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Abstract

Analysis of the Irish state's administrative system is an unaccountably neglected area of systematic academic inquiry. This is all the more difficult to account for in view of the dynamic relationship between government actors and the public bureaucracy in realizing political goals. Drawing on the Irish State Administration Database (Hardiman, MacCarthaigh and Scott, 2011; http://www.isad.ie), this paper identifies some distinguishing institutional features and dominant trends in Irish politico-administrative governance, and suggests avenues for future inquiry.

The paper begins with an examination of literature on administrative system change, with a focus on the New Public Management literature. Following this, the Irish case is profiled, identifying the evolution of ministerial departments and of state agencies by successive Irish governments, including patterns of agency creation and termination over time. Particular attention is given to the 1989-2010 period which has been one of quite rapid and complex organizational change within the state's bureaucratic apparatus.

Introduction: The evolution of state administrations

Few comprehensive or objective accounts exist of how and why systems of public administration evolve over time. And when compared with the comprehensive and growing literature within political science on the changing character of democracy, politics and political institutions (cf. Strøm et al., 2003; Held, 2006; Manin, 1997; Rosanvallon, 2008), equivalent work in the field of public administration appears comparatively underdeveloped. Notwithstanding some recent work examining the relationship between institutional arrangements and policy outcomes (Lijphart, 1999; Swank, 2002), we are left with comparatively weak theories of how bureaucracies respond to changing political preferences. While the debate over where politics ends and administration begins has a long lineage (cf. Wilson, 1887, Goodnow, 1900, Pendleton Herring, 1936), in more recent decades ideas about the emergence of public 'managers' and the perceived politicization of the senior public service have taken a strong hold (Peter and Pierre, 2004). But detailed empirical comparative inquiry is relatively rare.

Part of the problem is that national bureaucracies are in constant flux. Reflecting this, much of the literature on changing structures and forms of organization are confined to short periods of time or to particular policy fields or modes of governance. This limits the scope and range of analysis. Much of public administration research also concentrates on the machinery of government, taking the political context as given. More fundamentally, there has been a methodological problem with little agreement on the best empirical measures to use when seeking to capture the essential characteristics of the state itself (cf. Hardiman and Scott, 2012). Therefore, relatively little research has been conducted on understanding direct linkages between a country's political context and the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of public administration.

The dominant perspective for understanding public organizations and the work they do is an instrumental one, i.e. bureaucracies are the manifestation of those political goals that have been deemed appropriate by democratic governments (Christensen et al., 2007). This does not explain, however, why bureaucracies seem to expand rather than contract over time. The seemingly inexorably growth of the public sector across

the developed world during the 20th century, and the encroachment of the state on an ever-greater number of policy arenas, has thus prompted a variety of theories. Niskanen (1971), for example, developed a 'budget-maximising' thesis which posited that public managers constantly seek to expand their domains of influence including through institutional expansion. Other theorists have argued that public organizations continue long after their usefulness has been realised (e.g. Downs, 1967; Kaufman, 1976), not least because of the permanency of tenure enjoyed by bureaucrats. Peters proposed a theory of entitlement, arguing that governments allow citizen entitlements to build up during good times and then find it hard to rescind them (Peters, 2010: 8).

The instrumental perspective of traditional public administration views the public interest as that which is expressed politically and ultimately codified in law. The role of the state is principally one of 'rowing', i.e. designing and implementing policies focused on a single objective. Boundaries between political and administrative domains are clearly defined, but as the study by Heclo and Wildavsky (1981) of the British civil service in the 1970s identified, there was a common commitment to the nation and its welfare in the political-administrative 'village'. Other features of this traditional public administration include permanent tenure, hierarchical division of tasks and linear accountability structures, leaving little room for administrative discretion. In this perspective, the characterisation of the politico-administrative regime is one that confers the dominant weight of influence on the preferences of political actors.

More recently, however, the role of market forces in shaping the functional and organizational mode of bureaucracy has infused much of academic writing on public administration and demanded a rethink of how we understand administrative systems and the influence of politics in shaping outcomes. While reforms based on the US-inspired system of financial 'program budgeting' opened the way to new ideas concerning the provision of greater policy and financial discretion to public organizations in other developed states, the subsequent managerial-type reforms received most scholarly attention. In particular, literature on the characteristics and effects of New Public Management (NPM) has dominated (McLaughlin et al., 2002; Christensen and Laegreid, 2011).

Addressing this literature, the evolution of the Irish national bureaucracy is considered in this paper and in so doing provides new perspectives for how we understand the relationship between political preferences and the organizational means for their implementation. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section considers the phenomenon of New Public Management and its use as a frame for understanding administrative reform and development. Following this, and drawing on a time-series database of national level public organizations in Ireland – the Irish State Administration Database (http://www.isad.ie) - the Irish case in presented through an examination of two 'layers' of the state's bureaucratic apparatus. First an examination of the evolution of ministerial departments since the foundation of the state is presented according to a series of phases (emergence, development, modernity and complexity). Secondly, the incidence of state agency creation and closure over time is examined. Beginning with an analysis of the rate of agency creation and termination by government since independence, the changing agency landscape in the more recent (1989-2010) period is considered in some detail by coding agencies according to their functions, policy domains and legal forms. A concluding section considers recent developments and suggests avenues for future inquiry.

New Public Management and political power

Coined some twenty years ago by Hood (1991), the term New Public Management has been extensively used to capture the nature and scale of the changes that were transforming bureaucracies across the globe. These changes, which had their roots in calls for strengthening the play of market forces in public services and a reduction of state interventions, were characterised by delegation, decentralization and devolution. NPM has remained resistant to definition however. Christensen and Laegreid (2011: 1) view it as a 'general concept'; Hood and Peters (2004) argue that there is no broad agreement on its key features; and Bozeman summarises it as a 'loosely integrated management philosophy' that 'has become a brand, one signifying market-oriented governance' (Bozeman, 2007: 69-82).

However, while the central doctrines associated with NPM are certainly contested, Kettl identifies NPM's most prominent virtue as its 'sharp and clear definition of the problem of modern government and of the solutions that would fix it' (Kettl, 2006:

314). NPM has provided both a locus and a theoretical underpinning for a range of reforms in developed bureaucracies. With its emergence as a response to global economic malaise and the need to tackle the high costs associated with public services, New Public Management offered the promise of improvements in administrative efficiency and performance through the introduction of market-type conditions and ideas. NPM favoured a move away from centralization and hierarchical consolidation within the public sphere towards structural disaggregation. This fragmentation facilitated specialisation and separation of functional tasks (policy implementation, regulation and evaluation) performed by discrete parts of the public service.

Significantly, much of new public management has been 'highly ambivalent' about the implications for political control and accountability (Mulgan, 2003: 155). NPM devolves responsibility for implementation of reform onto the bureaucrats themselves; but this produces a problem for politicians who need to ensure that 'rent seeking' behaviour does not follow or new inefficiencies develop. This can produce a system of oversight and monitoring and performance assessment that, instead of simplifying public bureaucracy, greatly increases its complexity (Hood et al., 1999).

Reflecting this, a number of paired terms regularly feature in discussions of trends in modern governance which are often posited as antinomies, such as accountability and efficiency, or hierarchy and networks, or rule-following and flexibility. Broadly characterised in this manner, we can see why features of the Weberian state are thought to be incompatible with the principal objectives of NPM. And indeed where NPM was deemed to be introduced most thoroughly, particularly in Britain and New Zealand, new modes of management through outcome-based budgets, performance targets, and delegated authority represented a departure from older traditions and practices of public service activities. However, even in Britain and New Zealand, these features may not have been as all-encompassing as many have assumed; the 'NPM revolution' itself depended on core policy competences and a capacity to rule from the centre (Holliday, 2000). And the evident shortcomings of the purest form of NPM in turn have given rise to an often bewildering variety of initiatives in 'post-NPM', as the need to reintegrate policy formation and implementation become

apparent, and the merits of classic bureaucratic practices are rediscovered (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007; Olsen, 2005).

The rise of public service 'managers' and the associated increase of bureaucratic autonomy was perceived to be at the expense of political control of the bureaucracy, and in particular the shape of policy outcomes. Therefore, post-NPM (or 'second generation' NPM) reforms are not characterised only by consolidation and recentralization (cf. OECD 2010), but also by the reassertion of central political power. They are also associated with improving co-ordination across and between levels of government, and terms such as 'joined-up' or 'whole-of-government' approaches to policy making are now part of the lexicon of modern governments (and their critics). Bouckaert et al (2010) attribute this renewed emphasis on enhanced co-ordination of public organizations to the pressure to find holistic approaches to organizational design in order to meet new and anticipated adaptive demands arising from processes of Europeanization and internationalization. Halligan (2011: 94-5) suggests that in those states of the Anglo-Saxon administrative tradition, and particularly those that eagerly adopted NPM ideas, post-NPM reforms involve hybrid approaches to organizational control, often combining traditional approaches to hierarchical authority with 'new' ideas about performance management.

In general, however, politicians have struggled to adapt to the complex new environment which requires strategic rather than detailed operational control. The implications of these theories are that public sector reforms inspired by NPM would feature the delegation of tasks to agencies and a retreat of the core state from functions and from policy areas in which it had previously been involved. 'Post-NPM' public sector reform should feature 'de-agencification' and a shift toward more centralised policy coordination.

Drawing on the resources of the Irish State Administration Database, as discussed by Hardiman and Scott (2012), it is possible to interrogate the evidence for these changes in an Irish context by means of a detailed profile of the organizational evolution of the Irish state. The following analysis first considers the differentiation of government departments over time, which reflects shifts in the policy areas to which governments

were committed. Following this, we consider the changing profile of state agencies. Thirdly, we assess the patterns of the demise of agencies and of new agency creation, showing that while agencies are abolished more often than many might assume, there has until recently been a strong trend toward new agency creation.

These data throw new light on the distinctive features of the Irish public administration, showing a more complex and dynamic picture than heretofore recognized, and with a variety of developments occurring within both NPM and post-NPM reform periods. As we consider the profile of change in Irish public administration, the paper finds also finds that we need to recognize ongoing government preference for the capacity to deploy multiple organizational forms rather than search for administrative coherence.

The functional allocation of ministerial departments and tasks: a primary overview of changing policy preferences

In the first instance, the most tangible method for tracing changing political preferences is to examine the distribution of portfolios amongst Cabinet Ministers. For the independent Irish state, the critical point of departure must be the 1924 Ministers and Secretaries Act, which sought to provide a new and basic structure for a functioning administrative system under political and parliamentary control. To do so the Act abolished many (though not all) legacy organizations which survived the transition to self-rule in 1922, and concentrated the business of central government in a cabinet of 11 Ministers, each of whom would control a department for which they would be responsible to Dáil Éireann. This basic structure remains in place today, though the number of Ministerial portfolios has expanded[1], and is designed to provide the primary co-ordinating and control mechanism at the apex of the governing apparatus.

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[1] The number of portfolios has not always matched the number of Ministerial positions, set at a maximum of 15 under the 1937 Constitution (Article 28.1). For example, in 1978 there were a total of 18 departments managed by a Cabinet of 15 ministers.

Between 1924 and 2010, we can discern four distinctive periods, each characterised by particular political imperatives and prevailing administrative orthodoxies. As Table 1 below identifies, these are the 'emergence' period between 1924 and 1949, a phase of 'development' between 1949 and 1969, the 'modernization' period of 1969 to 1989, and more recently a period characterised by 'complexity' beginning in 1989 until the present. For each period there is an associated characterization of the politico-administrative regime and a dominant type of government.

Table 1 about here

Emergence 1924-48

Following the civil war the assertion of central authority in Ireland was rapid, and while a large number of trade unions existed to represent members of the Irish Free State's administration, overt political expressions by the civil service were absent. The policy-administrative dichotomy was, arguably, most clearly defined during this period than any other and heavily informed by the classic bifurcation advocated by Wilson (1887) among others. Structurally, for the quarter century after 1924, the system of central control by a small number of Departments remained largely intact, with the notable exception of the introduction of three new Departments in 1947: Health, Local Government and Welfare (Tables 1 and 2 below) which reflected the European-wide emergence of state welfare provision.

A report in 1935 by the 'Commission on the Civil Service' whose terms of reference, (though principally concerned with arbitration over pay and conditions) also included recommendations on the organization of the system in 1935 did not suggest any such changes. However, the creation in 1947 of a Department of Local Government crystallised a distinguishing feature of Irish government – a weak tradition of devolving real power to the local level and, with a few minor exceptions, a tendency to transfer authority upwards to central government. This period is also one in which single party government dominates, with Fianna Fáil controlling the executive on its own during the 1932-48 period. The 1937 Constitution adopted during this period also copper-fastened the Westminster/Whitehall style of government, and expanded the number of Ministerial positions (though not necessarily the number of Departments) to 15.

Table 2 about here

Development

At first glance, changes in the allocation of the departmental portfolio of Irish governments in the post-war decades between 1949 and 1969 seem relatively minor (Table 2). However the emergence of the Departments of Transport and Power, and later Labour, emanated from the sea-change in economic policy away from self-sufficiency towards growing integration with international markets. The creation of these departments preceded Ireland's preparation for its eventual successful accession in 1973 to the EEC (Geary 2010). But the organizational innovation was shaped to a degree by European examples, drawn in part on the influence of Keynes's ideas on British governments and in part on French experiences of economic (and later administrative) planning.

It is well documented that senior civil servants took a lead role in developing the new economic strategy for the state. In the absence of an entrepreneurial or industrial class, successive governments were not averse to using the civil service as the vehicle to develop the economy, including the continued appointments of civil servants to the boards of commercial state companies. And while a series of short lived governments alternating between multi-party and single party administrations during the early 1950s did not lead to any overt politicization of the senior civil service, from the late 1950s onwards there emerged a greater policy-making role for the bureaucracy.

Table 3 about here

Modernisation

The expanding role of the state from the 1970s onwards is reflected in the emergence of distinctive policy fields as stand-alone departments. We can also discern a growing tendency to move policy portfolios between government departments as government organization become more complex and the drive to achieve a rational grouping of tasks becomes more challenging. As Table 4 identifies, the Department of the

Environment was created in 1977, while Economic Planning and Public Service for a time became separate Departments, as managerial ideas about planning took hold. In the ten-year period 1977-86, Industry and Commerce experienced a considerable number of portfolio rearrangements.

During this period, there is also evidence of greater blurring of political and administrative lines. While the appointment of special advisers can be traced to the 1950s, their systematic use began in the 1970s when six such persons were appointed during the Fine Gael/Labour government of 1973-7 (Connaughton, 2010: 66). Essentially political appointees made by Ministers to assist them in their tasks, advisers work closely with civil servants and are deemed to represent the views of the Minister in their respective departments. Political involvement in the administrative sphere was also modified with the creation of the Top Level Appointments Commission in 1984. For the first time, governments could choose from amongst a short-list of candidates for senior positions in the civil service.

This period is also one characterised by increased calls for reform of the public service. The seminal report of the Public Service Organisation Review Group published in 1969 led to some experiments in the policy formulation capacity of departments, and most significantly the creation of a separate Department of Public Service in 1973 which was eventually subsumed within the Department of Finance in 1987 (though it retained a distinct identity within that Department (Wright, 2010: 37). But there was little by way on concrete reform to existing practice and structure across the service. The Fine Gael/Labour coalition of 1983-7 produced a White Paper on public service reform titled *Serving the Country Better*, which reflected the international trend towards the introduction of new result- and customer-focused management systems. Little came of this however, as this government's energies were absorbed by crisis in the public finances and a rapid rise in external debt. The apparent rigidity of the civil service structure and practices resulted in criticism of the conservative culture and apparent imperviousness to change within the bureaucracy. For example, Kenny criticised the bureaucracy's 'systemic resistance to change' and the 'confusion and overlap' that existed within the public service (Kenny, 1984: 54, 59).

Table 4 about here

Complexity

The final period for consideration is that between 1989 and 2010, one characterised by deepening complexity in the distribution of policy portfolios across central government departments. As Table 5 identifies, only four Departments did not undergo change in title during this period – Taoiseach and Finance (which for constitutional reasons cannot change), and Defence and Foreign Affairs. In large part, this has been the result of successive and ideologically diverse coalition governments, and the desire of the various partners in post-election coalitions to have responsibility for key policy areas has resulted in extensive portfolio mergers and de-mergers. However, it also reflects the shifting policy associations in government - for example, the Department of Transport and Tourism had responsibility for Communications added to its remit in 1991, before losing its Tourism responsibility and instead gaining the Energy portfolio in 1993. In 2002 the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications lost the latter two functions, becoming the Department of Transport. Uí Mhaoldúin (2007: 7) also identifies Ireland's membership of the EU and greater societal expectations as reasons for the increased frequency of departmental realignments. Other factors contributing to the deepening policy complexity facing the state during this period include the increase in the number of non-state actors (each with competing demands and perspectives) formally engaged in public policy processes, as well as the extended reach of the state into new policy fields through a variety of regulatory means.

Table 5 about here

This period is when we first see sustained attempts at reform of the public service, beginning formally with the launch of the NPM-inspired Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) in 1994 which sought to apply management ideas explicitly to the public service for the first time. In comparative terms Ireland was something of a latecomer to these reforms which had been initiated in other Westminster/Whitehall jurisdictions in the 1980s. New practices in respect of financial reporting, HR and customer service were introduced. In terms of the politico-administrative relationship,

as part of the reforms, attempts were made to devolve responsibility for certain issues (principally HR) from Ministers to senior civil servants, though within the overall framework of political responsibility for the bureaucracy which remained with Ministers. Perhaps most significantly, the SMI emerged from within the civil service itself, and despite initial political support, was never fully embraced by successive governments, nor did it receive the necessary political drive to achieve reform targets (Hardiman and MacCarthaigh, 2011). Reform programmes in other Westminster-style democracies at this time were designed to provide greater political control over the direction and performance of the state apparatus (Aucoin, 2011). But in Ireland, we find instead a weakening of political authority and an apparent loss of control by government over the size and cost of the public service. As Connaughton (2006) argues, in spite of its promises of greater clarity over responsibility for the performance of public functions, the period after the SMI's launch is one in which the allocation of accountability between the political and administrative realms and the efficacy of the doctrine on ministerial accountability was most seriously found wanting. This was evidenced by a number of high profile cases where responsibility for political and administrative failures could not be adequately identified (Travers, 2005, cf. Connaughton, 2006).

The changing role and influence of state agencies

Examining the changing departmental portfolio arrangements does not, however, provide us with a complete picture of the changing administrative landscape, and may in fact mask the changing policy preferences of political executives. In other words structure does not always align with or reflect policy. Indeed the essence of a non-specialist or generalist bureaucratic system is that administrators undertake new tasks in response to changing government priorities without necessarily requiring macro-level changes (legal or structural) in organizational form. A more comprehensive picture demands looking within and beyond ministerial Departments at the discrete organizational units or agencies that operate with varying degrees of autonomy from central control. Drawing on the theory of delegation (Strøm, Müller and Bergman, 2003), agencies are most easily conceptualised as a link in the chain between voters

and the bureaucracy, through which central governments delegate functions and associated responsibilities to a variety of public (and semi-private) institutions.

The recent acceleration in the use of semi-autonomous or arm's length agencies has in fact been a popular device for most developed governments (OECD, 2002; Pollitt et al., 2001). The proliferation of agencies internationally has meant that most national administrative systems harbour a variety of different types of structurally disaggregated organizations. While there are multiple reasons for this 'agencification', they have resulted in an increase in the level of bureaucratic autonomy in the public sector and ultimately in the fragmentation of its policy capacity (Olsen 2009).

What exactly constitutes a state agency is widely contested, with considerable variety internationally in the definition of the concept (Greve et al., 1999; Smullen, 2004). Roness (2007) suggests that classifications of state agencies have varied according to the origin of the measure of analysis, which can include budgets, efficiency, legal status or the principal mode of accountability. Others draw on a variety of meta-classifications (Hood and Dunsire, 1981; Hardiman and Scott, 2010; 2012).

Remarkably, until recently, the analysis of the variety and tasks performed by these organizations in Ireland has not been the subject of any substantial or sustained study. The absence of agreement on what constitutes a public body or state agency plays a role here. Thus a number of generic terms have been used to describe these organizations – most notably 'state-sponsored bodies' and 'semi-states'. Snapshot studies have attempted to comprehend the variety of organizations using a simple distinction between commercial and non-commercial activities. For example, FitzGerald's (1963: 5) analysis in the 1960s of the *State-Sponsored Bodies* defined them as:

> autonomous public bodies other than universities and university colleges, which are neither temporary in character nor purely advisory in their function, most of whose staff are not civil servants, and to whose board or council the Government or Ministers in the Government appoint directors, council members, etc.

A separate study of these bodies, conducted as part of the report of the Public Services Organisation Review Group (1966-9), also excluded universities and reported that:

> For practical purposes we have taken the term 'state-sponsored body' to cover any autonomous public body with a Board appointed by the Government to discharge those functions assigned to it by the Government.

Similarly categorising them as either commercial or non-commercial, the report stated that:

> It seems to us that the commercial state-sponsored bodies form a sector of the public service qualitatively different from the non-commercial bodies and there is an instinctive recognition of this fact in the tendency to refer to them as the 'public enterprises'.
> The distinction which we draw between commercial and non-commercial state-sponsored bodies is primarily related to the source of their revenues. In the 'commercial' area, some bodies like the ESB are self-supporting. Some make losses because they are required to provide uneconomic services in the national interest and receive State subsidies directly and indirectly. In our definition of these bodies as 'commercial', we mean, primarily, that they operate in a commercial atmosphere where commercial criteria can be used to judge their effectiveness.

Writing in 1980, the great authority on Irish public administration Tom Barrington also found it hard to untangle the organizational web, stating that there were 'more than four hundred separate bodies within the [administrative] system' and this included local government' (1980: 4). However, in counting these 'bodies', he included 'about forty commissions, offices, agencies' and 'about ninety state-sponsored bodies'. Donald E. Leon found it problematic to confirm the number of 'advisory bodies' in use by the government at a given time, the majority of which he found took the form of committees involving non-public service experts or representatives of interest groups (Leon 1963).

Unlike in other jurisdictions, the names of organizations give us little clue to their powers, accountability, funding, or their relationship to central departments. Councils, Commissions, Boards, Authorities, Agencies and Bodies are used interchangeably, though the latter three names have been more commonly used since the 1980s. Official sources are also inconsistent, with different lists and classifications existing between central authorities and the remit of oversight organizations such as the

Ombudsman of the Office of the Information Commissioner extending to some, but not all, organizations (cf . Hardiman and Scott, 2012).

A number of recent studies note the relatively ad hoc manner in which agencies have been created in Ireland, the wide variety of accountability and communication mechanisms, and the absence of performance frameworks (McGauran et al. 2005; Clancy and Murphy 2006; OECD 2008). This phenomenon is not unique to Ireland, and similar work in the UK has uncovered analogous problems associated with delegated forms of governance (Flinders, 2008). The Irish State Administration Database makes it possible to analyse these developments over time, and to consider the variety of ways in which public sector bodies may come into being, change over time, or cease their existence.

As Figure 1 below shows, the increase is one that has gathered pace over time, and most particularly over the last twenty years, with a peak of 360 distinct national-level organizations performing public functions around 2008. Since then we find a net decrease in the aggregate number, the first such time in the history of the independent state that a sustained period of 'de-agencification' has occurred.

Figure 1 about here

The pace of change has varied in the creation and closure of state organizations (other than government departments). Disaggregating these figures by the number of months that each government was in existence since 1922 reveals some interesting patterns, as Figure 2 below shows.

Figure 2 about here

Little organizational activity is apparent during the foundational year of 1922. But then, in spite of the desire manifest in the Ministers and Secretaries Act 1924 to limit the number of state bodies, quite a number of new state organizations were created between 1923 and 1927. These included several regulatory bodies such as the Civil

Service Commissioners and the Irish Film Censor's Office, as well and commercial undertakings such as the Electricity Supply Board and the Agricultural Credit Corporation as the new state sought to stimulate industrial development.

For the half century following this, there is a consistent pattern of agency creation ranging on average between 0.2 and 0.6 new agencies appearing per month. The number of terminations rarely breaches a rate of 0.2, leading to a pattern of incremental increase over this period, as shown in Figure 2.

The onset of economic crisis in the mid-1980s resulted in a spike in the number of agency terminations, and during the 6 year period 1987-93, for the first time there were slightly more agencies terminated than created by successive governments.

When the data are disaggregated by government, Figure 2 also reveals a sharp rise in the pace of agency creation during the Fianna Fáil/Labour Party coalition government (1993-4), which accelerated further during the Fine Gael/Labour Party/Democratic Left government (1994-7) and pinnacled during the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat government of 1997-2002. During the lifetime of this latter government, on average 1.6 agencies were being created per month, dropping only to 1.3 agencies per month during that government's second term. The onset of a new crisis in public finances in 2008, combined with a concern about the fragmented nature of the bureaucracy, resulted in a sharp arrest in the number of agency creations, and a rapid rise in the number of terminations becomes apparent, beginning in late 2008.

The rapid and sustained period of agencification was not the result of a deliberate process of developing a purchaser-provider split within the administrative system (that is, with functions being actively devolved to agencies under the control of policy-focussed ministries and ministers). Instead, it occurred in an ad hoc manner. McGauran et al. (2005: 55-6) identified a number of contributory factors for the increase in the establishment of state agencies by Ministers. These included: a means to facilitate social and interest groups in policy at national level, a result of reforms advocating the delegation of tasks to agencies, a product of EU legislative

requirements, and even a desire to secure greater resources. The OECD's (2008: 298) review of the public service pointed at the use of agencies as a means to circumvent controls on personnel numbers within government departments. As a result, the absence of central co-ordinating and control mechanisms for the resulting 'organizational zoo' resulted in considerable complexity (Hardiman and Scott, 2012). Both the political executive and the parliament struggled to manage the problems of accountability this entailed (MacCarthaigh 2010, 2012).

Identifying the death of state bodies is not a simple task. The Irish State Administration Database distinguishes between twelve different potential fates for agencies. The list is as follows:

1. Absorption

2. Birth

3. Death

4. Merge

5. Nationalization

6. Privatization

7. Replace

8. Secession

9. Split

10. Transfer from sub-national level

11. Transfer of function

12. Transfer to sub-national level

Figure 3 displays trends in the most common types of events leading to the termination of agencies: straightforward closure or *death*, *replacement* by another organization, *merger* of an agency into a new entity, and *absorption* into a parent department.

Figure 3 about here

Though the overall numbers of terminations are low prior to the 1980s, the effect of economic recession in the 1980s and again more recently, and the subsequent contraction in public finances, correlates with an increase in agency deaths. However,

we also find terminations occurring as a result of increased agency mergers beginning in the 1970s and more recently, the replacement of agencies with new organizations adopting new legal forms and functions. A small but steady increase in the number of absorptions is also evident.

Although outpaced by the number of agency creations over the same period, therefore, the prevalence of agency terminations between 1980 and 2010 presents a more dynamic picture of the state's administrative development than heretofore recognised. While there is strong evidence of rapid agencification between the mid-1990s and 2008 (coinciding with NPM-inspired reforms), and of this subsequently giving way to a period of organizational consolidation and reintegration (in line with post-NPM concepts), a less well recognized trend may be discerned. Even as new agencies were created over time, some established agencies were closed, or merged with others, or folded back into departmental structures. Thus the creation of new agencies must be considered with the less noticeable fact of their demise.

The Database also allows us to analyse agencies according to function, policy field, and legal form. We find that the tasks most commonly performed by new agencies between 1989 and 2010 are service delivery, regulatory, and advisory, with a small but significant body of organizations being created to undertake adjudicatory tasks. This is broadly consistent with NPM ideas concerning the separation of policy formulation and service delivery roles, as well as the insulation of functions from political interference through their delegation to autonomous organizational forms. In this respect Ireland's administrative development mirrors that of other European states over the same period (Pollitt et al., 2004; Verhoest et al., 2011). But unlike in many other jurisdictions, no guidelines existed as to when it is deemed appropriate to establish such agencies, a lacuna identified by the OECD in its review of the Irish public service (2008: 294-6).

Figure 4 identifies the variety in functions of new agencies created during the 1989-2010 period, categorised according to the various Taoisigh heading each government.

Figure 4 about here

The growth of independent regulatory agencies in most OECD states is a well-documented phenomenon (Gilardi, 2008), but the development of the Irish regulatory state through the use of such agencies is a comparatively recent development. Figure 4 identifies that a large number of these regulatory bodies have been created over a very short period. Another noteworthy trend is the expansion in the number of adjudicatory organizations, many of which provide alternatives to the courts for grievance and dispute handling (Hardiman and Scott, 2010: 182-4; 2012).

Advisory bodies also grow in number over time, a trend that was particularly pronounced during the administrations led by John Bruton (1994-7) and Bertie Ahern (1997-02). Typically, these bodies allowed for the formal involvement of stakeholder organizations from various policy sectors into the decision-making process, either through Board appointments or through structured engagements on policy development. Examples include the Women's Health Council, the Irish Council for Science Technology and Innovation, and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

In order to examine the policy areas in which agencies operated, the Irish State Administration Database adopts a typology of sixteen distinctive policy domains. Figure 5 below profiles the wide range of policy fields in which new agencies were deployed.

Figure 5 about here

While there is considerable variety overall, there is some clustering in the areas of enterprise and economic development under Bruton (1994-7) and Ahern I (1997-2002), and later health, public order and safety, education and training, and social protection under Ahern I (1997-02) and Ahern II (2002-7). During the Ahern III

government (2007-8), the number of new agencies reduced drastically across all policy fields: the phase of administrative expansion and fragmentation which began in the early 1990s abruptly ceased. This trend continued into the period of the Cowen administration (2008-11).

Finally, a distinctive feature of the Whitehall administrative tradition is the latitude it provides for a range of legal forms of public organization. The Irish State Administrative Database identifies 11 such forms for Irish agencies (apart from government departments), ranging from statutory corporations to non-statutory non-departmental organizations (cf Hardiman and Scott, 2012). The choice of legal form for a new organization is in many cases arbitrary, and it is not axiomatic that certain legal forms carry with it particular forms of autonomy or mode of control by a central authority. In general, the use of a discrete statute to determine the role and governance architecture for an agency and the adoption of a corporate legal identity provides some insulation against arbitrary political interventions. In many cases this is vital to achieve the 'credible commitment' demanded by markets for organizations such as independent regulatory agencies, and by civil society in the case of independent grievance handling bodies such as Ombudsman offices. But it is not uncommon for non-statutory agencies to have their legal status changed at a later stage so they are put on a statutory footing.

Figure 6 below shows that a variety of legal forms was used during the period of complexity (1989-2010). But the majority of organizations created during the agency 'boom' years of 1997 and 2007 (Ahern I and Ahern II) were given statutory corporate status. In most cases this involved creating a governing board or authority, and required these bodies to employ appropriate personnel to meet statutory requirements in areas such as HR, financial management and freedom of information. The 1997-2007 period also witnessed the creation of a large number of statutory non-departmental bodies (not adopting a corporate form), as well as non-statutory non-

departmental bodies which in the main are created by governments by administrative circular.[2]

Figure 6 about here

Conclusions: Rationalizing bureaucracy

If the period 1989-2010 can be characterised by centrifugal pressures leading to organizational fragmentation and complexity in the Irish administrative system, it has now given way to a new period featuring more centripetal dynamics and a reassertion of central political controls. The organizational configuration of the Irish public service is once again under scrutiny, arising from the need to reduce public spending, achieve greater administrative effectiveness, and secure a more efficient deployment of staffing. The combination of these pressures suggests that we might expect to see a reduction in the number of public organizations in Ireland and a deconstruction of the state apparatus that has emerged at an accelerated pace over the last ninety years.

This paper has demonstrated that the evolution of the national bureaucracy in Ireland, and particularly during the 1989-2010 period, is more dynamic than previously thought. The manner of organizational change was quite ad hoc, involving multiple organizational forms and functional tasks that were not subject to any central regulation or political oversight. At first glance, the phenomenon of agencification in Ireland over the recent period appears to be in line with theories of NPM, which advocate the delegation of tasks to specialized organizational forms, and also mirrors developments in other western states over the period. But closer analysis identifies that Ireland did not closely adhere to NPM reforms in the same vein as other Whitehall-style administrations (Hardiman and MacCarthaigh, 2011). Instead we find a number of other factors at play in driving the creation of agencies in Ireland, with

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[2] In one of the few studies of organizational life-cycles in public bureaucracies, Kaufman's (1976: 34-42) analysis of the survival rate of federal agencies in the United States between 1923 and 1973 uncovered the fact that while the number of agency creations increased over the period in question, the use of statutes for their creation became less frequent (Kaufman 1976: 34-42).

little evidence of NPM-style disciplines emerging in relation to performance management and sanctions. Also, in contrast with NPM theory, we also find agency terminations occurring in tandem with their creation.

The complexity and cost of the enlarged bureaucracy became a prominent political issue with the onset of the financial crisis in 2008, and a programme of agency rationalizations (or de-agencification) was initiated to begin in mid-2009. This included a cut in the aggregate agency population numbers and significant sharing of support functions such as IT, HR and financial management systems. A public-service wide programme of staffing reductions and reduced budgets has also forced greater institutional integration, as government seeks to reassert its authority over an administrative system that to be at least partially responsible for the financial and economic crises (Wright, 2010; Nyberg, 2011). Thus, while Ireland was a relative 'laggard' in respect of adopting NPM concepts for bureaucratic reform, it has rapidly adopted core features of post-NPM reforms and in particular the practice of organizational re-integration and recentralization. As with the period of agency creation, however, the agency rationalization programme is occurring in ad-hoc fashion, driven primarily by the need to re-establish control over a fragmented and costly administration. Unlike the 1989-2010 period, however, there is now much more engaged political interest in the issue of administrative reform.

The re-centralisation of political control has manifested itself in the decision of the new government in 2011 to split the Department of Finance, thus establishing a new Department of Public Expenditure and Reform whose brief includes managing and co-ordinating the administrative rationalisation project. There is little evidence, however, that agency rationalisation of itself secures cost savings or greater efficiencies. The structures of the Irish administrative system have been manipulated to meet particular challenges in the past, but a longitudinal perspective allows us to see the consequences of this unplanned approach to organizational innovation. Achieving a leaner public service requires a more considered approach than simply 'culling' agencies. A more effective configuration of departments and agencies, each with the organizational design best suited to its task, would achieve more effective 'joined-up government'.

Public administration cannot be understood independently of shared understandings of the appropriate scope, role and reach of the state, and these are inherently political decisions. This paper has identified that Irish governments have tended to prefer to retain the capacity to create and terminate different forms of organization than to engage in periodic assessments of the appropriateness of particular organizational designs for the tasks to be performed. The paper has also demonstrated that scholars of public administration need to move beyond a concentration on ministerial structures if they are to develop a more complete picture of bureaucratic change. The Irish State Administration Database provides a new research tool for understanding how our public administration came to be configured as it is. It provides a valuable resource to inform evidence-based policy analysis of organizational change and to allow for greater understanding of Irish politics and public governance.

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Table 1: State development 1924-2010

Period	Period of state development	Type of political-administrative regime	Type of Government	Government composition (coalitions shaded)
1924-48	*Emergence*	Emphasis on separation of political and administrative roles.	Single-party dominant.	C na G 1924-32
				FF 1932-48
1948-69	*Development*	Emergence of policy formulating bureaucracy.	Alteration between single party and coalition governments.	Inter-party 1948-51
				FF 1951-4
				Inter-party 1954-7
				FF 1957-69
1969-89	*Modernisation*	Emergence of managerial doctrines, some blurring of political and administerative roles	Alteration between single party and coalition governments.	FF 1969-73
				FG/Lab 1973-7
				FF 1977-81
				FG/Lab 1981-2
				FF 1982-2
				FG/Lab 1982-7

				FF 1987-9
1989-2010	*Complexity*	Dominance of managerialism, increased blurring of political and administrative roles.	Coalition government dominant.	FF/PD 1989-92
				FF/Labour (1992-4
				FG/Labour/DL 1994-7
				FF/PD 1997-2007
				FF/PD/Green 2007-10

Table 2: Emergence 1924 – 48 (Departmental changes in bold)

1924	1948
President of the Executive Council	**Taoiseach (1937)**
Finance	Finance
Justice	Justice
Local Government and Public Health	**Local Government (1947)**
Education	**Health (1947)**
Lands and Agriculture	**Social Welfare (1947)**
Fisheries	Education
Industry and Commerce	**Agriculture (1928)**
Posts and Telegraphs	**Lands (1934)**
Defence	*--Lands and Fisheries (1929-1934)*
External Affairs	Industry and Commerce
	Posts and Telegraphs
	Defence
	External Affairs
	Supplies (1939-1945)

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

Table 3: Development 1949-69 (Departmental changes in bold)

1949	1969
Taoiseach	Taoiseach
Finance	Finance
Justice	Justice
Local Government	Local Government
Education	Education
Agriculture	**Agriculture and Fisheries (1965)**
Industry and Commerce	Industry and Commerce
Lands	Lands
Posts and Telegraphs	Posts and Telegraphs
Defence	Defence
External Affairs	External Affairs
Health	Health
Social Welfare	Social Welfare
	Gaeltacht
	Transport and Power
	Labour (1966)

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

Table 4: Modernization 1969-89 (Departmental changes in bold)

1969	1989
Taoiseach	Taoiseach
Finance	Finance
Justice	Justice
Local Government	**Environment (1977)**
Education	Education
Agriculture and Fisheries	**Agriculture and Food (1987)**
Industry and Commerce	*--Agriculture (1977-1987)*
Lands	**Industry and Commerce (1986)**
Posts and Telegraphs	*--Industry, Commerce and Energy (1977-1980)*
Defence	*--Industry, Commerce and Tourism (1980-1981)*
External Affairs	*--Trade Commerce and Tourism (1981-1983)*
Health	*--Industry, Trade, Commerce and Tourism (1983-1986)*
Social Welfare	**Tourism and Transport (1987)**
Gaeltacht	*--Tourism and Transport (1977-1980)*
Transport and Power	*--Transport (1980-1983)*
Labour	*--{Communications (1983-1987)}*
	--{Public Service (1973-1987)}
	Social Welfare
	Defence
	Foreign Affairs (1971)
	Health
	Gaeltacht
	Labour
	Marine (1987)
	--Fisheries (1977-1978)
	--Fisheries and Forestry (1978-1986)
	--Tourism, Fisheries and Forestry (1986-1987)
	Energy (1983)
	--Economic Planning and Development (1977-1980)
	--Energy (1980-1981)
	--Industry and Energy (1981-1983)

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

Table 5. Complexity 1989-2010 (Departmental changes in bold)

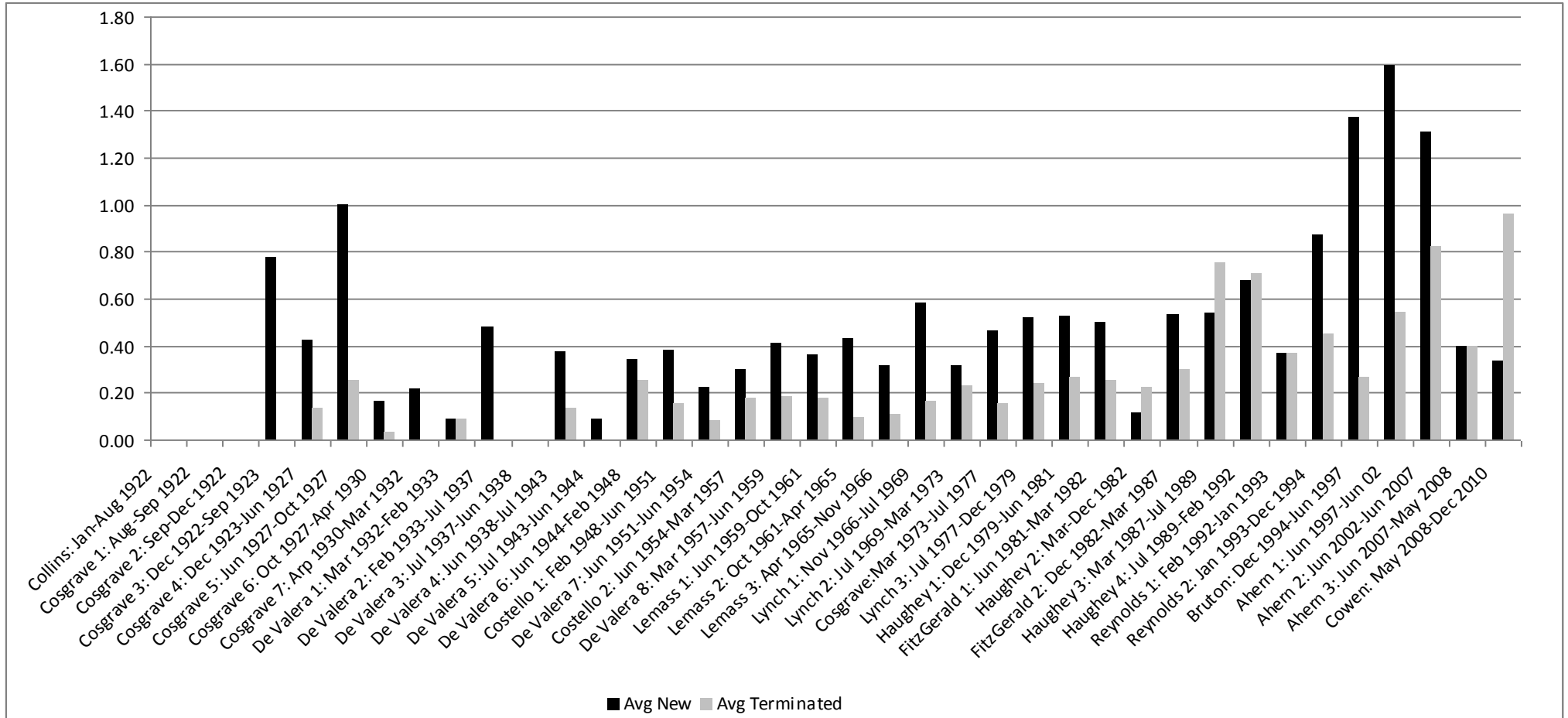| 1989	2010
Taoiseach	Taoiseach
Finance	Finance
Justice	**Justice and Law Reform (2010)**
Environment	*--{Equality and Law Reform (1993-1997)}*
Education	*--Justice, Equality and Law Reform (1997-2010)*
Agriculture and Food	**Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2003)**
Industry and Commerce	*--Environment and Local Government (1997-2003)*
Tourism and Transport	**Education and Skills (2010)**
Social Welfare	*--Education and Science (1997-2010)*
Defence	**Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (2007)**
Foreign Affairs	*--Agriculture, Food and Forestry (1993-1997)*
Health	*--Agriculture and Food (1997-1999)*
Gaeltacht	*--Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (1999-2002)*
Labour	*--Agriculture and Food (2002-2007)*
Marine	**Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (2010)**
Energy	*--Enterprise and Employment (1993-1997)*
	--Enterprise, Trade and Employment (1997-2010)
	Social Protection (2010)
	--Social, Community and Family Affairs (1997-2002)
	--Social and Family Affairs (2002-2010)
	Defence
	Foreign Affairs
	Health and Children (1997)
	Tourism, Culture and Sport (2010)
	--Tourism and Trade (1993-1997)
	--Tourism, Sport and Recreation (1997-2002)
	--Arts, Sport and Tourism (2002-2010)
	Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (2010)
	--Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht (1993-1997)
	--Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (1997-2002)
	--Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2002-2010)
	Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (2007)
	--Marine and Natural Resources (1997-2002)
	--Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (2002-2007)
	Transport (2002)
	--Tourism, Transport and Communications (1991-1993)
	--Transport, Energy and Communications (1993-1997)
	--Public Enterprise (1997-2002)

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

Figure 1: Public organizations in Ireland 1923-2010 (including Ministerial Departments)
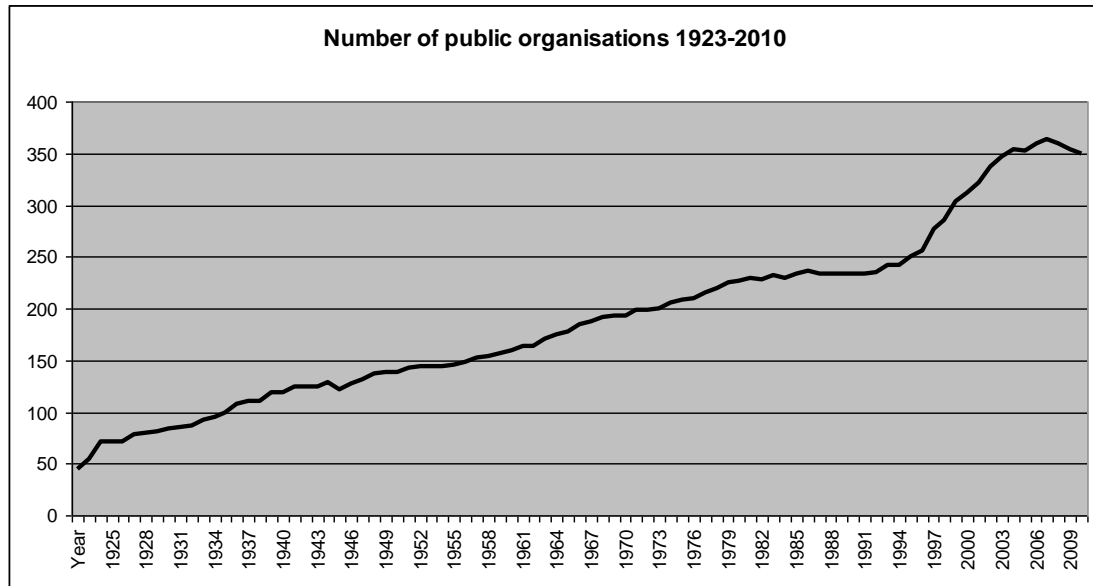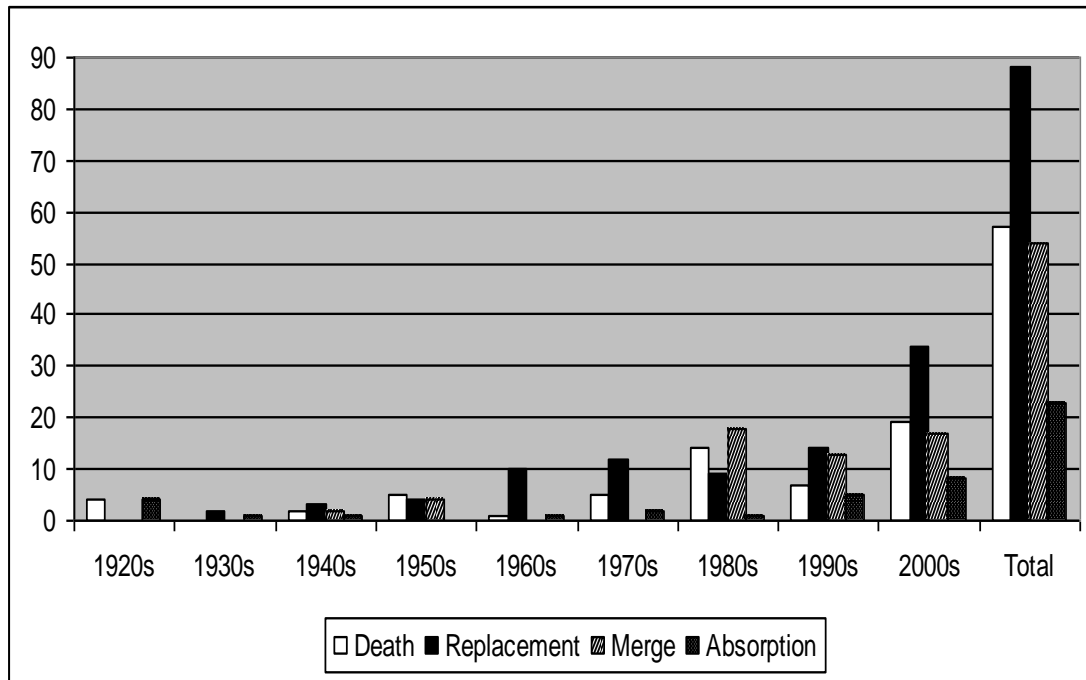

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

Figure 2: Average monthly organisational creation and termination 1922-2010 (excluding ministerial departments)
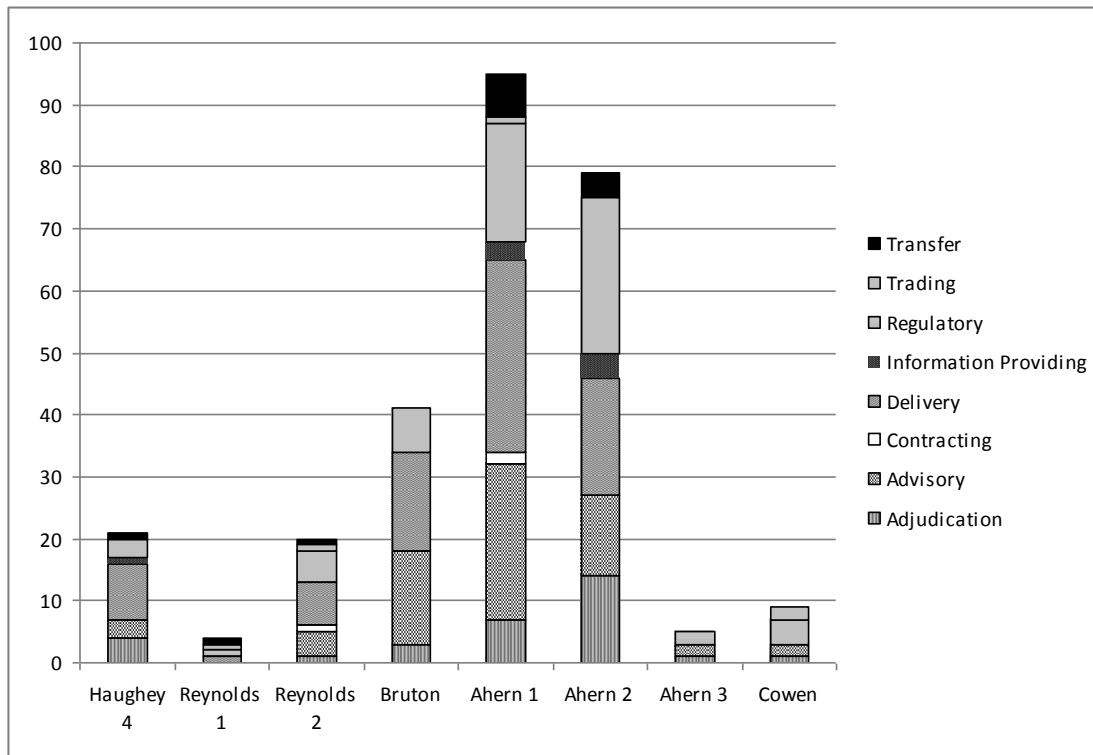

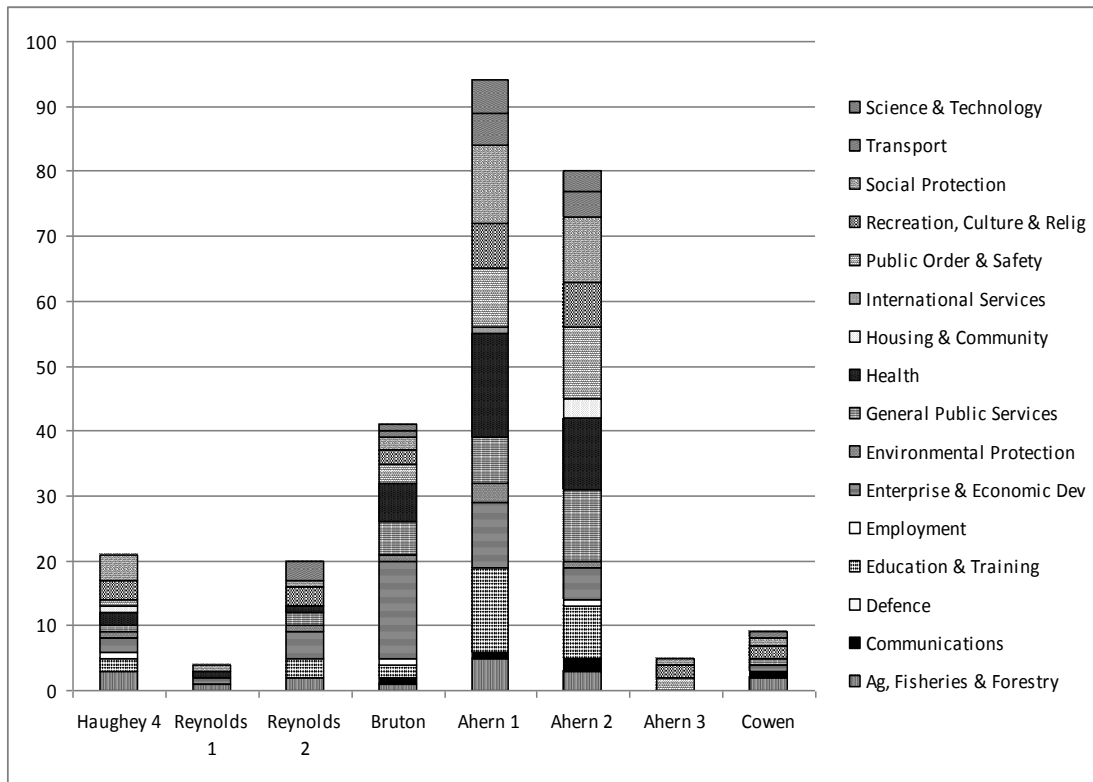Source: (Hardiman at al. 2011)

Figure 3: Agency termination 1920- 2010

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

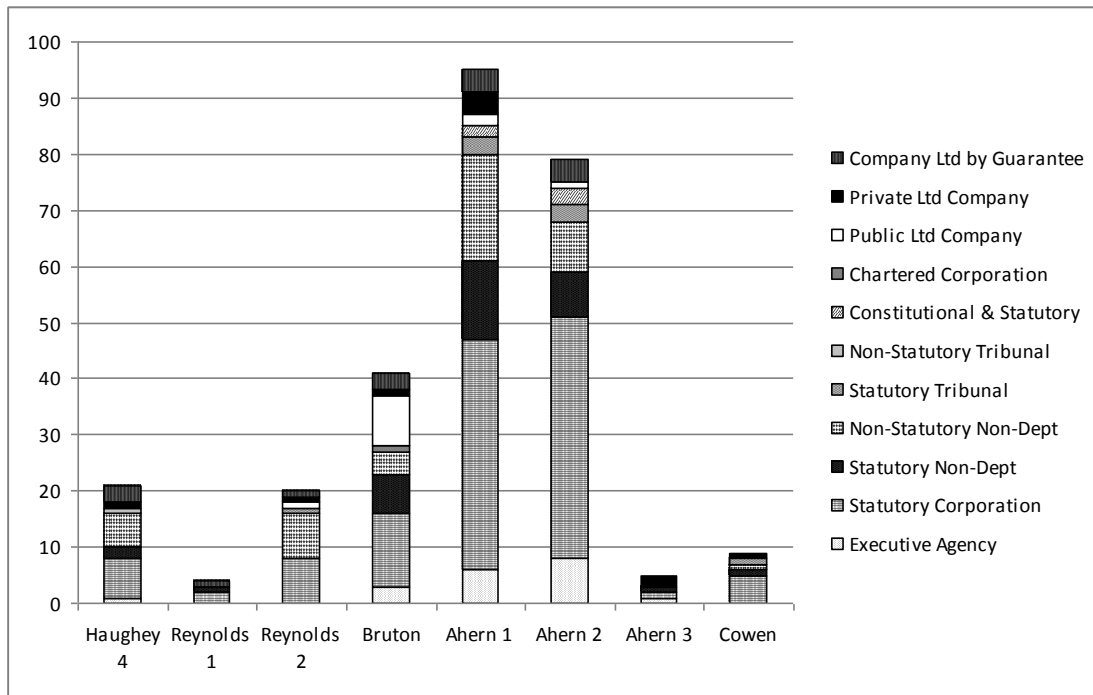*Figure 4: Functions of new agencies 1989-2010*

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

Figure 5: Policy domains of new agencies 1989-2010

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)

Figure 6: Legal form of new agencies 1989-2010

Source: (Hardiman et al., 2011)