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Out of the ivory tower: an explanation of the policy advisory roles of political scientists in Europe

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Abstract

The relevance and impact of political scientists' professional activities outside of universities has become the focus of public attention, partly due to growing expectations that research should help address society's grand challenges. One type of such activity is policy advising. However, little attention has been devoted to understanding the extent and type of policy advising activities political scientists engage in. This paper addresses this gap by adopting a classification that distinguishes four ideal types of policy advisors representing differing degrees of engagement. We test this classification by calculating a multi-level latent class model to estimate key factors explaining the prevalence of each type based on an original dataset obtained from a survey of political scientists across 39 European countries. Our results challenge the wisdom that political scientists are sitting in an "ivory tower": the vast majority (80%) of political scientists in Europe are active policy advisers, with most of them providing not only expert guidance but also normative assessments.

Keywords European political science · Policy advisors · Latent class analysis

Introduction

Questions about relevance of academic research in general and political science specifically have been on the agenda for some years (Bok 1982; Posner 2001; Wilensky 1997). This has been driven by an increased focus of public funders and ongoing debates inside the scholarly community around the question of

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

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the societal relevance of academic research (Bandola-Gill et al. 2021a). While debates regarding the impact of political science within the academic community often center around measurements of publications or citations (Norris 2021; Reymert et al. 2020; Tronconi and Engeli 2022), assessments of impact by, for example funding bodies, often adopt a broader view and focus also on socio-economic relevance of research. Moreover, governments throughout Europe, as well as the European Union (EU) itself, increasingly consider the question of how research matters for solving societies' grand challenges and what is its "practical"—i.e., non-academic—value for society (Bandola-Gill et al. 2021a; Gornitzka and Maassen 2014; Hendrix et al. 2023).

One aspect that has been largely neglected in discussions around the social relevance of political science research is the activity of political scientists in policy advisory roles. While there has been some work regarding advisory roles of scholars from other disciplines (for economics see e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2013; Christensen 2017), as well as policy advisory roles of academics in general (Head 2015; Pielke 2007), we do not know much about the extent to which political scientists engage in policy advice and what factors influence their level of activity (for an overview of the US discussion see Wilensky 1997). This is especially important as political scientists have a thematic proximity to politics and policymaking. In this sense, policymakers and the institutions in which they act are both the object and target of advice given by political scientists.

Our study addresses this gap using data from an original survey of university-based political scientists in 39 European countries. To analyze their policy advisory activities, we employ a conceptual model with four ideal types of advisory roles: the "Pure Academic," the "Expert," the "Opinionating Scholar," and the "Public Intellectual" (Brans et al. 2022a, 2022b).

We use a multi-level latent class model to simultaneously classify political scientists into each of the four ideal types, assess the occurrence and possible prevalence of any of the types, and estimate the individual and contextual determinants of type assignment. Understanding how different factors drive, or hinder advisory engagement can inform ongoing debates about the relevance and professional role of political scientists and stimulate discussions around the professionalization in this as well as in other disciplines.

Our results indicate that political scientists working in Europe are very active in providing some form of policy advice, with most giving not just factual advice but also engaging in normative assessments. The probability of belonging to a particular advisory type is shaped not only by individual characteristics such as age or gender, but also by structural-environmental aspects such as the type of impact regime used in a country. This suggests that European political scientists' policy advice activity is the result of a complex interplay between structural-institutional conditions and individual characteristics.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next sections present our conceptualization of four types of advisory roles and describes the research design and methods used in our empirical analysis. We then present the empirical results and discuss how they relate to our conceptual model. Finally, we consider



Table 1 The four ideal types of policy advisory roles

Advisory types	Frequency of advice	Type of knowledge
Pure academic	No provision of advice	Not applicable
Expert	Variable frequency	Episteme (theoretical) + Techne (applied)
Opinionating Scholar	Variable frequency	Phronesis (normative)
Public Intellectual	High frequency	All types interchangeably

the implications of our findings for the relevance and impact of political scientists in Europe.

Theory and hypotheses

Four ideal types of policy advisory roles

We use a typology of the policy advisory roles of political sciences, which was originally developed by Brans et al. (2022b). According to this approach, policy advisory roles can be grouped into four ideal types based on two main criteria: (a) how frequently academics engage in policy advisory giving activities, and (b) what type of knowledge they provide to policymakers. The four policy advisory roles suggested by Brans et al. (2022a, b) are: the “Pure Academic,” the “Expert,” the “Opinionating Scholar”¹ and the “Public Intellectual” (Brans et al. 2022b). These types mirror, to some extent, Pielke’s (2007) four idealized roles of science in policy and politics and draw on some insights from Head’s (2015) typology of policy interested academics.

Our interest in this study lies neither in the further conceptualization or relabelling of these ideal types, nor with uncovering the “optimal” number of ideal types to describe our sample. Notwithstanding potential conceptualization issues, we are interested in using this recently developed typology to determine the relative prevalence of these a-priori theoretically derived types, and in assessing the impact of individual and systemic factors on their distribution. Below we summarize (Table 1) and then quickly present the four types as developed by Brans et al. (2022b).

The “Pure Academic” is different from Pielke’s (2007) “pure scientist” and Head’s (2015) “mainstream academic” in that she does not engage with advice giving activities at all. This is the kind of researcher who is involved exclusively with teaching, producing research output and publications, and disseminating her work among her peers (e.g., in scientific conferences). This does not mean that the

¹ While we agree with one of the reviewers that the label “opinionating” could be perceived negatively by some, we want to highlight that it is not meant in a judgemental way. We kept the label for the sake of consistency with the initial conceptualization as proposed by Brans et al. (2022b).



work of a pure academic cannot inform policy-makers' decisions, that it does not have societal impact, or that this type of scholar is invisible in the public arena. But the bottom line is that this type of academic does not engage actively in any kind of policy advice.

By contrast, the other three ideal types participate actively in some kind of policy advice. The "Expert" offers advice on a frequent yet thematically restricted basis on issues that, drawing on Tenbenschel's (2006) scheme, can be classified as "*episteme*," meaning that they relate to fundamental research focusing on causal-links, or "*techne*," meaning applied or practical knowledge. This becomes visible, for example, by being a member of an expert committee. The "Expert" thus resembles to some extent Pielke's (2007) definition of "science arbiter" and Head's (2015) classifications of "expert critic" or "consultant."

The advice provided by the "Opinionating" Scholar falls within Tenbenschel's (2006) "*phronesis*" knowledge category that describes value- or ethics-based normative science. Academics in this category can be pundits, or express normative views within a network of stakeholders and policymakers. The frequency of policy advisory activities can vary within this type, and the key element is the emphasis on normative views or advocacy.

Finally, the "Public Intellectual" offers all the aforementioned types of advice and is a very active scholar in advisory arenas, combining the different types of activities and knowledge.

Explaining policy advisory role variation

To explain the different ways in which academics engage in policy advice and to identify the factors that help us categorize political scientists into the four advisory types, we draw on the literature on faculty behavior, motivation and careers (O'Meara 2003). We argue that the policy advisory role performed by academics, as "engagement" and "external service" more generally, is a result of systemic factors, i.e., the "environment and conditions under which work is done" (O'Meara 2003: 202), such as, for example, the various societal impact incentive structures in place in each country and higher education (HE) institution (Bandola-Gill et al. 2021b); and also of individual characteristics and circumstances, especially academics' career stage and gender (Aguirre 2000; O'Meara 2003).

H1: Stage of academic career

The needs of academics, their own expectations and the expectations of their institutions vary throughout the "seasons" of their careers, and this influences their propensity to become engaged with societal outreach activities (O'Meara 2003). A fundamental distinction here is between early and later academic career stages. Early career researchers (ECRs) still have to build their profile and prestige. At that stage, publications in prestigious journals and winning grants are usually key concerns for attaining tenure and climbing the academic career ladder (Meschitti 2020). Additionally, because of their junior position and restricted negotiating power, ECRs are often "delegated time-consuming tasks with little value for



promotion” (Meschitti 2020: 20). Given their time constraints and the strategic incentives in place, ECRs will thus tend to focus on research, teaching and university administration tasks rather than on activities with little “career-advancement value,” such as engaging in policy advisory activities (Bandola-Gill 2019). Our first hypothesis is therefore:

H1: Younger and non-tenured academics are more likely to be pure academics compared to older and tenured academics.

H2: Gender

Gender is another individual characteristic that may influence the policy advisory roles taken up by academics. Women in academia still experience different career paths from their male colleagues. Women academics encounter higher education institutions as gendered workplaces with gendered organizational practices, a gendered division of labour and very often overt and covert discrimination practices (Awesti et al. 2016). Simply put, gender is very often a “status characteristic for allocating resource and opportunity” (Aguirre 2000: 42), as evidenced, e.g., by the fact that women are less represented in professorial positions and senior leadership roles (Meschitti 2020: 18). Moreover, female academics are very often assigned heavier teaching loads as well as more pastoral duties (Aguirre 2000) and are disproportionately involved in service-learning activities (Ibidem), all of which are time-consuming, and thus reduce the space for policy advice-oriented activities (Meschitti 2020: 18). Hence, we would expect women academics to choose different roles with respect to policy advising.

H2: Female academics are more likely to be pure academics and experts and less likely to be public intellectuals and opinionating scholars.

H3: Impact regimes

Engagement in policy advice is further influenced by the institutional environment in which academics work (O’Meara 2003). This includes institutionalized incentive systems, opportunity structures and policies that promote “engagement” as a core function of higher education institutions (Bandola-Gill et al. 2021b; O’Meara 2003).

Different approaches to impact measurement have diverse effects on academic identities (Balaban and de Jong 2023), practices or values (Bandola-Gill 2019; Watermeyer and Chubb 2019), as best highlighted by the comparative studies of impact approaches (Bandola-Gill et al. 2021b). One of the reasons for this variability in the effects of the impact measurement is its performativity (Callon 2008; Power 2015). Just like other cases of policy instruments, impact assessment methods do not just reflect reality but rather actively construct it—the problem of ‘impact’ becomes enacted in the ways that are delimited by the key dimensions of the measurement approach (Bandola-Gill and Smith 2022). In particular, assessing the non-academic effects of science necessarily results in recognizing some practices as aligned with the impact definitions and rejecting others as being outside of the scope of ‘impact’. Thus, impact assessment has a direct effect on advisory practices as it encourages only a limited scope of available advisory repertoires due to its ‘instrumental bias’ (i.e., encouraging forms of advice that directly translates into short-term effects) (Bandola-Gill 2023). We therefore argue that a key institutional factor that influences the policy advisory roles of academics is the nature and development of the “impact regime” in each higher education system. Bandola-Gill et al. (2021b)



have recently mapped impact regimes across higher education systems in Europe. According to their classification, some European countries—e.g., Austria—have still to implement an impact regime for their HE system. In such systems, characterized by an absence of institutional incentives for impact, logically we do not expect an impact regime-related effect on the policy advisory roles of political scientists.

A second impact regime, prevailing in countries such as Sweden, sets general impact targets and “soft signals” for some non-research-related incentives, mainly career-related benefits for individual academics. These soft signaling regimes whose incentives are not linked to research funding are not expected to be very different from systems with no impact regimes. These regimes are characterized by an “initial-rhetoric-reality gap” (Bandola-Gill et al. 2021a) that seeks to recalibrate the ideational and discursive context surrounding impact but have no hard incentives in place. Thus, academics can ignore any calls for relevance and impact. We would therefore expect that:

H3a: Soft signaling impact regimes do not affect the policy advisory roles of academics.

The remaining four impact regimes are all linked to research funding incentives, but they differ with respect to: (a) the locus of assessment (HE institutions or individual researchers), and (b) their formality (“hard steering” vs “soft nudging” of assessment and quality). There are two regimes that target individual academics and individual research projects. “Individual nudging” regimes (in place, e.g., in Germany, Finland, and Belgium) include discretionary assessment of some proposed impact within a specific funding application. “Individual steering” regimes (e.g., Spain, Ireland and Turkey) are more formalized; they steer individual academics’ behavior through explicit expectations of impact within specific grant applications. Essentially, these regimes push political scientists toward expert roles, irrespective of whether the assessment of their projects is hard, or soft. Political scientists in these regimes commit to engage as experts with non-academic users in all stages of the research process, from initial research design (co-production) to the dissemination of findings. We would therefore expect:

H3b: Political scientists in individual nudging and individual steering impact regimes are less likely to be pure academics and more likely to be experts.

The remaining two impact regimes focus on the higher education institution rather than individuals. “Institutional nudging” regimes (e.g., the Netherlands, Italy and France) are soft regimes, featuring low formality with respect to impact assessment. Therefore, we argue that institutional nudging regimes are similar to the soft signaling regimes we described above. They offer rhetorical steers with no effects. Thus, we would expect that:

H3c: Institutional nudging impact regimes have no effect on the propensity of political scientists to engage in policy advice.

Finally, “institutional steering” regimes are characterized by formality and close steering and control mechanisms. They shape the broader institutional setting of research by assessing the research impact performance of universities. The UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a typical representative of this approach,



but others have also adopted this model—e.g., Norway (Bandola-Gill et al. 2021a). Institutional steering regimes are expected to be the most consequential because the research and impact performance of a university feeds directly into rankings and prestige and therefore can affect university income. Either indirectly, by signaling quality to future students, or directly, by being tied to the level of government subsidies. In turn, individual career incentives of academics within these systems are also affected as academics who produce research that can be proven to be of use to non-academic users are rewarded. We would therefore expect that:

H3d: Political scientists in institutional steering regimes are less likely to be pure academics and more likely to be experts.

Data and methods

Data

Our analysis uses data from an original survey sent out to 12,400 political scientists at universities in 39 European countries (including Turkey and Israel) between March and December 2018. The survey was part of an EU-funded COST Action.² Respondents in our sample satisfied the following criteria: (i) they hold a PhD in political science and work at universities or are affiliated to formal organizational units within universities whose main specialization is political science or similar fields (e.g., public administration, international relations); and (ii) their research topics are related directly to political science.³

The survey structure and questions focused on academics' advisory activities, but also tapped into the state of political science in individuals' countries of work. The questionnaire was originally drafted in English, but was translated into several other languages (e.g., French, German, Italian, Spanish) in order to enhance access. Respondents could choose in which language they wanted to complete the questionnaire.

All individuals in our sample were invited up to four times to participate. The total number of completed surveys was 2,354, with response rates ranging from 7% in Turkey to 70% in Albania. The average response rate was 26%. Given the potential self-selection of respondents and cross-national differences in response rates, one has to be cautious about the representativity regarding specific country communities.⁴ Figure 1 summarizes the distribution of respondents by country.

² COST Action CA15207: PROSEPS Professionalization and Social Impact of European Political Science, see: <http://proseps.unibo.it/>

³ Besides these two criteria, country experts could use additional criteria in accordance with the demarcation of the discipline in their country.

⁴ As noted by one of the reviewers, of particular concern is that participation in our survey might be correlated with engagement in policy advice (i.e., that a political scientist more/less actively involved in policy advice may be more/less likely to fill out the questionnaire), which would obviously undermine the generalizability of our findings. A first look at our data suggests that this does not seem to be the case, as roughly half of the respondents in our sample are never or only rarely involved in policy advising. Nonetheless, in order to address this concern in a more "statistically principled" manner, we resort to propensity-based adjustments (Lee 2006) to account for potential selection bias. See the Online Appendix (Section B) for details.



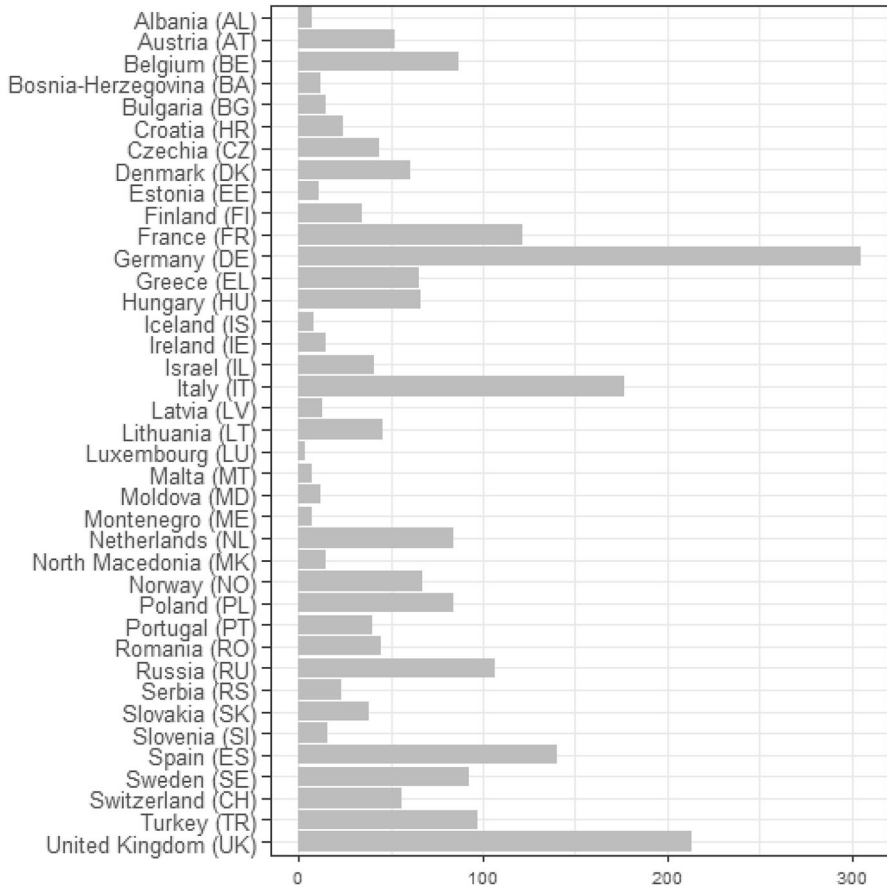


Fig. 1 Number of survey participants, by country

Our dependent variables are built from six survey items asking participants about the frequency of their involvement in the following advisory activities: (i) providing data and facts about policies and political phenomena; (ii) analyzing and explaining the consequences of policy problems; (iii) evaluating existing policies and institutional arrangements; (iv) offering consultancy services and policy advice; (v) making forecasts and/or conducting polls; and (vi) making value judgments and normative arguments. Responses to each item are coded on a 5-point scale, ranging from “Never” (1) to “At least once a week” (5).

The independent variables in our analysis comprise measures for the main factors expected to influence the probability that survey participants are classified into the different advisory types (hypotheses H1—H3). To examine differences in the propensity to engage in advisory activities between early career and more established academics, we include age and a dummy variable taking the value 1 if the respondent holds a permanent (tenured) position. An indicator for female academics



accounts for gender differences. Drawing on Bandola-Gill et al. (2021a), the basic characteristics of the impact regimes prevailing in each higher education system are operationalized through a series of indicators distinguishing between “soft signaling,” “individual nudging,” “institutional nudging,” “individual steering” and “institutional steering.” The baseline category is “no impact regime.”⁵

Besides these key explanatory variables, our model specification controls for systematic differences in advisory activities across sub-disciplines and areas of expertise within political science and includes country random effects to account for within-country correlations and for the influence of unobserved contextual factors. Summary statistics for the covariates included in our analysis are reported in Table 2.⁶

Empirical strategy

We fit a multi-level latent class model (Alvarez et al. 2021; Henry and Muthén 2010) to estimate the prevalence of advisory types in our sample and the determinants of individuals’ probability of assignment to each type. Latent class models are a useful tool to explain heterogeneity in observed ordinal variables (e.g., responses to the six survey items measuring political scientists’ involvement in advisory activities) in terms of a small number of well-defined, substantively relevant latent classes or groups (e.g., advisory types). The survey responses are assumed to arise from mutually exclusive classes or types capturing differences in behavioral or attitudinal patterns explained by political scientists’ underlying or latent types. To account for heterogeneity in individual academics’ propensity to engage in advisory activities, the probabilities of belonging to advisory types are allowed to correlate with the relevant personal characteristics and contextual factors underlined in our theoretical framework (Fig. 2).

Specifically, let $Y_{i,j,k}$ denote the response of individual $i = 1, \dots, N_j$ in country $j = 1, \dots, 39$, to survey item $k = 1, \dots, 6$ asking participants about the frequency of their involvement in advisory activities. The probability that i exhibits a particular pattern of responses $\mathbf{Y}_{ij} = (Y_{i,j,1}, Y_{i,j,2}, Y_{i,j,3}, Y_{i,j,4}, Y_{i,j,5}, Y_{i,j,6})$ to the six survey items is given by:

$$P(\mathbf{Y}_{ij}) = \sum_t P(T_{ij} = t) \prod_{k=1}^6 \prod_{l=1}^5 p_{k,l,t}^{I(Y_{i,j,k}=l)} \quad (1)$$

where $P(T_{ij} = t)$ is the probability individual i ’s advisory type T_{ij} is t , $t = \text{Pure Academic, Expert, Opinionating Scholar, Public Intellectual}$,

$p_{k,l,t} = P(Y_{i,j,k} = l | T_{ij} = t)$ is the probability that i ’s answer to survey question k equals l conditional on her belonging to advisory type t , and $I()$ is an indicator function taking the value 1 if $Y_{i,j,k} = l$, and 0 otherwise.

⁵ We also examined the robustness of our findings by implementing alternative specifications of HE impact regimes proposed by Bandola-Gill et al. (2021a, b). The main findings are not sensitive to the particular operationalization of this variable.

⁶ Section A in the Additional file 1: Online Appendix provides country-specific summary statistics for the dependent and key independent variables included in our analysis.



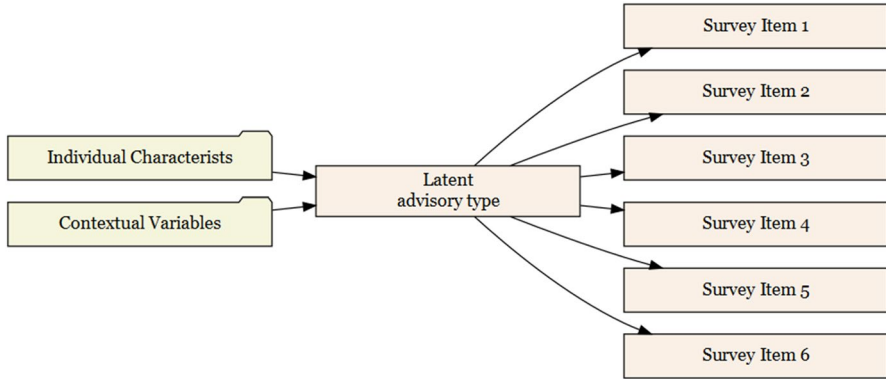


Fig. 2 Relationship between dependent variables (survey items), advisory types, and independent variables

We adopt a generalized logit link function (Huang and Bandeen-Roche 2004) for the conditional response probabilities $p_{k,l,t} = P(Y_{i,j,k} = l | T_{i,j} = t)$:

$$\log \left(\frac{p_{k,l,t}}{p_{k,5,t}} \right) = \alpha_{k,l,t} \quad (2)$$

To complete our model specification, the probability that individual i belongs to advisory type t is expressed as a function of her individual characteristics $X_{i,j}$, the impact regime in her higher education system, Z_j , and (unobserved) country-level factors:

$$P(T_{i,j} = t) = \frac{\exp(X_{i,j}'\beta_t + Z_j\gamma_t + \eta_{j,t})}{\sum_r \exp(X_{i,j}'\beta_r + Z_j\gamma_r + \eta_{j,r})} \quad (3)$$

where the random effects $\eta_{j,t}$, $j = 1, \dots, 39$, account for unobserved cross-national heterogeneity and intra-country correlation in the probabilities of type assignment.

The empirical approach implemented here therefore allows simultaneously: (i) estimating individuals' propensity to engage in the different advisory activities covered in our survey; (ii) classifying individuals into underlying advisory types; and (iii) assessing the impact of individual and contextual factors on the probabilities of type assignment—and, ultimately, estimating how much the relevant independent variables correlate with the probability that political scientists participate in different advisory activities. We resort to Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulations to fit the model (Lynch 2007), incorporating propensity-based adjustment weights to account for potential self-selection bias (see footnote 2).⁷

⁷ Some of the advantages of the Bayesian framework in this setting are that it allows for a detailed description of the parameters of interest via examination of their posterior distributions, and that it helps account for the uncertainty in these parameters while avoiding asymptotic approximations—a convenient feature given that the number of individuals assigned to each advisory type could in principle be rather small (e.g., Iaryczower and Katz 2015). Additional estimation details are provided in the Online Appendix (Section B).



Table 2 Summary statistics for the dependent and explanatory variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev	Range
Advisory activities (outcomes)			
Providing data and facts about policies and political phenomena	2.31	1.08	1–5
Analyzing and explaining the consequences of policy problems	2.44	1.11	1–5
Evaluating existing policies and institutional arrangements	2.30	1.09	1–5
Offering consultancy services and policy advice	1.99	1.06	1–5
Making forecasts and/or conducting polls	1.58	0.89	1–5
Making value judgments and normative arguments	2.02	1.10	1–5
Key explanatory variables			
Age: ^a 25–35	0.11	0.31	0–1
36–45	0.37	0.48	0–1
46–55	0.25	0.44	0–1
56–65	0.17	0.38	0–1
Tenure	0.70	0.46	0–1
Female	0.33	0.47	0–1
Impact regime: ^b soft signaling	0.10	0.31	0–1
Individual nudging	0.27	0.44	0–1
Institutional nudging	0.29	0.45	0–1
Individual steering	0.12	0.32	0–1
Institutional steering	0.16	0.37	0–1
Controls ^c			
Discipline: ^d political science	0.40	0.49	0–1
Public administration	0.21	0.41	0–1
Public policy	0.28	0.45	0–1
Area of expertise: ^e civil rights	0.17	0.38	0–1
Immigration	0.14	0.35	0–1
International affairs	0.27	0.44	0–1
Public administration/reform	0.33	0.47	0–1

^aThe reference category is “Over 65”

^bThe reference category is “No impact regime”

^cCountry effects are included among the controls

^dThe reference category comprises respondents who listed their discipline as International Relations, Security Study, Social Science Methods or “Other Fields”

^eThe baseline category comprises respondents who did not mark any of the listed categories as their main area of expertise

Our approach improves on commonly used methods to developing political typologies based on cluster analysis. In particular, unlike our empirical strategy, cluster analysis is not based on a statistical model. Consequently, it does not yield information about the probabilities of type assignment and ignores the classification uncertainty arising from the fact that advisory types are estimated (rather than observed), which can result in high rates of mis-classification (Kamata et al. 2018). Additionally, assessing the impact of covariates on the probability of type assignment is not



straightforward in cluster analyses. Although researchers sometimes incorporate cluster indicators in subsequent regression models aimed at uncovering the determinants of type assignment, they typically ignore classification measurement errors—which leads to potentially biased estimates for the relationship between the typologies and the covariates of interest (Haagenars 1993). Our method overcomes these limitations.

Before discussing our findings, it is worth noting that the number of categories is dictated by our theoretical framework, which—as noted above—distinguished four types of advisors depending on their involvement in advisory activities. This is a usual practice in latent class analysis when there are clear theoretical expectations about the nature of the groups underlying the data (Finch and Bronk 2011; Katz and Levin 2018). In such cases, defining the number of classes “(...) is not a statistical issue but a theoretical one that should be based on a substantive interest of the researcher” (Oberski 2016, p.180). In this sense, our interest lies not in uncovering the “optimal” number of advisory types in our sample, but rather in determining the relative prevalence of these theoretically derived types and in assessing the impact of relevant individual and systemic factors on their distribution. That said, as a robustness check, we estimated several alternative models with a different number of classes, attempting to balance parsimony and accuracy (Hallquist and Wright 2014). In particular, we considered whether a more parsimonious representation of differences in political scientists’ propensity to engage in advisory activities—i.e., a model with fewer advisory types—was able to explain the observed data patterns as well as our four-class model. As we show in the appendix, our preferred model outperforms these alternative specifications according to a variety of model selection criteria.

Results

Figure 3 provides information about the relative prevalence of the four ideal advisory types in our sample. The mean posterior probabilities of classifying respondents into each type are: 0.20 for Pure Academics, 0.28 for Experts, 0.48 for Opinionating Scholars, and 0.04 for Public Intellectuals. In other words, based on these probabilities of type assignment, almost 50% of the participants in the survey would be classified as Opinionating Scholars, while only 4% of the political scientists in our sample would be allocated to the Public Intellectual type. These results challenge the common prejudice about academics living in an “ivory tower,” but also assumptions by academics themselves that “mainstream” scientists have limited engagement with policy practitioners (Head 2015). Political scientists in Europe are quite extrovert in their policy advisory activities, with four out of five academics in our sample engaging in some form of advice.

To assess whether and to what extent the probability of type assignment is associated with the factors underscored in hypotheses H1-H3, Fig. 4 plots the impact of the independent variables on the likelihood that a political scientist belongs to each of the four ideal types. More precisely, the figure reports the marginal effect of these



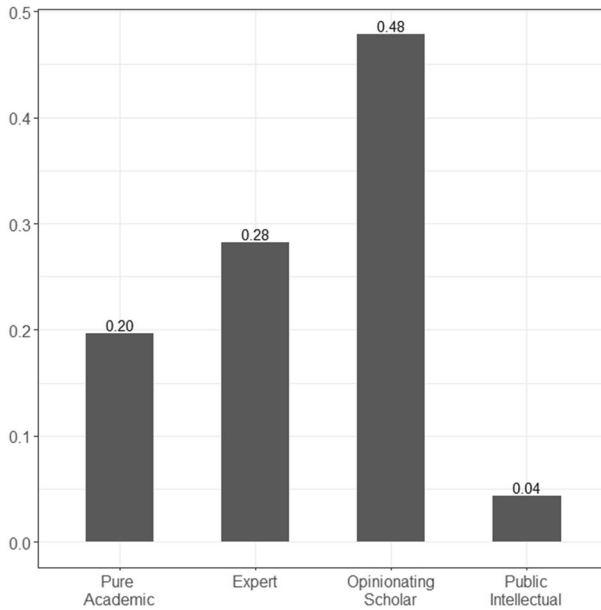


Fig. 3 Mean posterior probabilities of type assignment

covariates, i.e., the expected change in the probability of assignment to each advisory type associated with a change in each of the key explanatory variables.

The estimates reported in Fig. 4 provide only partial support for the hypothesis that early career academics are more likely to be pure academics than later career academics. On the one hand, in line with H1, we find that respondents aged 25 to 35—i.e., typically early career researchers—are 3.51 percentage points more likely to be assigned to the type of Pure Academics compared to older respondents. On the other hand, we do not find statistically significant differences in the probabilities of type assignment between tenured academics and researchers without a permanent position. This is somewhat surprising, and one explanation could be differences in the academic labour markets throughout Europe regarding the availability of tenured positions (there are, e.g., similar findings for Germany from Blum and Jungblut 2022).

Hypothesis H2 addressing gender effects in policy advice, by contrast, is backed by the analysis: the results in Fig. 4 underscore clear gender differences in policy advisory roles. Keeping everything else fixed, female academics are more than 6 percentage points more likely to be allocated to the Expert type than their male counterparts are. At the same time, the average probability that a female researcher is classified as Opinionating Scholar or Public Intellectual is 4.43 and 1.74 points lower, respectively, than for a male academic. Only for Pure Academics, gender does not seem to have a significant effect.

Moving to the relationship between impact regimes and advisory types, we observe that hypothesis H3a finds confirmation in the data. Soft signaling has no significant influence on respondents' probabilities of being allocated to any of the



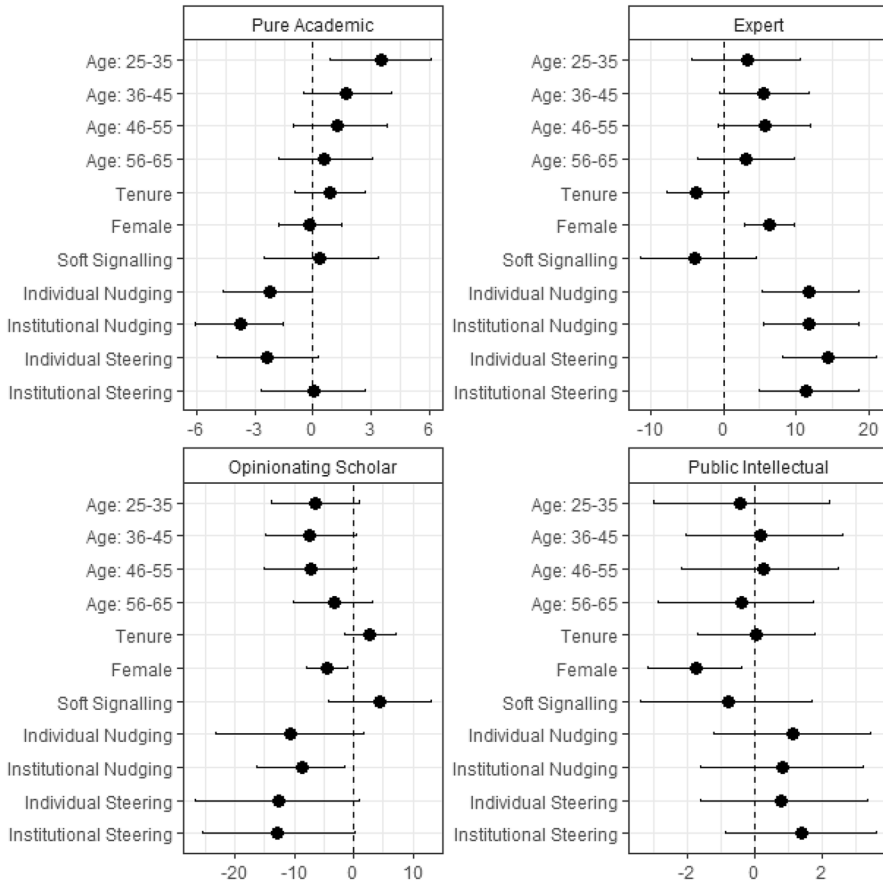


Fig. 4 Marginal effects of key explanatory variables on type assignment. *Note:* Circles represent the expected change in the probabilities of type assignment associated with a unit change in each covariate, in percentage points. Horizontal lines give the 95% highest posterior density intervals

four advisory types. That is, keeping everything else constant, the relative share of advisory types in higher education systems that adopt a soft signalling regime is statistically indistinguishable from other impact regimes.

The evidence for H3b-d is mixed. Consistent with hypotheses H3b and H3d, political scientists in the Individual Nudging, Individual Steering and Institutional Steering regimes are between 12 and 14 percentage more likely to belong to the Expert type than those in the “no regime” baseline. However, only Individual Nudging is significantly correlated with a decline in the prevalence of Pure Academics. Also contrary to our expectations, Institutional Nudging impact regimes are systematically associated with a reduction in the proportion of Pure Academics and Opinionating Scholars and with a concomitant increase in the proportion of Experts.



That none of these impact regimes have a significant impact on the propensity of political scientists to act as public intellectuals is hardly surprising. The Public Intellectual is a rare type in the academic political science community in Europe, with only about 4% of our respondents falling into this category. This might mean that the reasons driving engagement here might be more personality than institution related.

Besides testing our hypotheses on the possible driving or hindering factors of engagement, the analysis also highlights sizable disparities in the proportion of advisory types across sub-disciplines and areas of expertise. Figure 5 reveals that scholars working in the political science mainstream, public administration and public policy are between 12 and 27 percentage points less likely to be classified as Pure Academics than those in other sub-disciplines (e.g., international relations, security studies, or “other fields”). By contrast, the share of Experts is significantly higher among mainstream political scientists and public policy scholars than in other sub-disciplines, while Opinionating Scholars have a relatively larger presence among academics in mainstream political science and public administration.

As for the area of expertise, the share of Pure Academics is significantly lower among political scientists specializing in Civil Rights, Immigration, International Affairs and Public Administration/Reform than among those with other areas of expertise; Civil Rights, Immigration and International Affairs also have a relatively larger presence of Opinionating Scholars. Additionally, academics whose expertise lies in Civil Rights or Immigration are significantly less likely to be allocated to the type of Experts than those working in other areas. By contrast, the likelihood of belonging to the Expert type is systematically higher among scholars working on Public Administration and Reform. Interestingly, expertise in Civil Rights is associated with a 2.3 percentage points increase in the probability of being a Public Intellectual.

We observe no systematic cross-national variations in the share of advisory types beyond those associated with differences in impact regimes. This is illustrated in Fig. 6, which plots the residual country-specific effects on the probabilities of type assignment. In other words, once we account for differences in the nature of the impact agenda in each country, other contextual factors fail to significantly shape the distribution of advisory types.

Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis clearly shows that political scientists in Europe are active policy advisors, with four out of five engaging in some form of advisory activity. These results challenge common assumptions about “mainstream” academics having limited engagement with policy practitioners (Head 2015). Among those active in policy advice, most do not limit themselves to presenting only technical knowledge, but they also combine this with some form of normative assessments. However, Public Intellectuals are a rare phenomenon within European political science.

We found strong evidence that the policy advisory role performed by academics is shaped by their individual characteristics as well as by the environment in which they work (O’Meara 2003). Our estimates corroborate that scientists’ career stage



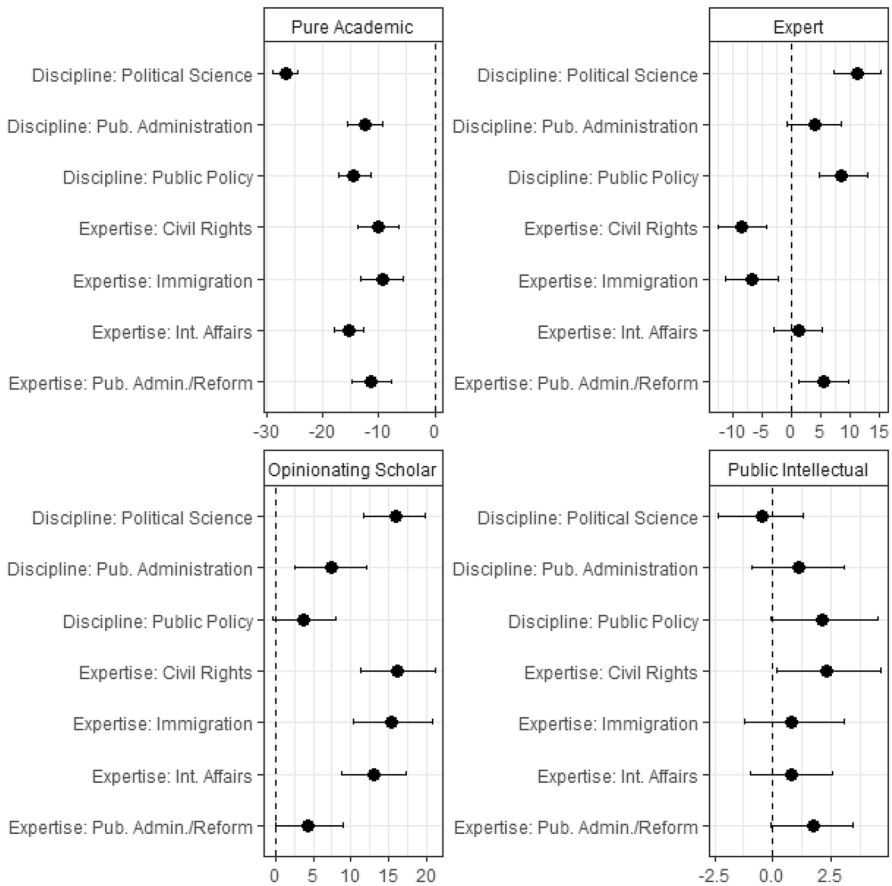


Fig. 5 Marginal effects of control variables on type assignment. *Note:* Circles represent the expected change in the probabilities of type assignment associated with a unit change in each covariate, in percentage points. Horizontal lines give the 95% highest posterior density intervals

(O'Meara 2003) and gender (Aguirre 2000) influence the type of policy advisory roles academics engage in. Younger political scientists are more likely to be among the Pure Academics. However, the type of employment (tenure or non-tenured) of academics does not seem to affect their advisory type. As for gender differences, our results indicated that women political scientists are less likely to be Public Intellectuals or Opinionating Scholars and more likely to be Experts. While these results highlight that political scientists' personal characteristics matter for their engagement in policy advice, they could be interpreted in two different but not mutually exclusive ways. On the one hand, our findings could signal that it is easier for older and male political scientists to engage in policy advising because they are more secure in their professional positions and do not need to balance this type of activity with potentially competing tasks that have a greater importance for their careers. On the other hand, older and male political scientists may find it easier to



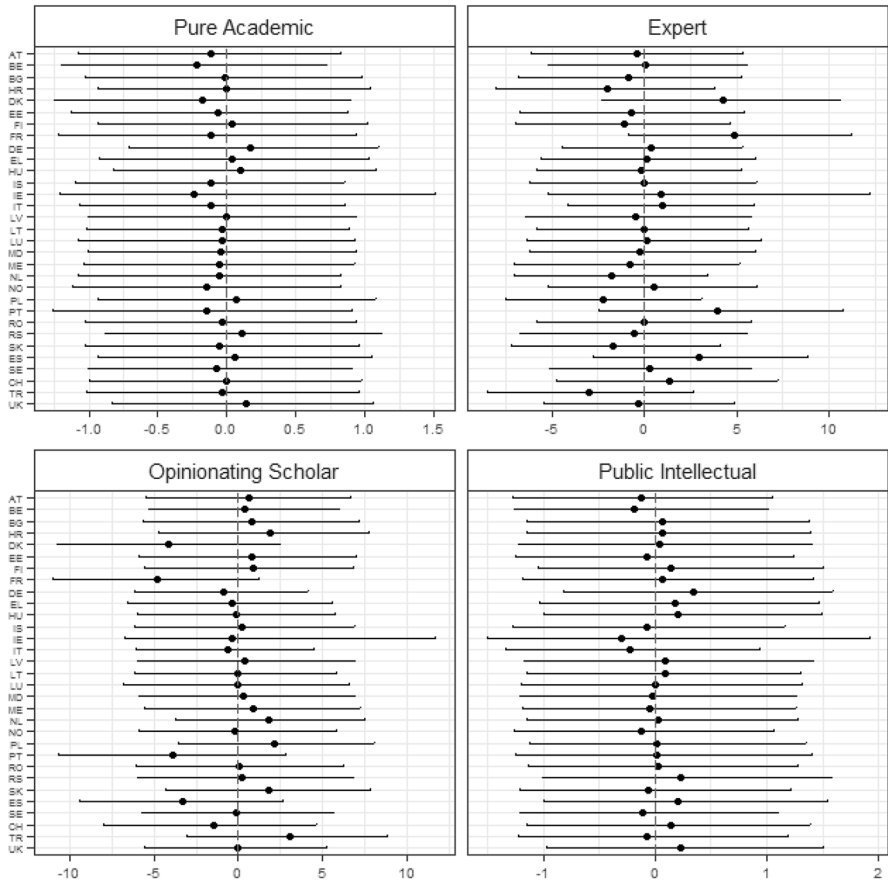


Fig. 6 Unobserved country-specific differences in type assignment. *Note:* The figure plots the impact of unobserved country characteristics on the probabilities that respondents are allocated to the different advisory types. Circles represent point estimates (posterior means); horizontal lines give the 95% highest posterior density intervals

act as policy advisors simply because they have more chances of doing so, as biases of those demanding advice may favor them.

Besides personal characteristics, we also found that contextual factors matter. The type of impact regime has significant influence on the likelihood that scholars from that country belong to a specific advisory type. In countries that implement incentive systems that promote “engagement” as a core function of higher education institutions, political scientists are more likely to be Experts and less likely to be Pure Academics than in countries with no impact regimes. By contrast, soft signalling impact regimes have no systematic influence on the distribution of advisory types. We also found no significant cross-country differences in the relative dominance of advisory types after controlling for the type of impact regime. Therefore, our results support earlier arguments that highlight that national impact



regimes have a direct effect on advisory practices through their encouragement of certain types of activities that are rewarded through the system (Bandola-Gill 2023). These results clearly show that political scientists are not only driven by personal characteristics when engaging in policy advice, but also that the context in which they work matters, an argument that previously has been made in comparing the US and Western Europe (Wilensky 1997).

Finally, our estimates indicate that the specialization of political scientists also plays a role for their involvement in policy advice. Scholars working on areas such as immigration or civil rights are less likely to be classified as Experts and more likely to be Opinionating Scholars combining factual knowledge with normative assessments. These either could be indications for specific norms regarding policy advisory work in certain research communities or indicate that research in these areas is inherently more normative.

Overall, our analysis shows that European political scientists are active in providing policy advice, and that they do so in different forms. Our results highlight that whether and how political scientists in Europe engage in policy advice is the product of interaction of individual and contextual factors. Altogether, though, it is important to underline—especially at a time of heated debates about the societal relevance of academic research—that most political scientists in Europe are far away from being “ivory tower academics,” and instead fulfil a wider societal role by actively engaging in advisory work (see also Hendrix et al. 2023).

Although our study provides a first detailed assessment of the policy advisory work of European political scientists, it also exhibits some limitations. First, we only study the supply-side of policy advice. The ability of political scientists to provide advice obviously depends not only on their own willingness but also on the openness of public or private parties to receive their advice. Our survey did not gather information on the demand-side—i.e., politicians, administrative organizations, NGOs, or businesses. Moreover, we do not have any data on the impact of the provided advice but rely on self-reported patterns of activity. Future studies may analyze the interplay between the supply- and demand-side of policy advice and focus more on the impact of provided advice to uncover the dynamics behind this relationship and potential selection factors regarding the uptake of provided information (see e.g., Migone et al. 2022).

A second limitation of our study is that it is exclusively focused on political science. While there is prior research regarding policy advisory work from other disciplines (see e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2013; Christensen 2017), there is only limited comparative knowledge. Given that disciplines differ in the nature of the knowledge they produce, one could expect that the difference, for example, between providing applied or fundamental science is relevant for policy advisory dynamics between providers and recipients. Thus, more comparative studies across disciplines would be a valuable addition.

Finally, our study focused on a range of policy advisory activities, but there are also other activities that academics may embark on that arguably are in a grey area between media presence and provision of policy advice. Future studies should therefore also have a closer look into the link between outreach to and visibility in media and the provision of policy advice.



Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-023-00440-x>.

Data availability The dataset is available online through GESIS: <https://doi.org/10.7802/2564>

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