

The Becoming of the Policy Maker

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Abstract

This essay explores the development of the term “policymaker” by reviewing major periodicals from 1870 until 1940, with particular focus upon the period of 1920 to 1940. Events of this period provide insight into the conditions under which “the policymaker” emerges as a concept. Although “policymaker” is today a commonplace, this was not always so, as a simple overview of the term’s usage indicates. In fact, the term itself was virtually unused until about 1940 in both periodicals and academic journals. This essay contends that the idea and identity of the policymaker take shape alongside the development of the administrative state, a contention explored through a consideration of how the policymaker develops in the context of debates about education policy and about executive requirements in the period of 1920 through 1940. The essay concludes with a consideration of the policymaker as a modern political identity.

Keywords

policymaker, administrative state, Brownlow Committee, education

Introduction

In 1920, the term “policy maker”¹ was virtually unused. Today it is a commonplace in political discourse, yet it is not always clear what the role of the policymaker is when the term is used. Sometimes the policymaker appears as a

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legislator, an official designated through elections to decide on what occurs within a jurisdiction; sometimes the policymaker appears as an advocate, a person whose focus upon an issue and advocacy leads to change. The policymaker is even referred to independent of human agency, as in the case of the atomic bomb, which has itself been described as a policy maker (Brodie, 1948).

The term itself does not refer to a specific function or role. Instead, as the conclusion of this study suggests, the idea of the policymaker is best understood as a modern political identity that emerges from practical attempts to develop the modern administrative state. As such the connection between the becoming of the policy maker and public administration, understood as the set of activities that constitute the modern state, is perhaps obvious. Public administration is itself an essential project in making the modern state, and part of that process entailed the development of an agent, which we have come to know as the policymaker. As an initial point of evidence, one need only turn to the document widely cited as sparking the discipline of public administration, Woodrow Wilson's 1887 essay titled "The Study of Administration." Wilson's use in this essay of the term "policy making," an idea that would come to play an important part in the development of the kind of state and government that Wilson and his progressive compatriots envisioned, is considered the first formal entry of the term in the English language (see the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry of "policy-making"). Thus, the term policymaking is born alongside a call to develop a study of administration that would serve the specific context of the United States. Whether or not this fact has any importance is open to interpretation, but it is the contention of this essay that it does. Policy making, the policy maker, and the administrative state are all born of a common endeavor, which is to arrange a body politic that satisfies the demands of governing with the values of popular sovereignty, and the present study considers this development in the particular context of U.S. political culture. Bringing to light the role of the policy maker as it becomes a modern political identity can help us to understand what is specific about the institutional arrangement that Dwight Waldo (2007) named the administrative state.

If the term policymaker did not become commonly used until the mid-20th century, then what term was used to designate that role? This is precisely the point: There was not a role that suited a policymaker, as we understand it, until the 20th century with the political and policy problems stemming from theories of progressivism and the emergence of mass society, the very conditions under which the administrative state took form through ideas and practices associated with Public Administration. These broad social forces shaped and continue to shape the idea of the policymaker, though it would be inaccurate to say that those social forces *caused* the policymaker. Moreover, we

cannot turn simply to the definition of policymaker to discover this, for the definition is at once ambiguous and self-referential.² The meaning of the term exists somewhere in its evolving usage, and to witness this evolution we must attend to the period when the political values of progressivism take form through national institutions in the United States. That period is generally the interwar period of 1920 through 1940, although the idea of the policymaker really became cemented in the period during and immediately after World War II. Nevertheless, the policymaker becomes a concept and a political agent alongside the ascendance of a certain strain of Progressivism that tended more toward statism than individualism. This strand of Progressivism developed into the political movement of New Deal liberalism and influenced the development of the administrative state in the United States.³

The focus of this study is on that period between the two great wars, 1920 to 1940, under the assumption that exploring the development of the idea of the policymaker helps to show how the political project of Public Administration took form. The concerns of early 20th century U.S. government include growing attention to the ways in which executive powers can be used to improve the conditions for all. In the beginning, the term is used in a way that might best be described as a floating signifier, a way of directing attention to some activity but without a concrete understanding of any referent. This is most evident in the discussion of the involvement of policy makers in education reform, where the idea is expressed in the debates over universal, state-directed education. By the late 1930s, however, there is a growing sense that some identity must be assigned to these officials whose role in governing is increasingly without doubt amid the expanding responsibilities of government. The idea of a policymaker begins to appear in news periodicals concerning discussions over executive power as well as political party interests. By the time of the first major reorganization of government by the executive in the United States in 1939, the notion of a “policy-determining official” as having specifically executive powers is enough of a concern to warrant debate over how such an official would fit into the established administrative system.

This study focuses upon those two aspects in the development of the policymaker, fashioned here as education and executive requirements in the United States. I show how the term evolved from an ambiguous signifier of agency in the education context to a concern with retaining room for discretion in an expanding administrative state and the related political problems this raised. The relevance of this inquiry to Public Administration is primarily justified by an absence. The idea of a policymaker is a common concept despite the fact that many of the benchmark thinkers of Public Administration, including Wilson, Frank Goodnow, and Leonard White (1939), do not reference “policy makers” in their work on Public Administration. By the late

1930s, as executive reorganization coincides with an expanding administrative state, the policy maker emerges prominently as a new political identity associated with bringing into force the activities of administration. It was not to administrators or civil servants that the concerns of administration turned. When, as the Brownlow Report declares, the president needed help, the policy maker emerges as the agent to provide it. In short, the modern political identity that I describe as the policy maker is a specific production of Public Administration and the administrative state.

Research Approach

The focus of this essay is the period between 1920 and 1940, which, as will be clear, precedes the ascendance of the policymaker as a political identity. To investigate this, I focus upon the use of the term in journals indexed in JSTOR, but the prompt for the inquiry was a simple search of the term in the Google collection digitized books. Assuming this digitization of print material is an adequate sample of the cultural usage of certain phrases and terms (Michel et al., 2011), the striking observation about the term policymaker (and the variants “policy-maker” and “policy maker”) is the relative rise in use starting in 1940 (see Figure 1).⁴ Among the digitized books, the term itself was virtually unused until the 1940s.

A JSTOR search helped to identify the uses of “policy maker,” “policy-maker,” and the plurals of both during the period from 1900 to 1950 in academic journals.⁵ In addition, I searched in popular periodicals using ProQuest as well as the archives that are available online. Searches in popular periodicals of the time, including *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, verified that the term was seldom used until the 1940s. In the *New York Times*, “policy maker” was sparsely mentioned until the 1940s. From 1851 to 1940, a search for the term yielded 16 articles. Most years, the term was used only once. In the decade from 1941 to 1950, there were 51 results. The *Los Angeles Times* yielded one result in 1935, and the term was not mentioned again until 1940; in that decade, the term policy maker was found in 31 unique articles. The *Washington Post* returned eight uses of the term between 1896 and 1940 and 10 times as many from 1941 to 1950, and the *Wall Street Journal* delivered one article before 1940, a 1907 profile of L. F. Loree and his elevation to presidency of the Delaware & Hudson railway, whom the author described as “an able manager, a policy-maker and a railway strategist,” and only 13 in the following decade. The compound phrase is used more frequently in the plural, but the pattern is largely the same. Within the four newspapers mentioned above before the end of 1940, the term “policy makers” was found in 111 news articles. In the decade from 1941 to 1950, the term was found in nearly 1,300 articles.⁶

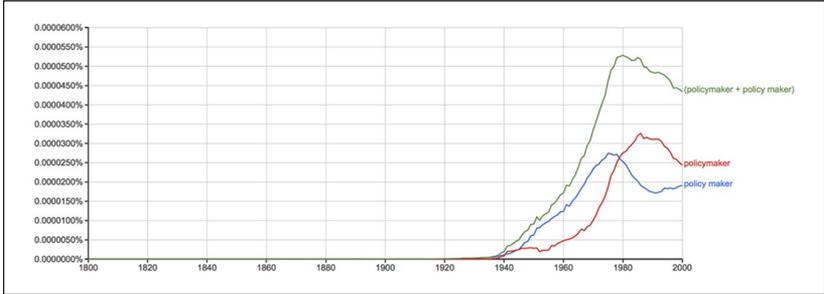


Figure 1. N-gram of “policy maker” and “policymaker.”

Source: Google N-gram Viewer.

Among academic journals, the period from 1900 to 1940 delivered a combined 72 distinct articles in which policy maker or its plural was used. In the decade of 1941 to 1950, 742 articles employed the term, and from 1951 to 1960 more than 2,500 articles did so. The first use of the term found in the journal *Public Administration Review* was in a review of Donald Kingsley’s *Representative Bureaucracy: An Interpretation of the British Civil Service* written by Avery Leiserson in 1945, and the first original article using the term appears to be Martin Grodzin’s “Public Administration and the Science of Human Relations” written in 1951. In *American Political Science Review*, the expression is found as early as a 1947 essay by Leonard Doob about how the knowledge and expertise of social scientists was viewed and used in the Office of War Information, staffed by what he called “policy-makers.”

This itemization of counts is interesting insofar as it shows how the term increased in use over a relatively short period of time. This investigation, however, is not a mere count but an exploration into meaning and usage, with particular focus upon the administrative and policy conditions in which the term appears most prominently. I explore a period prior to the term being a commonplace expression (indeed, during the debates over the Brownlow Report, discussed below, there was inconsistency between using “policy maker” and the more cumbersome “policy-determining official”). The objective is to develop an understanding of what ideas are linked to the development of the concept of the policymaker. As such, this inquiry can be considered genealogical to the extent that, in eschewing a foundational moment from which an idea of the policymaker developed, the focus is upon the political and social changes that correspond with the development of the administrative state. The policy maker is not made at some specific moment. It becomes; it emerges from changing practices and conceptions of the state.

The two policy debates that guide this discussion include a particular policy content area, namely, education, and a broader organizational concern over the emerging administrative state, specifically the reorganization of the executive branch in the United States in the late 1930s. The first of these debates centers on education policy and the development of a role for policy makers as federal and state interests are forced into theoretical alignment around education and social efficiency. By selecting this context, I hope to show how thinking about policy makers is tied to practical agency within an expanding state as education becomes more broadly available. The second of these debates shifts attention to “administrative” issues with the debates concerning the Brownlow Report and the matter of executive reorganization in the late-1930s. During these debates newspapers expressed some of the most direct language about the power of policy makers (or what the Brownlow Report calls “policy determining officials”). The debates over the Brownlow Report highlight the ways in which popular presses try to make sense of this new and developing agent and political identity of the modern administrative state.

Education and the Policy Makers

At the beginning of the 20th century, it is reasonable to say that there was no policy maker or group called policy makers. The idea—a person whose position was defined as making policy—was an unfamiliar notion at the time. What is apparent is that a particular division of political roles prevailed, the classical political theory of a division between executive, judicial, and legislative. The matters that govern society were safely categorized as laws, and these were derived from the actions of those empowered by legitimate means to decide upon them within constitutional constraints.

Among the earliest uses of the phrase policy-maker was an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* about people who make a business successful (Collins, 1909). The idea of policy in this article referred to activities conducted within the constraints of existing laws (“Policy is nothing more than the common law under which a business is conducted”), and the policy-maker was described as the combination of a decider, a planner, and director (“The true policy-maker in business affairs is a man with his feet firmly on the ground today, and clear insight into tomorrow, and perhaps, a fair guess about the day after. Laying down broad, just, simple statutes for the government of the business, he sits on the woolsack and enforces them as problems arise.”). The policy maker was described as one who must make the decision, but must do so within the constraints that constitute the business. The example used is that of a group of salesmen interested in unloading defective goods on a failing buyer. The article described a conflict between the sales department, interested in getting rid

of as many goods as possible, and the credit department, fearful that the faltering buyer would fail before paying for the goods. The matter ultimately came before the policy-maker. The decision was made that there would be no sale, but only because the firm had never made it a practice of such cheap stunts as the sales force intended. The article described the decision as being made under the protection of the “policy of the house,” under a “cloak of impersonality, just as the penal code enables a judge to hang a murderer in a purely impersonal way.”

A Floating Signifier

Other than the occasional ambiguous mention in reference to insurance policy, the idea of the policy maker was an altogether alien political concept until the 1920s. Nevertheless, how the phrase was used in the *Saturday Evening Post* article hints at some important considerations that would arise as the term gained currency later in the century. The observation that a person be in a role where decisions must be made within reasonable constraints given complex motivations and arrangements (such as conflicts between two departments), the fact that the policy maker acted both with discretion and under a veil of impersonality, a seeming contradiction, and the separation of the policy maker from the actual executors of the policy all came to play an important part in what becomes the policy maker as a political identity. But, for much of the early 20th century, the term “policy maker” functioned more as a floating or empty signifier than as a clear explication of some political agent. This was most evident in the development of the policy maker alongside a rapidly changing educational system in the United States.

One of the earliest and most prolific users of the expression “policy makers” is the largely forgotten educational theorist David Snedden. Snedden distinguished between educators and educational policy makers in a series of seven articles published between 1928 and 1937 that explored the purpose of education in a society navigating a workforce altered by industrial practice and urbanization, such as that of early 20th century America. He explored the value of schools, from kindergarten to college, in what he considered their end product of “learnings” (Snedden, 1933), engaged systematic investigations of educational practice (Snedden, 1928, 1930b, 1934, 1937), and argued on the purpose and value of colleges, specifically the relative value of vocational versus liberal arts institutions (Snedden, 1930a, 1935). The common theme linking these articles together was the case Snedden made for strategic vocational training and its ties to what he referred to as social efficiency.

The idea of social efficiency in education emphasized a practical orientation within educational institutions such that the processes of education

would prepare students for a specific calling so that a student would become a “producer” in society. By the time Snedden wrote his series of articles mentioned above, he had prevailed, in a sense, in a debate with John Dewey over the direction of education in the country. The debate took place in the *New Republic* in 1915, but the content of the disagreement was expressed initially by Snedden in a speech at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the National Education Association when he was Commissioner of Education for the state of Massachusetts (Dewey, 1915a, 1915b; Snedden, 1915). What Snedden said at this meeting framed vocational education as a necessary social project given what he framed as rapidly changing social and economic conditions. He suggested that the institutions of liberal arts education were inadequate to the task of a practical society, saying that support of them was “grounded in custom and prescientific belief in its usefulness that bordered on ‘mysticism’” (Labaree, 2010, p. 165).⁷ Snedden (1977) juxtaposed an old practice in which “vocational education [was] carried on in society largely by agencies other than schools” with the “twentieth century, with its demands on America, . . . that opportunities for vocational training in schools shall be made available for any and all desirous . . . to contribute useful service to the world” (p. 42). The debate between Snedden and Dewey occurred with this idea in the background during the time that Dewey was also writing *Democracy and Education* (Garrison, 1990). Not once did either Dewey or Snedden refer to a policy maker, even as they were discussing a design of a system, specifically public education, that connected the governments at local, state, and federal levels. Nevertheless, the conditions under which a policy maker emerged are delineated by this debate.

These conditions are in large part the product of the system advocated by Snedden and formally adopted through the Smith–Hughes Act of 1917, which institutionalized vocational education across the country and effectively marked the victory of Snedden and the other advocates of social efficiency in education. With social efficiency and the institutionalization of vocational education, a new role had been created without any formal attribution of agency. In other words, the state entered into the operation of vocational education, largely in the name of equal opportunity as this institutional practice directly challenged traditional practices of apprenticeships, but this institutional change and development required an agent who decided how to make this arrangement work. This agent was not simply the legislators who passed the law nor the educators charged with executing the educational mission. With the acceptance of social efficiency and a vocational orientation of education made formal through legislation, the conditions were set for how to decide, but not for who decides. Snedden described them as agents somewhere between legislation and implementation. He named them policy makers.

A Role Within Administrative Demands

Snedden consistently distinguished between educators and what he called “policy makers” (and he never referred to them in the singular). To begin, Snedden (1928) explained how the developing field of educational sociology promised to be “a fertile source of numberless suggestions immediately practicable of application in teachers’ and policy makers’ practices” (p. 262). He described a position that anticipated theoretical concerns of the 1940s and 1950s around decision making in which policy makers would operate in relation to information, usually provided through some expert, so that better decisions about an objective could be achieved (Snedden, 1930b). Eventually, this role within education became more formalized as policy makers were put in charge of designing the curricula for schools and were considered the “corporal’s guard” faced with solving the myriad “problems of educational purposes, values, aims, or ends, as well as means and methods” (Snedden, 1930b, p. 491).

The context of education is valuable to our understanding of the emergence of the policy maker because it includes two intersecting events that will continue to resonate in other fields later in the 20th century: an expanding institutional role of the state in an administrative form and a criterion for judging the importance for such expansion, namely, social efficiency. The conditions of the 20th century, from a Weberian standpoint, are conditions in which the traditional forms of authority are overcome by a bureaucratic form, an authority with a legitimacy derived from impersonal rules and laws. In the political arena, democratic practices overcome traditional practices so that it is thought unacceptable to exclude people arbitrarily from certain societal practices (e.g., the drive noted by Snedden in which the state must intervene to guarantee opportunity for those who would pursue a productive vocation). The complex arena of education, a subject that was of substantial interest in the early 20th century just as it is today, required deliberate thought and design to achieve the goals of societal flourishing, or, in the words of some educational theorists, social efficiency. At the same time, this condition created an expansive role for the state and conditioned new expectations within the public. This was a point that Snedden implicitly acknowledged in another essay he published in 1929, more than a decade after his debate with Dewey, titled “Shall We Keep the Children Out of School?” In this essay he raised the question of how soon a child should be subject to education and whether it was acceptable for the state to promote early education. This question has remained on the minds of educational theorists to the present day, and Snedden did not provide a definitive answer, though he offered an impassioned plea in favor of delaying formal education. The point that Snedden’s

essay raised, and the one with which we end this discussion of education, was the matter of how education as a state concern created the conditions under which questions about how properly to conduct education emerged. The use of the term *conduct* is deliberate here because the concern was not limited to implementation or execution; it included the conditions of and the conditioning of the set of practices at the level of the state that are properly considered to be “education.” From a social efficiency standpoint, an engagement into education, what we might call a policy, is a *scientific* engagement, which required systematic consideration of information to achieve the highest level of accomplishment possible. The conditions for deciding were then settled by the standards of social efficiency, but the question remained: Who will do this as or on behalf of the state?

The answer to this was implicitly in Snedden’s use of the term “policy makers,” a term that he never defined but only gave meaning to through context. He framed policy makers as a group of decision makers who were not legislators, who were not educators, but who were specifically concerned with the mission of education and its potential social achievements. One can see some connection with Snedden’s idea of decision makers working under the law and guided by social efficiency and the description of the policy of the house from the *Saturday Evening Post* article cited above: Social efficiency guides how to decide, essentially being a comprehensive “policy of the house.” Snedden alluded to a political identity that connected the intent of law with the practicalities of execution.

From a political theory standpoint, this connection between the law and its execution, the space sometimes called policy, is an unusual space where matters of the state are negotiated and decided. In short, it is the remnant of sovereignty, the power par excellence that became diffused into a mass representation and a division of power and, thus, somewhat lost. This matter of sovereignty and decision about the direction and work of government is at the center of the other context in which to explore the becoming of the policy maker, namely, the tension between the executive and the legislative. From the expanding role of education as an instrument of social advancement and efficiency, I now turn to the period of the late 1930s, a period of unquestionable change in the scale and breadth of government in which the scope of executive power was negotiated, to discover the policy maker.

Executive Requirements

A government without good management is a house builded on sand.⁸

The previous section noted how the term policy maker functioned as an empty or floating signifier, a point not in conflict with the ambiguous, if

suggestive, usage by Snedden in the context of education policy. The idea of the term as a floating signifier is clearer when we consider the way it was popularly used during the 1930s in major news periodicals such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. As noted above, the frequency of use for the expression “policy maker(s)” increased dramatically in the decade of the 1940s. From 1930 until 1940, the term was used rather sparingly, and the meaning attributed to it was largely unclear or unsettled. By this time, the public began developing an interest in the emerging power and roles of positions within the early administrative state, but there was not an obvious term to describe them.

News media used “policy maker” in myriad ways. Sometimes the term was used simply in the context of foreign policy, which was consistent throughout the period and extending into the 1940s because of the intense focus upon the war effort, but even during the early 1930s there were occasions when the term was used to refer to a group empowered to negotiate trade deals (Foss, 1934). This meaning was echoed in the role that policy makers had in the lead-up to the second World War, such as an article featuring a Methodist peace activist who encouraged that “prayers for peace will fail unless crystallized in votes against war policies and policy makers” (“Speaker Seeks Methodist Aid in Peace Drive,” 1934). This attribution of a role in foreign relations would have a significant place in the 1940s, but even in the period of the early 1930s there is a connection made between domestic policy and this new role of a policy maker. The clearest evidence of this was in the popular press discussions about the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), a central part of the early New Deal.

The Brain Trust

Rexford Tugwell was an early adviser to President Franklin Roosevelt and part of what became known as the “Brain Trust.” He was an economist who later became the Governor of Puerto Rico during World War II. In 1934, though, he was best known as the architect and director of the AAA. As an academician and adviser to the president, Tugwell was held in high regard with frequent visits to the White House to discuss matters directly with the president. As a figure whose dealings had direct influence upon the farmers of the country; however, Tugwell’s reputation faltered. An article in the *Washington Post* from October 26, 1934, cited the flagging support for Tugwell in the “corn and grain belt” because of his alleged disregard for the Constitution. This article described others within the AAA as “policy makers [who] agree that the speeches and public appearances of the former Columbia professor (Tugwell) have had little effect dispelling” the belief that he overstepped Constitutional boundaries. At the time this article ran in

the *Washington Post*, Tugwell was in Europe negotiating tariff and trade deals. Upon his return in November 1934, a *New York Times* article featured an interview with him about the issues that arose during his absence. In response, Tugwell stated explicitly that “he had never made the policies of the AAA.” In the last paragraph, he avoided judgment over a bill then going through Congress to promote “truth in advertising” with regard to food and drugs. He stated that he “would support whatever measure was brought forward in Congress” (“Not Policy Maker, Tugwell Asserts,” 1934). The bill he referred to would later become the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938, but what is interesting about the issues surrounding Rexford Tugwell is the ambiguity of his role, where he could be in charge of a group of “policy makers” while declaring not to be a policy maker himself.

At the heart of this largely forgettable event in 1934 was a key conceptual tension, that between an administrator and a policy maker. This tension arose often in discussions of how the New Deal would be realized through the expanding apparatus of government needed to accommodate its success. In fact, this tension was made even more complicated by the fact that “policy maker” was used as a reference to both officials in new departments brought about by the New Deal and political figures who led their respective parties. An early exemplar of the latter was a profile of Herbert Hoover at the end of his presidency in 1932. Hoover was described as “an admirable planner, organizer and administrator, but a very poor policy-maker and leader” (“Finds Hoover Lacks Ability as a Leader”, 1932). This distinction between planning, doing, and “policy making” was one that returned occasionally in other news articles. What is interesting about this profile is that it equated leader and policy maker and distinguished the idea from much of what governing understood at the time entailed: planning, organizing, and administering.¹⁰ Also on the theme of party leadership, a 1931 article in the *New York Times* discussed the importance of the role of the party disciplinarian in the convention system that replaced the boss system of old (“Party Discipline Upheld by Wood”, 1931). The development of the primary system had the potential to undermine the party platform, freeing a candidate to ignore party commitments and become “his own organization, his own platform, his own policy maker.” In this context, the connection between leader (of the party) and policy maker was clear.

By the mid-1930s, a link between the party tactician and the idea of a policy maker was evident in the existing tensions between the expanding goals of recovery in the New Deal and the remaining ideology of the Hoover Republicans. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* from June 23, 1935, described the role of Charles Michelson, an advisor to President Roosevelt and the strategist behind what the article called the “smear Hoover publicity

campaign.” This was a campaign initiated not while Hoover was in office, but after he left office. The strategy, the article explained, was propagandistic, intended not only to aggrandize the New Deal but also to diminish Hoover and the ideas he represented. In this respect, Michelson was described as “much more than a publicity man; he is a policy maker, an administration tactician [who] has much more to do with the making of administration policy than National Chairman Post-master General Farley” (Sullivan, 1935). This latter reference was to James A. Farley, at the time a prominent figure in the Democratic Party. Apparently, the author of the *Los Angeles Times* article considered Farley of sufficient reputation that the reference could be made without elaboration. In fact, James A. Farley was a rather notorious figure of the period. A profile of him by Delbert Clark (1936) was run in the *New York Times Magazine* in March 1936. This profile did not describe Farley himself as a policy maker. That label was reserved for the president, who was called the “boss policy maker.” Farley was a strategist for the party itself, in charge of ensuring that the president was reelected. The arrangement was something that modern election watchers would find familiar. Farley worked with a person named Emil Hurja, who, the article stated, “studies the information, reaches a mature conclusion, correct in a surprising number of cases, as to what it signifies, and then makes a graph. He loves graphs.” Farley received this information and himself made “as nearly accurate a statement of the facts and their meaning as it is possible to obtain.” This was all done in the interest of reelection, but Delbert Clark declined to attribute to Farley the label “policy maker.”

The profile of Farley by Delbert Clark was sympathetic to the Roosevelt administration. The article demonstrated how Farley was in fact restrained by “the one boss Farley knows,” namely, President Roosevelt. In this sense, it appears that the restraint by Clark in not attributing to Farley the label “policy maker” could be deliberate. Evidence of such intent is in another profile by Clark published by the *New York Times* a year later, this time of the shifting composition of what was known as the Brain Trust (Clark, 1937). Along with Rexford Tugwell, the original Brain Trust consisted of Harry Hopkins, who was Secretary of Commerce and a chief architect of the Works Progress Administration; Adolf Berle, who argued for regulation instead of “trust busting” and would later be made Assistant Secretary of State and Ambassador to Brazil; and Raymond Moley, who became known for his break with Roosevelt’s policies, specifically New Deal liberalism. These were figures whom Delbert Clark referred to not as policy makers or as administrators, but as “idea merchants . . . like the old professor of philosophy who was mistaken in a Pullman smoker for a salesman, and when asked what his ‘line’ was replied: ‘Notions.’” By 1936, the original Brain Trust was split up for various

reasons. Moley's break with the New Deal policies, described in his 1939 book *After Seven Years*, was largely complete. Tugwell's inability to serve as an administrator to run the Resettlement Administration led to his exit from Washington. Hopkins remained one of Roosevelt's closest advisers, while Berle consulted Fiorello LaGuardia in his successful mayoral campaign and served as the city's last Chamberlain before becoming Assistant Secretary of State. This split was marked in part by the development of a "Neo-Brain Trust" more focused upon policy and administration than the original one.

Much like in the profile of Farley, Delbert Clark was careful to avoid suggesting that these influential figures who constituted the different Brain Trusts were anything but constrained by their specific roles, which was to bring ideas and to otherwise be in the shadows "thinking." Clark said that "Mr. Roosevelt is president and chairman of the board of his own Brain Trust, that he too has ideas, and that the ultimate decision is always his, and his alone." The persons who made up the Brain Trust, Clark was careful to note, were "in various non-policy making agencies, or agencies which definitely call for the academic mind." Clearly, by this point, there was some impression that there were persons advising the president whose role extended beyond the conventional division of executive, legislative, and judicial roles in government into something with greater potential for influence. Thus, by the late 1930s the *idea* of a policy maker was taking shape, enough so that the role itself was almost consciously attenuated in profiles of those close to the president.

Although the idea was emerging at this point, there did not seem to be any clear consensus around a meaning to the idea. Almost exactly 1 year after Clark's profile of the Brain Trust, an article in the *New York Times* discussed the reorganization of executive agencies. This reorganization proposal showed clearly that there was an open desire among some to formalize the emerging powers of the executive achieved through the New Deal. The Byrnes Bill, as it was called, was designed to allow the president the power to reorganize executive agencies with some exceptions. Included in the plan was the extension of civil service "to all positions in the government except those the President regards as having policy-determining functions and except those otherwise requiring Presidential appointment and Senate approval." This bill would eventually become the Reorganization Act of 1939, the first major planned reorganization of the executive branch in the history of the United States. Its most lasting influence has been the Executive Office of the President, which was created under this legislation. This reorganization plan was an important event in administrative history, proceeding from a report issued to Congress by the President titled *Administrative Management in the Government of the United States*, a product of the

President's Committee on Administrative Management, which consisted of Louis Brownlow, Charles Merriam, and Luther Gulick. It is now more commonly known as the Brownlow Report.

Executive Reorganization

The Brownlow Report was originally presented to the 75th Congress in January 1937. In his letter to Congress introducing the report, President Roosevelt emphasized the organizational challenge presented by modern governing demands. The challenge, with the country having emerged from the "trough of the depression," was to develop a modern management structure responsive to these growing demands of government to "preserve that freedom of self-government our forefathers fought to establish and hand down to us" (Roosevelt, 1937, p. 1). The President went on to describe how the forefathers' struggles were specifically political ("against tyranny, against nonrepresentative controls, against government by birth, wealth, or class, against sectionalism"), while the current generation's struggles were organizational ("against confusion, against ineffectiveness, against waste, against inefficiency"). In a sense, Roosevelt echoed Woodrow Wilson (1887), who urged attention to efficiency and administrative matters given a final settlement on political and constitutional ones.

The report was a detailed account of what was needed, in the vernacular of the time, to modernize government in order to achieve progress. In the letter to Congress, Roosevelt stated plainly that the intention was not to expand the powers of the President, but that the recommendations were a reasonable exercise of executive power as established by the Constitution. Of course, there was vehement disagreement about this claim. In fact, the first attempt to pass the legislation for reorganization was in 1937, and the attempt coincided with Roosevelt's infamous "Court-Packing Plan," known formally as the Judicial Procedures Reform Bill of 1937. Although this bill was not an overt attempt to exercise undue executive power—Roosevelt acknowledged that it was the purview of Congress to expand the size of the Supreme Court—it was commonly viewed as having been motivated by the fact that the Supreme Court regarded much of Roosevelt's New Deal to be unconstitutional. As Roosevelt had recently won a resounding victory in November 1936, the legitimacy of the New Deal was considered firmly established. But Roosevelt's attempt to influence the judicial branch was not well-received. Ultimately, the Judicial Procedures Reform Bill of 1937 died in committee, but the impetus behind its rejection, the popularly propagated idea that Roosevelt was attempting to impose a quasi-dictatorship, collaterally influenced the reorganization bill.

“Reorganization of Executive Departments” was delivered to Congress by the President on January 12, 1937, a few weeks before the Judicial Procedures and Reform Bill of 1937. The Reorganization bill underwent an extensive period of drafting. By March of 1938, 14 months after the Brownlow Report was delivered to Congress, there remained extensive opposition to the powers requested by the President for the President. Among the points of contention was the distinction between civil service employees and those positions that were, in the words of the Brownlow Report, policy-determining. An article in the *New York Times* expressed the divide on the matter of such officials, but consideration of such roles was constitutive of the Report. One of the key recommendations, as the President himself explained, was to “extend the merit system upward, outward, and downward to cover practically all non-policy-determining posts” (Roosevelt, 1937, p. 3). Senator Harry Byrd, Democrat of Virginia, was among the most vocal opponents of the first reorganization attempt, and one of the reasons appears to be that “the President would have the discretion to put any official in the category of policymaker and thereby make his appointment a personal one not governed by civil service rules” (“Senate in tangle on reorganization,” 1938).

The Brownlow Report provided some clarity as to how these new political agents fit into the government structure. At the most basic level of departmental organization, a distinction was made between administrators and policy-determining officials (or what was at least once referred to as “policy officers”; Brownlow et al., 1937, p. 66), and it was made clear that policy-determining officials function as department heads. Their duties were “primarily the consideration and adoption of broad policies and the representation of the department in its relations with other departments, with the President, with Congress, and with the general public” (Brownlow et al., 1937, p. 66). The idea of the report is that the policymakers were free from administrative duties (being that they were not professionals and were thus “ill-equipped” for them) such that their time be committed to “departmental policies and programs” (Brownlow et al., 1937, p. 66). To be clear, the Brownlow Report never referred to “policy maker(s)”; instead, it relied on an understood distinction between administrators and policy-determining officials, the implication clearly that administrators do not have policy-determining powers. As Senator Byrd’s opposition made clear, however, this role of policy-determination was ambiguous and, as such, subject to elaboration. It was in part the power of the President to determine who was a policymaker that doomed the first attempt at reorganization. Roberts (1996) argued that the Brownlow Committee was a failure because the committee did not appreciate how a request for reorganization creating new powers for the executive would be received by the legislative branch of government. It has also been framed as

a formative defeat of Roosevelt's presidency (Polenberg, 1966). The evidence is clear, nonetheless, that the contest was between the powers of legislation and execution, and at the center of this debate appeared the matter of policy-determination, which was designated a strictly executive matter.

Roughly coincident with the Brownlow Report was a short article by Leonard White titled "Administration as a Profession" that explored some of the same themes that arose in the debates over reorganization. White, however, never spoke about policy makers or policy determining officials. He focused upon a Fayolian view of administration as an activity of planning, organization, command, coordination, and control upholding a division between legislative decisions and the "relatively routine tasks of day-by-day execution of established policy" (White, 1937, p. 86), an allusion to what Waldo (2007) would call the politics-administration formula of separation. Even when this idea was critiqued by Waldo in his study of the administrative state, there was no mention of a policy maker. The mere absence of mention is not necessarily meaningful here. Waldo recognized the undercurrent of power and politics in administration as a profession; he referred to the New Administrators as becoming the Democratic Ruling Class (Waldo, 2007, p. 126). What is clear from Waldo's survey of ideas is that these new agents of the state were the products of what he called the Administrative State who functioned at the nexus of planning and execution, precisely the arena of concern in the debates over the Brownlow Committee. The formation of and debates over the policy maker presaged the concerns raised by Waldo about what he called the politics-administration formula.

A theme from the debate over reorganization of the government was the distinction between an administrator and a policymaker, the latter having a clear connection with the vision and goals of the executive, the former apparently motivated by standards of professionalism. In other words, both the administrator and the policymaker were essential to the executive branch, but only one, namely, the policymaker, acted within the environment of politics. Administrators served as neutral actors who fulfilled legislative intentions through executive action (or, as White described it above, day-by-day execution of policy). The policymaker, however, appeared as something new, a political agent whose role seemed to be somewhere between planning and execution, a role that was both political and administrative.

Summary

At the point of the reorganization of government in 1939, the idea of an official with policy-determining powers was well-enough understood to warrant a specific delegation of appointment. The President, it was argued, retained the

power of such appointment in the interest of fulfilling the duties of his role, while the professionalization of the administration that began with the Pendleton Act of 1883 was retained to continue the structural isolation of executive roles from changing administrations (often referred to as the spoils system).

Drawing a distinction between administrative and policy-determining roles reflected a common concern in early administrative history, particularly an insistence on developing an administration that was free of political influence. Indeed, the early administrative theorists variably emphasized the need for a professional and neutral class of administrators whose positions were insulated from the whimsy of political machinations, even if their activities would prove to be not so. Among these early articulators of the administrative state, the term policymaker is not featured prominently and is apparently never used. Frank Goodnow (1900) focused upon the respective roles of politics and administration in the development of a modern democracy, as he explained, without recourse to a political identity between the two. Woodrow Wilson referred to reformers in his 1887 article articulating the boundaries of and need for administrative study, but not policy makers. Wilson did, however, give birth, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to the term policymaking (as already noted), but the closest he came to describing an agent capable of bringing about the necessary change is his reference to “reformers.” “Policy maker” is not used in the *Papers on the Science of Administration* edited by Gulick and Urwick and published in 1937, and Leonard White’s *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*, first published in 1926, made no mention of the term. Chester Barnard’s *The Functions of the Executive*, first published in 1938, barely mentioned the idea of policy itself, focusing far more on the political role of the executive.¹¹ Nevertheless, each of these important early documents of the developing administrative state expressed a similar position on the importance of neutrality in administration, which helps to explain, perhaps, the insistence on an independence between administration and the policy maker (or policy determining official) that was apparent in the debates over the Brownlow Report. Appleby offered a succinct portrayal of this somewhat convoluted arrangement in which policy appeared separate from administration. “For a half century or so,” he said,

while political science was developing as a distinct discipline, much of its literature tended to accept as substantially real a separation of powers which excluded from administration any—or at least any important—policy-making functions. . . . The President was recognized as an outstanding exception, but the President’s office was conceived of in personal rather than institutional terms. He was a policy-maker as an individual and as President, not as Chief Executive. (Appleby, 1949, p. 3)

Perhaps this desire for neutrality stemmed from a common corruption of the policy maker as an agent of party strategy, as described above. Frequently, the term was employed to designate party leaders, even those involved in politics outside of the United States, including reference to Neville Chamberlain's leadership in British tariff policy (Augur, 1936), Churchill's role with the Tories (Hewett, 1949), and von Ribbentrop's role in German foreign relations with the Soviets (Joesten, 1939). This apparently political place of the policy maker was also evident in the connection made between that designation and propaganda, such as when Charles Michelson could lead a "smear Hoover campaign" and also be labeled "much more than a publicity man: he is a policy maker" sitting at the side of Roosevelt (Sullivan, 1935). The point is that the policy maker was self-evidently not neutral, and so it existed as a political identity in the administrative state that must be distinguished from the administrative apparatus itself. The flip side of this thinking, though, was the belief that administrators are neutral, that their activities do not overstep the ideal of a neutral line of execution in accordance with policy intents and goals. In the same context as the above-mentioned quotation, Appleby (1949) declared that "[u]nder such a theory of separation, a civil service system was justified, accepted, and probably to a small extent over-sold" (p. 3).

Seen in this way, the development of the policy maker alongside the rising administrative state might be viewed as a designation of space for discretion in a government apparatus that, at least in theory, discouraged it. The Brownlow Papers testified to the role of policy-determining officials as being largely independent of the legislative branch, which was one of the main concerns raised by opponents to the reorganization plan. Administrators, guided by the professional ethic of civil service, were thought also to be unbound to the Office of the President, whereas a policy maker worked, as we now sometimes hear, at the pleasure of the president.

The implications of this began to take shape in the 1940s, but the basic framework of the issue around the policy maker stemmed from the concern over policy-determining officials. To be clear, these policy-determining officials were important administrative officials who were unbound by the ethic of civil service. By the middle of the 1940s, beginning while the United States was embroiled in a war of unprecedented global scale, the concern over the emergence of a policymaker was substantial enough to warrant attempts that restricted this developing administrative state. In particular, the debates over the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) expressed a clear concern over how a powerful administrative system required procedural boundaries that expressed, as Pat McCarran (1946), Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, put it in 1946, "a comprehensive charter of private liberty and a

solemn understanding of official fairness” (p. iii). McCarran (1946) would express more succinctly the issue and how important an impersonal system of administration truly was in his often-repeated line that the APA “enunciates and emphasizes the tripartite form of our democracy and brings into relief the ever essential declaration that this is a government of law rather than of men” (p. iii). The policy maker emerged alongside the administrative state and carried with it the burden of a person in the position of deciding where decisions are intended to be impersonally procedural.

Conclusion

The policymaker is a specifically modern political identity brought about as a by-product of the growing administrative state. While Public Administration as an academic field may hold to its scientific aspirations, the emergence of the policy maker as a new political identity underscores how the field is not simply describing and understanding the world but is actually making it. The policy maker is an example of how Public Administration as a field produces the administrative state and its concomitants, not simply studies its components. To look to the policy maker as a factor in any explanatory model of policy making or administrative functioning is to turn to an invention of the field to explain itself.

The evidence of this was initially apparent in how the term was used in education. Snedden’s appeal to policy makers was an at-best ambiguous allusion to what he imagined to be a group of people deciding upon how to proceed with education policy, about how to realize reform. The important connection for Snedden was the condition of social efficiency. This idea of the early 20th century was closely connected with the efficiency focus of administrative theory in general, but the specificity in education was important. The basic framework of social efficiency in education was the belief that educational policy and practice be focused upon a maximization of utility in educational institutions. In short, education should function to serve both the students and society at large by preparing students to be productive members of society. Within education, then, the focus was upon how best to make decisions based upon the information made available. The earliest uses of “policy maker” connected the role with a person positioned to decide given certain restrictions so that the decision was made in an impersonal manner. The concept of social efficiency was the condition through which impersonality was imposed upon the policymakers’ decisions in education. Importantly, the distinction between administrators (teachers) and policymakers was insisted upon in the discussion of educational policy. The role of the policymaker emerged alongside the acceptance of state interest in education, where a

bridge between the legislative body and the executive body of implementers was required.

The educational context underscores how the policymaker emerged as state involvement in society expanded to satisfactorily achieve large-scale social projects. This theme developed further in the 1930s in the broader context of the administrative state and the New Deal policies of Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt gained a reputation as a governor of New York for his reorganization of state government toward the objective of efficiency, and his importation of this idea to the federal level, although unsurprising, did nevertheless elicit concerns over the scope of power that the executive deserved, particularly the informal powers that were in part manifested in the agent of the policymaker. It was recognized and made explicit that the executive, given the increasing responsibilities accompanying the expanding administrative state, required more assistance in executing policy and legal directives. As the Brownlow Report stated quite plainly, "The President needs help" (Brownlow et al., 1937, p. 19). But it was also well-established that the spoils system, in which the array of jobs in the executive was filled at the discretion of the president, was neutralized by already-enacted administrative reform. One of the issues that caused conflict was the matter of officials who were not administrators in the civil service but were empowered by the administrative apparatus. These were the "policy-determining officials," whose appointment was left to the discretion of the president. The concern, put simply, was how to manage efficiently while not expanding the powers of the president beyond Constitutional objectives. Policy-determining officials, who were labeled "policy makers" in the media, represented a political challenge, and it nearly undermined any progress on reorganization.

This period of 1920–1940 was only the beginning of the rise to prominence of the policymaker in our political language and structure. By the 1940s, the use of the term increased noticeably. By the time of the 21st century, the identity of the policymaker was of such common sense that the role it fulfilled could be imprecise while the term retained meaning and understanding. Its common-sense was indicated by the prominence of the policymaker in various explanatory models of the policy process. The policymaker developed as a specifically modern political identity for the administrative state, connected as it was to developments in law and policy that are aimed at positive improvements to social goals that, it is thought, only government can achieve with any reasonable level of scale and efficiency. As White (1937) explained, "by 1930, government had grown far beyond the capacities of either the ordinary citizen or of any one group or any small number of groups of specialists" (p. 84). This growth, which is an expression of social demand,

made possible, even necessary, the development of the modern political identity of the policy maker.

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Notes

1. The term “policy maker” is variously used as both a compound word (policy-maker) and a phrase (policy maker). The word “policymaker” appears less frequently during the period of concern in this article, but I will occasionally use it when discussing the idea itself. I have made efforts to use the phrase where I talk about its use in early discussions.
2. *Webster* defines policymaker as “someone who sets the plan pursued by a government or business etc.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “a person responsible for or involved in policy-making.”
3. Walter Nugent’s concise discussion of Progressivism lays out the legacy of the political theory into the 1920s rather nicely. He explains that “the Progressives were instrumentalists—and to many of them the most effective instrument of progress was government, at all levels. . . . Nevertheless, a good many Progressives who survived into the 1920s, especially Republicans or one-time Bull Moosers, could not accept the New Deal because for them it went too far toward statism, across the grain of their deep individualism. But others did become New Dealers” (Nugent, 2010, pp. 126–127).
4. As Figure 1 shows, the relative use of the term policy maker and the compound policymaker begins an exponential increase around 1940. This graphic displays the use in books digitized by Google using character and text recognition software. According to Michel et al. (2011), Google worked with university libraries and scanned every page of their collections to amass over 15-million books in digital form, estimated to be 12% of all books ever published. The n-gram viewer uses an estimated 5-million books based upon the quality of the scanning and the ability of the software to recognize the characters. It is reasonable to view this 4% of all books ever published as a sample for statistical analysis. A gram is an uninterrupted string of characters including numbers. The “n” of n-gram designates the number of uninterrupted strings. Thus, the phrase “policy maker” is a 2-gram, and the phrase “policymaker” is a 1-gram.

5. I also searched using the Web of Science Core Collection, but the Social Science Citation Index did not begin until 1956. What the search did return when applied through 1970 did not include any articles not already identified through JSTOR.
6. I searched the “New York Times” through the *New York Times* TimesMachine. The *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal* were each searched through ProQuest Historical Papers.
7. Labaree (2010) offers a detailed account of the debate between Dewey and Snedden.
8. Roosevelt (1937, p. 1).
9. The original name was the “Brains Trust,” as pointed out by Tugwell himself in his 1968 book by that title, *The Brains Trust*.
10. To see this clearly, think of the classic elements of public organization articulated by Luther Gulick as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting (POSDCORB). There is no clear place for “policy” here, and certainly no role for a policy maker.
11. In the 1968 edition of Barnard’s work, Kenneth Andrews notes how the Carnegie School that includes Simon, March, and Cyert have expanded the thesis of Barnard away from the “policy formulating” decisions of the executive and into matters of organizations generally, focusing primarily upon human problem solving and rational choice issues (see Barnard, 1968, p. xvii). The inference of policy formulation in the work of Barnard is only apparent once the ideas of policy makers and formulation have become normalized by the 1960s as a key function of the executive, especially since Barnard does not actually use such language.

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