

Policy autonomy of agencies: concept, measurement, and empirical findings

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Conceptual clarifications

- policy autonomy = agency involvement in the development and formulation of policies
- formal decision-making authority usually rests with the parent ministry, government or parliament
- having policy autonomy does not necessarily imply that agencies are able to influence policy decisions
- agencies may influence decisions which have a major impact on the definition and exercise of their tasks

Policy autonomy in the COBRA survey



- assessment of the agency's role in relation to the parent ministry with regard to policy making
- assessment of changes in the agency's role in relation to the parent ministry over time
- exercise of typical policy activities by the parent ministry, the agency or a mixture of both
- acceptance of the agency's views and requests by the parent ministry

Empirical findings (examples)



- a considerable number of agencies (24%) can develop policy proposals in their area of responsibility
- more than 30% report an increase in the possibility to develop policy proposals during the past five years
- evaluation and feed-back regarding policy effectiveness and the formulation of regulations are the most common policy activities of agencies
- 37% report a (very) high degree of acceptance of their views and requests by the parent ministry

Which factors affect policy autonomy?

- policy advice or service delivery as main task
- political salience
- contact person in the parent ministry's hierarchy
- participation in formal and informal EU-networks
- no effect: regulation as main task, formal-legal structure, mutual trust

Questions

- Are there better ways of measuring policy autonomy?
- What are the policy preferences of agencies?
- How much policy autonomy do agencies have in other politico-administrative contexts?
- Should agencies have (more) policy autonomy?

Thank you very much for your attention!

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Further readings

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- Bach, T., & Jann, W. (2010). Animals in the administrative zoo: organizational change and agency autonomy in Germany. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 76(3), 443-468.
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