree of formal powers to appoint or remove individuals (see also Chapter 19 in this volume). A widely used definition of formal politicization is ‘the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards and disciplining of members of the public service’ (Peters and Pierre 2004: 2). An important question in comparative research—both over time and between countries—is the degree to which such formally politicized positions exist in policy bureaucracies (Page and Wright 1999). In studies of parliamentary systems where top-level positions are formally politicized, scholars usually consider partisan loyalty as the core political criterion for appointing and replacing top officials, and seek to describe and explain the occurrence of party political backgrounds among top officials, based on biographical information (Derlien 2003; Dahlström and Niklasson 2013; Ennser-Jedenastik 2016b; Veit and Scholz 2016). Another strand of research investigates the politicization of top officials by studying how political change such as cabinet or minister turnover affects top officials’ turnover (Derlien 2003; Meyer-Sahling 2008; Boyne et al. 2010; Meyer-Sahling and Veen 2012; Christensen et al. 2014; Dahlström and Holmgren 2019), using various methods such as event-history-analysis or descriptive analyses of the degree of replacement of top officials.

The literature on political influence on personnel decisions often takes the delegation problem in a principal-agent relationship as a starting point, arguing that politicians face a delegation problem, as they cannot be sure that bureaucrats share their policy preferences (Huber and Shipan 2006; see also Chapter 3 in this volume). Not only do they have limited expertise, but they also face important capacity constraints to oversee the bureaucracy. To avoid a ‘runaway bureaucracy’ (McCubbins et al. 1987), politicians can staff key positions with individuals that have policy priorities similar to their own (Lewis 2008). By selecting individuals with a known loyalty to their own political party, politicians can minimize the problem of adverse selection—choosing a person without

knowing for sure that she will act as intended. Those ‘allies’ will make sure that decisions are biased in favour of politicians’ preferences (Bach and Veit 2018; Dahlström and Holmgren 2019). The appointment and replacement of top officials are potentially powerful instruments of political control. Knowledge about whether and how politicians use those instruments is fundamental for understanding the nature of democratic governance, as politicians may also use their formal powers as a patronage tool to reward loyalists with doubtful qualifications for the job at hand (Grindle 2012; Kopecký et al. 2016).

More recently, scholars have started to investigate that political executives may select (or replace) top officials based on other criteria than partisan loyalty, including political and public management skills (Fleischer 2016; Bach and Veit 2018). Another typology of political appointees’ qualifications distinguishes professionalism, political allegiance, and personal loyalty as selection criteria (Kopecký et al. 2016). The question why political executives appoint political appointees, and more specifically what qualifications they look for, has been studied most intensely in the US, where scholars have studied how presidents balance loyalty and competence when selecting top officials (Lewis 2008; Lewis and Waterman 2013; Hollibaugh et al. 2014; Ouyang et al. 2017). A key argument in this literature is that political executives (in this case the US president) will consider different kinds of qualifications depending on the kind of post to be filled. They may be able to compromise on professional competence for positions in organizations which are at the margins of the president’s agenda, yet they have strong incentives to fill positions with loyal and competent candidates in organizations ranking high on their agenda to ensure the achievement of policy objectives. In studies of other contexts, only few studies explicitly address differential patterns of politicization within the executive (Christensen et al. 2014; Ennser-Jedenastik 2016b; Kopecký et al. 2016; Bach et al. 2020). We will address this emerging research theme more thoroughly in this chapter’s final section.

26.2.2 The Organization and Power of Policy Bureaucracies

The study of the relationship between political executives and policy bureaucrats is invariably connected to the structure and organization of government, and more specifically to the balancing of political control and bureaucratic power. A key question in the literature is therefore how policy bureaucracies are organized, and how this affects power relations between politics and administration. Here, we can broadly distinguish power relationships between political executives and bureaucrats on the one hand, and power relationships inside the executive, for example between a prime minister’s office and line departments, on the other hand. These relationships will also differ between parliamentary and presidential systems of government, but also between countries with similar systems of government because of variation in organizational structures and processes.

The notion that organization affects power relations goes back at least to Max Weber's works on bureaucratic organization, who suggested that politicians will always remain 'dilettantes' in comparison to expert bureaucracies. As mentioned above, this line of reasoning is concerned with how much power permanent bureaucracies actually have, and how political executives can make them responsive to their policy preferences. In Weber's view, the existence of a political leadership with a power base outside the bureaucracy, usually through an electoral mandate, is an important condition for the exercise of political control over the bureaucracy. Although political leaders differ in terms of their authority across countries (Page 1992), the basic condition for the exercise of political control over policy bureaucracies, that is, having a political rather than an administrative leadership, is usually fulfilled in modern democratic states. What this perspective highlights, though, is the usefulness of looking at the power and resources of political executives to understand power relations with bureaucracies.

More specifically, scholars working in this tradition have studied organizational and procedural mechanisms for avoiding different kinds of 'drift' away from the wishes of elected politicians, using the analytical toolbox of principal-agent models (Huber and Shipan 2006). There is a large body of literature on the political control of the federal bureaucracy in the United States, yet this literature primarily addresses questions regarding congressional control over bureaucracy and the relative influence of the president and congress over bureaucratic decision-making (see Moe 2012 for an overview). Hence, in terms of political control over bureaucracy, presidential systems are characterized by a situation in which both the legislative and the executive branch are potentially facing problems of political responsiveness among bureaucrats (Weingast 2005). This is different in parliamentary systems of government, where political executives have been delegated authority to govern by parliament. Having said that, one of the main areas of research related to the political control of the bureaucracy by the US-president are political appointments in the federal bureaucracy (see below) and the centralization of resources within the Executive Office of the President (Rudalevige 2009). The different approaches of US presidents to increase the political responsiveness of the US federal bureaucracy, which for instance also include the appointment of 'policy czars', are discussed under the label of 'administrative presidency' and continuously attract the attention of executive politics scholars (see Helms 2017 for an overview of this literature).

In the context of parliamentary systems of government, questions about the organization of the executive apparatus and political control of the bureaucracy have centred on the capacity of the political leadership relative to the permanent civil service. This debate is related to issues of size in terms of relative numbers of political executives in a department, such as cabinet and junior ministers or staff units such as 'cabinets ministériels' in Austria, France, Belgium, or the European Commission (Schnapp 2004). A key topic in debates of the 1970s was the use of planning units, based on the idea to increase capacities for long-term and comprehensive, cross-sectoral policies (Fleischer 2009). A related, more contemporary phenomenon is the increasing use of special advisers who directly support the political executive but who (at least formally) do not have

any managerial authority within a department (Eichbaum and Shaw 2008). This is an emerging area of research, which we address in more detail below. The common denominator of those topics is a focus on increasing the leadership capacity of political executives vis-à-vis permanent bureaucracies as a means of improving political control.

Another key aspect of political control over bureaucracy is related to questions of coordination within the government apparatus, more precisely related to the ability of presidents, prime ministers, as well as finance ministers, to control and coordinate other departments and the public sector at large (Dahlström et al. 2011). The starting point of this perspective is a ‘natural’ tendency of public organizations such as line ministries to pursue distinct and (necessarily) selective policy objectives. In other words, the basic problem or challenge is that governments are characterized by a division of labour, which requires some degree of coordination (Wegrich and Štimac 2014). This challenge arguably has increased over time, especially in the wake of administrative reforms resulting in a higher fragmentation of public bureaucracies around the world (Bouckaert et al. 2010). Hence, questions of organization and political control are not simply about the relation between politicians and bureaucrats, but also about power relations between the ‘core executive’ (i.e. those organizations set up to ‘pull the strings’ in government in order to achieve some coherence and to solve conflicts) and other governmental bodies. In a broader perspective, issues of control over bureaucracy also touch upon the relation with other administrative organizations, in particular executive and regulatory agencies (see below).

26.2.3 The Interaction of Political Executives and Policy Bureaucrats in Policy-making

The third field where the power relation between elected politicians and the policy bureaucracy plays out is the actual interaction in policy-making. Who is really calling the shots when it comes to setting the agenda, formulating policy lines and designing individual policies? Max Weber’s model of bureaucratic rule has long been interpreted as a normative model that calls for a strict separation of roles in policy-making, with politicians setting the objectives and allocating values and bureaucrats merely implementing the directions by filling in the details (Aberbach et al. 1981). And while this myth prevails as a normative model also within the bureaucracy, it has been repeatedly debunked by empirical research since the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Mayntz and Scharpf’s (1975) study was among the first that debunked the myth of a strong hierarchical relation between executive politicians and policy bureaucrats. Their in-depth empirical studies of policy-making in the German federal bureaucracy revealed two key findings. One is the central role of the smallest organizational units in the German ministries—the *Referate* (sections)—in the policy formulation process. Not only was policy knowledge concentrated in these units, they also maintained relations with external stakeholders, such as interest organizations. Much of the policy knowledge was generated through these interactions. Mayntz and Scharpf (1975) showed

that these units were not only critical in formulating a first draft of a policy, but also in initiating policies. The second key finding was that the relation between the lower levels and the political leadership was characterized by a (silent) dialogue. In this dialogue model, the policy bureaucracy was taking into account signals from the higher echelons in their rather independent policy work, while the political level values the subject matter related expertise of policy bureaucrats. While the dialogue model is suggestive of a relatively harmonious relation between the two antipodes, Mayntz and Scharpf (1975) pointed at the limited capacities of the political level to actually lead the policy-making process, given their limited resources for policy analysis and development work.

And while this study was limited to Germany, and is by now four decades old, its core empirical findings have displayed remarkable longevity. Aberbach et al. (1981) have confirmed in the comparative study of the policy bureaucracy that bureaucrats are indeed involved in all dimensions of policy-making (including aggregation of interests). The integration of political aspects of policy-making by civil servants, such as anticipating potential opposition and support for policy alternatives, has subsequently been labelled 'functional politicization' denoting distinct role perceptions as well as decision-making behaviour (Derlien 1996; Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014). Peters (1988) has outlined five different ideal-type models of politics-administration interaction that mainly point at cross-national variation in relational distance between politicians and bureaucrats—with the 'village life' model being at one end and the 'adversarial model' at the other. Peters builds his typology on seminal studies of individual countries, such as Hecló and Wildavsky's (1974) work on the UK civil service that indeed stresses the informal character of the club like caste of higher civil servants in this country. Hecló's (1977) study highlights the contrasting model of the US, which he characterizes as a 'government of strangers' given the high fluctuation of public officials in the US 'spoils system'.

But despite these cross-national differences, the hybridisation of roles, the significance of policy bureaucrats in policy development and the limited role of hierarchy in politics-administration relations within a policy-making context has been confirmed by the many studies that have been published in the 1970s and 1980s. More recent follow-up studies, however, indicate shifting tectonics in this relation. For example, Goetz (2007) in a review of the key claims of Mayntz and Scharpf (1975) points at politicization, outsourcing of policy advice and Europeanization as key trends undermining the central role of the bureaucratic policy-makers in Germany. For other countries the shifting relation have been characterized as more disruptive, that is, as the 'breaking of the bargain' (Savoie 2003). The rise of the New Public Management (NPM) since the 1980s can be seen as a driver and manifestation of such disruption. With tailwind from a general rise of 'bureaucracy bashing', politicians demand more managerial skills and 'delivery competencies' (Hood and Lodge 2006) and also more direct accountability of bureaucrats for results—and in particular failure. The trend of politicization, discussed above, is linked to the increasingly widespread perception of growing estrangement between executive politicians and policy bureaucrats, with the former trying to strengthen loyalty and thinking in political terms within the bureaucracy and the latter perceiving a decline of influence in policy-making.

Such a claim can however not be generalized. While there is a growing number of studies that suggest that tensions between politicians and policy bureaucrats have resulted in more strained interactions or the side-lining of the permanent bureaucracy in policy-making (e.g. 't Hart and Wille 2006 studying interactions of ministers and officials in the Netherlands), we lack systematic and cross-national comparative research that would allow to generalize such a claim. At the same time, there is sufficient empirical ground to suggest that the rapidly changing context of policy-making—mediatization, austerity, political polarization—has had its toll in terms of challenging if not disrupting the 'dialogue model' of politics-bureaucracy interactions in policy-making. We should just be aware of a potentially wide range of variation cross nationally with regard to the strength and impact of these disruptive trends.

26.2.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Political Executives and Bureaucrats

Empirical research on the three big questions discussed above has been shaped by a variety of theoretical approaches. Max Weber's model of bureaucratic rule is an enduring reference point, mainly used as a yardstick for assessing the empirical reality in contrast to normative ideals of politics-bureaucracy relations. Weber's thinking has also been very influential in studying how different national systems deal with the challenges of controlling bureaucracy (Page 1992). But research on the politics-bureaucracy relation has also been influenced by the dominant general theoretical frameworks in political science, namely the rational choice (or public choice; also political economy) approach and the family of institutional approaches (see Chapter 5 in this volume). The political economy perspective is particularly significant, not primarily because of its explanatory power of behaviour. Its significance lies also in its practical relevance in shaping or justifying sentiments about the politics-bureaucracy relation being mainly a problem of controlling a bureaucracy that is always trying to shirk and drift (Pierre and Peters 2017).

Niskanen's (1971) model of the budget-maximizing bureaucrat was the first influential rational-choice/political economy approach dedicated to the behaviour of bureaucrats. Wilson (1989) and Dunleavy (1991) have debunked its simple claim—that bureaucrats seek expanding budgets because this comes with opportunities for increasing salary and power. Wilson argued that an increasing budget might undermine the coherence of an agency's mission; taking on tasks that do not fit into the existing portfolio might also undermine the reputation of the agency or create divided constituencies. Dunleavy (1991) remained within the bounds of the rational choice logic, but argued that bureaucratic leaders are more interested in maximizing interesting policy work and engagement with the political leaders, rather than cumbersome administrative (i.e. implementation) work that comes with risks of conflict and blame. The creation of a number of executive agencies that relieved UK central government departments from implementation tasks was used as an example to develop that theory and later on tested empirically (James 2003).

Despite these challenges, the rational choice perspective remained the central parsimonious theoretical framework for the analysis of the politics-bureaucracy relation. In particular the principal-agent framework (see Bendor et al. 2001 for a review) took centre stage in the theoretical debates. Not so different from Weber's take, it highlighted the 'information asymmetry' between the political principals and the bureaucratic agents—and assumed that the bureaucrats would use this asymmetry for their private gain by way of shirking and drifting. The model became the reference point and justification for performance contracts and incentive systems that aimed at minimizing risks of bureaucratic shirking and agency drift and provided a key academic justification of the NPM revolution sweeping across many governments in the OECD world and beyond (Boston et al. 1996). For executive politicians, the NPM approach promised a solution to the problem of the 'shirking bureaucrat' (Pierre and Peters 2017), also in light of doubts about the loyalty of bureaucrats having already served for previous governments.

It took two decades of NPM reform practices with a range of unintended effects, such as pervasive 'gaming' of target regimes, crowding out of intrinsic motivation (or public service motivation), before challenges of the principal-agent-perspective received more voice in the debate and competing approaches emerged. The Public Service Bargain (PSB) theory of Hood and Lodge (2006) is one exhibit of this new line of theorizing. The PSB perspective conceives the relation between executive politicians and policy bureaucrats as a bargain where both parties gain something but also have to give up something. Loyalty, reward, and competencies are the three main dimensions of this bargain, and Hood and Lodge (2006) can demonstrate that the managerial agency bargain that is part of the NPM reform toolkit is but one of many different bargains that have developed since the departure from the classic PSB. This classic bargain, originally formulated by Bernard Schaffer, consists of politicians giving up the right to hire and fire bureaucrats at their will but gain a certain set of competences and loyalty to the government of the day; bureaucrats give up their right to criticize the government in public and gain an accepted position in the policy-making system and a set of rewards, of which job security and predictable career patterns are the most important ones. Hood and Lodge (2006) draw on various country contexts (the United Kingdom and Germany, in particular) to show how this classic bargain varied between these two countries early on (with a more 'agency' type in the United Kingdom and a more independent 'trustee' bargain in Germany) and how administrative reforms and contextual changes have changed the bargains. The PSB perspective in particular allows to explore how changes in one dimension, for example the reward dimension, can have (unintended) downstream effects on other dimensions. For example, the idea to buy-in more 'delivery' skills with a more managerial ('turkey race') reward structure can—and did—undermine the loyalty of bureaucrats to support executive politicians in critical situations.

The PSB perspective is an important departure from the unidirectional perspective of the principal-agent framework that is limited to exploring ways to control the runaway agent—an assumption that has been challenged on empirical and theoretical grounds (see Pierre and Peters 2017 for a summary). It stresses the exchange relation between the two parties and the significance of informal expectations and understandings, with

some form of capricious equilibrium as an underlying criterion for a ‘good’ relation between politicians and bureaucrats (although Hood and Lodge would not state that so bluntly). Further scholarship of the current decade has added to the challenges of the principal-agent perspective by pointing at the often problematic behaviour of the political principal. In these accounts, the key problem is not the bureaucrat, but the cheating, shirking, and drifting principal who does not hold his or her end of the bargain, undermining policy effectiveness, bureaucratic professionalism, and democratic accountability (Schillemans and Busuioac 2015; Miller and Whitford 2016).

Further tailwind for the more critical take on the role of politicians in the relation with bureaucrats comes with the recent wave of research following the ‘behavioural’ turn in economics and beyond. Mainly being interested in the prevalence of biases among actor groups, including but not limited to politicians and bureaucrats, experimental designs have explored the prevalence of, in particular, confirmation bias, that is, the tendency to pay greater attention to information supporting existing causal understandings and worldviews. These studies show that politicians indeed display a strong confirmation bias when confronted with new information (such as information of performance about schools)—and providing more evidence that challenges prior attitudes actually results in stronger confirmation biases and motivated reasoning (Baekgaard et al. 2019). These studies, and the ‘behavioural’ theorizing on which they are based, have as yet not contributed to the exploration of the politics-bureaucracy relation—mainly because they are focusing on individual behaviour and have trouble conceptualising interaction between actors and how organizational context shapes individual biases (or adds new ones). However, the mechanisms uncovered, such as the biases and uses of heuristics, have already played an important role in the development of theories of administrative behaviour (Simon 1947), and indeed build on Simon. Today, these approaches have the potential to uncover dynamics in the politics-administrative relation that could be integrated into or combined with other approaches that seek to develop the classic principal-agent perspective. And new challenges of political polarization, hyper-politicization, and weaponizing public administration for political approaches call for such integration of perspectives (see final section).

26.3 POLITICIANS AND BUREAUCRATS IN EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT: CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

26.3.1 Comparative Perspectives on Political Control and Bureaucratic Power

The comparative study of political executives and policy bureaucracies is certainly one of the most fruitful areas of research within the literature discussed in this chapter.

The most influential comparative study to date was published in the early 1980s, focusing on the interaction of (executive and legislative) politicians and policy bureaucrats (Aberbach et al. 1981). This study showed significant cross-country differences in the respective roles and interactions of politicians and bureaucrats. Most subsequent comparative analyses are edited volumes with country chapters often using somewhat different theoretical and empirical approaches, rather than being the result of tightly integrated comparative projects (Page and Wright 1999; Peters and Pierre 2004; Dahlström et al. 2011).

Yet despite being mostly comparable rather than comparative, those studies have moved the research frontier and have paved the ground for later research. To engage in meaningful comparative research on a larger scale requires conceptual development based on thick contextual analysis. In particular, this literature highlights different institutional arrangements for addressing the delegation problem faced by political executives. Those arrangements can be thought of as a continuum, where some countries are characterized by politically neutral, purely merit bureaucracies without formal politicization of top official positions (e.g. United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands), whereas others have politicized positions at the 'commanding heights' of policy bureaucracies (e.g. Germany, Sweden, USA, France), and still others apply political criteria for political appointments also below the very top level of policy bureaucracies (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Spain, Greece) (Derlien 1996; Page and Wright 1999).

Moreover, scholars have also proposed other typologies of political and administrative relationships for comparative research. Meyer-Sahling (2008) differentiates four types of politicization according to two criteria: (1) is bureaucratic turnover systematically taking place after change in government; and (2) what is the recruitment pool for top officials? The resulting typology includes non-politicization (no replacement, internal recruitment pool, e.g. UK, Denmark), bounded politicization (replacement, internal recruitment pool, e.g. Germany), open politicization (replacement, external recruitment from outside political settings, e.g. United States), and partisan politicization (replacement, external recruitment from political settings, e.g. Hungary). However, even within non-politicized settings, political executives may replace top officials after political changes, such as in Denmark, with incoming top officials being selected on meritocratic, rather than party political grounds (Christensen et al. 2014).

In particular, contemporary scholars have engaged in comparative studies covering smaller numbers of countries, addressing topics such as functions and interactions of politicians, special advisers, and career officials (de Visscher and Salomonsen 2013; Christiansen et al. 2016), interactions of politicians and bureaucrats in rule-making (Page 2012), the politicization of the civil service (Meyer-Sahling and Veen 2012), and the organization of executive bureaucracy (Fleischer 2009). Having said that, there are several noteworthy comparative studies covering more than a handful of countries, including a study on 'party patronage' (Kopecký et al. 2012; Kopecký et al. 2016) based on face-to-face expert interviews. This research not only looks at the prevalence of politicization of (different parts of) the state apparatus but also at the kind of qualifications of political appointees sought by politicians, and politicians' motives for politicization. A key finding is that politicians' motives for politicization are primarily

about exercising political control, although often in combination with the desire to reward loyal followers.

Another approach is to collect survey data among senior officials to assess cross-country variation in politicized appointments. Bach et al. (2020) show that patterns of politicization in Europe fit squarely with established administrative traditions, such as low levels of politicization in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries and high levels of politicization in Napoleonic countries, but also shows how countries considered being part of the same tradition vary substantially in terms of politicized appointments, such as the post-communist countries (Meyer-Sahling and Veen 2012). A third approach is to gauge politicization by mapping party political backgrounds of top officials. There are to date no examples of comparative studies of top officials in policy bureaucracies using this approach, but there are several single country studies, which provide useful starting points for international comparisons (Christensen 2006; Meyer-Sahling 2008; Ennsner-Jedenastik 2016a; Bach and Veit 2018).

26.3.2 Leadership Capacity and Political Control: The Growth, Function, and Effects of Ministerial Advisers

The increasing use of ministerial advisers who enter and leave their position together with their political superiors and are appointed on political rather than meritocratic grounds is another key topic in contemporary research on politico-administrative relations (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015; Hustedt et al. 2017; see also Chapter 25 in this volume). This body of scholarship focuses on the expansion, roles, and effects of ministerial advisers (Eichbaum and Shaw 2008; Yong and Hazell 2014; Christiansen et al. 2016; Askim et al. 2017; Hustedt and Salomonsen 2017). The main reasons for the growth of ministerial advisers (who are also known as ‘special advisers’ or ‘political advisers’) include a need to increase the political leadership’s capacity to control the policy bureaucracy, the emergence of more complex policy problems (see also the final section on ‘stress factors’), and permanent attention by the news media on political executives. All these developments create the need for political executives to surround themselves with ‘personal loyalists’ (Hood and Lodge 2006), who help politicians to navigate through rougher political waters.

The literature suggests that the numbers of special advisers have in particular grown in systems with a politically neutral, meritocratic civil service (Dahlström et al. 2011). The potential threat these special advisers pose to civil service neutrality and impartiality are a cross-cutting theme in this body of scholarship (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015). Many studies on special advisers aim at gaining a better understanding of ‘the nature of the beast’, including growth patterns (Dahlström 2009), career backgrounds (Yong and Hazell 2014), and the functions and role understandings of special advisers (Askim et al. 2017). The latter body of research has produced several typologies of ministerial advisers, functional roles (see Hustedt et al. 2017 for an overview). For instance, Askim et al.

(2017) find that ministerial advisers in Norway encompass 'stand ins' for their minister, 'media advisers' (also known as 'spin doctors'), and political coordinators. In other contexts, ministerial advisers also perform genuine policy advisory functions or oversee policy implementation.

Moving from the description of backgrounds and roles, this body of research has increasingly focused on investigating special advisers in the broader context of executive politics and their impacts on intra-executive relationships between career bureaucrats, political executives, and special advisers. A key question in this regard is whether special advisers insulate policy bureaucrats from political executives or otherwise control the flow of information from policy bureaucrats to political executives. However, empirical evidence about these implications is mixed. To illustrate, whereas Eichbaum and Shaw (2008) suggest that this kind of 'administrative politicization', is not practiced on a routine basis in New Zealand, comparative research on Denmark and Sweden by Öhberg et al. (2017) shows that a higher number of special advisers decreases policy bureaucrats' access to political executives. There is evidence that special advisers have an impact on career bureaucrats, in the sense that the latter are less functionally politicized (and hence coming closer to the Weberian ideal type) in systems with special advisers compared to their peers in systems without any substantial numbers of special advisers (Christiansen et al. 2016). In contexts with few special advisers and a highly meritocratic career civil service, such as Denmark, the latter effectively perform genuinely political functions which otherwise would be performed by ministerial advisers. However, this functional politicization seems to come at the price of a lower proportion of genuine policy-making functions performed by policy bureaucrats. In that sense, ministerial advisers may contribute to a more clear-cut separation of political and administrative functions, rather than politicizing policy bureaucracies.

Another theme related to ministerial advisers relates to their role in executive coordination, which effectively means whether special advisers effectively are 'delivering' increased levels of political control of permanent bureaucrats. Here, research indicates that special advisers may indeed increase political control over policy coordination, although their authority is shaped by the institutional context, such as systems with high degrees of prime ministerial authority (and hence powerful special advisers) as opposed to systems with strong line ministers (Hustedt and Salomonsen 2017). Taken together, recent scholarship on interactions and functions of special advisers and policy bureaucrats not only highlights implications of political leadership capacity on political control over the bureaucracy, but also sheds new light on the roles and functions of career officials and their responsiveness to political preferences.

26.3.3 Governing Executive and Regulatory Agencies

Although this chapter primarily focuses on political executives and policy bureaucracies, any contemporary analysis of the relation between politicians and bureaucrats in executive government would remain incomplete without considering executive and

regulatory agencies which have become an integral component of governments around the world (Levi-Faur and Jordana 2004; Verhoest et al. 2012). The delivery of public services and the exercise of regulatory functions by agencies with an appointed leadership have become a cornerstone of public sector organizations in the wake of managerial reforms and liberalization and privatization policies throughout the world. Having said that, the provision of public services by organizations operating at arm's length from executive politicians is far from new and has a long tradition, for example in Scandinavia. From the perspective of political executives, agencies pose a potential problem of political control over policy implementation, but they may also provide advantages to politicians by serving as 'lightning rods' for problems of policy implementation (Hood 2011). There is a growing body of literature addressing different aspects of political control, party patronage, and bureaucratic autonomy in relation to arm's length government.

First, executive politicians may consider agencies and other arm's length bodies as job machines providing employment opportunities for loyal supporters. Likewise, boards of public corporations can fulfil a similar function of generating 'jobs for the boys'. The key rationale for politicians motivated by rewarding supporters is that senior appointments in organizations outside the policy bureaucracy will provoke less public attention and are attractive due to the large number of positions available. Moreover, senior positions in agencies may not be subject to the same civil service regulations regarding selection and tenure. Alternatively, political executives may seek to exercise control over arm's length agencies by appointing political allies in order to compensate for limited means of direct control over those bodies (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016b; Bach et al. 2020).

The empirical literature indicates generally lower levels of politicization for appointments in agencies (and other arm's length bodies) compared to ministerial departments (Kopecký et al. 2016; Bach et al. 2020). At the same time, in particular in developing contexts, the creation of agencies has been linked to the idea of 'islands of excellence' in otherwise highly politicized and unprofessional bureaucracies. Hence, the idea would be to deliberately create organizations protected from politicians' (ab)use of appointment powers (Roberts 2010). This notion of credible commitment is also at the core of the discussion about regulatory agencies. Assuming time-inconsistent preferences among politicians, regulators are created as formally independent, protected from political interference by various tools of institutional design (Roberts 2010). Again, the idea is one of de-politicization, creating effective government by delegating discretion to professional civil servants. However, this type of delegation does not mean that politicians completely abstain from exercising political control, but compensate their lack of influence over substantial agency decisions (i.e. formal agency independence) by appointing partisan loyalists to leadership positions (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016b). This research shows that higher levels of formal agency independence are positively associated with the level of party politicization.

Finally, whereas scholars of politicization in Europe have shown that patterns of (de) selection of top officials are not the same for all ministries or agencies (Kopecký et al. 2016), they are only gradually beginning to understand the reasons for the differential

politicization of the government apparatus (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016b; Bach et al. 2020). The public sector has witnessed increasing levels of delegation to executive and regulatory agencies operating at a distance from ministerial departments. Agencies perform important societal functions, which may prompt ministers to politicize agency heads. To date, only a handful of studies have examined the politicization of agency heads, providing mixed results (Dahlström and Niklasson 2013; Ennser-Jedenastik 2016b; Petrovsky et al. 2017; Dahlström and Holmgren 2019). This is different in the US, where scholars have extensively studied political appointments across the entire government apparatus. Importantly, this literature shows how differences between organizations' political relevance and complexity affect patterns of top official (de)selection (Lewis 2008; Lewis and Waterman 2013; Hollibaugh et al. 2014). As of now, the European literature has largely ignored within-country variation of politicized appointments (with few exceptions, see Kopecký et al. 2016).

26.4 A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE STUDY OF POLITICAL EXECUTIVES AND POLICY BUREAUCRACIES

The three fundamental topics discussed in the second section of this chapter will still feature prominently in future research on the relation between executive politicians and policy bureaucrats. What has changed since the first wave of research on these topics is, however, the social, political, technological, and economic context in which the 'natural' tensions between politicians and bureaucrats play out. These changes call for a development, if not reconsideration (or overhaul) not only of the empirical focus of research and the respective theoretical lenses, but also of the normative orientation marks to make sense of shifting patterns and responses to new challenges.

26.4.1 The New 'Stress Factors' in Executive Politics

How the politics-bureaucracy nexus responds to new 'stress factors' that are putting pressure on both parties, has been a key research topic, as we discussed above. The rise of 'bureaucracy bashing' and belief in the superiority of private sector management techniques and market incentives have challenged the classic PSB (although in more diverse ways than the NPM folk story has it). But while these developments are very much on the radar of public administration research, new 'stress factors' and pressure points call for a further development of this line of research. The rise of wicked and unruly problems—such as climate change, migration, terrorism, and digitization—is combined with the changing media landscape, and in particular the rise of social

media that not only puts politicians and also increasingly public agencies under constant scrutiny, but also fuels political polarization and ‘truth decay’ (Kavanagh and Rich 2018).

These trends translate into the politics-administration relation by further distancing the two parties: under tighter media scrutiny and more rapid communication cycles, and the increasing risk of malicious critique, the significance of purely political thinking and strategic communication increases—something that the traditional policy bureaucrat might not be able or dispositioned to deliver. On the one hand, this development calls for a further exploration of the dynamics of politicization. In addition to studying personnel decisions and their effects (see below), such a research agenda should focus on (changes in) role understandings and interaction patterns between political executives, special advisers, and policy bureaucrats.

On the other hand, a key question is how this development sits together with the increasing technical and analytical demands placed on policy bureaucrats. The rise of complex policy challenges calls for a major update of the competency profile and the attraction of ‘nerd type of competencies’ (Lodge and Wegrich 2012). Ironically political polarization and ‘truth decay’ come together—with stronger calls for more technocracy and analytical skills—be that in the form of ‘experimental policy-making’ or impact assessment procedures. One can both argue for these to be counter-trends to politicization and that there is an overlap between technocracy and anti-politics pursued by populist parties and public moods. In other words, the policy bureaucracy is pushed to fulfil contradictory demands: being more political responsive and savvy in supporting tactical communication but also to keep up with the increasing demands for state of the art analytical policy work (Veit et al. 2017). While the PSB perspective is well placed to capture the changing patterns in terms of mutual expectations for competency, reward and loyalty, future studies should re-orient towards one of the field’s core topics by investigating what is happening inside the ‘machine room’ of government. Such studies could investigate politico-administrative interactions in policy-making processes with different degrees of political contestation or degrees of analytical requirements.

26.4.2 Politicization: Appointments, Replacements, Effects

Although being an established field of research, many puzzles in the study of politicization of senior level appointments remain unsolved. A key argument in the contemporary literature is that the delicate balance between safeguarding the bureaucracy’s professional autonomy and ensuring its responsiveness to elected politicians preferences has tipped towards the latter as a result of increasing levels of political influence on the (de)selection of top officials (Suleiman 2003; Peters and Pierre 2004; Dahlström et al. 2011; Aucoin 2012). Yet this claim of an increase in civil service politicization stands on shaky empirical ground. Most politicization research is primarily cross-sectional or retrospective in nature, rather than truly longitudinal. For instance, Dahlström (2009)

uses country experts' estimates of the numbers of political appointees over time, whereas others rely on survey data, expert interviews, or mixed methods to track politicization dynamics (Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014; Kopecký et al. 2016; Bach et al. 2020). Those studies face obvious methodological limitations in grasping long-term trends, and we clearly need better data, for instance based on document or biographical analysis to track changes over time and to compare developments over time.

More substantially, we know little about the actual motivations and criteria for (de) selecting top officials used by political executives. There is some evidence about control versus reward as motivations (Kopecký et al. 2016), but analyses of top officials' partisan loyalty or of political change as driver of bureaucratic turnover represent cases of observational equivalence—they are compatible with both reward and control types of motivations (Dahlström and Holmgren 2019). Moreover, we know little about substantial criteria for appointing and replacing top officials beyond measures of partisan loyalty, including politicized contexts but also countries with meritocratic personnel systems where politicians have more limited influence on personnel decisions regarding top officials. The literature on the loyalty-competence nexus in political appointments in the US could potentially serve as a way forward for research outside the US context (Lewis and Waterman 2013; Hollibaugh et al. 2014; Ouyang et al. 2017).

Another important future challenge is that almost all studies of politicization concentrate on incumbent office holders, which substantially limits the possibility for drawing inferences on politicians' reasons for selecting top officials in the first place. For instance, partisan loyalty might be widespread among senior officials below the level of top officials as well; yet we simply do not know whether this characteristic makes a difference for individual career success. Bach and Veit (2018) address those problems and demonstrate the analytical purchase of studying the promotion of top officials in Germany among a pool of candidates based on multiple selection criteria. A comparison of potential and actual office holders is considered the ideal research design for studying politicians' selection criteria (Ouyang et al. 2017). However, in contrast to research on the selection of ministers among members of parliament (Bäck et al. 2016), this approach has until recently not been used in politicization research.

Finally, the politicization of civil service appointments raises important questions about the desirability and effects of politicization. There is a growing body evidence that politicization has detrimental effects on government performance and increases risks of corruption (Lewis 2007; Moynihan and Roberts 2010; Dahlström and Lapuente 2017). Again, the US-literature offers the most comprehensive analyses, indicating lower levels of administrative performance for public agencies managed by political appointees as opposed to career officials (Lewis 2007; Moynihan and Roberts 2010). Moreover, there is empirical evidence about the negative effects of politicization of the public sector on various aspects of good government (Dahlström and Lapuente 2017). However, we know little about the effects of politicization of policy bureaucracies (which may not necessarily coincide with the politicization of the public sector in general) on some measure of 'government performance'.

26.5 CONCLUSION

The starting point of this chapter was the observation that political executives inevitably face problems of delegation vis-à-vis policy bureaucracies. In consequence, the study of the relationship between political executives and policy bureaucrats is concerned with the problem of ensuring political control over the bureaucracy, and the assessment of bureaucrats' influence on policy-making. Whereas the principal-agent framework and other political economy approaches have generated important insights into politico-administrative relations, there is growing evidence that several of these theories' core assumptions are empirically standing on shaky grounds (Pierre and Peters 2017), and that one of the big theoretical challenges is to understand the conditions under which bureaucratic autonomy, rather than political control, should be a guiding principle for organizational design (Miller and Whitford 2016; Dahlström and Lapuente 2017).

In order to answer questions such as how much bureaucratic autonomy is required for good governance, we need a sound knowledge base about the antecedents and effects of politico-administrative relations in executive politics. Future research on the relation between political executives and policy bureaucrats should not only develop causal models explaining the dynamics of this relation in increasingly turbulent times; it should also contribute with normative theories about appropriate degrees of bureaucratic autonomy on the one hand and (the boundaries of) legitimate political control on the other hand. The implicit normative underpinnings of principal-agent approaches has too long shaped our debates about what happens and what should happen in the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats.

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