



CHAPTER 8

Driven by Academic Norms and Status of Employment: The Advisory Roles of Political Scientists in Germany

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8.1 INTRODUCTION

While our knowledge of expertise brought into the policymaking field has increased significantly in recent years, there is still much to be learned about how the roles of experts and expertise vary from the comparative perspective, including across policy areas and fields of expertise. This chapter studies the policy advisory role played by Germany's political scientists. Germany represents an interesting case for several reasons. Traditionally, the focus has been on the consensus-seeking nature of Germany's 'civic epistemology' (Jasanoff, 2007), that is, the culturally specific practices of the State's production and use of knowledge (Straßheim & Kettunen, 2014; see also Pattyn et al.,

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2019). Moreover, structural incentives for academics to engage in advisory work regarding political decision-making have been largely absent. However, mainly for historical reasons, German political science traditionally fulfils a ‘watchdog’ function, whereby it safeguards the democratic foundations of the State. Indeed, German political scientists have never been completely detached from societal debate or politics. At the same time, a strong academic ethos in Germany also limits policy advisory activities. Moreover, there may be differences in policy advisory activities between, for example, diverse levels of policymaking, policy sectors, and academic subdisciplines (such as public policy, electoral research, and political theory). In recent years, there has also been a lively debate among German political scientists regarding the political relevance of their discipline, which has gained momentum in the face of ‘post-truth’ and ‘truthiness’ discussions. Yet, while the debate is heating up, the role of political scientists in Germany’s policy advisory system has not been the subject of much empirical research.¹

Against this backdrop, this chapter studies how, to whom, and how often Germany’s university-based political scientists provide their expertise for the purposes of policymaking. The analysis offered here is based on the German results of a survey of political scientists in more than 30 European countries that was conducted in the second half of 2018 and is presented in Chap. 2 of this book. The data provide the first systematic overview of the advisory activities, and the related views and incentives, of political scientists working at German universities. We substantiate the quantitative analysis with a case study that examines how Germany’s political scientists’ policy advisory activities play out with regard to a topical case, namely, how right-wing populism in parliaments and society can be understood and addressed.

8.2 THE GERMAN POLICY ADVISORY SYSTEM

The policy advisory system in Germany, with regard to *scientific* policy advice, has traditionally been correlated to the consensus-seeking nature of civic epistemology (Jasanoff, 2007; Straßheim & Kettunen, 2014). In this, public knowledge-making is of a corporatist, institution-based character, and the main sources of expertise are authorized institutional

¹To our knowledge that is with the exception of one study of the profession which included a question on policy advisory activities in a survey of German political scientists (Landfried, 1986).

representatives, for example, trade unions and employers' organizations. However, research on policy advisory systems, particularly in the English-speaking world (Halligan, 1995), has revealed how processes of externalization have led to a general shift away from reliance on the public service sector to other providers of advice and to the professionalization of policy powers outside the public service realm. The nature of policy advice has also changed in the case of Germany (Veit et al., 2017). While there is a degree of continuity in consensus-seeking, there has been a process of pluralization and professionalization of the advisory landscape since the 1990s (Pattyn et al., 2019). Pluralization refers to the shift from a mainly vertical advisory system to a more horizontal one (Craft & Howlett, 2013) characterized by the emergence of new, external advisory actors. In the German case, this has meant a weakening of the position of traditional advisory actors, the 're-discovery' of policy advice as a core task by non-university research institutes (Thunert, 2013), and the emergence of new players. The process of professionalization, that is, the build-up of internal or external actors' powers to advise on different aspects of policy (Fobé et al., 2017), has seen the emergence of a 'consulting industry' (Heinze, 2013). The changes witnessed are correlated to the moving of parliament and almost all ministries from Bonn to Berlin and to the more competitive political climate of the 'Berlin Republic' (ibid.).

Overall, the policy advisory system in Germany currently seems more horizontal and pluralistic than vertical and hierarchical, although both types co-exist and interact, and the dominant one varies depending on the issue concerned and the specific context. The policy advisory structures depend on consensus-seeking, neo-corporatist traditions within a specific policy domain and on other factors such as whether long-term or anticipatory, more short-term or reactive decisions are concerned (see Craft & Howlett, 2013). The strength of political scientists within departmental research (*Ressortforschung*) or on ministerial advisory councils also varies between policy sectors. Furthermore, advisory content also varies, with some matters being procedural, while others are more substantive (Craft & Howlett, 2013; see also Prasser, 2006). As has been shown for other countries, the quantity, nature, and use of policy advice also depend on individual decision-makers in the political and administrative spheres (Landry et al., 2001). Policy sectors in Germany differ significantly with regard to the static characteristics of the advisory system, as well as in their dynamic characteristics (e.g. politicization, marketization of advice). These

sectoral differences may also be reflected in the degree and type of involvement of political scientists.

8.2.1 *German Political Science and Policy Advice*

Germany has a large political science community, reflecting the established, advanced state of the discipline within academic research and teaching. As Schüttemeyer (2007, p. 183) concludes, political science ‘is quite well positioned in the German university landscape’. While in some countries there has been a certain degree of specialization, in Germany all broader subdisciplines of political science have developed more or less equally. At the same time, as Eisfeld (2019, p. 182) warns, the considerable fragmentation of German political science may also endanger its overall political relevance. For political science, the relationship between ‘politics’ and ‘science’ as such is particularly pertinent and has been debated in Germany for decades (see, e.g. Landfried, 1986; cf. Blum & Jungblut, 2020). More direct involvement in public debate and policy-making that goes beyond the mere provision of factual knowledge is still something that some regard with suspicion as being ‘un-academic’. At the same time, at a fundamental level German academia sees itself as one of the watchdogs of German democracy (cf. Blum & Schubert, 2013b), and this is also reflected in the fact that academic freedom is explicitly mentioned as one of the basic civil liberties by the German constitution. There is an historical reason for this: following the failure of academia during National Socialism, German political science was established (with significant support from the United States) as a discipline after WWII. Its defining feature was its status as a ‘science for democracy’ (Paulus, 2010). In their role as ‘academic watchdogs’, political scientists would defend the basic foundations of the democratic state, whilst at the same time maintaining a certain distance from day-to-day politics, partly in order to guarantee political independence. Thus, the role of political scientists in Germany may be described best by comparing them to referees that uphold the basic rules of the game but do not interfere with the way the game is actually played.

Recently, the debate regarding political scientists’ societal role and involvement in policymaking has been rekindled (see the documentation of the German Political Science Association [DVPW] available at: <https://www.dvpw.de/informationen/debatte-zum-fach/>). In April 2016, two political scientists writing in the daily newspaper FAZ claimed that ‘the