

# **REVISITING POLITICIZATION: POLITICAL ADVISERS AND PUBLIC SERVANTS IN WESTMINSTER SYSTEMS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent times much has been made of the threat that some argue is posed by political advisers to the impartiality of the Westminster civil service. The possibility of fruitful relations between political staff and civil servants is accepted in some quarters, but the balance of academic and media attention has highlighted examples of conflict and distrust. To date, however, scholarly research has not fully illuminated the views of those deemed most 'at risk' from the advent of political advisers in executive government. This article seeks to address that gap. Drawing on primary data collected through a large-scale survey of senior officials in the New Zealand Public Service, the paper (a) assesses the degree to which those officials perceive political advisers as a threat to their neutrality and (b) describes the form taken by that threat as variously perceived. On the evidence reported, it is suggested that traditional understandings of 'politicization' need to be reconceptualized if they are to fully account for the nature of the relationship between political and civil service advisers in Westminster executives. To existing conceptions of politicization, therefore, the article proposes adding another: 'administrative politicization'. This construct allows for different gradations of politicization to be identified. It also enables a nuanced assessment of the nature and extent of a risk to civil service neutrality which, the data suggest, is not as great as is sometimes alleged.

## INTRODUCTION

A good deal has been said – much of it fearful – about the threat posed by political advisers to the impartiality of Westminster-style civil services.<sup>1</sup> In the case of New Zealand, the issue was placed firmly on the agenda when, in his 2002 Annual Report to parliament, the then State Services Commissioner suggested that recent increases in the number of ministerial advisers in ministers' offices had “raised fears in some quarters about the potential for the politicization of the Public Service” (Wintringham 2002, 10).<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere in the family of Westminster nations, too, senior officials, academics and media commentators are shining a spotlight on what is now routinely referred to in the United Kingdom (U.K.) as the “third element” of the executive branch (Wicks 2002, 3). On occasion, what is illuminated is regarded favourably. Sir Richard Wilson, a former head of the British Civil Service, maintains that advisers are “now established as a proper and legitimate feature of the constitutional framework within which Cabinet ministers work”, whose value lies in being able to “help the department understand the mind of the Minister, work alongside officials on the Minister's behalf and handle party political aspects of government business” (Wilson 2002, 387).

Equally, political advisers are sometimes viewed with suspicion or worse. In both Ireland and the U.K. concern is expressed that the growing influence of special advisers may – if it has not already done so – politicize the policy process by diminishing the role of civil servants (Connaughton 2005, 2006; Mountfield 2002; Neill 2000, 73). There has been disquiet, too, that the privileged access political advisers have to ministers leaves open the potential for the inappropriate usurpation of executive authority (U.K. Parliament 2001; Wicks 2002). Meanwhile, in Australia political advisers have been described in one commentary as the “junk-yard attack dogs of the political system” (Weller 2002, 72), and accused of complicity in events such as the ‘Children overboard’ affair (see Senate of Australia 2002; Tiernan 2007).<sup>3</sup>

Much of the scholarship on political advisers conveys a sense of foreboding; a concern that officials' place in the Westminster scheme of things is under threat from the (political adviser) barbarians at the gate. But a good deal of it tends to accept that threat as given – typically on the basis of advisers' role in controversial, and mostly media-related events. In Australia, the Children overboard affair is the exemplar; in the U.K., that role is perhaps best played by the “unfortunate events” which took place in the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and in Canada, the sponsorship scandal that contributed so significantly to the defeat of the Liberal (Martin) Government has resulted in a focus on the respective roles and duties of political and public service actors.

Yet empirical tests of the assumption that political advisers pose a threat to the conventions which underpin the permanent civil service in Whitehall, Canberra, Ottawa, Dublin, Wellington and elsewhere, and its relationship with its political masters and mistresses, are few and far between. Given the explicitly normative dimension of much of the popular and a significant part of the academic commentary on advisers, and more specifically how best to inoculate Westminster systems from the partisan distemper associated with them, the absence of an evidence base is problematic. Moreover, there is a sense in which conceptual and theoretical frameworks have lagged behind significant institutional changes such as the advent of the third element in executive government. Our principal objective in this article concerns the latter – and specifically the failure of orthodox conceptualizations of politicization to speak to a new set of institutional arrangements and behavioural dynamics.

While the focus here is on the particular circumstances within one member of the Westminster family of nations, and the implications for that family generally, the issues raised by the introduction of a third actor into what was hitherto a bilateral relationship between minister and public or civil servant are not confined to Westminster systems alone. Such systems are both constitutionally and institutionally qualitatively different from those in which there is a clearer separation between legislative and executive branches (with the civil service in Westminster systems sometimes viewed as providing a check against ‘unbridled’ executive power) and in which there is greater recourse to partisan appointments within the administrative arm of executive government. But the imperative for the provision of advice to political actors in Westminster systems by politically neutral and expert public service advisers – Westminster’s ‘free, frank, comprehensive and fearless’ advice – is shared by others, notably in Federal and State systems of governance and public administration in the United States (U.S.). And so there is a commonality between Westminster imperatives and the normative tests advanced from Wilson (1887) to Wildavsky (1987): whether in the former’s admonition that while “politics sets the task for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices”, or the latter’s oft-cited maxim that public policy (administration) should “speak truth to power”. There are also the seminal contributions within the U.S. literature addressing these issues (for example, Durant 1995; Hecl 1977). More recently, the risks associated with a move to ‘at-will’ employment on the part of a number of U.S. states – risks including the provision of advice that is more responsive than responsible – have been noted in case studies that speak both to issues within Federal and State administrations in the U.S. and to those that we identify in this article within the Westminster family (see, for example, Bowman and West 2006; Cogburn 2006; Condrey and Battaglio 2007; Kellough and Nigro 2006).

The purposes of this article, then, are three-fold. Firstly, we review traditional understandings of ‘politicization’, particularly in Westminster contexts, where one of the defining elements in the family of ideas that constitute Westminster is that of a constitutional, expert, and non-partisan civil service (Rhodes and Weller 2005).

Secondly, we advance a new theoretical conception of politicization which speaks specifically to the relationship between political advisers and permanent civil servants. Orthodox understandings are of limited use in both describing and assessing the threat to civil service neutrality which some see in the advent and conduct of political advisers. Here, we propose a framework derived from the material experiences of the relevant stakeholders. It is, as a consequence, better suited to the particulars of the trilateral relationship which increasingly applies within the executive branch in many Westminster jurisdictions.

Thirdly, we apply that theoretical framework to the analysis of data drawn from a large-scale survey of senior officials in the New Zealand Public Service. On that basis it is suggested that while it is possible (and, indeed, increasingly common) to mount an *a priori* case that the third element represents a threat to public servants, the evidence – at least from New Zealand – is that, on balance, the risk is more theoretical than actual.

## **POLITICIZATION: TRADITIONAL VIEWS AND LIMITATIONS**

The extent to which, in the New Zealand context, the advent of ministerial advisers has resulted in a retreat from Westminster principles and practices has been examined elsewhere (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007). The purpose of this article is different, but Westminster – as a particular doctrine of political and administrative arrangements – provides the point of departure. Broadly speaking, politicization, as we use the concept

here, involves some degree of diminution in one of the defining components of the Westminster model. That component, as foreshadowed above, is “[a] constitutional bureaucracy with a non-partisan and expert civil service” (Rhodes and Weller 2005, 7).

The notion of a constitutional bureaucracy suggests both formal and conventional institutional arrangements. One of these, typically, is the convention that the civil or public service meets its constitutional obligations to the government of the day through the provision of advice that is of a neutral or non-partisan kind. As Weller has recently observed, this “means telling ministers what they need to know, even when the news is bad and even when ministers may not want to hear it” (2002, 64).

The optimal set of circumstances – a ‘Westminster equilibrium’, perhaps – is one in which there is an appropriate measure of responsiveness to the policy priorities of the government of the day, but within the context of Westminster institutional arrangements (whether formal or conventional) that ensure that responsiveness is mediated by a public interest test. Politicization can therefore be viewed as the outcome of formal or conventional institutional arrangements which compromise the integrity of the policy process.

As noted during a recent U.K. House of Commons Select Committee Inquiry, orthodox definitions of politicization “hark back to Northcote and Trevelyan, whose seminal recommendations were intended to ensure that the civil service attracted able and energetic people” (U.K. Parliament 2005, 1). In that context, it made sense to ensure that meritocratic criteria, rather than partisan considerations, functioned at the point of entry into the civil service. The influence of Northcote and Trevelyan is no better demonstrated than in the fact that orthodox definitions of politicization have tended to focus on the systems and criteria under which officials – and particularly senior officials – have been *appointed*. Politicization has been viewed as a significant departure from the application of merit criteria in appointment processes. And so Peters and Pierre, for example, define politicization as “the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards, and disciplining of members of the public service” (2004, 2).

In other words, standard conceptions have tended to view appointment processes as the primary *locus* of politicization (see Campbell and Wilson 1995; Hughes 2003; Mulgan 1998, 1999; Peters 2001, Weller 1989; Weller and Young 2001). As Mulgan has observed, the assumption is that:

[p]oliticized appointment processes ... will encourage politicized actions on the part of the public servants. In particular, politicized appointments will undermine the traditional political neutrality of career public servants and their capacity to give ministers advice that is free and frank (or ‘frank and fearless’ in the Australian version) (2006, 4).

For those interested in establishing whether political advisers are a risk to civil service neutrality, this presents several challenges. For one thing, definitions typically focus on the most senior tier of officialdom: the permanent secretary, Chief Executive or country-equivalent. Consequently, with the arguable exceptions of Peters and Pierre, and Mulgan, few of those who discuss politicization examine what happens *beneath* the level of the head of department.<sup>4</sup> Yet in policy-making contexts it is typically amongst the second and third tiers of the public service that contact between ministerial advisers and officials generally takes place (see Maley 2000, 454). A focus on the very top of the department, therefore, does not readily permit an exploration of the degree to which interactions two or three rungs down the ladder threaten the neutrality of public servants.

Secondly, more often than not attention is paid to the process and criteria by which individuals of a particular ideological disposition are matched with – or dismissed from – the most senior bureaucratic positions. The inference is that a partisan appointee will produce partisan advice (and, additionally, that this is less desirable than advice delivered freely and frankly), but seldom is the relationship between appointment and the tenor of the advice subsequently tendered expressly asserted, much less analysed.

Clearly, a case can be made for a causal relationship – of indeterminate strength – between a partisan appointment and policy substance. However, it is not clear that this assumption universally holds (or, for that matter, that political advisers themselves are unable to speak truth to power). Neither is it necessarily the case that the appointment and dismissal of heads of departments is the only – or necessarily even the most significant – determinant of politicization.

Accordingly, it is useful to distinguish between the politicization of *appointments* and the politicization of *policy*. A focus on the latter suggests a remedial ‘target’ other than the civil service, and a *structural* manifestation or determinant of politicization other than the appointment processes for senior officials (see Peters and Pierre 2004, 5). Other things being equal, the politicization of senior civil service appointments may well lead to the politicization of policy. Mulgan suggests, however, that the connection:

is at most a contingent one. A career public servant appointed on merit is quite capable of distorting the public record to suit the government of the day, just as a politicized appointee may behave as a principled professional, resisting pressure to slant information to suit the government’s line (2006, 26).

Thus, politicization of policy may occur in the absence of politicization of public service appointments; indeed, that is more or less what is inferred by those who see in political advisers a threat to the political neutrality of permanent officials.

In sum, the bulk of the scholarship on politicization describes an arc around ministerial advisers. Virtually all of it attends to bilateral relations between ministers and their officials. Some of it, particularly Peters and Pierre (2004) and Mulgan (1999, 2006), emphasises – or at least entertains the possibility of – similarly bilateral relations between senior officials and their subordinates within departments. But much of the literature has little to say on the trilateral relationship between ministers, ministerial advisers, and public servants.

Consequently, the third element is frequently the elephant in the room. What Weller and Young (2001, 172) characterise as ‘narrow’ definitions of politicization – those which concentrate on the appointment and/or dismissal of departmental heads – are insufficient. Such definitions do not speak to the nature, location and exercise of the institutional levers through which political advisers may be able to exert pressure on civil servants.

## **TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH: ADMINISTRATIVE POLITICIZATION**

In the research described below, initial attempts at analysing participants’ views on the risks posed by ministerial advisers were guided by categories suggested by the literature surveyed above. It quickly became clear, however, that what respondents were saying could not satisfactorily be explained by reference to that scholarship. What was lacking was a means of conceptualising in some meaningful way those behaviours of ministerial advisers which are described (by officials, in this case) as politicizing.

Two issues stood out. The first was that the experiences reported by participants which, in their view, had consequences for their impartiality were not all of the same order. For example, cases in which ministerial advisers demand changes to the content of officials' papers pose a qualitatively different threat to civil service neutrality than those in which ministerial advisers disagree with the substance of that advice. In the research reported here, both were described by respondents as actions which compromised public service neutrality, yet it is important to discriminate between different actions on the basis of their probable impact on that impartiality.

Secondly, some of what was described by respondents as politicization seemed, in fact, to represent some other phenomenon at work. It may be more accurate, for instance, to treat a disagreement between advisers and officials over policy options as an example of contestability rather than as an attempt by the former to 'politicize' the latter.

In short, it was apparent that what was required was a more nuanced conceptualisation which did not treat politicization as a single, non-differentiated phenomenon and, additionally, which would help establish where something *other* than politicization might be taking place.

To some extent the business of constructing such a framework was informed by the growing scholarship on the advent and influence of political advisers in Westminster nations.<sup>5</sup> Even here, though, relatively little attention is paid to the complexion of politicization, or to the ways in which ministerial advisers 'cause' it. It tends simply to be asserted, and considered a risk. For the most part, therefore, an inductive approach was adopted, drawing on what participants had to say in response to a series of questions probing the issue of politicization in order to develop a profile of the phenomenon in the institutional and behavioural context of ministerial adviser/official relations.

To existing conceptions of politicization, then, we propose adding another. For the purposes of analysing the effects of ministerial advisers' activities on the civil service, it is helpful to conceive of 'administrative politicization' as an intervention which offends against the principles and conventions associated with a professional and impartial civil service.

This conceptualisation has both procedural and substantive dimensions. An action offends in a *procedural* sense if it is intended to, or has the effect of constraining the capacity of public servants to furnish ministers with advice in a free, frank and fearless manner. Procedural politicization can be manifested in two ways. The first occurs when an adviser intervenes in the relationship between a minister and his or her officials. The distinguishing feature here is the conscious attempt on the part of the adviser to place him or herself between ministers and officials, constraining the ability of the latter to tender free, frank and fearless advice. The second describes conduct by ministerial advisers which is intended to, or which has the effect of constraining the capacity of officials to tender free, frank and fearless advice by intervening in the internal workings of a department.

The signal characteristic of interventions of a procedural nature is that they interfere with public servants' responsibilities to and relationships with their ministers. As such, they may well diminish or otherwise limit officials' contribution to policy formation. But whether or not they necessarily politicize the public service, or the content of officials' advice, is a separate consideration.

However, there are other interventions which may very well have those effects, for which reason attention is drawn to the *substantive* dimension of administrative

politicization, which describes an action intended to, or having the effect of colouring the substance of officials' advice with partisan considerations.

## **THE RESEARCH**

It has been noted that while “there is a sense among practitioners as well as academic analysts that some politicization [of the civil service] has been occurring, ... the evidence supporting that belief is often subjective, anecdotal and rather diffuse” (Peters and Pierre 2004, 1). The research reported here is a response to that relative dearth of empirical evidence (at least in Westminster contexts).<sup>6</sup> Specifically, it is intended to establish whether or not senior officials in the New Zealand public service think that ministerial advisers pose a threat to public service neutrality and, if so, what material form the threat is thought to take.

The institutional context in which the officials' survey was conducted has been noted elsewhere (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007). The instrument, which comprised 68 items and a mix of forced-choice and open-ended questions, was administered in early 2005. Officials from 20 (of the 36) government departments, and the New Zealand Police, agreed to participate in the project, and the questionnaire was distributed to 546 senior public servants. Completed questionnaires were received from 188 respondents – a response rate of 34.4%.

The intent was to elicit the views of those officials who had had contact with ministerial advisers at any point since 1990, and whose engagement had been in relation to substantive policy matters, rather than administrative concerns. Although it is impossible to specify precisely the number in that population (and the absence of a sampling frame constrains the use of inferential statistical analyses), the size of the sample and the response rate permit a robust analysis of the data.<sup>7</sup>

### *Respondents*

In the event, respondents – of whom there were more men (53.7%) than women (46.3%) – were drawn from the span of government departments. Fifteen percent were with one of the three central departments (the Treasury, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the State Services Commission). Most (47.3%) worked in departments in which policy and operations are combined, although a good many were in departments which are predominately policy (26.6%) or delivery oriented (13.8%). A much smaller group (2.2%) were situated in funding/purchase agencies.

The vast majority of participants were employed in the top three tiers of the public service. Just over 30% were either Chief Executives, or tier two officials who report directly to their Chief Executive. The largest cohort comprised tier three staff (57.5%), who report to their employer through a tier two manager. Some 12.4% of responses were from tier four or other staff, who were predominantly managers of district or local offices.

Participants drew on a considerable stock of experience: 12.9% had worked in the New Zealand public service for five or fewer years, 18.3% for between six and ten years, and the balance for more than 11 years. Forty six percent had been with their current department for fewer than six years; nearly a fifth (17.8%) for 16 years or more.

### *Data*

A series of questions concerning participants' views on, and experiences of, the threat posed by ministerial advisers was asked.<sup>8</sup> At the most general level, respondents were split on whether the actions of advisers threaten the neutrality of the public service (see Table 1). Just over a third felt that they did; slightly more did not believe this to be the case; and a quarter were unsure one way or the other.

There were varying degrees of association between this issue and sundry independent variables. The relationship between officials' views and rank, for instance, was moderate, with senior officials less likely than their junior colleagues to perceive a risk.<sup>9</sup> So, too, were respondents employed in one or other of the three central agencies (the Treasury, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the State Services Commission), and longer serving officials.<sup>10</sup>

TABLE 1  
**Do ministerial advisers threaten the impartiality of the public service?**

	frequency	valid %
yes	66	36.3
no	71	39
undecided	45	24.7
total	182	100

Note: missing=6

When asked to describe in concrete terms the nature of the threat, the third of respondents who expressed concern provided a range of examples. Table 2 orders those responses according to the dimensions of administrative politicization described above.

TABLE 2  
**The nature of the threat (1)**

	count	% responses	% cases
procedural	37	35.5	47.4
substantive	18	17.3	23.1
other	49	47	62
n	104	100	133.3

### *Procedural politicization*

Of the dimensions noted above procedural politicization was cited most frequently, and particularly that variant describing intervention by political advisers in the relationship between a minister and his or her officials. In effect, this constitutes empirical support

for anecdotal evidence reported elsewhere that political advisers “stand between ministers and their departments” (Keating 2003, 93).

The majority of participants were inclined to think that ministerial advisers do have some bearing on ministers’ receptiveness to advice from officials (Table 3).

TABLE 3

**Does the presence of a ministerial adviser in a ministerial office have an impact on the Minister’s receptiveness to advice from officials?**

	frequency	valid %
yes	101	55.8
no	32	17.7
undecided	48	26.5
total	181	100

Note: missing=7

As to the nature of that effect, officials provided a range of assessments. For instance, there was some support for the proposition that advisers actively prevent officials’ advice from reaching ministers’ desks. Although relatively few respondents (15.4%) unequivocally agreed this occurs (while 48.9% disagreed, more or less strongly, that it does), a further 35.8% gave a mixed response to this item, which may suggest that a narrow majority of respondents feel such conduct occurs at least some of the time. Concerns about such conduct were most likely to be found amongst junior officials, and those working for agencies whose primary function was not the provision of policy advice (i.e. those in delivery departments and/or purchase or funding agencies).<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, only just over a third of respondents (38.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that ministerial advisers actively hinder officials’ access to ministers. On this matter, respondents who had been seconded from their department to a minister’s office were only marginally more inclined to think advisers do, in fact, act in this manner than those who had not.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, officials employed in policy ministries and departments in which policy and operations are institutionally combined were marginally less likely to see a problem here than were other officials.<sup>13</sup>

As to specifics, there were reports of ministerial advisers who have “convinced a minister that a free and frank briefing paper should be turned back at the adviser’s door so the Minister could say he had not received advice on the subject” (173); of a case in which an adviser did “not pass on information she thought the Minister didn’t need” (064); and of instances in which “a ministerial adviser with strong personal policy views and a poor historical relationship with this department periodically undermined the Minister’s confidence in officials’ advice” (151). Some respondents also felt that some ministers were inclined to ask their advisers’ views on the competence of officials and, on that basis, either to take those officials’ advice or not.

A number of officials also recounted examples of ministerial advisers intervening directly in their and/or their department’s work. Some reported what amounts to intimidation: one tier two official recalls receiving “phone call suggestions, directions,

and hints on what to do ... [and] views on what might happen if something is not done (i.e. possible negative consequences)” (040).

Others said that ministerial advisers sometimes “give policy directions to staff rather than that coming from the Minister to the Chief Executive” (105); “cut across accountability lines and intervened in industrial relations negotiations and contract negotiations” (113); and “refused to let us release information under the Official Information Act when we had a legal obligation to do so” (162).

But the consequences of advisers’ interventions are not universally held to be nefarious. As one respondent noted, regardless of the deployment of advisers, some ministers are “always open to free and frank advice from our department” (022). And in some respondents’ opinion the net effect can be positive:

The presence of a ministerial adviser/s in ministers’ offices can provide a competing source of policy advice to departments’ advice. Ministerial advisers can also provide political and practical technical advice around implementation issues that cannot be, or which it is inappropriate to provide, as part of departments’ advice to ministers. This means ministers consider departmental advice *alongside* the advice of advisers (041; original emphasis).

### *Substantive politicization*

Relatively few responses corresponded with the category substantive administrative politicization – i.e. attempts by ministerial advisers to directly influence or determine the content of officials’ advice to ministers. To be sure, some senior public servants have had experiences “where advisers have asked to review policy papers and seek changes before being submitted to ministers” (006). Others report cases in which advisers have “asked for papers to be rewritten to reflect their [the adviser’s] needs, not departmental advice” (060), or attempted to “edit out full/complete advice, and block out sensitive material that may damage political interests” (167). But there were fewer such reports than might, perhaps, have been expected, given the tenor of much of the commentary regarding the adverse effects of political advisers.

Conversely, there was some support for the view that even when advisers do act inappropriately, the ways in which public servants themselves respond can go some way to offsetting the attendant risks. As one Chief Executive expressed it, while “[t]here is a risk that a hands-on adviser could change the advice and behaviour of a department, this can be managed. Officials need to stick to objective analysis and information, and maintain trust and credibility with the Minister” (015). A tier two official endorsed this assessment. In her opinion:

There are risks – if public servants feel unduly pressured, or don’t understand how to work professionally with advisers. But this is not the fault of advisers individually or as a class, it is about public service professionalism. In other words, the risk of impartiality depends on what officials do, not what advisers do (011).

### *The significant ‘other’*

What was not anticipated was the proportion of responses (as reported in Table 2) which, while concerning a question which specifically focused on the incidence and form of politicization, seemed to be evidence of other phenomena. Table 4 incorporates the two coding categories which captured the majority of those responses. Most

strikingly, 24% of all responses to the initial question involved actions or circumstances which are arguably best described as contestability.

TABLE 4  
The nature of the threat (2)

	count	% responses	% cases
contestability	25	24	32.1
role/accountability	7	6.7	9
other	17	16.3	21.8
n	49	47	62

Clearly, there are methodological issues regarding the attribution of meaning in play here, but when a senior official reports that “political advisers advocate a particular line of argument that may not, in our judgment, be supported by data or research” (035), what they are describing is – in our view – a contest for the policy upper hand, not an attempt by an adviser to direct officials to produce advice of a particular flavour.

Certainly, a good many senior officials (47.5%) believe that ministerial advisers do at least try to keep certain items off the policy agenda of the government of the day. But fewer (35.8%) think that advisers actively discourage the provision of free and frank advice by officials, and fewer still (26.2%) are of the view that advisers do, in practice, exert too much control over the policy agenda (although in both cases the high proportion of equivocal responses should also be borne in mind).<sup>14</sup>

Many also find nothing especially objectionable, much less threatening, in the fact that ministerial advisers contest the advice put forward by public servants. As one put it, advisers can impede officials’ work, “[b]ut only in the sense that their advice was contrary to ours, resulting in the Minister choosing an alternative approach – which seems entirely legitimate!” (096; original punctuation).

Some respondents were quite forthright in their assessment of the value advisers can add to officials’ responsibilities. For one, “the most significant role of ministerial advisers in the policy process is their role in relaying and clarifying ministers’ expectations and views to senior departmental managers. Clear and blunt explanations about ministers’ opinions and interpretation of issues is invaluable for senior staff, in particular” (041). (Neither was the normative orientation underpinning this observation wholly anomalous in the wider context. When asked, 57.9% of respondents rated the advent of ministerial advisers a positive development overall (8.7% felt negatively about it, and the remainder were undecided), and 72.7% indicated that their personal relations with advisers were generally positive.)

Others, though, are far less sanguine about the adviser’s role generally, and the effects of contestability specifically. In the view of one, when advisers are “too involved (and therefore directional) in the early stages of policy development ... [this] [h]inders the consideration of all possible options/solutions” (180). (Although this may be no different in practice to the path-dependent effects of decisions taken by any other policy actor early in policy-formation.) Another noted that the contribution by one adviser of

what officials felt was “subjective and non-empirical comment and advice” had “degraded” the department’s advice in the eyes of ministers (185).

Such views reflect a measure of intolerance for the intrusion of other streams of advice. To the extent that any such intolerance reflects a departure from traditional norms of public service impartiality, it is worth noting, too, that only a quarter of respondents (28.5%) actively disputed the proposition that it is appropriate for advisers to be drawn from the public service and to return there on leaving a minister’s office. That might be read as an indication that conventions of public sector independence are less strongly entrenched than Westminster traditionalists might prefer (see also Eichbaum and Shaw 2007).

### *Roles and accountability arrangements*

Finally, a small number (6.7%) of responses went to what are, in the first instance, issues to do with roles and accountabilities. In one of the items comprising the composite measure, 50.6% of respondents had either agreed or strongly agreed that advisers sometimes exceed their delegated authority (only 5.7% disagreed with the statement, and not one strongly disagreed with it). That strength of sentiment did not carry over into reports of actual experiences, but concerns are clearly harboured in some quarters – especially amongst departmental officials who had spent time on secondment in ministerial offices – that ministerial advisers overstep the mark from time to time.<sup>15</sup>

Most frequently, examples were given of advisers who had asserted an authority in their dealings with officials which exceeded that delegated by ministers. Thus, instances were communicated in which “advisers have over-ridden ministerial decisions” (006); “requested reports from the department for themselves and not for ministers” (090); and “issued instructions purporting to reflect the Minister’s views which have then proved to be different (i.e. these advisers cannot always speak for this)” (108). The second-order consequences of these sorts of incidents were sometimes (but not always) consistent with one or other of the dimensions of administrative politicization, but the proximate issue was an inappropriate assertion of executive authority.

The point was made, it should be said, that these experiences are not necessarily the result of deliberately mischievous behaviour on the part of ministerial advisers. It appears that a lack of clarity (which may, in fact, stem from ministers) around the nature and extent of the delegation can be at the root of misunderstandings. Thus, what some respondents reported as malicious interference was construed by others as what happens when “there is (a) a lack of clarity on constitutional contributions, and (b) where [the] roles and functions of government and/or the department are not well understood by the adviser” (033).

Moreover, it was suggested that, when well managed, the roles of officials and ministerial advisers were complementary rather than conflicting (a matter to which we presently return in greater detail). Echoing the view of Sir Richard Wilson (noted above), one explained that “[p]roperly managed relationships and roles should mean that ministerial advisers deal with matters that officials cannot: e.g. the politics of MMP [and] the political aspects of policy” (049). Policy is developed in an intensely political context, and the point made by the respondent who noted that ministerial advisers “are important in ensuring departments understand ministers’ expectations [and] ... provide a mechanism to reinforce the distinction between departmental and political advice” underscored the potential value of political advisers in this regard.

That said, the pressing need for clarity around roles and responsibilities was a recurring theme. As one senior official explained:

Yes – there is a risk [to the public service] if the adviser is not clear about their own role, and if the public servants do not hold the line on their role. Sometimes, with strong personalities, there can be blurring. Role clarity is essential. (024)

So, too, are protocols which clearly delineate the various actors’ respective roles and responsibilities. New Zealand lacks much of the formal architecture which wraps around special advisers elsewhere. In the U.K., for instance, there is a dedicated code of conduct for ministerial advisers; in both Ireland and Australia legislation underpins the role and functions of ministerial staff. New Zealand has neither. Nor has it taken a consistent approach to the negotiation of protocols governing relations between ministerial advisers and departmental officials (see Table 5). In most cases, in fact, relations between the ministerial office and the department are not subject to protocols, or officials are unsure whether or not such understandings even exist.

**TABLE 5**  
**Are there protocols governing contact between ministerial advisers and officials in your department?**

	frequency	valid %
yes	51	28.3
no	66	36.7
unsure	63	35
total	180	100

Note: missing=8

There was, however, widespread acknowledgement amongst respondents of the importance of protocols, codes of conduct and so forth. Support for a special code of conduct for ministerial advisers was especially strong: fully 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such a code should be articulated.<sup>16</sup> Many felt that not only might it help regulate the activity of ministerial advisers, it could also usefully clarify the relevant roles and responsibilities of ministerial advisers and officials. This, it was widely felt, is central to ensuring that the relationship between advisers and officials functions transparently, and to minimising the potential for officials’ relationships with ministers to be compromised.

## **DISCUSSION: ARE THE BARBARIANS AT THE GATES?**

### *The case against ministerial advisers*

Commenting on the British context Sir Richard Wilson (2002) has noted wryly that the 3,700 or so members of the senior civil service are in no immediate danger of being overrun by a small *cadre* of special advisers. Much the same could be said of the New Zealand case, where some 1,250 senior officials are confronted by perhaps 25 ministerial advisers (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007).

But what lies at the root of concerns that advisers have the potential to or do, in fact, erode public service neutrality, is their institutional proximity to ministers. (And in New Zealand's case advisers are physically located in ministers' offices, which are themselves collectively situated away from departments.) To paraphrase Maley (2000a), advisers are therefore able to cultivate relationships (with departments, external interests and other ministers' offices) and gain access to information (about what is on or off the agenda, which policies are about to be announced, emerging opportunities, etc.), both of which are valuable currencies in the policy process. As veto players (Immergut 1998), they are also able to choke off or facilitate the flow of advice and information into and out of the ministerial office and – crucially – control access to the minister. It is reasonable to suggest, then, that advisers may be a menace to public service impartiality.

To some extent the data collected in this research confirm this case. Clearly, there are times when at least some ministerial advisers exert pressure on officials to temper their advice, and/or direct them to tailor the particulars of that advice to partisan requirements. The evidence does not conclusively establish that officials' advice is, in fact, materially changed as a consequence of such pressure: public servants are perfectly capable of resisting such imprecations. But in and of itself such conduct is at odds with the accepted convention that officials shall tender advice freely, frankly and fearlessly. It is the intent as much as the outcome that is of concern here: it may be uncomfortable to advise freely and frankly when the minister's adviser has made it known that that is not what is needed in the current circumstances.

In absolute terms, however, there were few reports of substantive administrative politicization. Rather, the data indicate that attempts by advisers to interfere in relations between ministers and their departments, or within the operations of departments themselves, are more prevalent than are those to tamper with the contents of officials' advice. Over a third (35.5%) of all examples given by public servants of inappropriate behaviour on the part of ministerial advisers fell within one or other of these categories of administrative politicization.

Procedural politicization may be of particular concern. If, as has been suggested (Mountfield 2002, 3), at some juncture vigorous gate-keeping on the part of advisers compromises senior civil servants' contribution to policy formation and their access to ministers, it could well lead to a more overt form of politicization. One participant gave that very point a sharp edge in noting that “over time, there is a risk that departments will feel obligated only to provide advice acceptable to gate-keeping advisers or that they will heavily influence the way advice is presented” (023).

Respectfully, however, while the conduct described by Sir Robin Mountfield would compromise the policy process (by constraining the contribution of the professional public service), it need not necessarily politicize either the service or its advice. As inferred by the response quoted above, that outcome would depend on choices made by public servants themselves in response to the behaviour of ministerial advisers, and this research uncovered no evidence that officials are abandoning the tenets of Westminster impartiality in droves in order to ensure continued access to the political executive.

For similar reasons, it is not clear that interference by ministerial advisers in departments' activities is as serious a threat to public service neutrality as might at first be thought. This is not to suggest that such conduct is necessarily acceptable. For one thing, insofar as New Zealand's Cabinet Manual (which codifies the procedural bases of cabinet government) does not fully distinguish between an adviser and his or her minister, it may constitute 'ministerial' interference in operational matters which are more properly the domain of officials. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, such is not

formally countenanced. It happens, of course: the notion that ministers are disinterested in policy implementation has long been recognized as a fiction. But as far as the formal arrangements are concerned – under which appropriations, and purchase and employment arrangements, are predicated on a bifurcation of responsibility for policy outcomes (ministers) and outputs (departments and their Chief Executives) – political intervention in departments’ activities is considered poor form.

Furthermore, it is unhelpful, and misrepresentative, to assume that a minister and his or her adviser(s) constitute an indivisible entity. Instead, Weller’s contention – that “we can no longer maintain the myths that advisers are no more than extensions of ministers, and that telling the advisers is the same as telling the minister” (2002, 73) – is the more compelling view. A ministerial adviser’s authority may derive from their appointment by a minister, and from any delegations subsequently made, but in dealings with public servants that adviser will exercise agency, discretion and judgment. And as many respondents were at pains to point out, the nature and extent of the authority with which ministerial advisers speak is frequently (and on occasion, some suspected, purposefully) unclear, at least to the public servant. There is a strong case, the data indicate, for a rigorous rethinking of the arrangements governing the conduct of ministerial advisers and, more generally, relations between advisers and officials.

The case made here is that a procedural malaise is not synonymous with – indeed, it may not produce – public service politicization (where politicization involves a repudiation of Westminster canons of political neutrality). However, systematic interference by ministerial advisers in relationships between ministers and officials, and within departments, may have consequences which are no less deleterious for that. Specifically, it may well increase the probability of civil servants finding themselves on the outer: if not politicized, then certainly marginalized in the policy process. Put differently, the negative effects of the procedural dimensions of administrative politicization may attach not so much to civil servants as individuals or as an occupational class, or indeed to the professional ethos of the civil or public service, as to matters of process. In this view, marginalization may be a consequence, rather than an example of procedural politicization.

Much of the existing literature fails to distinguish the threat ministerial advisers pose to public service neutrality from that posed to the place of public servants in the policy process. This is fundamentally an argument about access; about whether officials are being shut out of a policy ‘market’ in which ministers remain the dominant (if not the only) purchasers, but where there are multiple providers. Were this to be the case, it would have grave consequences for the capacity of the public service to provide the sort of “institutional skepticism” (Plowden 1994, 104) which is viewed a crucial corrective to political short-termism, expediency and policy naivety.

But the data, at least, provide no evidence that this is what is occurring. They *do* suggest that officials harbour greater concerns about this prospect than they do that the civil service is in imminent danger of politicization. They do not, however, indicate that these nascent concerns are matched by experience. Neither do they support the contention that ministers are systematically taking decisions without prior recourse to officials’ advice.

### *Responsive competence enhanced?*

There is another way of looking at all this. Thus, what for some constitutes politicization, and to others smacks of marginalization, looks to others still like legitimate contestability.

A case can be made that ministerial advisers are part of a wider strategy – which includes the use of time-limited employment contracts for senior civil servants, and the adoption of output- and increasingly outcome-based appropriations and performance management systems – by political executives to ensure a greater measure of responsiveness from the permanent bureaucracy. This may be especially so in jurisdictions in which ministers exercise no formal responsibility over the employment of officials. As members of what Peters (2001, 246) describes as a “counter-staff”, ministerial advisers break the monopoly on advice traditionally enjoyed by the public service. In this view, partisans become an off-set to bureaucrats’ power and policy leverage (see also Rhodes and Weller 2001, 238).

It may well be that a suspicion of the motives of bureaucrats is part of the reason for recourse to ministerial advisers. But while rational choice provides an *ex ante* explanation of the growth in the number of ministerial advisers, the testable propositions which stem from it – that officials’ policy-making contribution is curtailed; that the public service retaliates to its loss of ‘market share’ by moving from neutral competence to partisan alignment – are not supported by this research.

No evidence was forthcoming from officials that ministers are dispensing with the services of public servants. If anything, the reverse applied. In part, this might be because ministers identify a clear division of labour as between officials and ministerial advisers. To some extent this, too, may be particular to the New Zealand context, and specifically to the advent of non-single party majority government. Under minority and/or multi-party conditions, ministers simply must have advisers who can attend to the partisan dimensions of government formation and management, and policy-making. That said, the increase in the numerical size and influence of this new class of adviser in jurisdictions without proportional representation suggests that there are other imperatives at work.

For their part, a number of respondents to the officials’ survey volunteered that an adviser who offers a different view to public servants, or who reaches different conclusions on the basis of available evidence, is not the same as one who *instructs* officials to change the substantive or presentational aspects of their advice. Others noted that ministerial advisers provide officials with incentives to improve the quality of their own advice. As one put it, when ministerial advisers are around, public servants’ “ideas and arguments need to be strongly robust and comprehensive. Every angle and argument needs to be covered and countered” (092). There is an acknowledgement, too, that access to an alternative set of views gives ministers greater policy choice.

But it is not at all clear that most officials consider the entry into the market of a powerful competitor to be altogether a bad thing. Many respondents consider their relationship with ministerial advisers to be a complementary, not a competitive one. This assessment is often driven by officials’ assessment of the MMP-specific dimensions of the adviser’s role. The point was repeatedly made that:

ministerial advisers have a particular contribution to make to the successful passage of legislation in situations when the government does not control a majority in the House. They are able to undertake negotiations and broker agreements on legislation that would compromise the political neutrality of officials. If they do this supported by advice from officials that provides a ‘negotiating brief’ this can be a very valuable role (086).

So, where some see a buffer between ministers and their officials, others see a legitimate conduit – one which permits an explicit distinction to be drawn between the political and administrative dimensions of a minister’s role. In so doing, advisers can

actually take the potential political heat off officials, thereby allowing them to focus on the provision of free and frank advice. One Chief Executive indicated in no uncertain terms that far from politicizing the public service, the effect of ministerial advisers was “the reverse. They free us much more than would otherwise be the case from being drawn into the political process” (096). Responses such as this suggest that the institution of the public service may, in certain respects, be *strengthened* by the advent of ministerial advisers.

In sum, the data tend not to bear out the prognoses of those who fear for civil service neutrality in the face of a growing number of partisan advisers at the heart of the executive. Indeed, there is a sense that advisers may well help officials gain ‘clear air’, and shield them from demands that might otherwise be made of them which *would* expose them to the risk of politicization.

In this view, the deployment of ministerial advisers need not fundamentally cut across the imperatives of civil service impartiality. Assuming that government is inherently political, and not an extended exercise in rationality, the appointment of partisan advisers seems an altogether more sensible way of meeting ministers’ legitimate political needs than does the conscious politicization of the public service. In this way ministers can take care of the political business, but also protect and continue to draw upon the various benefits – institutional memory; continuity of advice; free and frank assessments of policy issues – that stem from a professional bureaucracy. In this respect, it can be argued that ministerial advisers help bring about what Peters (2001, 87) calls “responsive competence” (the harnessing of a political disposition to administrative talent in order to achieve governments’ goals) without necessitating recourse to an unduly committed and partisan civil service. In short, advisers may, in fact, bolster the capacity of the permanent civil service to provide institutional skepticism in circumstances where that is necessary.

## CONCLUSION

To what extent is it possible to extrapolate from the New Zealand experience to other Westminster jurisdictions? There is a view (see Wanna 2005) that since jettisoning plurality in favour of proportional representation at the national level New Zealand has become something of a Westminster outlier. That said, it retains most of the features Rhodes and Weller (2005, 7) associate with the Westminster model, including Cabinet government, ministerial accountability to the parliament, the fusion of the executive and legislative branches, and a non-partisan and expert civil service.

Our focus in this article has been firmly on the last of these characteristics. And whatever the attributes of New Zealand’s current arrangements which support the case that it is a Westminster anomaly, in terms of the formal and conventional organisation of its system of public administration, New Zealand exhibits all of the defining features of a professional and impartial civil service.<sup>17</sup>

In that context, the purposes of this paper have been threefold:

- to explore traditional understandings of ‘politicization’, particularly in Westminster contexts;
- to suggest a new conception of politicization which speaks specifically to the relationship between political advisers and senior civil servants;
- to review evidence from a large-scale survey of senior officials in the New Zealand Public Service;

Inevitably, the research reported here has limitations. For instance, it elicited relatively few responses from less senior public servants. Therefore, we cannot be sure of the extent of contact between these officials and ministerial advisers, nor of the views held by the former regarding the risk of politicization posed by the latter.

Equally, it suggests matters requiring further enquiry, including the impact which administrative politicization may have on events further along the policy chain (such as policy implementation and outcomes), and the ramifications of the advent of ministerial advisers for accountability arrangements within the political executive. There is also the potential to move beyond the confines of the Westminster family and examine how particular configurations of political and administrative interests and actors impact on the public policy process across a range of parliamentary and presidential political and administrative systems. Recent U.S. research provides an excellent basis on which to build a comparative research enterprise.

However, the paper also provides, on the basis of New Zealand evidence, an opportunity to assess the balance of risk and opportunity presented by the advent of a 'third element' in the institutions and processes of executive government in New Zealand.

Peters and Pierre have pointed out that "[o]ne of the persistent claims made about the public sector over the past several decades has been that the public service has become more politicized. [However] ... the exact meaning of that term is often not specified" (2004, 1). Through an assessment of the extent to which senior New Zealand officials believe ministerial advisers threaten public service neutrality, this paper has sought to address both issues.

The foregoing suggests a need for a more nuanced, and empirically relevant concept of politicization as it applies in the context of intra-executive relations. As advanced here, that concept is based on what officials themselves have to say on the subject and, when put to empirical use, has facilitated several things.

First, it has revealed something of the scope and diversity of the conduct of ministerial advisers which is perceived by senior officials in the New Zealand Public Service to constitute politicization. Very little of what was conveyed is consistent with traditional understandings of the term. Of the 343 qualitative responses to survey questions concerning politicization, only one directly referred to the bases on which top officials are either appointed, dismissed, rewarded or sanctioned.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the data suggest the need for a flexible approach to the nature of politicization. The advent of a third element requires a reflexive conceptualization; it demands that researchers look beyond the bilateral relationship between ministers and senior civil servants (particularly whether appointment procedures are or are not consistent with the Northcote/Trevelyan principle of meritocratic appointment and progression) and at the interplay between non-partisan and partisan actors of various kinds and in multiple contexts.

In turn, this means discriminating between the substantive and procedural dimensions of politicization. The former presents a clear and present threat to civil service impartiality, but the latter, while it may constrain officials' contribution to policy-formation, does not present the same challenge. A further distinction can usefully be made between contestability and actions by advisers which may have the effect of contaminating the institution of the public service and/or the advice which issues from it. The data reported in this article, and the manifest weakness of orthodox conceptualizations of politicization in providing a framework through which to illuminate emerging institutional and behavioural realities, strongly suggest that a more fluid conceptualization of politicization is needed if theory-building and empirical

analysis are to reflect institutional and procedural realities in a number of Westminster democracies.

## APPENDIX 1

### Relations between officials and ministerial advisers

(Where 1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=neither agree/disagree; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree.)

	<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1	relationships between advisers and public servants are generally positive	3.4%	63.1%	24.6%	8.9%	0%
2	advisers are a legitimate feature of executive government	7.1	70.1	17.9	3.8	1.1
3	advisers are more influential now than they used to be	19	40.8	33	6.7	0.6
4	advisers make a positive contribution to the policy process	4.9	47.3	37.5	9.2	1.1
5	advisers have too much influence in shaping the government's policy agenda	4.4	21.9	47	24	2.7
6	advisers try to keep certain items off the policy agenda	8.3	39.2	31.5	18.8	2.2
7	advisers, through their actions, constitute a risk to public service neutrality	6.1	24	33.5	32.4	3.9
8	advisers do not encourage free and frank advice on the full range of policy options available to government	7.8	27.9	25.1	33.5	5.6
9	advisers have little or no bearing on officials' access to ministers	2.2	18.7	20.9	44	14.3
10	advisers sometimes exceed their delegated authority	6.8	43.8	43.8	5.7	0
11	advisers hinder officials' access to ministers	1.7	20.7	39.1	35.8	2.8
12	advisers prevent departmental advice from reaching ministers	2.3	13.1	35.8	43.2	5.7
13	it is appropriate for advisers to be drawn from the public service, and to return there on leaving a minister's office	9.3	38.5	23.6	21.4	7.1
14	advisers facilitate interest group engagement with the policy process	3.9	38.3	43.9	12.2	1.7
15	advisers add value to the policy process under coalition and/or minority government conditions	7.3	45.3	40.2	5.6	1.7

16	advisers play a positive role in facilitating relations between coalition partners	8.9	38.5	49.7	1.7	1.1
17	advisers play a positive role in facilitating relations between governments and their parliamentary support parties	5.6	37.3	53.7	2.8	0.6
18	the overall number of advisers should be limited	7.8	27.9	45.3	17.9	1.1
19	Parliament should control the number of advisers	5.7	17.6	44.9	26.7	5.1
20	there should be a special Code of Conduct for advisers	27.6	53.6	14.4	4.4	0
21	a Code of Conduct for advisers should be provided for in statute	6.7	12.8	38.3	33.3	8.9

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Various terms are used in Westminster systems to describe advisers employed to provide a partisan perspective to ministers. Australians refer to ministerial staff; in the United Kingdom and Ireland the preferred term is special advisers. In this article reference is to ministerial advisers, which is the formal classification most likely to attach to staff employed by the Executive Government Support unit of the Department of Internal Affairs to furnish advice to ministers, including advice of a partisan nature. When the term ‘adviser’ is used, the reference is to ministerial advisers. The descriptors ‘civil service’ and ‘public service’ are used interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> The affair concerned the actions of ‘political’ staff in the Office of the Minister of Defence, Peter Reith. Before the November 2001 Federal election these staff were instrumental in the release of photographs of asylum seekers that purported to show children being thrown into the sea as a protest against, or in an attempt to frustrate, those asylum seekers being taken into custody by the Australian Defence Force. Much was made of this by the Prime Minister and his ministerial colleagues during the election campaign. Subsequent inquiries – including by a Committee of the Australian Senate – indicated that the photographs were taken when the vessel carrying the asylum seekers sank, and that the Minister’s staff were advised of this prior to the release of the photographs (see Senate of Australia 2002).

<sup>4</sup> While this is certainly the case within Westminster systems, recent research in the U.S. has focused on the impact of the replacement of ‘merit’ with ‘at-will’ employment practices – particularly at the State level – and at the risk of politicization (largely in personnel decisions, but with implications for the quality of policy advice). This research has sought to illuminate attitudes and behaviours among a range of ‘classified’ and ‘unclassified’ employees, and is not confined to relationships between political principals and departmental or agency heads.

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<sup>5</sup> See Blick 2004; Connaughton 2005, 2006; Holland 2002; Keating 2003; King 2003; Maley 2000a, 2000b, 2002a, 2002b; Mountfield 2002; Neill 2000; Phillipps 2002; Senate of Australia 2002; State Services Commission 2004; Tiernan 2004, 2007; U.K. Parliament 2001, 2002; Weller 2002; Wicks 2003; Wilson 2002.

<sup>6</sup> It is part of a multi-year research project which also entails surveys of and interviews with New Zealand cabinet ministers, officials and ministerial advisers. The officials' survey from which these data (which are both quantitative and qualitative, the latter comprising participants' responses to open-ended questions) are drawn canvassed a range of issues regarding relations within the executive. Only those data relevant to the question of politicization are included here. The survey was endorsed by the State Services Commissioner on the basis that the identities of participants and their departments would remain anonymous to the researchers and in subsequent publications. To this end the Leadership Development Centre agreed to contact all departmental Chief Executives on our behalf seeking permission for senior officials to participate in the research, and in due course distributed a questionnaire which respondents returned directly to us. For a fuller description of results, see Eichbaum and Shaw 2007.

<sup>7</sup> In New Zealand's fragmented public service it is difficult to establish the precise numbers of public servants at different levels. The Leadership Development Centre, which holds the most recent data, have put the number of the top three tiers of officials – not all of whom have contact with ministerial advisers – at 1,254 (as of 2003/04).

<sup>8</sup> The focus of this article precludes consideration of the other issues traversed in the questionnaire. However, the tenor of responses is captured in the composite measure reported in Appendix 1 (and see Eichbaum and Shaw 2007).

<sup>9</sup> n=182; gamma=-0.227; p=0.037.

<sup>10</sup> The n scores, correlation coefficients and probability values respectively are n=182, gamma=-0.428, p=0.008; n=182, gamma=0.193, p=0.018.

<sup>11</sup> The n scores, correlation coefficients and probability values respectively are n=174, gamma=0.221, p=0.048; n=173, Cramer's V=0.229, p=0.003.

<sup>12</sup> n=179, gamma=0.136, p=0.442.

<sup>13</sup> n=176, Cramer's V=0.178; p=0.135.

<sup>14</sup> These data, too, are from the composite scale (see Appendix 1).

<sup>15</sup> n=176, gamma=0.539, p=0.003.

<sup>16</sup> Data from the composite scale (see Appendix 1).

<sup>17</sup> For a fuller treatment of the question of New Zealand's place at the Westminster table see Eichbaum and Shaw 2007.

<sup>18</sup> This respondent felt that ministerial advisers were a risk to the public service "mainly because they have better ministerial access and will personally undermine public service staff both to ministers and across parties. This problem becomes acute when Chief Executives are recruited for political purposes without protection if they take positions contrary to party policy" (006).

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