Centralization of Power in Ontario Provincial Cabinets:
Its Impact on Ministers

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INTRODUCTION

Political observers have maintained that power in Canadian legislatures has become increasingly centralized, and has shifted away from Cabinet as a collective, toward the First Minister and the centre.[1] The "centre" refers to the Premier, his inner circle of ministers, and non-elected political aides.[2] Theorists support that the full cabinet has been overshadowed as a decision-making center.[3] Under a highly centralized model, Christopher Dunn argues that cabinet becomes a vehicle to implement the center's objectives rather than objectives of cabinet as a collective.[4] Cabinet is thought to be the only venue where legislators can initiative and legislate public policy, yet many ministers may be left out of actually initiating major policy shifts because of increased control by the Premier. The majority of Canadian literature on centralization of power focuses on the federal government. One Minister under Chrétien compared Cabinet to a collective focus group for the Prime Minister rather than a decision-making body.[5] Jeffrey Simpson says the full federal cabinet is akin to a mini-sounding board or a slimmed down caucus.[6] Yet, theorists point to greater potential for heightened centralization with the Premier in provincial legislatures, highlighting that the issue is relevant to the provincial context.[7]

One Member interviewed for this paper compared power to capital: "Someone has to give it up, in order for someone to pick it up," he said.[8] This raises interesting questions for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario: How much power do Ministers actually have? If less power lies with Cabinet, what impact has this had on Ministers? What do unelected advisors actually do? The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of centralized power with the Premier on Ministers, and to assess whether centralization of power with the Premier has increased, decreased, or remained constant in the last five cabinets in Ontario.

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[1] Peter Aucoin, "Independent Foundations, Public Money, and Accountability: Wither Ministerial Responsibility as Democratic Governance?" Canadian Public Administration 46.1 (2003): 20.
Donald Savoie, Governing from the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999); Graham White, Cabinets and First Ministers (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).
David Cameron, Celine Mulhorn, and Graham White, Democracy in Ontario: A Paper prepared for the Panel on the Role of Government 2003.
[2] Theorists such as Bakvis and Savoie include central bureaucratic agencies and senior public servants in their characterizations of the "centre" but the role of the bureaucracy is not within the scope of this paper.
[3] Christopher Dunn, "Changing Cabinet's Design: Evolution of the Institutionalized Cabinet," in The Institutionalized Cabinet: Governing the Western Provinces (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, Institute of Public Administration of Canada [IPAC]).
[4] Christopher Dunn, Ch. 7 "Premiers and Cabinets" in Provinces: Canadian Provincial Politics (2nd Ed.) (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006); David C. Docherty, Legislatures (UBC Press, 2005).
[5] Savoie, 1999.
[6] Jeffrey Simpson, The Friendly Dictatorship (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2002).
[7] Bakvis, 2001; White, 2005, p. 54.
[8] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.

Rationale

The literature on provincial cabinets is largely underdeveloped. There is minimal research examining the impact of centralization of power on provincial ministers, as the focus is largely geared toward ministers in Ottawa, or on the impact of centralization of power of the executive on backbench members.[9] Despite several similarities between the Premier and the Prime Minister, provincial executives are not miniature versions of their federal counterparts.[10] Since Cabinet thought of as the center of power, it is useful to gain a deeper understanding of its operations in practice. The topic may have implications for how effectively ministers undertake their portfolio responsibilities, and the satisfaction and engagement they experience with their role.

This issue is of interest to the public, and has gained currency with the popular media. Noted political journalist James Travers wrote, "Strong cabinets are dusty relics. Far more powerful than ministers are the political professionals who form a protective inner circle beholden only to the prime ministers, not voters."[11] On the Ontario provincial government, Jim Coyle reported that "the shift of power from the Legislature into cabinet, then into the leader's office and the hands of a royal guard of gatekeepers and advisers has not stopped."[12] These commentaries bring to light relevant criticisms of the centralized model, such as decreased government responsiveness and accountability to voters, and diminished ministerial autonomy and independence.

Methodology

The available literature was reviewed, to gain an overview of relevant theories and perspectives. First-hand interviews with past and present figures at Queen's Park were the primary information source. Eighteen interviews were conducted with past and present Cabinet Ministers in the Ontario legislature, under the governments of Peterson, Rae, Harris, Eves, and McGuinty. The objective was to gauge Members of Provincial Parliament's (MPP) satisfaction with the guidance, communication, and independence they received under the given Premier, and their insight as to whether centralization of power has varied in recent years. Effort was made to select respondents who held several portfolios under various Premiers, to gain a comparative perspective. In addition, two interviews were conducted with senior political staff in order to learn about the role of staff in advising the Premier and interacting with ministers. A snowball sampling technique was used. Respondents were asked whether they would suggest informants on the topic. Two backbench MPPs were interviewed in response to recommendations.[13] Approximately eight open-ended questions were posed to each respondent. The interview questions were modified based on the respondent. All interviews were conducted on the basis of anonymity, in order to elicit the most candid comments.

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[9] Cameron, Mulhorn amd White, 2003.

[10] Dunn, 2006.

[11] James Travers, "An Eloquent Plea for Democracy," The Globe and Mail 5 March 2011 (Reprinted). A6

[12] Jim Coyle, "Ontario Voters Deserve More than Muppets," The Toronto Star 22 November 2010. A9

[13] The views of one backbench MPPs is included in this paper, and this is indicated in the appropriate footnote. All other respondents who were MPPs, held current or former Cabinet posts.

Limitations associated with this research are the minimal literature that was available specific to the Ontario legislature. Time constraints made it unfeasible to interview an equal number of respondents from all governments under review, or to interview a larger sample of respondents. Fifteen individuals declined to participate. It was more difficult to reach ministers from the Peterson government because of difficulty obtaining contact information since many of these individuals have long since left the legislature. Further, there is a possibility that respondents were not honest or objective in their responses, because of the sensitive nature of the topic, for fear that they would be identifiable, or because of cabinet secrecy. Responses from certain members may have affected by a partisanship, political motivation, or individual bias. In order to balance potential biases, interviews will be supplemented by references to more objective indicators of concentration of power, such as cabinet committee structure, size of cabinet, or references from the literature to Premiers' leadership styles.

BACKGROUND

Factors that Impact Centralization of Power

The size of the Premier's office, cabinet committee structure, size of cabinet, and the Premier's leadership style are indicators of centralization of power with the Premier. Matheson supports that the extent to which a First Minister dominates his Cabinet depends how he opts to organize his office, his personality, the political situation, and the relationship he forges with his Cabinet colleagues.[14] Notwithstanding the impact of these variables, however, it is undeniable that the Premier is always the most powerful figure in the legislature. Only the Premier wields the power to appoint ministers to Cabinet, (and remove them as he or she deems appropriate), and to dominate decision-making when he or she sees fit.

Cabinet Committees

Cabinet structure is an indicator of how power is shared within cabinet.[15] Premiers tend to alter the committee structure to mould structures and process to their own philosophies of leadership, management styles, and political objectives.[16] Since cabinet is governed solely by parliamentary convention, its structure is flexible. Generally, an increase in cabinet committees is thought of as less centralized. The assumption is, through increased cabinet committees, a greater number of ministers are able to work through issues before it reaches the Premier. The sheer number of cabinet committees is a simplistic indicator of centralization of power with the Premier, and it would be necessary to examine the structure of these committees to gain a deeper understanding. As this is beyond the scope of this paper, cabinet committee structure will only be discussed briefly to gain an overview of its main implications.

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[14]W.A. Matheson, The Prime Minister and Cabinet (Toronto: Methuen, 1976).
[15]Dunn, 2006.
[16]Peter Aucoin, "Organizational Change in the Machinery of Canadian Government: From Rational Management to Brokerage Politics." Canadian Journal of Political Science 19.1 (1986): 3- 27.

Dunn argues that the move toward an institutionalized cabinet (said to have been initiated with Robarts as Premier) has diffused power and authority, embraced coordination and consultation, and made the dominant premier pattern more difficult to achieve.[17] Dunn's model of the institutionalized cabinet describes a decision-making structure where the executive is supported by central agencies and support structures, and the Premier shares power with chairs of influential cabinet committees, the finance minister, members of inner cabinets (planning and priorities committees), and in some cases, deputy premiers.[18] Dunn observes that Ontario has vacillated between institutionalized and Premier-dominated patterns.[19]

Policy and Priorities Board (often referred to as P and P) is the most useful indicator of centralization in a government's authority and decision-making structure. Based on interviews with MPPs, P and P is an informal "inner cabinet" or "executive committee," composed of about eight of the most powerful and influential ministers in a given government.[20] Political theorist Christopher Dunn confirms that influential policies and planning committees group together the most important ministers in cabinet.[21] Based on publicly available information, the role of P and P is to focus on strategic priorities of the government.[22] The presence of a P and P tends to make cabinet structure more hierarchical; without one, the authority structure is generally more flattened-out.[23] Interviews with members who sat on P and P revealed that they considered it to be a primary vehicle for dialogue and communication with the Premier. The governments of Peterson, Rae, Harris, Eves, and McGuinty each had P and Ps in place (although it was known by Priorities, Policy, and Communications Board under the Harris and Eves governments).[24] P and P is chaired by the Premier. The implications of P and P is that a core group of senior ministers (such as ministers responsible for Health, Transportation, Finance, and Economic Development) are involved in key discussions on central government priorities, and the rest of ministers are not. White and Lindquist state that establishing a formal inner and outer cabinet structure affirms that certain key ministers wield a disproportionate power.[25]

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[17]Dunn, 2006.

[18]Dunn, "Changing Cabinet's Design," in The Institutionalized Cabinet

[19]Dunn, 2006; Matheson, 1976.

[20]Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.

[21]Dunn, 2006.

[22]"Priorities and Planning Committee," 12 April 2011, Office of the Premier, Government of Ontario, 20 April 2011, <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca>.

[23]Dunn, The Institutionalized Cabinet.

[24]This presence of P and P under all governments under review is based on information from interviews with MPPs.

[25]Evert Lindquist and Graham White, "Analyzing Canadian Cabinets: Past, Present, and Future," in M. Sharih and A. Daniels, eds,, New Public Management and Public Administration in Canada (Toronto: IPAC, 1997).

Cabinet Size

The size of cabinet indicates greater predisposition of a Premier to increase control over cabinet. Dunn argues that larger cabinets are more prone to become Premier-centered; an observation that is supported by Bernier, Brownsey, and Howlett.[26] Lindquist and White state that in smaller cabinets, ministers have more extensive portfolio responsibilities and greater power over decision-making.[27]

Leadership Style

The Premier's leadership style and philosophy impacts how he or she will manage their ministers: in accordance with a top-down, command-and-control manner, or with a more collegial, flattened-out structure.[28] Bakvis states that the personality of the First Minister exerts a significant influence on how decision-making operates, and on the frequency by which one-on-one backroom deals will characterize his or her government.[29] Respondents supported the impact of leadership of tendency to centralize power. Certain Premiers have tried to create a decision-making structure that fosters greater participation among Ministers, while others have relied on a smaller, inner circle of Ministers and trusted advisers to turns to for advice. "It's a matter of style and personalities," summated one MPP.[30]

FINDINGS

Has Centralization Increased or Decreased? Recent Provincial Trends

Based on MPPs' interview responses, centralization of power with the Premier has existed in each of the cabinets examined in this paper. One MPP said, "It's always been that they've decided what to do with the input of a few selected people."[31] Some longstanding members expressed almost a nostalgic view of a past system under which ministers had greater autonomy, but these perspectives were focused on governments before Peterson. One longstanding member compared the current system where "the center has a fixed plan" and "everyone is on the same page," to twenty-five years ago when "everyone had their own page."[32] Another MPP said it is naïve to think that centralization of power was not in play in previous governments, and that even in cabinets with strong ministers, the premier always had the final say.[33] It is useful to combine anecdotal information from interviews, with accounts from the literature to ascertain recent trends.

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[26]Dunn, 2006; Luc Bernier, Keith Brownsey, and Michael Howlett. eds., Executive Styles in Canada: Cabinet Structures and Leadership Practices in the Canadian Governments (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, IPAC, 2005).
[27]Lindquist and White, 1997.
[28]Savoie, 1999.
[29]Bakvis, 2001.
[30]Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[31] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[32] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[33] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.

Peterson (Premier: June 26, 1985 - October 1, 1990)

When Peterson assumed office, he was the first Liberal Premier after over four decades of PC dominance. His government was a result of a minority government pact with the NDP. During his first term, he implemented a very clear-cut mandate; a condition of the NDP's support. Graham White states Peterson's government was supported by a large number of partisan staff that advised Cabinet decision-makers, dispelling any myth that the accumulation of the Premier's partisan staff is a recent development.[34] Many of Peterson's ministers were inexperienced.[35] Yet, Ministers' responses suggest there may have been less control from the center at this time.

One respondent said that he received an ideal amount of guidance and support from the Premier, adding that Peterson provided the necessary advice and counsel that he required. He said that Peterson was helpful in assessing if a proposed initiative fit within the government's overall plan. However, he deduced that the ideal relationship he experienced was likely a special circumstance, and the result of his close, personal relationship with the Premier.[36] Another MPP said he was able to initiate proposals under Peterson, and had significant flexibility in his portfolio. He stated that, under Peterson, he had the ability to bring initiatives forward and sell them to colleagues. The MPP contrasted this to his experience as a minister two decades later under McGuinty, when the center had greater control, and there was less consultation with Cabinet on the center's initiatives.[37] A longstanding MPP supported that, even as a more junior minister under Peterson, he had never felt constrained in doing his job.[38]

Rae (Premier: October 1, 1990- June 26, 1995).

The NDP government's unexpected rise to power prompted criticisms that the party was very much unprepared to govern. White offers useful evidence as to specific changes that were implemented to cabinet under Rae. White states that Rae had twenty-seven ministers at one time. In addition to a large cabinet, the number of political staffers under Rae was high.[39] Thomas Walkom describes Rae's style of decision-making in cabinet as consensual and consultative, but notes the result to be an inefficient and costly system.[40] White supported that Rae perceived the need to persuade, rather than dictate, to his Cabinet colleagues, and to concede to Ministers on certain issues.[41] Rae had eight cabinet committees, suggested a more consultative and collaborative style.

Yet despite these points, evidence from political observers and MPPs suggest the system was highly centralized under Rae. Rae appointed 7 ministers without portfolio, which

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[34] Graham White, <u>The Government and Politics of Ontario</u> 5th Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 19997).

[35] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

[36] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.

[37] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

[38] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

[39] White, 1997.

[40] Thomas Walkom, <u>Rae Days: The Rise and Follies of the NDP </u>(Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1994).

[41] Dunn, 2006 (ch. 7).

would appear to have diffused cabinet's power further to caucus. Yet, these ministers did not attend Cabinet meetings, and White offers cynical views for their appointments. Rae required that P and P approve the recommendations of policy committees before they went to Cabinet. P and P also reviewed all ministry spending proposals after they were reviewed by policy committees. The Premier backtracked on an initially stated position, when he amended the system to make P and P members chairs of policy committees.[42] This move can be perceived to increase P and P members' power and influence. Respondents described P and P as an 'executive committee' or an 'inner cabinet,' with its members wielding significant influence.[43] One MPP said that P and P constituted the "centralized opinion of government that interacts with the issues, before Cabinet gets to them."[44] Another P and P member said, "Everything that went to Cabinet went to P and P first, so I was part of that process of vetting certain initiatives, rejecting or adopting them.[45] According to White, centralization increased during the middle of the NDP government's term upon initiation of the Expenditure Control Plan (ECP) and the Social Contract process.[46] The NDP's agenda necessitated swift, decisive action by Cabinet.

MPPs offered diverse perspectives on cabinet dynamics under Rae. The majority of members interviewed said they received minimal guidance and direction from the Premier. Many cited that they communicated with the center in very few instances, if at all. Two MPPs said and that more guidance and communication would have been appreciated.[47] Other respondents said that they were happy to manage their portfolios independently, and would not have appreciated "interference" from the center.[48] Such was the case of one MPP, whose many years of experience in opposition had equipped him with a solid understanding of the system prior to this appointment to Cabinet. He said that he did not require direction from the center, and certainly would not have appreciated it.[49] Another MPP expressed a similar position. "We weren't making policy decisions that would impact millions of people. We had enough intelligence, capacity and knowledge in our staff that we were capable of doing our job – we didn't need, or want, intervention from the Premier's office. I wasn't quite sure that they would understand the issues as we did. I was very happy that we didn't have that type of influence."[50] Other MPPs supported that the Premier was more heavily involved in portfolios in which he had a personal interest.

Degree of ministers' independence varied, based on the MPP. One MPP said, "I was guided by party policy – I'm not sure what you mean by independence." [51] Another MPP said she was very independent, but a minister's 'independence' needed to be viewed

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[42] White, 1997.
[43] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011; Interview with MPP, Phone, April 2011.
[44] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011 Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[45] Interview with MPP, Phone, April 2011.
[46] White, 1997.
[47] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011; Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[48] Interview with MPP, Toronto April 2011; Interview with MPP, Phone, April 2011.
[49] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[50] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.
[51] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.

within the context of the government's overall priorities and direction.[52] One member said he had a difficult relationship and sparse communication with the Premier, and that he fought with the center over a variety of issues including independence. The MPP said greater communication with the Premier – and less directive*s* – would have been appreciated.[53]

For Rae's inner circle, direction, guidance, and communication were provided to Minister through P and P, cabinet, and policy committees.[54] One member said that P and P members had many opportunities to discuss issues with the Premier in collective settings.[55] Another senior member said, "Any time I needed to communicate with the center, I spoke to the Premier," remarking to have received one call from the premier's chief of staff throughout his term as a minister. He said this was atypical of many of his cabinet colleagues, noting, "Many other ministers got calls with guidance from the Premier's direction."[56] One MPP said the Premier relied more heavily on an inner circle of ministers who he was comfortable with, for advice and input.[57] One senior MPP stated that a smaller group of ministers and senior political advisors from the Premier's office would meet informally to discuss issues and advise the Premier. The expertise of the group was deployed to respond to quickly emerging issues, intergovernmental matters, or other issues on which the Premier was seeking input. Highlighting the emphasis on consultation on the NDP government, the member stated, "The Premier did not make decisions on his own; he always sought input."[58] Yet, based on differences in ministers' responses, it seems that Rae relied primarily on an inner circle of Ministers and advisers, rather than on the advice of Cabinet as a collective. Based on information from MPP's responses, other ministers communicated primarily with the Premier's staff, rather than with Rae.

Harris (Premier: June 26, 1995 – April 14, 2002)

There is consensus in the literature that Harris' decision-making processes were highly centralized. Luc Bernier, Keith Brownsey, and Michael Howlett support that Harris and the "New Right" era were responsible for exacerbating the "democratic deficit," as a result of their highly centralized, government-by-premier models of governance.[59] White states that decision-making under Harris was driven by the Premier and a handful of key ministers.[60] Harris' term as Premier was characterized by the implementation of a concrete, wide-sweeping policy agenda, the Common Sense Revolution, or Bill 26 (Omnibus Bill). Harris' cabinet constituted a clear divergence from the institutionalized cabinet model, characterized by coordination and consultation.[61] Harris' model is

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[52] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[53] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[54] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[55] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[56] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.
[57] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.
[58] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[59] Bernier, Brownsey, and Howlett, 2005.
[60] White, 1997.
[61] Dunn 2006; White 1997.

consistent with Dunn' description of an "unaided" cabinet, which is described as having a simpler structure, less standing committees, restricted collegiality, less input into decisions from the center, and less collective decision-making.[62]

White describes Harris' cabinet structure as "built for speed" and designed to push through the government's agenda in an expedient and efficient manner. Harris eliminated all but two policy committees from the preceding Rae government. Harris reduced the number of political staff, resulting in a smaller Cabinet Office as compared to under Peterson and Rae. Cabinet committees had six members each, to facilitate reaching a consensus in a timely fashion. Cabinet was reduced to nineteen portfolios. There was less emphasis on cabinet deliberation, substantive policy analysis, and meaningful internal or external consultation, and more emphasis on policy implementation. The policy agenda was largely driven by the Premier and his key ministers. Many of these structural changes to cabinet were initiated under the rationale of fiscal constraint. Harris expanded P and P, the cabinet system, and Cabinet Office upon an economic upturn.[63]

In a mode of governance described by political observers as highly centralized, it was somewhat surprising that the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with their experience as ministers under Harris' coordination. One member said that "the centralization question was somewhat less of a concern" because there was a singular focus on implanting a specific plan.[64] Another MPP defended Harris' "fairly centralized" system on the grounds that "it was one of the reasons we were able to do as much as we did."[65] Many of the MPPs interviewed who had served as ministers under Harris came to cabinet with parliamentary or professional experience from previous years at Queen's Park, or in the business or public sector. Many respondents highlighted the importance of drawing on their previous parliamentary and professional expertise to manage relations with the center. Moreover, certain respondents cited their strong personalities as important considerations in how they dealt with control from the center. A longstanding member he had had a great deal of independence, that had enabled him to implement significant reforms and to make headway in his portfolios. He noted that this was not consistent with the experiences of certain of his Cabinet colleagues. He attributed his own success to his ability to remain focused and stubborn, and to persevere and persuade Cabinet and the center of issues, even when they were initially met with opposition or controversy.[66]

MPPs interviewed generally expressed satisfaction at their relationships with the center under Harris. A very senior member attributed his good relationship with the center to his portfolio, and his close personal relationship with the Premier. He said he spoke to the Premier once or twice a day, and that they frequently met formally and informally. They had an ongoing dialogue and were very like-minded, which had facilitated their working relationship and contributed to the free reign he had in his portfolio. He said, "Me and the

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[62] Dunn, 2006 (Ch. 7).
[63] White, 1997.
[64] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[65] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.
[66] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

Premier went back a long way. He trusted me implicitly."[67] Another member said that there was enough latitude in his portfolio to respond to issues raised by stakeholders and constituents, which he considered an important aspects of his position. "I wouldn't have lasted that long in Cabinet if I did not feel that I had adequate power to do what I was there to do," he said.[68] One member said that he had had enough independence, but that he had consistently fought for it.[69] Others supported that they had independence, but it wasn't given to them easily. One MPP said she felt that there was enough latitude under both Harris and Eves to act on issues that she identified in her ministry, provided that she made a successful case to their colleagues.[70] One MPP said the nature of his portfolio had warranted minimal interest from the center, much to his satisfaction. "As long as I was doing a good job, the center wouldn't be in my office," he said.[71]

Other members under Eves said that direction from the center waxed and waned. An MPP qualified that there was greater involvement from the center on central election platforms. She stated that in her case, an important issue had emerged later in the mandate that she had remedied more autonomously. She said this was because it was not a crucial issue on the minds of the public, and it was not included in the party's election plank. As such, there was less input from the center.[72] One member said that, upon his appointment to Cabinet, there had been an adequate amount of support and guidelines surrounding communications, and cautions on political issues that could arise if comments were made that were inconsistent with stated government policy.[73] Another MPP said based on her experience, that there was a greater amount of guidance and direction from the center when one was initially elected, when there was a Throne Speech, and when there was a Budget. She added that, with each subsequent year of being in government, guidance and direction from the center diminished.[74]

Eves (Premier: April 15, 2002 – October 22nd, 2003)

As Eves' tenure as Premier spanned just over 6 months, informants spoke less about the degree of his centralization in his administration. Many PC ministers had served as Ministers under both Harris and Eves, and were able to offer a comparison between the two. One member said that he had had good relationships with both Harris and Eves. This had facilitated his ability to work with the center, and to advance initiatives with the center's support.[75] Another member said that there was much more guidance from Harris than from Eves. She attributed this to differences in political circumstances. Under Harris, the PCs were elected on a clear-cut and concise mandate, and ministers were there to implement this mandate. This was juxtaposed with the Eves government, which governed for a very brief period, she noted. There was little in the way of guidance

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[67] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[68] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[69] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[70] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[71] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[72] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.
[73] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[74] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[75] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

during that time, according to the member. One MPP said, "There was more centralization in Harris, than in Eves. Eves and his people, had more propensity to allow for more ministerial responsibility.[76] This may provide an incomplete picture of centralization under Eves, however. According to White's research on Eves' cabinet, Eves regularly excluded ministers from key decisions in an "extraordinary usurpation or cabinet prerogatives," and even took control over the formulation of the 'Magna' budget from Finance Minister Janet Ecker.[77]

McGuinty (Premier: October 30, 2007 – Present)

Respondents offered varying viewpoints as to the degree of centralization in the current government. The cabinet committee system has shifted under McGuinty, in that backbench MPPs now act as chairs of cabinet committees; an ostensible effort to diffuse cabinet's power to caucus. A senior staff member said that there has been an increase in the size of the Premier's office under McGuinty, but rationalized this to new functions that have been added to the office including a new regional desk and communication officers. The informant said that the office of the Premier is staffed by about 60 people.[78]

One MPP said that McGuinty's leadership style makes Cabinet less. He said, "I do not think the current government is constrained by control from the center." When issues arise that are not part of the mandate plan, the member said that Ministers are responsible for developing a plan and convincing Cabinet that it is the right one. "The Premier tends to give ministers freedom and flexibility to do their work, all within the context of the Premier's responsibility to set and oversee the overall objectives of government," he said. He also pointed to McGuinty's leadership style as more collegial stating, "McGuinty is a collaborator. He knows his leadership responsibilities, but he knows he needs a team to get it done." The longstanding member offered a comparison of his cabinet experiences, stating, McGuinty is "even better than the Peterson government in terms of having an ongoing communication between ministers and the center." He added that Cabinet is still very much the main forum for analytical discussion, where major decisions are made.[79]

One longstanding members stated that there was less involvement from the center in his portfolio because of the Premier had confidence in him and his portfolio was uncontroversial.[80] Other members supported that there was sufficient independence to act on issues that were raised by stakeholders. This position was not consistent among respondents. One MPP said, "I would have liked more latitude to pursue an issue. When things come to your attention [you want to be able to pursue them]. Even if stakeholders identified something as an issue and convinced you it was a good idea to pursue, there are so many checks and balances that you had to make a really good case to the Premier's staff." He recalled, "It's made clear to you, that your role as Minister and the agenda that

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[76]Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[77] White, 2005, p. 76.
[78] Interview with senior staff member, Premier's Office, (Phone), April 2011.
[79] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[80] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.

you implement are based on your mandate letter. There is very little room for 'free lancing,' beyond the letter."[81]

Communications varied, based on the minister. One member said he and the Premier had discussed his Cabinet portfolio on a one-to-one basis for a total of ten minutes, over the course of his over three years in Cabinet. He explained that the majority of communications was undertaken by their respective staffs, and one-to-one communication was not required because the portfolio was uncontroversial and he was experienced.[82] Another member said that the independence he received, characterized by little guidance or communication from the center, highlighted the fact that the Minister was managing his portfolio responsibility effectively. He said, "There have been less than five telephone calls between the Premier and me. And that's a good thing." He noted that communications in cabinet and in caucus, as a collective, had been sufficient.[83] For the majority of ministers, communications with the Premier was primarily through his staff. Consistent with information from other governments, senior ministers had more direct access to the Premier. A former high profile minister said that he had had direct access to the Premier, by sitting near him in the House, through Cabinet, or through one-to-one meetings. He contrasted to his previous experience under Peterson, where he was a more junior minister with more restricted policy responsibility, and not a member of P and P.[84]

Setting the Context: Themes in how Centralization Impacts Ministers

A number of themes and trends emerged from the literature and from interviews, which provide context for how centralization impacts various ministers. This includes members' parliamentary and professional experiences, their personalities, the nature of their portfolios, and their relationship to the Premier.

Political Amateurism

Based on interviews, previous parliamentary and professional experience impacted a legislator's preparedness for their post as ministers, and influenced their interactions with the center. Atkinson and Docherty note the rise of political amateurism, defined with shorter, interstitial parliamentary careers.[85] White states that there is a higher proportion of political neophytes in provincial cabinets than there are federally.[86] Dunn argues that more inexperienced ministers on the provincial scene leads to increased competency for the Premier to dominate Cabinet.[87] Having limited knowledge and expertise on one's portfolio and on government operations can make it difficult for a minister to assert

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[81] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[82] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[83] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[84] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[85] Michael M. Atkinson and David C. Docherty. "Moving Right Along: The Roots of Amateurism in the Canadian House of Commons." Canadian Journal of Political Science 25.2 (1992).
[86] Graham White, Ch. 8: Evaluating Provincial and Territorial Legislatures, in Dunn, Provinces: Canadian Provincial Politics (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006).
[87] Dunn, 2006.

authority and control over their department, Bakvis maintains.[88] Increased political amateurism impacts cabinet selection, in that there is a smaller pool of experienced candidates from which to draw cabinet ministers.[89] Certain members stated that the representation principle also contributes to the prevalence of weaker members in cabinet; a tendency also observed in the literature.[90] The literature supports that a lack of parliamentary experience is a major factor in explaining ministers' susceptibility to party discipline, their inability to effectively scrutinize and critique government, and their often ineffective performance as cabinet ministers.[91]

While all ministers must orient themselves to their posts upon their appointment to cabinet, the issue of inexperience is accentuated for individuals who become ministers immediately upon their election to the legislature. One MPP who followed this path described the necessity of quickly learning how to manage relationships with the center.[92] Several respondents pointed to the difficulty of keeping up with a steep learning curve upon their appointments to cabinet. This sentiment was more pronounced for members with minimal parliamentary and professionals experience. One member surmised that he would have been a different minister if he had served as a minister two decades later, with the experience and knowledge he had since obtained as a longstanding MPP.[93]
A less experienced and talented cabinet can increase centralization from the Premier, according to a past senior member. This is because experienced ministers require less guidance, and are thus given greater independence in their portfolios, he said.[94] Another member substantiated that certain inexperienced ministers required more communications and guidance, in her statement: "You get to know who your good ministers are - who you can let run with something, and who still needs handholding."[95]

In contrast, other members embark on their cabinet career after significant parliamentary experience in opposition or in the backbenches. Individuals may also come to Queen's Park with extensive business or professional experiences. Knowledge, confidence, and expertise from their previous experiences (attained in Queen's Park or elsewhere) assists them in activities necessary for success as a Cabinet Minister - such as negotiating with the center, advocating for projects and policies to the Premier and to their cabinet colleagues, challenging the status quo, and providing leadership to their ministry.

Advocating Issues to the Center

Based on interviews, the ability of a minister to have independence from the center was closely linked to his or her ability to advocate for issues in their ministry to cabinet colleagues and to the Premier. One member said that a minister has to sell issues to one's

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[88]Herman Bakvis, <u>Regional Ministers: Power and Influence in the Canadian Cabinet</u> (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
[89]Bakvis, 1991.
[90]Docherty, 2005; Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[91]Atkinson and Docherty, 1992; Bakvis, 2001.
[92]Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[93]Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[94]Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[95]Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

colleagues and to the Premier to justify major policy shifts in a ministry.[96] Another MPP supported that a precondition to acting on issues in one's ministry was making a good political case. One member acknowledged, "If my initiatives made sense, my colleagues would support them."[97] Respondents noted that bringing well-thought out issues before the Premier and his staff was more likely to end in success.[98] One longstanding member said, "If I had the facts, I wasn't afraid to bring a different opinion to the table." The MPP cited the importance of arming oneself with factual information before taking issue to cabinet. "I had latitude to act. But you had to make the case to your colleagues," she said. She said that it could require a time-consuming effort to obtain the support of their colleagues and the center but that the process was worth it in order to effectively fulfill one's role.[99]

Personality of Ministers

Personality and attitudes are an important determinant in ministers' rapport with the center. When the Premier gives a direction in a minister's department, it can be perceived as necessary guidance or unwelcome interference. This is linked to MPPs' views on how leadership and government should operate. One member said, "Politics is the art of the achievable – and it's not my way or the highway," highlighting the necessity of compromise with the center. Some MPPs are more willing than other to subscribe to this 'team-based' mentality.[100] An MPP cited that personality is also an important factor in determining the willingness of ministers to stand up for themselves and to exercise the full scope of power that is available to them.[101]

Minister-Premier Relationships

During interview questions, several members cited their relationship to the Premier to provide context for their responses. Many stated to have had a close, personal relationship with the Premier under which they served. Consequently, several noted that this may have made their experiences unique from that of their colleagues, and their outlook on centralization may not be consistent with other ministers.' Several respondents who were close to the Premier had more direct access to the Premier, communicated more with the center, and relied less on the Premier's staff, as compared to other ministers. As well, ministers with personal relationships expressed greater satisfaction with the independence and guidance they had as ministers. In contrast, members who cited a poor relationship with the Premier often had very little communication with the Premier, and expressed less satisfaction with their experiences.[102]

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[96] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[97] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[98] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[99] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[100] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[101] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[102] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

Nature of Portfolio

Interview responses revealed that the nature of the portfolio is a key determinant in involvement of the center. As stated by one MPP, "Not all ministries are created equal."[103] Simpson supports that certain ministers are more equal than others because of the importance of their portfolios.[104] One respondent said that cabinet "is not and has never been" a table of equals. There have always been ministers with high profile portfolios that are more demanding and important than others.'[105] The nature of one's portfolio has a direct impact on communication with the Premier. Senior ministers have a 'seating chart advantage' in the House, in that they are often seated in close proximity to the Premier. Respondents who sat next to various Premier confirmed that this facilitated one-on-one communication on a myriad of issues when the House is sitting.

There was consensus among respondents that certain portfolios require less guidance and direction, such as portfolios dealing with administrative, regulatory matters. This is because they do not entail politically sensitive matters, or do not have far-reaching financial implications, according to MPPs. Ministers charged with managing 'uncontroversial' departments cited that they had more leeway to manage their portfolios independently. Yet, Savoie remarks that the First Minister can intervene on any issue, large or small, when he or she feels that their judgment is required. They may also intervene if an issue is politically important, or if his advisers become concerned that the responsible Minister is not equipped for the task.[106]

Alternatively, ministries that deal with politically sensitive and contentious issues typically have greater oversight by the center.[107] Respondents noted that the Premier will focus more personal attention on the portfolios that involve his main priority areas, including those included in the government's mandate letter.[108] Nearly all respondents made reference to the mandate letter as the key source of guidance and direction provided to ministers. The letter delineates the main priorities of the Premier, and the agenda the government will follow to implement the party's electoral commitments. One member said that the mandate letter is prepared by people around cabinet.[109] MPPs stated that a minister's task is specific: to implement the objectives outlined in the mandate letter. One member said that in policy-driven ministries (such as Education, Energy, and Health), minister's actions are largely dictated by the policies laid out in the mandate letter.[110] Other ministers' portfolios may not be included as key government priorities, and hence would have greater autonomy.

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[103] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[104] Simpson, 2002.
[105] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.
[106] Savoie, 1999.
[107] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[108] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[109] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[110] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.

The Premier's 'Unelected' Office

Based on the literature and on first hand interviews, political staff are germane in discussion of the relations between ministers and the center. Staff in the Premier's office fulfill a variety of functions, including responding to correspondences, dealing with press, researching policy, scheduling, and crafting communications. The Premier's chief of staff plays an instrumental role in assisting the Premier. Observers of the system direct stark criticisms toward the First Minister's staff. Simpson writes that "advisors are more influential than ministers, but they deny it to avoid bruising egos. He adds that senior political advisers may be consulted on certain decisions, while elected ministers are not.[111] Aucoin states that power is concentrated with the prime minister and a personalized court of favored ministers, unelected political aides, and public servants.[112] Theorists posit that staffers in the Prime Minister's office have the ability to undercut a minister's proposal, and to significantly influence decision-making.[113]

The situation does not seem as dire in the Ontario legislature, based on the available evidence. Certain members drew attention to the role of political staff, during interviews. One member said, "Over the last number of decades, power has shifted substantially to the unelected officials in the Premier's office, and our government was no different," alluding to his time as a minister in the NDP government.[114] A former PC senior minister said, "In every government I've seen, there are always four to five unelected advisors …Every government has behind the scenes people."[115] One influential Queen's Park staff member downplayed the matter as an exaggeration. She said, "You're always going to be reading in the paper about the role of the corner office. There isn't corner office decision-making, or caucus [members] wouldn't bother showing up to caucus."[116] Another senior staff member said there is a pervasive perception that the Premier's office deals with all difficult and sensitive issues, which "in many cases is not even true." He emphasized that the role of the office is to coordinate and orchestrate responses to difficult issues. He said he is not a 'decider,' but rather, aims to ensure that the decisions that need to be made by elected officials are actually made, based on their merit, political needs, and objectives. "I do play a role in making sure things don't go badly," he said, including ensuring that "half-baked proposals" brought forward by members are not implemented until fully developed.[117]

Certain MPPs depicted the Premier's staff as loyal highly partisan henchmen with direct access to the Premier. Bill Murdoch, a backbencher PC Member, recently delivered a public speech disparaging the current style of government in Ontario, characterized "by a handful of unelected advisors, who are in constant and direct contact with the Premier, thereby rendering the majority of elected members to the sidelines."[118] Respondents

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[111]Simpson, 2002.
[112]Aucoin. 2003.
[113]Savoie, 1999; Matheson, 1975.
[114]Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[115]Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[116] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[117] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[118] Bill Murdoch, MPP, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Public Speech (Hard Copy). April 2011.

revealed a degree of resentment at communications and directives disseminated from the Premier's staff. One member expressed the difficulty that could arise when working with the Premier's intermediaries. He described a situation where he submitted recommendations to the Premier. They were subsequently modified by the Premier's staff, who felt that the changes they had made were better suited to what the Premier would want. When the Premier did view the recommendations, he did not approve of them, and said he wanted something different; which was the same thing as the minister's initial proposal.[119] Another member said, "[The Premier's staff] might tell you this isn't what the Premier wants, but you don't even know if the Premier is aware of the issue, or if it's the Premier's view, or the staffs.' As a result, he said when ministers have issues with the center, it is often with the staffers, rather than with the Premier. "MPPs have egos," he said. "I never had a problem with the Premier telling me what to do, but I did have a problem with the Premier's LA [Legislative Assistant] telling me what to do."[120] Another MPP said that staff in the Premier's office "were young, and knew very little about the world." He said, "Any time I needed to communicate with the center, I spoke to the Premier," and that communicating via the Premier's intermediaries, "wouldn't have flied" with him.[121] Further, an MPP lamented on a system in which "fifty year old MPPs are taking orders from unelected 25 year olds in corner offices."[122] Moreover, staff seem to typically be the bearers of bad news for ministers. One member said, it is the Premier's staffers who will inform a minister when he or she is not doing something right.[123]

In Defense of Centralization

White offers the indelicate statement that "cabinet was never intended to be democratic," a tone that was prevalent among several interview respondents.[124] Many MPPs highlighted advantages of strong central control from the Premier. One MPP said strong direction from the center is especially prudent in a new government with inexperienced ministers. A clear policy agenda is required to ensure that the government delivers on its election campaign commitments, because governments become basseted by an enormous number of issues once they take office. The MPP added that, if ministers are acting independently, the government would be less able to implement a clear, focused policy agenda. She offered the following perspective on concentrated power: "You wouldn't get anything done, you would get lost… There tends to be a perception that [centralization] is bad." She countered this perception, with the premise that successful governments often run like effective business organizations, in terms of having a strong authority structure, priority-setting for the senior management team, and a strong central control.[125]

Members stated that the unrelenting demands on a Premier's time require him to have clear priorities and a concise agenda in order to be effective. One MPP said, "Your actions as a Minister have to make sense with the overall plan. You can't have everyone

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[119] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[120] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[121] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[122] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[123] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[124] White, 2005, p, 12.
[125] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

doing their own separate things."[126] Another member said, "There is no room for Ministers to freelance. It's a team sport."[127] A longstanding member offered further insight on the topic. "There has not been a lot of change in centralization of power. This is an age old debate. The government has to find a way to coordinate its activities – and that's the Premier's role. This isn't inappropriate, it's necessary. You become an advocate for your area, and the Premier has to make sure that everything fits together," he said. "I'm not one that thinks that the coordinating, and aggregating role of the Premier, is inappropriate. It is required, to make sure all of the ministry pieces fit together, and it's always been the same; it's never been different."

Moreover, certain respondents made the case that today's political environment necessitates greater control from the center. Dunn states that the role of the Premier has broadened, and the Premier has a more complex policy environment to navigate, a shift that was also mentioned by respondents in their rationale to increased power by the Premier.[128] Moreover, many members pointed to the instantaneous nature of the media cycle, and the desire and necessity for the center to have knowledge, awareness, and the ability to respond swiftly to events that unfold, to manage a media response.[129] One senior staff in the Premier's office stated there is an expectation of the media and observers of government are for governments to be coordinated, and to think in an aligned fashion.[130] In addition, the center plays an important role in considering the overall fiscal implications to government spending of a Minister's proposed initiatives, since ministers' desires to pursue initiatives must be counterbalanced by the government's ability to pay.[131] Additionally, certain respondents drew attention to the increasingly leader-focused nature of politics. One respondent said that leaders "run the show, because they carry the weight of the choices that the party makes.[132] Leaders are judged for the success or failure of their government, and thus, "It's natural for the person that will be held responsible to want control," according to another member.[133]

Impact of Centralized Power on Cabinet Ministers

The literature offers certain indications of how centralization of power with the Premier impacts ministers. Cameron, Mulhern, and White write that the growing concentration of power with the executive, and specifically with the First Minister, leads to weakness in the role of MPPs, an enfeebled and dependent condition of legislators, and a decreased ability to legislators to perform their roles effectively.[134] White notes that on top of several negative impacts of devotion to public life, MPPs also experience frustration at not being able to influence policy significantly.[135] David Docherty states that the talent of

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[126] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[127] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[128] Dunn, 2006 (Ch. 7).
[129] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011; Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[130] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[131] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[132] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[133] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[134] Cameron, Mulhorn and White, 2003.
[135] White, 1997.

many skilled legislators is not deployed, because there is a lack of opportunity to use them in a highly centralized system.[136] Simpson acknowledges that legislators must balance their desire for individual thought, with the need to align oneself with one's party.[137] Cabinet is widely perceived as the fulcrum of power, and offers the greatest opportunity for individuals to realize their personal political ambitions.[138] Ministers have the greatest chance to influence public policy than any other legislator, notes Docherty and White.[139] Appointment to cabinet as widely perceived as the zenith of one's parliamentary career, and linked to MPPs' job satisfaction. Savoie states that what matters to Ministers is that they are Ministers, and Cabinet becomes a prized possession to be cherished.[140]

However, once an MPP has reached his or her goal of Cabinet, they may be met with new and unanticipated challenges. Savoie states that cabinet becomes an ends, rather than a means. The new objective of a minister becomes to not rock the boat, to avoid causing any problems or embarrassments, and to stay in cabinet.[141] This means succumbing to compromise in many instances. While ministers may disagree with an issue before it is finalized, once a cabinet decision is made, all ministers are expected to support the policy. As a result of cabinet solidarity, ministers who disagree with cabinet must either stifle their dissent, or resign. Few ministers choose to go this route. As a result, ministers may have to accept, publicly support, and implement policies within their departments that they do not necessarily agree with.[142]

MPPs acknowledged that even though they may have disagreed with a policy during cabinet, after the decision is made, they must accept government's decisions in public and "defend it like it was there own."[143] Others stated there is little room for critical views expressed by ministers, either in public or in private, under certain governments. One respondent observed, "Most parties do not tolerate dissension – some, but not too much." As a result, in the large majority of cases, ministers "toe the line," to avoid sabotaging their positions in cabinet. He said that the Premier becomes concerned when ministers "freelance" or speak too freely, because the Premier is concerned with how powerful ministers become, and that ministers are not contradicting the actions of the center. Yet, giving ministers independence could also lead to successful outcomes and positive press coverage for the government. As a result, the informant said that the Premier needs to enact the appropriate balance of how much freedom to permit to ministers.[144] Control of message was a theme highlighted by certain members. One MPP said that the center had control over every communication that emerged from his office,

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[136] Docherty, 2005.
[137] Simpson, 2002.
[138] Docherty, 2005; Charih and Daniels, ed., "Ministerial Responsibility and Administrative Accountability," in Thomas, P.G., New Public Management and Public Administration in Canada (Ch. 6). IPAC.
[139] Docherty and White, 1999.
[140] Savoie, 1999.
[141] Savoie, 1999.
[142] Thomas, New Public Management (Ch. 6).
[143] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[144] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

such as speaking notes for events or basic information for the public. "Everything you did had to be approved by the Premier's office," he said. "Centralization of power does not allow you the opportunity to freelance or to express opinions," he noted. "There are times then you may not necessarily like the message, but in order to keep cabinet solidarity, you have to toe the line. You're singing from a hymn book and you won't say or do something that would jeopardize your chances of getting in or getting kicked out of cabinet."[145] Another MPP said that this makes legislators feel that they are a mouthpiece.[146]

Cabinet disengagement was cited as an effect of centralization of power. One member said centralizing power runs the risk of disengaging cabinet and caucus. He said that a Premier must figure out how to "meaningfully engaged people" and "make them feel value-added."[147] Decreased engagement was mentioned by another member, who also said there is less communication and information-sharing in highly centralized systems. "People want to share expertise, and they want to be engaged," he said.[148] One respondent said that centralization "marginalizes members" and "makes them feel like they're not important." He added that ministers and members alike may lose faith in their party, and in their Premier, if they feel unengaged from their leader. Accordingly, the MPP underscored the importance for the Premier to connect to his cabinet and caucus.[149]

A PC member recalled that it could be frustrating when the center blocked proposals, because they had limited expertise in his portfolio area.[150] Another MPP surmised that centralizing power "has to be very demoralizing" for other ministers, but stated that this had not been the case for him. He said that individuals leave their careers to come to Queen's Park out of a sense of public service, and a desire to make a meaningful contribution. "If you learn that your influence and opinion is not valued, it does not take long for a sense of powerlessness to set in. It begins to undermine people's enthusiasm for their job, and for their sense of worth." He added, "This was observed on occasion with some colleagues, especially those without business backgrounds, who did not learn to assert [themselves]... they quickly became intimidated."[151] This was consistent with an experienced PC member, who said that "experience makes it easier to lessen the impact of centralization of power."[152] A Liberal MPP said the most important thing for legislators is "wanting to feel like you can make a difference," but "backbenchers, and even Cabinet Ministers sometimes, feel like they can't."[153] A former PC member reinforced this message, stating, "You think you're going to do great things, and that you'll have clout, which frankly, you don't have. I think we all come here for the right reasons. But you're actions are often dictated – how to vote, what to say in committee. .. With any backbench member or junior minister, you will sense the frustration. I've experienced them all, and

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[145] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[146] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[147] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[148] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[149] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[150] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[151] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[152] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[153] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.

it's not a nice feeling. You have to prove yourself as a loyal member of the team, it might hurt you to put the time in, but you have to do it."[154]

Many members' responses evidenced the importance of ministers' personality as a central determinant of how centralization of power impacted them, if at all. One member said, "I was never frightened to meet with the center in disagreement." He stated, "They did not disagree with me very often," which he attributed to his tendency to approach the center with well thought-out issues.[155] Another MPP recalled, "I had strong views, and so did [the Premier]. I could defend my position, so we could have a good discussion on what the options were." She added, "At the end of the day, the guy at the end of the table usually makes the call."[156] One former minister offered to following take on his rapport with the center: "I was one of the ministers who did not fall in line. I questioned things when they were inappropriate or wrong. I wouldn't align myself publicly with things that I did not agree with. I would say, 'If you don't like it, take me out of cabinet.' I was never afraid of losing my job. If you're going to have any worth as a cabinet minister, you have to exercise your voice and your judgment."[157] A longstanding member said he had been successful in realizing major initiatives in his ministry "partly because I was so headstrong. I was never afraid of losing my job."[158]Another member said, "I was a fairly free spirit, and an independent thinker… I am a strong believer in policy decisions based on internal debate. I wasn't one to take marching orders.[159]

The Premier's power to appoint and dismiss ministers is a significant factor in the discussion. One member said, "The center is strong because they control your future."[160] Another MPP said, "There were some people that I never saw oppose anything the government ever did. They were fearful, afraid of losing their jobs as cabinet ministers." The minister added that an individual needs to be equipped with the self-confidence required for assertion, in order to provide effective representation for their ridings.[161] The argument that one generally has to obey the center to advance professionally is persuasive. One longstanding member who has never held a cabinet position recalls being told by the Premier, "I can't make you a Minister because you won't do what you're told." Yet, the member expressed that this was somewhat liberating. He said, "If you can give up on the thought of ever being appointed as a chair, or a minister.. Then you can just do it your own way." He stated that the independent style he has adopted as a legislator has better equipped him to represent the needs and views of his constituents and of Ontarians.[162]

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[154] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[155] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[156] Interview with MPP (Phone), April 2011.
[157] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[158] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[159] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[160] Interview with MPP, Toronto, April 2011.
[161] Interview with MPP, Toronto, March 2011.
[162] Interview with MPP (Non-Minister) MPP, Toronto, April 2011.

CONCLUSION

What impact does centralization of power have on Cabinet Ministers? Based on research conducted for this paper, the answer is, 'it depends.' It was established that one's parliamentary experience and their ability to advocate for issues in their ministry are important factors in determining how much leeway they had in their ministry. It was also ascertained that the personality and leadership style of the Premier sets the tone for whether power will be centralized – and the personality of ministers impacts how they will respond to heightened control from the center. The role of senior partisan staff in the Premier's Office remains somewhat arcane, and would be a topic work focusing on in future research.

Based on the literature and interviews with MPPs, centralization of power has always been in place, but may have increased slightly in the Cabinets of Rae and Harris. This could be attributed to political circumstance, and leadership style. However, the presence of P and Ps in every government, and anecdotal evidence from MPPs, suggests that each cabinet under review was informally 'tiered' with a core, inner decision-making structure. Some ministers are more important than others, based on their portfolio and their relations with the Premier. While some were relatively unaffected by centralization of power, others found directions from the center to be controlling, disempowering, and disillusioning. Ministers, like other MPPs, are elected to parliament to represent their constituents and advocate for Ontarians. Yet, in some cases, ministers may not bring to views of their constituents to the cabinet table, because they are not in accordance with the views and actions of the center. Reliance on cabinet as a collective body would draw on the talent and expertise of all of its composites, rather than a select few. While this may lead to a slower decision-making process, surely it would improve the quality of our public policy and lead to greater satisfaction and engagement among provincial ministers.

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