Media Attention and the Demise of Agency Independence: Evidence from a Mass Administrative Reorganization in Britain

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Abstract: When administrative agencies are terminated, do they quietly fade from public view? On the one hand, the terminated agencies may have weak issue networks and agency reputations allowing them to lose public salience. On the other hand, strong issue networks and agency reputations may mean that termination increases attention to the agencies, making the government pay the cost of public attention generated by the actors within the issue networks. We assess these competing claims by using a unique dataset from a recent mass reorganization of independent agencies in Britain as well as data capturing media attention to agencies in major national newspapers. Using a difference-in-differences approach, we find that the agencies subject to termination experience reductions in the number of media coverage in major newspapers, disappearing from public view during the post-decision reform period.

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Stimulating an important literature in administrative and executive politics, Kaufman (1976) asked, "are government organizations immortal?" The answer for U.S. agencies (Lewis 2002; 2004; Carpenter and Lewis 2004) and the programs administered by them (Berry, Burden, and Howell 2010) as well as for agencies in other countries (e.g., Park 2013; James et al. 2015) has been that they are not. While some scholars view agency termination as the "ultimate act of political control" (Carpenter and Lewis 2004, p. 202), we argue that it may be only the penultimate act of a political drama. Do agencies slated for termination see a drop-off in media coverage, or do their public reputations generate media salience even after they are eliminated? We set our analysis in a recent mass reorganization of British independent agencies. During these reforms, the government made deliberate choices about which agencies to retain as they are or to structurally alter or eliminate altogether; these choices have consequences for the government's democratic accountability in a wide variety of policymaking domains (Bertelli and Sinclair 2015).

Regardless of the specific details of the government's choices, these decisions did rescind some aspect of the independent agencies' prior relationship to the broader administrative state. An agency's reputation, though, can survive the termination decision, keeping the public perception of its function and purpose, as well as the objectives of its issue networks, alive as a potentially salient concern in the subsequent general election. We focus on the immediate and relevant political aftermath of the termination decision as agencies expire; termination, while dramatic (as noted in Carpenter and Lewis 2004), is not immediate. A doomed agency, even if nominally open for some period of time, or continuing in some other reformed fashion, may no longer provide the same benefits to interest groups, the government, and its own employees. While it is clear that over substantially longer periods of time that the reputation would

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eventually decay, the question at hand here is whether that decay happens before the next election cycle even begins in earnest. One could easily imagine agencies going "out with a bang," rallying interest groups and allies to plague the government post-termination.[1]

The literature on independent agencies often focuses on the government's choice, treating elected politicians as principals and administrative agencies as their agents. Studies of agency termination (Lewis 2002; 2004; Carpenter and Lewis 2004; Park 2013) often employ duration models, an approach that treats termination as a "cleanly observed" binary outcome (Carpenter and Lewis 2004) and test hypotheses about when agencies face the greatest risk of termination. Other recent scholarship challenges the binary treatment of termination from an accountability perspective and focuses on the role of previous media coverage on the decision of the government (Bertelli and Sinclair 2015). A number of studies of independent agencies present notions of the value agencies produce for the politicians who create them—expertise (Gailmard and Patty 2013), neutral competence (Huber 2007), and reputation (Carpenter 2010; Maor 2010; 2011). Reputation is "a set of symbolic beliefs about the unique or separable capacities, roles, and obligations of an organization, where these beliefs are embedded in audience networks" (for Carpenter 2010, p. 45).

Building on this reputational perspective, we argue that agencies with strong networks can increase their media profile, providing greater public information about their reputation to the voting public that can be used in retrospective evaluations of the government. An issue network represents any combination of outside lobbying organizations, private companies,

[1] According to our definition, 71 of 159 agencies are terminated. Only 16 agencies had completed the process of their transition by 2013, the last year in our sample. A skeptic of grouping these types together might expect the agencies which actually pass out of existence to have different average news coverage than the nominally terminated (but not yet transitioned) agencies. A variance test between the two groups fails to reject the null hypothesis that these groups receive similar newspaper coverage ($p=0.51$). A test between the 71 terminated and the 88 retained agencies (during the reform period) rejects the null hypothesis and finds a meaningful difference in coverage ($p<0.01$).

citizens' groups, political organizations, and other agencies within the government who benefit in some way from agency action.[2] If an agency has strong network and reputation, eliminating the agency may increase public attention to the agency. Such reputational stickiness may make the termination of an agency less clearly observable than the literature suggests. Alternatively, if networks are weak and media attention decreases with termination decisions, agency reputations do not survive and the government is better able to use termination as an act of political control. Our argument and measures concern media *salience* rather than *sentiment*, as different segments of the electorate will interpret diverse pieces of information according to their own predilections, but cannot react to the absence of information about an agency.

To test these competing claims, we use a difference-in-differences statistical framework to assess the impact of the treatment, alteration imposed by the government, on media coverage during the reform period. After the 2010 general election, the new coalition government agreed to a policy of reforming government operations – dubbed the "bonfire of the quangos," independent agencies officially called Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) that work at arm's length from the ministers. Since we aim to assess the political rather than organizational endurance of the agencies, our definition of termination matches largely with what the government claimed: any reform or alteration for which it could claim credit.[3] We collected counts of stories from major British newspapers for all 159 executive NDPBs from 2005-2013, a type of NDPBs that formulate and implement policy, and which have constituencies interested in

[2] Heclo (1978) defines issue network as "a shared-knowledge group having to do with some aspect (or, as defined by the network, some problem) of public policy" (citation from the reprint in Stillman (ed.) 2010, p. 415). In addition, Benson (1982, p. 148) defines a policy network as "a cluster or complex of organizations connected to each other by resource dependencies and distinguished from other clusters or complexes by breaks in the structure of resource dependencies" (cited in Rhodes 1990, p. 304).

[3] Compare the definition used in Lewis (2002, p. 92, emphasis added): "…eliminated whole with all of its functions or if it has had a name change, location change, and change of function." Our definition is more stringent because it does not consider mere name or location changes as terminations, and demands less reliance on Lewis's (2002, p. 92) further argument that an agency "has lost its organizational identity, but its personnel and some of its functions persist."

their fates and affected by their reputations. Our results indicate that terminated agencies receive less news coverage in the reform period in which they faced termination. Most of these agencies did not go out with a bang, even if a handful did receive national press attention, but rather, with a whimper. Our evidence is thus consistent with terminating agencies as a political control strategy.

In the next section, we review the literature on agency termination and motivate our hypotheses. We then describe the data collection and data structure for the model we use in this paper. Subsequently, we present three sets of results: our main difference-in-differences estimates, a variety of alternative specifications to establish the robustness of our finding of reduced coverage, and a source-specific model that further illustrates our finding across the major newspapers we study. We conclude with a discussion highlighting the manner in which our results add nuance to important aspects of governance and bureaucratic politics and provide a detailed illustration of one agency, the UK Film Council.

The Setting

Our analysis leverages a *period of mass reorganization*, which begins with the competition among political parties during the 2010 general election campaign. In contrast to the incumbent Labour Party, which had previously raised the issue of reorganizing the overall menu of independent agencies known as NDPBs, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats both emphasized the need for mass reorganization during the campaign. A period of mass reorganization, then, is a period in which the hazard of reorganization for all NDPBs is heightened. Following the election in May 2010, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government was formed. In October 2010, the government issued a comprehensive

preliminary report on all NDPBs at the national level wherein each NDPB received a decision on to what extent it would be reformed. Some were chosen to be retained while others were slated for alteration, loss of independence, or functional abolition—all of which are considered forms of termination in the extant literature (Park 2013, p. 416). The report was updated in December 2011 to include any progress or change made since the initial decisions. In December 2011, the Public Bodies Act received royal assent, giving cabinet ministers the authority to reorganize the sponsoring agencies. Many of the agencies nominally slated for termination at this time were not acted upon until much later, due to the need for ministers to draft detailed proposals, consult constituent groups, and seek parliamentary approval. Thus, the period of reorganization that we examine extends to the end of 2013, the most recent full year available and a time by which most agency dispositions were already considered final.

Agency Termination and The Media

We extend the Carpenter and Lewis (2004) perspective on agency termination. They correctly identify termination as a meaningful and powerful act of political control, the "ultimate act." Nevertheless, the principal, the government, itself will go on to face the electorate with some level of accountability for performance —responsibility is more diffuse in separation-of-powers systems and more concentrated in high accountability systems like the United Kingdom. During the period of reorganization, the government may administratively control the agency, however, it does not control the use of the agency's reputation in the media. If an agency has strong networks that create public reputation, the act of termination may not decrease or diminish the agency's reputation, but, instead, may heighten public attention to the agency. Such

reputational stickiness may make agency termination less clearly observable than the literature suggests.

As discussed before, agencies provide a host of benefits to the government such as expertise (Gailmard and Patty 2013) and neutral competence (Huber 2007). However, it is the agency's networks and public reputation (Carpenter 2001; 2010; Maor 2010; 2011) that undergird our present inquiry. For instance, the government may extinguish the flow of independent expertise—or increase political control over a policymaking task—from an agency through termination, but has less ability to eliminate the effect of its reputation in that way. Whereas prior studies of the interaction between public salience and bureaucratic politics have focused on the salience of policy issues (Koop 2011), we measure the media salience of agency itself as a proxy for its reputation. Reputation is a mechanism that forms the "tenuous link" between "general approval" of the government and "specific bureau[s]"; while it is hard to know precisely how voters will react to specific pieces of information available in the press, it is possible to measure the extent agencies are mentioned through one important source of voter information, print media (Downs 1964, p. 25; 1967).

Maor (2010) defines organizational reputation as "a set of symbolic beliefs held by audience networks about the actual performance of an organization, as well as its capacities, roles, and obligations to accomplish its primary organizational mission (Maor 2010, p. 134). Keeping a good reputation is important as it closely relates to legitimacy and autonomy (Maor 2007; Carpenter 2011; Carpenter and Krause 2011) and reputation can influence media coverage (Maor 2011; Maor et al. 2013). In our specific context, we care most about whether agency reputation and network can affect the public salience of agencies, which may work against the political decisions of the government.

Our notion of issue or policy networks allows for a broad definition of which actors might be included in those networks. In the literature, the American and the British perspectives differ to some extent (Rhodes 1990; Thatcher 1998; Jordan 1990; Borzel 1998). In the US, the focus is on the concept of issue network (Heclo 1978) and the iron triangle. The British literature focuses on the concept of policy community (Rhodes 1986; 1990; Marsh and Rhodes 1992), which developed in contrast to the traditional connection between manifesto programs and parliamentary legislation—the program-to-policy connection (Thatcher 1998, p. 392). While policy communities are highly integrated, stable across time, and limited in membership, issue networks have larger numbers of participants and are less stable in terms of participants, continuity, commitment, and interdependence (Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Thatcher 1998). In the UK, the policymaking arena is fragmented into subsystems with multiple policy networks that vary in their degree of strength and integration between various actors and organizations inside and outside of government (Richardson and Jordan 1979; Richardson 2000; Rhodes 1986; 1990; Gains 2003). Regardless of the academic tradition employed, though, there seems to be widespread agreement that agencies form constituent interest groups in all types of governing systems.

While the logic of iron triangles (e.g., Heclo 1977) is present in the spirit of Kaufman's (1976) argument, most of the arguments for agency immortality involved established constituencies obtaining specific benefits. Downs (1964, p. 25) observes that governments take cues from "major clients" of an agency to assess its value; those same major clients could be expected to communicate value to voters though the media as well (as we discuss in the context of the UK Film Council in the conclusion). An agency slated for termination, while it may have some interest in strategically defending itself against the hazard of closure (cf. Skelcher and

Dommett forthcoming; O'Toole and Meier 2004), may not be able to defend itself in an environment in which government asks "what have you done for me lately?" Downs' argument can work to the other end here as well: agencies experience a "sudden decline in relative importance" will experience talent and personnel loss as the "climbers" who seek to enhance their own stature "depart for greener pastures" (1964, p. 22). This loss of human capital provides a theory for why agencies selected for termination would experience a decline in coverage before the actual final date of operation, lowering their value to issue networks. Our argument, in essence, conceives of two types of agencies in terms of their networks and reputations. If the government chooses to terminate an agency with a strong network and reputation, it must pay the cost of public attention generated by its actors. In contrast, if an agency's network and reputation are weak, public salience wanes because the agency cannot sustain or increase public attention, a situation that worsens after the termination announcement.[4] An agency slated for termination may not be able to provide sufficient services in its moribund state to activate networks. Without networks actively sustaining its reputation, the agency's public salience declines and the organization loses its political relevance as well.

For the government, it would be beneficial to dramatically reduce or eliminate public attention to the agencies slated for termination. Such an achievement allows the government to claim credit for the mass reorganization without paying agency-specific costs associated with heightened media scrutiny to individual agencies. Sustained media coverage of a terminated agency challenges elite control over the storyline because coverage implies incomplete government control over the agency's public reputation. Contrasts between agency reputations sustained by media elites and government elite decisions can be damaging in subsequent

[4] Non-random agency selection is not a problem for inference here as long as the difference-in-differences assumptions are plausible. The coverage of the terminated agencies would have moved in parallel with the coverage of the unterminated agencies, absent termination.

elections. Zaller (1992) argued that prospective voters tend to follow elite opinion of their own party except when they are presented with conflicting views. In the absence of ongoing reminders about the specific government decisions and conflicts between different groups of elites, voters are likely to base their retrospective evaluations of the government on their own experience with that policy or government performance more generally (Fiorina 1981). For that reason, we expect that the government will contemplate media coverage and conflict and measure the outcomes of a process in which both the government and the agency personnel have already tried to optimize their payoffs. We empirically assess the claim that termination can be cleanly observed and the implication that a termination decision ends the political story.

Our hypotheses can be stated as follows.

H0: **Termination has no effect on media attention:** Agencies selected by the government for termination do not experience an observable change in the quantity of news coverage during the period of reorganization.

H1: **Termination decreases media attention:** Agencies selected by the government for termination receive less attention during the reform period.

H1A: **Termination increases media attention:** Agencies selected by the government for termination receive more attention during the reform period.

We expect in H1 that terminated agencies to have weaker networks and reputations and fade from view during the reform period relative to the null hypothesis H0. Alternatively, in H1A, we offer a claim to support the opposite: termination generates an increase in media attention sustained by strong reputation and issue network. We deploy a unique dataset to assess these hypotheses and describe it in the subsequent section.

Data

For all 159 executive NDPBs at the national level, we collected newspaper counts using keyword searches in the Factiva Database files for major British newspapers in order to obtain annual number of mentions that an agency receives in each newspaper.[5] The newspapers included: the *Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday, Daily Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph*, *Times, Sunday Times, Financial Times, Guardian, Independent, Independent on Sunday,* and *Observer*. We focus on salience because it reflects ongoing conflict that is generated by a sustained agency reputation. Hence, our data are collected annually and aggregated across newspapers to get total counts for each year for the pre-reform period (2006-2009) and for the period of mass reorganization (2010-2013) for the treatment period in our preferred specification. Because an agency reputation is the organization's external projection, writes Carpenter (2010, p. 51), "[t]he symbols that compose this projection…a leader, a compelling story of origins and growth, a scandal" develop over time, and in our case, political time. For this reason, we choose a four-year period during the prior Labour government under Gordon Brown as the pre-reform period of media attention for the agencies in our sample.[6] In a series of alternative specifications, we examine attention by individual newspapers as well as different time spans to capture the period of reorganization. For the models presented in the paper, we employ logarithms of the media counts to mitigate statistical problems caused by distributions with a few large outliers.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

[5] We deliberately focus on *executive* NDPBs, which "carry out a wide range of administrative, commercial, executive and regulatory or technical functions" (Cabinet Office 2012, p. 15). Of the roughly 400 agencies considered for reform during this time, the bulk or agencies were either *executive* or *advisory*. Executive NDPBs are typically set up by statute, have their own staff (an average of 96 FTE staff in our dataset), and are accountable to their sponsor departments for their budget (p. 16). Advisory NDPBs are very different type of agencies that "provide independent, expert advice to ministers on an ongoing basis" and they are typically administrative constructions with no staff or expenditure independent of their sponsor departments (p. 18). The types of agencies appropriate to the scope of our argument must do more than just provide advice to the government.

[6] This period begins in 2006 to avoid attention generated during the 2005 general election campaign. Our intent is to capture attention during a period of political time in which the prior Labour government was in power such that reputations are most salient for the change in government that began the period of mass reorganization in 2010. We vary this period in the models shown in Table 3 and the results using the 2010-2013 definition of the period of mass reorganization are robust.

We divide our media measures into two periods: before and after the formation of the coalition government and the policy of agency reform. The main model uses a balanced time period, calculating media coverage between 2006-2009 and then 2010-2013.[7] The 2010-2013 window covers the design and implementation of most of the reform. These time periods form our state variable, where S=1 in the coalition government period in which the termination decision issued for all treated agencies would be implemented for many. Whether the agency faced termination, defined as being abolished, integrated into a cabinet department, or structurally reformed, or was retained defines the treated variable, where T=1 if the agency was terminated in S=1. As we are using a difference-in-differences approach, T=1 even when S=0. In this way, we can examine whether treated agencies received different levels of media coverage before receiving the judgment of the new government during the period of mass reorganization.

The difference-in-differences coefficient is the parameter estimated for the interaction between S=1 and T=1. Note that this does not require that the level of media coverage remain the same, although it may, and our models control for the amount of coverage in the previous state. Our statistical model can be written as follows.

$$\text{News Coverage} = b_0 + b_1T + b_2S + b_3(T \times S) + \gamma X + \varepsilon$$

We also include a number of control variables. The following measure organizational characteristics and control for potentially influential variation in agency structures:

- Transparency is measured by an indicator of whether the agency holds public meetings or provides public minutes.

[7] Robustness checks presented in Table 3 include shifting the time intervals; the results are broadly consistent.

- We include an indicator for whether the agency's appointments are regulated by the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA), which limits patronage opportunities by overseeing the appointment process.
- Agency size is proxied by three separate measures: (1) the logarithm of the number of full-time employees (FTE) (James, Petrovsky, Moseley, and Boyne 2015); (2) a dichotomous variable indicating no full-time employees; and (3) the salary (in British Pounds Sterling) of the chief executive/secretary of the agency.
- To capture differences in government partisanship at the founding of the agency, we include a variable to indicate if the agency had been created in the New Labour era (1997-2010) as a measure of potential political conflict (Lewis 2004).

Further controls are included to clarify the effect of media salience. We include the proportion of the NDPB's coverage that appears in the *Daily Mail*. Existing literature on British media supports the view that the *Daily Mail* is typically perceived as a popular, right-leaning tabloid newspaper (Curran et al. 2009; Boykoff 2008). While it has a large readership—large, even among readers with a high interest in the 2010 election (Bertelli and Sinclair forthcoming)—extensive coverage in the *Daily Mail* reflects controversy rather than the operation of issue networks as we intend to capture (Bertelli and Sinclair forthcoming). The *Daily Mail* tends to cover particular types of political stories, as exemplified by the 2011 headline "Axe hovers over Quango Queen: Dame Suzi Leather accused of bias at Charity Commission."[8] Hence, we use this percentage for the years in which the government made the bulk of its reform choices, 2010-2011, as a way to capture the coverage type.

[8] Shipman, T. 2011. "Axe hovers over Quango Queen: Dame Suzi Leather accused of bias at Charity Commission." *The Daily Mail*, 28 January. Available online at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1351554/Axe-hovers-Quango-Queen-Dame-Suzi-Leather-accused-bias-Charity-Commission.html (last accessed 07/15/14). Most NDPBs get most of their coverage in other news outlets (see Table 1).

Our dependent variable is the number of stories by agency in each state. We report robust standard errors clustered by agency, which is the repeated observation in our dataset.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

We also examine our hypotheses in models using the logarithm of counts of mentions in each newspaper in each period. To capture partisan audience effects (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006), we include the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent*, and the *Daily Mail*. In October 2010 the *Guardian* published the names of the NDPBs under consideration for termination, such as the Youth Justice Board which is included in our data. The *Guardian* wrote: "The Youth Justice Board, set up by [then Home Secretary] Jack Straw to oversee crime prevention and custody of under 18s, is to be abolished. The Women's National Commission is to be abolished and its functions transferred to the Government Equalities Office."[9]

In comparison to the *Guardian* (Labour) and the *Daily Telegraph* (Conservatives), there is no clear partisan slant in the *Daily Mail* and the *Independent*, the *Daily Mail*'s focus on scandal and the *Independent*'s clashing readership of Liberal Democrats (minority coalition partner with the Conservatives) and Labour (the opposition). [10] Hence, we do not expect to see the manifestation of issue networks in the *Daily Mail* and the *Independent*, making them unlikely to reveal our predictions.

Results

[9] Curtis, P. 2010. "Government scraps 192 quangos." *The Guardian*. 14 October. Available online at: http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/oct/14/government-to-reveal-which-quangos-will-be-scrapped (last accessed 07/15/14).

[10] Bertelli and Sinclair (forthcoming) use data from the British Election Study (BES) to obtain a sense of the readership for this period. The *Independent* obtains a relatively large share of its readership from the Liberal Democrats, although it is also popular with the Labour (readers in about equal proportions from both parties). In this case, partisan interests may not easily coexist since the Liberal Democrats joined the Conservatives to form the coalition government. The *Guardian*, on the other hand, has about three times as many Labour readers as Liberal Democrat readers.

The result of our main model is consistent with hypothesis H1: terminated agencies do indeed fade from public view. Since the main model includes a panel balanced across years and neither the state nor time variables are statistically significant, we interpret this result as the absence of pre-coalition government differences between the terminated and the retained agencies as well as the absence of a change in news coverage between the two periods. This suggests that aggregate news space devoted to these types of agencies does not change despite the implementation of a new policy. Nevertheless, it shifts, as the interaction variable has a negative and significant coefficient in this model.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

We find further that agencies subject to OCPA oversight attract less media attention and larger organizations, as measured by number of employees, garner more of it. These variables are not interacted with the treatment, so the effects apply across both periods. Neither result is surprising—the OCPA variable may proxy for a number of other agency-level characteristics related to issue networks.[11] In particular, the effect on agency size (measured through FTE) helps to further control for heterogeneity in agency structures. For instance, the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (9,571 FTE, integrated into its department) and the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission (no FTE, retained in its pre-reform structure) are operating on a very different scale.[12] Other control variables are not statistically significant.[13]

Our measure of salience in the *Daily Mail* is also quite revealing. Agencies mentioned in the *Daily Mail* are likely to receive greater overall media coverage, suggesting that coverage in

[11] In some sense, this may be surprising – but we are not making a causal claim about OCPA oversight. Quite the reverse, in fact: a reasonable person would apply such oversight to an agency with a large pool of potential persons interested in the agency, a sensible proxy for the size of the audience network.
[12] Mean FTE is about twice for retained as terminated agencies in the dataset (608 as against 339, p=0.07).
[13] Bertelli and Sinclair (2015) find that some of these predict selection for termination. Consequently, one might interpret our results as an element of the coalition's strategy of mass reorganization that is *not* captured by the selection mechanism for treatment.

the *Daily Mail* is more likely to indicate scandals or controversies that other papers will cover as well. Controlling for high levels of attention from the *Daily Mail* helps to demonstrate that our results are about the salience of agencies related to agency reputations and networks. We expect issue networks and agency reputations to operate more through the partisan newspapers more focused on policy, particularly through outlets easily and cleanly identified with major political parties competing in general elections.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

In the newspaper-specific models of Table 2, we find that the results hold with the media outlets more identified with primary party competitors in the next 2015 general election, the *Telegraph* (Conservatives) and the *Guardian* (Labour). In contrast, we find no effect with the *Daily Mail* or the *Independent* for our difference-in-differences estimate, the newspapers for which we do not expect strong network and reputation effects. These findings should reinforce our assertions of partisan relevance exhibited in the main model.

Some of the other components are of substantive interest in the newspaper-specific models. In particular, the coefficient for the state variable, Coalition Era, has opposite signs and significance for the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*. This suggests that Conservative Party supporters received more news about the agencies during the coalition government's reform period while Labour Party supporters of the *Guardian* received less. Of course, our measure captures attention to specific agencies, rather than the overall policy of changing the structure of government.[14]

Agency termination can be a messy process. For additional confidence, we estimate a number of models using alternative definitions of the period of reorganization. The government

[14] For example, the *Guardian* could increase criticism of the government "bonfire" policy as a whole without naming specific agencies.

actively deliberated between 2010-2011 and sought to implement most of the reform plan during 2012-2013. Defining this interval improperly might influence the inference, although Table 3 reveals that our models are quite robust and this appears not to be the case. We test three alternative time specifications: using shortened pre-reform and periods of mass reorganization (2007-2009; 2010-2012), ignoring the election year and comparing the pre-election year to the period in which most of the decisions were made (2009; 2011), and a delayed window to compare the coalition period before and after the December 2011 announcement of the updated plan and parliamentary approval through the Public Bodies Act (2010-2011, 2012-2013). We also test two alternative models with additional variables. The first includes indicators for policy areas, using economic policy as the comparison category for domestic and international rights and security, social, and administrative policy.[15] The second model includes an indicator of whether an agency was sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS)—agencies sponsored by DCMS are structurally more likely to be in the media as their portfolio includes subjects explicitly oriented towards public view, such as the British Museum and the National Gallery.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The main hypothesized effect for the difference-in-differences approach holds across all five of these new models in Table 3. The terminated agencies get less coverage in the post-period, however defined. Controlling for policy areas, we find effects for security and social policy relative to economic policy; agencies in those areas received greater coverage overall.

[15] These indicators were formed by collapsing the detailed categories from the UK Policy Agendas Project (John, Bertelli, Jennings, and Bevan 2013). Economic Policy: Macroeconomics, Agriculture, Environment, Energy, Transportation, Community Development, Planning, Housing, Banking, Finance, Domestic Commerce, and Foreign Trade. Social Policy: Health, Labour and Employment, Education, and Social Welfare. Administrative Policy: Government Operations, Public Lands, Water Management, and Colonial and Territorial Issues. Rights and Security: Civil Rights, Minority Issues, Immigration, Civil Liberties, Law, Crime, Family Issues, Space, Science, Technology, Communications, Defence, International Affairs, and Foreign Aid.

We find the hypothesized result for the DCMS— agencies sponsored by the department do get more coverage. While including additional variables may provide some further context, these supplemental models are consistent of our primary finding of dissipating attention to terminated agencies.[16]

Conclusion

Much literature on agency termination focuses on the relationship between the government and the agency, and a great deal of this focuses on the American federal government. In some cases, agency personnel and officeholders have a symbiotic relationship, while in others, their relationship may be more oppositional; if the conflict increases to a sufficient level, the government can implement the "ultimate act of political control" and alter or destroy the agency (Carpenter and Lewis 2004, p. 202). Such events, especially in the American context that is the principal focus of this literature, are rare and consequently tend to be left out of discussions about the true ultimate act of political control in a democratic society: defeat at the polls. Media coverage of the government's decisions frames the subsequent electoral environment.

The electoral significance of the government's ability to alter the agency and lower its media salience can best be understood by a counterfactual. Suppose the opposite were true and we found instead compelling evidence for H1A—a positive and significant difference-in-differences estimate. In that event, the media would have focused attention on agencies already or soon to be structurally altered. The public, rather than merely seeing a government narrative

[16] We also estimate our models using a stricter definition for the treatment, namely, that an agency must lose its independence to be considered "terminated." These results are substantively the same. Our broader definition used for the main results should, if anything, work against finding statistically significant results since the reformed agencies do retain the capacity to provide some benefits for their support networks into the indefinite future.

about the broad program, would use the specific information provided about agencies and their functions to form less predictable evaluations. Specific groups of voters interested in one particular issue may then have different reasons to make retrospective judgments about government performance. Even a null finding would imply that agency reputations would linger, leaving behind reminders to specific groups about services that were not provided or had become politicized via the removal of independence.

Our findings are particularly important in the context of Westminster systems, essentially parliamentary systems with strong accountability relationships due to the absence of institutional veto players. In such systems, the very existence of independent agencies requires explanation. As in other studies of mass termination (Bertelli and Sinclair 2015; forthcoming), we see that the story is more compatible with blame shifting rather than solidifying commitments to extend beyond the tenure of a sitting government. Because the lack of institutional veto players means that the government can easily pass legislation to terminate these agencies (even across a wide variety of policy domains as in the 2011 Public Bodies Act), it is not a compelling argument that a government would create agencies to leave behind a legacy that subsequent governments would struggle to remove. The latter is the case in the United States, where institutional veto players with separated powers make such legislation far more difficult to enact (e.g., McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1989). In Westminster systems, the Coalition's reform program shows that an incumbent government can take a portfolio approach to push some policymaking domains away of government while taking responsibility for others (see Bertelli and John 2013a; 2013b).

We find that the altered agencies do see a reduction in coverage during the period of mass reorganization. This is all the more remarkable because alterations in fact lagged behind the announcements and some were not even fully implemented in the earlier parts of this period (see

appendix). Fifty years hence, we certainly expect to hear little of agencies terminated today. The effect we uncover is much more immediate. Our time frame includes a period of uncertainty before the electorate has endorsed (or rejected) government policies through a general election. Defining the period of reform in the time before the election gives this project its electoral relevance and tie to notions of democratic accountability.

Our findings provide some evidence that the public reputations of agencies are no more durable than the agencies themselves. In fact, in periods of mass administrative reorganization such as the one we study, both agencies and their reputations seem quite fragile. Of course, our finding should not be interpreted as suggesting that all agencies the government could terminate would experience reduced media salience. Instead, we provide evidence consistent with our argument that, by and large, the government picked targets with weak reputations and issue networks, providing a potential starting point for interesting future contributions to the literature.

We concede that the British mass reorganization context may not be readily generalizable to the American separation-of-powers context, where the theories on which the termination literature largely draws were developed. In that context, agency terminations are far more likely to be singular or smaller-scale events. Nonetheless, in our sample, agencies with strong networks and reputations also saw reduced coverage. What might seem an exception may well prove the rule: the UK Film Council (UKFC), an agency included in our dataset, helped to support popular films like *The King's Speech*, "the most successful British film ever."[17] The closure of the UKFC caused considerable controversy: even famous American actors like Clint Eastwood wrote to the government in protest and ensured that their protests appeared in opposition papers like the

[17] Pulver, A. and X. Brooks. 2011. "How The King's Speech has revived the British film industry: A favourite for Baftas and Oscars, the UK Film Council funded project was passed over by both Film4 and the BBC." *The Guardian*, February 11. Available online at: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/feb/11/the-kings-speech-british-film (last accessed 07/28/14).

Guardian.[18] The government terminated the agency regardless, preferring direct aid to the industry through the British Film Institute instead. From 2006 to 2009 the UKFC had 6.03 logged mentions in our data. From 2010 to 2013 it had 5.99. A year-by-year plot of the mentions, included in the appendix, shows the rapid decline: despite heightened interest surrounding the film and the termination in 2010 and 2011, with 249 total mentions in 2010, by 2013 our database only included 15 total mentions of the UKFC compared to 83 in 2005. Even in this high profile case, the agency displayed less reputational stickiness, which supports our general finding that agency reputations are not interfering with the political control impulse of political termination decisions.

[18] Shoard, C. 2010. "Clint Eastwood joins fight to save UK Film Council: Oscar-winning actor and director writes George Osborne in protest at planned closure of UK Film Council." *The Guardian*, August 9. Available online at: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/aug/09/clint-eastwood-film-council (last accessed 07/28/14).

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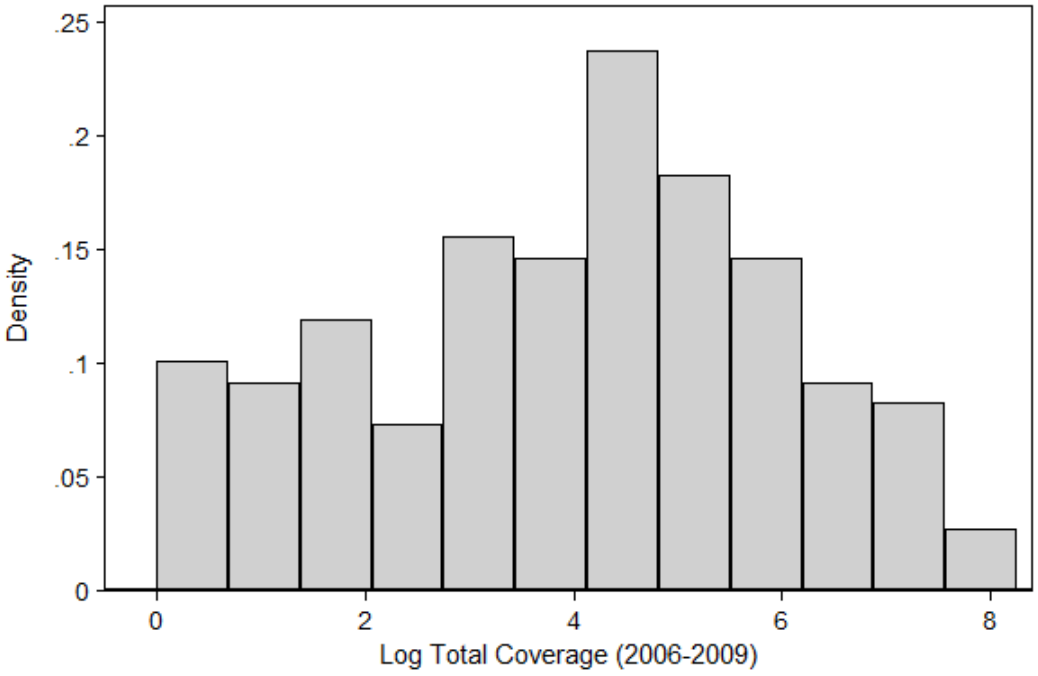
Figure 1: Distribution of Log Total Coverage in Pre-Treatment Period (2006-2009)



Distribution of Log Total Coverage in Treatment Period (2010-2013)

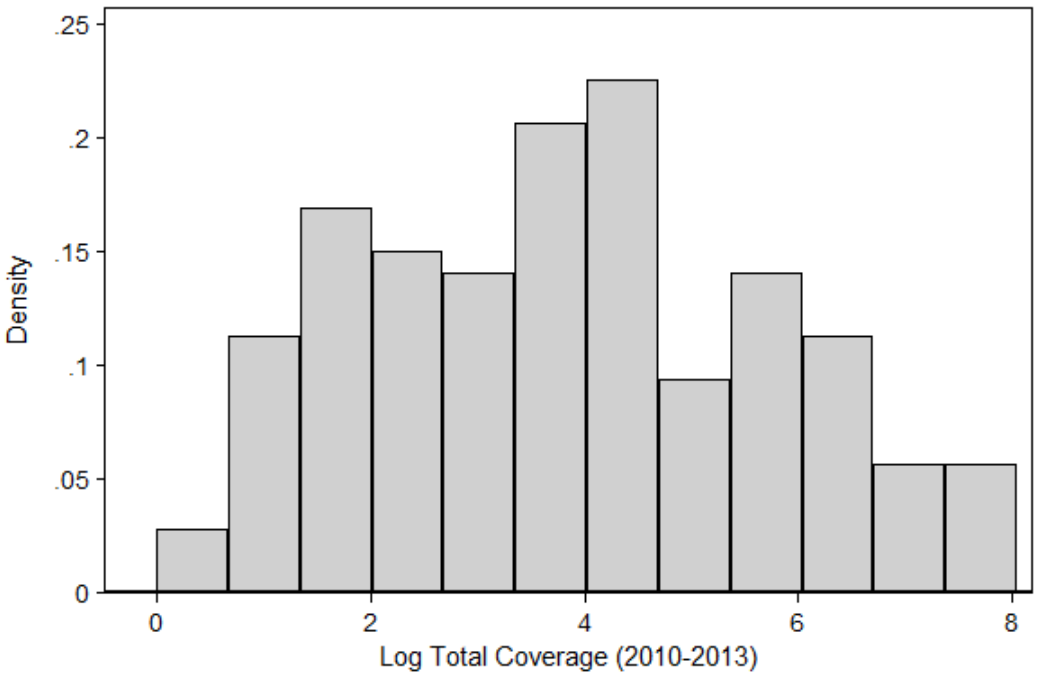


Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Main Model. Binary variables are indicated by †. The *Daily Mail* variable represents the percentage of coverage in 2010-2011 that each agency received in the *Daily Mail* and it equals zero if the agency had no coverage. The upper section of this table describes the main independent variables. The lower section reports a summary of the dependent variable, the mean log number of stories, for each pair of State and Treatment.

Variable	Retained (Not Treated)	Altered (Treated)
Mean % Stories in *Daily Mail* (2010-11)	0.05	0.07
Mean Public Meetings/Minutes†	0.64	0.56
Mean OCPA Oversight†	0.53	0.68
Annual Chair or (if missing) CEO Pay	39,560	41,498
Log (Full Time Employees)	4.58	3.90
Mean Indicator for No Full Time Emp.†	0.16	0.13
Log Total Coverage	T=0	T=1
S = 0 (2006-2009)	4.18	3.74
S = 1 (2010-2013)	4.23	3.37
N	88	71

Figure 2: Results of the Main Model. This model employs equal length periods (2006-2009, 2010-2013) with 318 observations in 159 clusters. The difference-in-differences estimate is the coefficient on the interaction between Treated and Coalition Era. The figure displays the 95% confidence interval around the estimate of the first difference (for continuous variables, a change from 1 standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above; for dummy variables a change from 0 to 1 with other characteristics at their median values); variables interpreted as statistically significant do not have a confidence interval which includes zero. $R^2 = 0.25$.

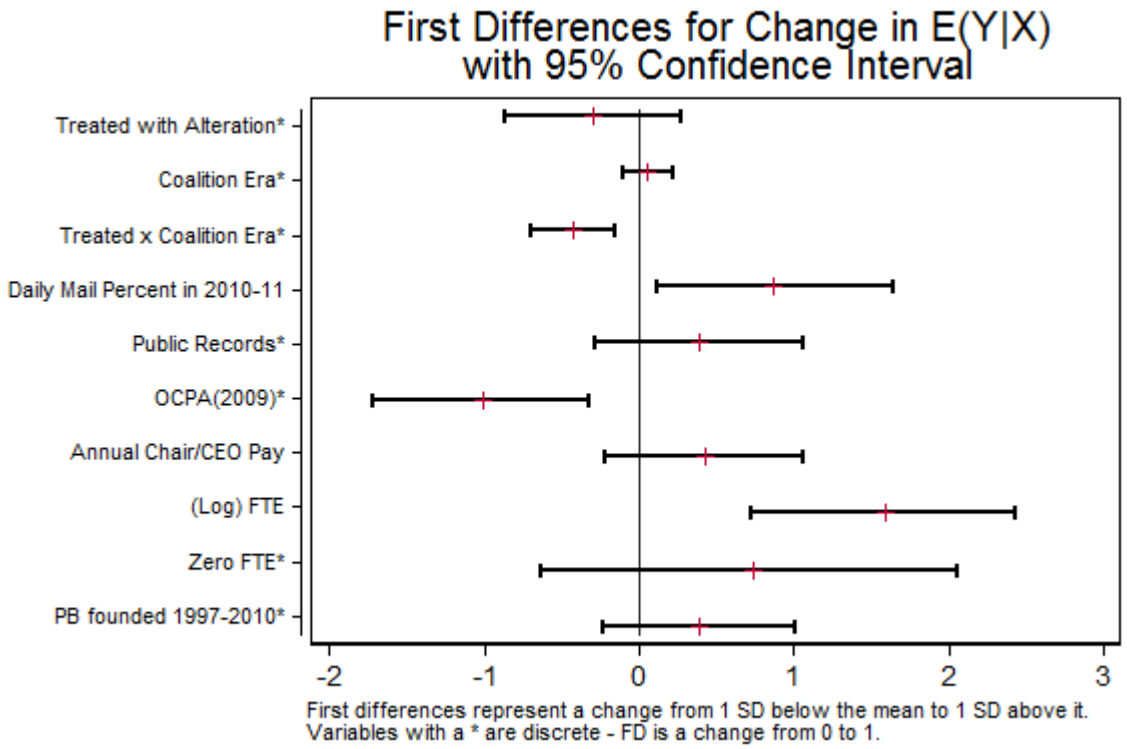


Table 2: Newspaper-Specific Models. Dependent Variable is the Log Number of Mentions (2006-2009, 2010-2013). Asterisks indicate statistical significance at the 0.05 level. Each model has 318 observations in 159 agency clusters. This table reports the coefficients from each linear model.

	Guardian		*Daily Telegraph*		*Independent*		*Daily Mail*	
Variable	Coef.	T	Coef.	T	Coef.	T	Coef.	T
Treated with Alteration	-0.07	-0.23	-0.10	-0.37	-0.23	-0.87	-0.02	-0.09
Coalition Era	-0.37*	-4.32	0.49*	5.69	0.07	0.87	0.06	0.77
Treated x Coalition Era	-0.47*	-3.18	-0.34*	-2.50	0.00	0.01	-0.15	-1.20
Public Records	0.46	1.43	0.23	0.76	0.37	1.34	0.30	1.22
OCPA (2009)	-0.65*	-2.09	-0.76*	-2.70	-0.75*	-2.84	-0.60*	-2.48
Annual Chair/CEO Pay	0.00	1.05	0.00	1.49	0.00	0.78	0.00	1.51
(Log) FTE	0.34*	3.80	0.28*	3.48	0.27*	3.36	0.28*	3.97
Zero FTE	1.17*	1.96	1.08	1.91	0.86	1.63	1.40*	2.93
PB founded 1997-2010	0.38	1.23	0.13	0.47	0.00	0.01	0.33	1.35
Constant	1.04*	2.21	0.81	1.87	0.88*	2.00	0.05	0.12
R^2	0.21		0.18		0.18		0.18	

Table 3: Alternative Specifications. The table presents five separate models. The first three columns show models varying the state endpoints from the main model. The models in two rightmost columns include indicators for policy areas (economic policy as the reference category) or an indicator for agencies within the DCMS. The difference-in-differences estimate is negative and significant at the 0.05 level in every model. This table reports the coefficients from each linear model.

State Time Period	(2007-2009) v. (2010-2012)		(2009) v. (2011)		(2010-2011) v. (2012-2013)		(2006-2009) v. (2010-2013)		(2006-2009) v. (2010-2013)	
Variable	Coef.	T	Coef.	T	Coef.	T	Coef.	T	Coef.	T
Treated with Alteration	-0.24	-0.76	-0.26	-0.91	-0.47	-1.67	-0.06	-0.18	-0.27	-0.86
Coalition Era/State	0.12	1.52	0.02	0.20	-0.20*	-2.70	0.05	0.68	0.05	0.68
Treated x Coal. Era(State)	-0.36*	-2.86	-0.46*	-3.73	-0.89*	-6.81	-0.42*	-3.05	-0.42*	-3.06
Daily Mail %	5.28*	2.22	4.99*	2.20	5.77*	2.51	4.76*	2.25	5.08*	1.97
Public Records	0.34	1.00	0.32	0.94	0.22	0.63	0.44	1.28	0.28	0.88
OCPA (2009)	-0.97*	-2.92	-1.00*	-3.19	-0.97*	-2.97	-1.00*	-3.14	-0.23	-0.48
Annual Chair/CEO Pay	0.00	1.31	0.00	1.84	0.00	1.56	0.00	1.64	0.00	1.36
(Log) FTE	0.33*	3.47	0.31*	3.30	0.26*	2.80	0.33*	3.47	0.34*	3.61
Zero FTE	0.77	1.08	0.89	1.34	0.64	0.92	0.61	0.82	1.29	1.72
PB founded 1997-2010	0.37	1.15	0.26	0.88	0.31	1.00	0.54	1.75	0.60	1.85
Policy: Security							1.03*	2.16		
Policy: Social							1.17*	3.68		
Policy: Administration							0.72	1.63		
Dept. of Culture, Media, Sport									1.37*	2.60
Constant	1.98*	3.85	1.16*	2.42	2.14*	4.19	1.42*	2.36	1.40*	2.28
R^2	0.24		0.26		0.28		0.31		0.29	

Annex (For Online Publication)

Notes on Dependent Variable Construction

We initially collected the data by NDPB for each year and for each major national newspaper from 2005 to mid-2014. Each observation in the original dataset is an NDPB; the counts by year and paper are additional columns in the spreadsheet. It is easy, then, to sum along the row to generate a pre-count and a post-count. We then expand the dataset to create a duplicate observation for every NDPB, with one observation labeled "State=0" and the other "State=1". The dependent variable then equals the pre-window total if State=0 and the post-window if State=1.

Figure A1: Distribution for Percentage of Stories in the *Daily Mail* (2010-2011), Retained (Untreated) NDPBs. The vast majority of NDPBs had less than 10% of their coverage in the *Daily Mail* or had no coverage at all — for the NDPBs with no coverage, their *Daily Mail* percent is recorded as zero.

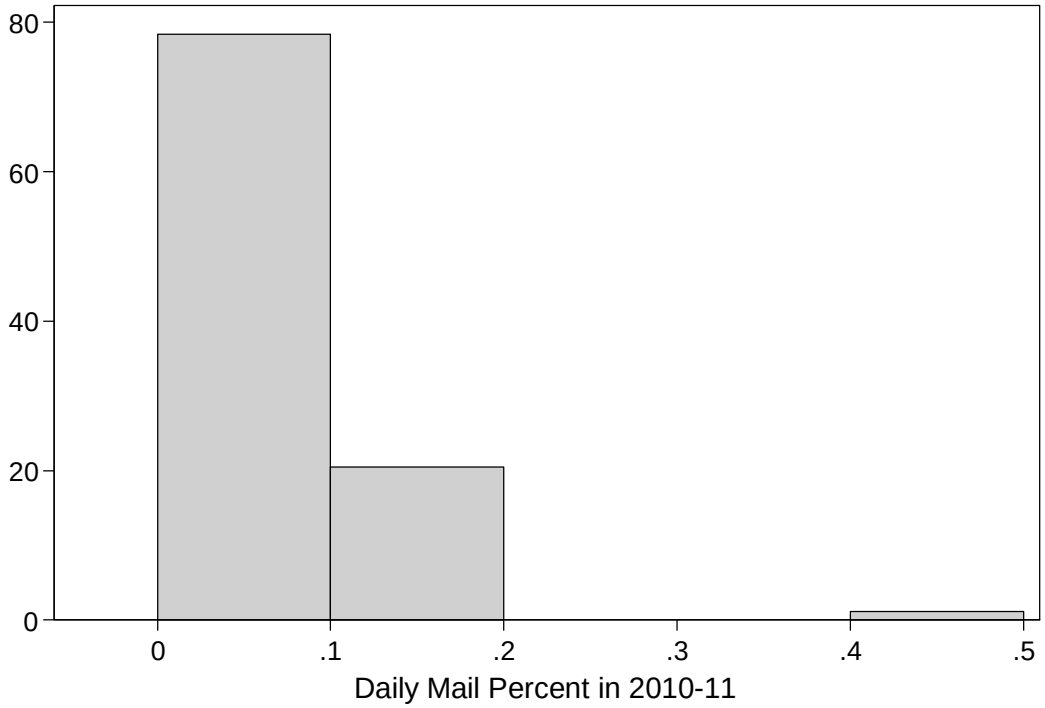


Figure A2: Distribution for Percentage of Stories in the Daily Mail (2010-2011), Altered (Treated) NDPBs. While the majority of NDPBs had less than 10% of their coverage in the *Daily Mail* or had no coverage at all — for NDPBs with no coverage, their *Daily Mail* percent is recorded as zero – a greater proportion of treated NDPBs had between thirty and fifty percent of their coverage in the *Daily Mail*.

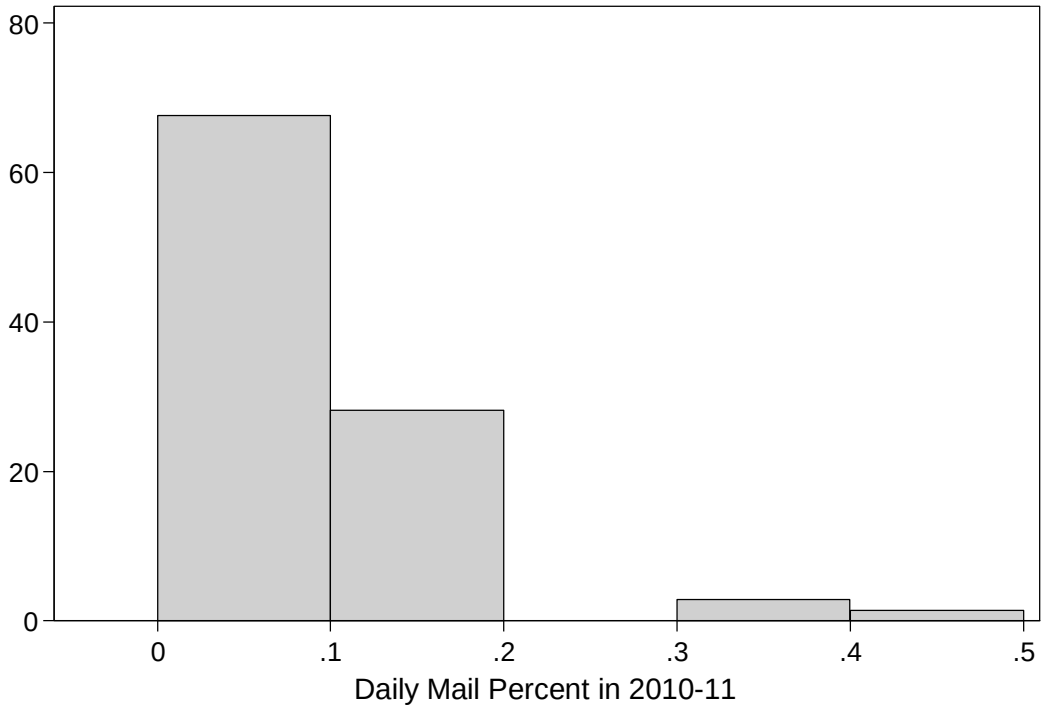
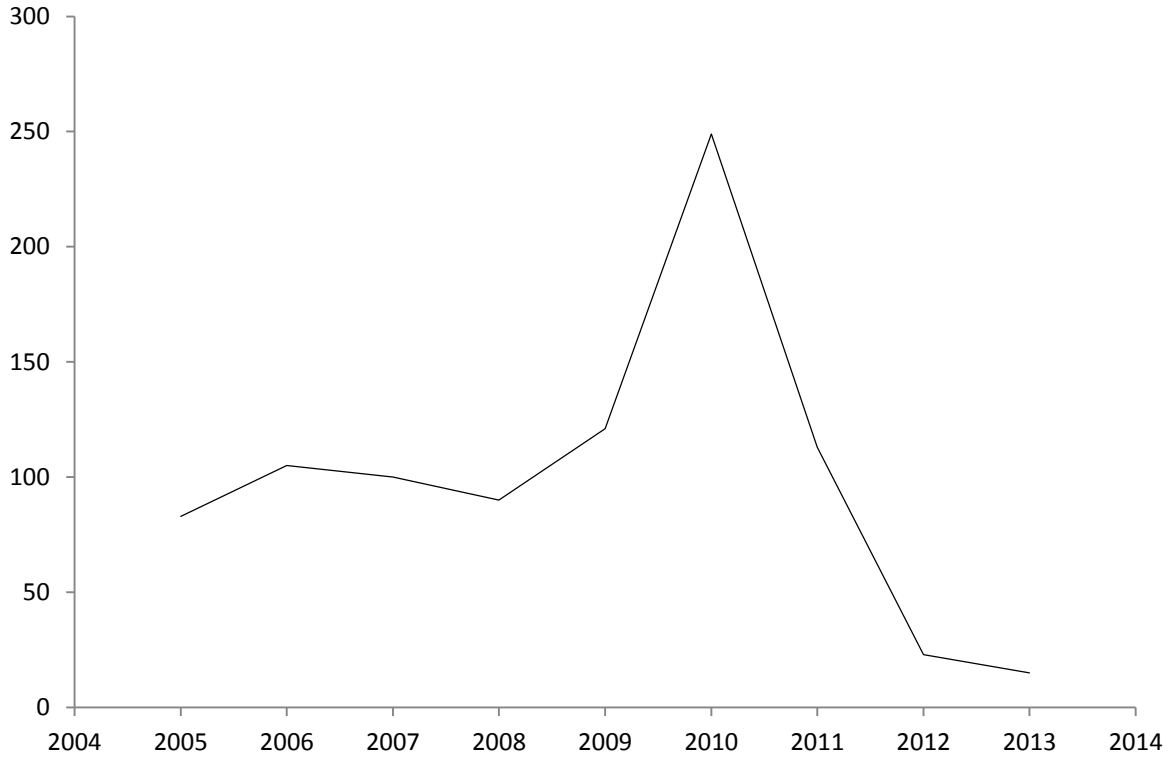


Figure A3: UK Film Council Stories (2005-2013). Total stories across the newspapers in our study mentioning the UK Film Council, an executive agency slated for termination in 2010 and confirmed in 2011.



The results of the models described in footnote 16 are presented in figures A4 and A5.

Figure A4: Termination Defined as Integration into a Cabinet Department or Abolition

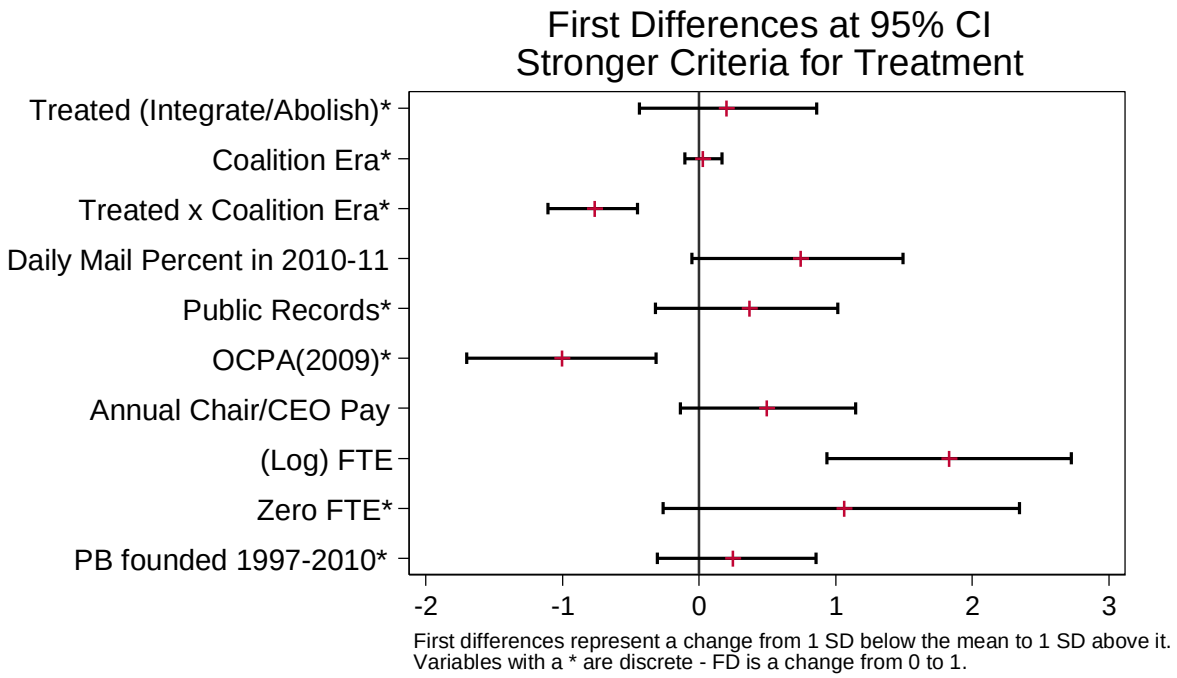


Figure A5: Termination Defined as Any Alteration to Agency Structure

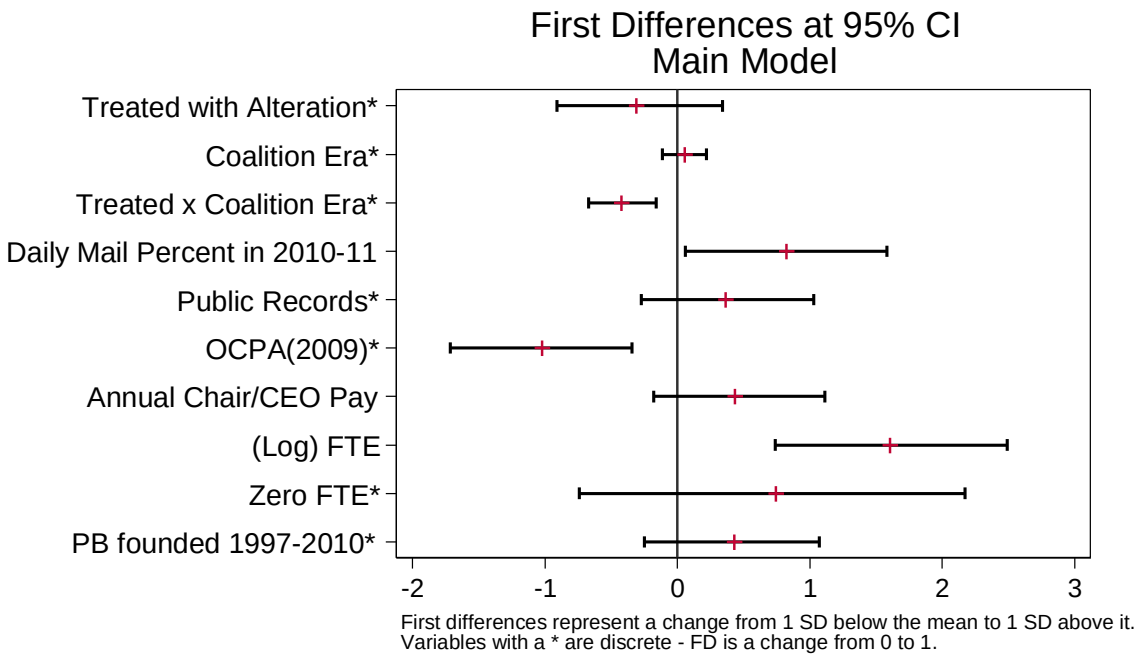


Table A: Complete List of Termination Dates of Executive NDPBs. The main source is *Annex – Public Bodies Reform Programme Update, 10 November 2014*, published by the Cabinet Office. The information is of the progress so far as at 10 November, 2014.

Name	Date
Big Lottery Fund	April 2011
British Hallmarking Council	Minor reform without a date[19]
Competition Service	Reform in progress[20]
Consumer Focus	April 2014
Advantage West Midlands	July 2012
East Midlands Development Agency	July 2012
East of England Development Agency	July 2012
North West Development Agency	July 2012
One North East	July 2012
South East England Development Agency	July 2012
South West of England Regional Development Agency	July 2012
Yorkshire Forward	July 2012
Homes and Communities Agency	Reform in progress
London Thames Gateway Development Corporation	February 2013
Valuation Tribunal Service	Decision changed to "Retain"
West Northamptonshire Development Corporation	July 2014
Gambling Commission	October 2013
Horserace Betting Levy Board	Minor reform without a date
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council	May 2012
National Lottery Commission	October 2013
Public Lending Right	October 2013
Sport England	Decision changed to "Retain and substantially reform"
Sports Grounds Safety Authority (previously Football Licensing Authority)	Decision changed to "Retain"
UK Sport	Decision changed to "Retain and substantially reform"
Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales	June 2013
Agricultural Wages Committees[21]	December 2013
Commission for Rural Communities	March 2013

[19] Minor reform without a date: This means that the public body has received the decision of "Retain" but it was stated that there should be some modification. Hence, we consider such decision as a termination decision.

[20] Reform in progress: This means that the public body has received one of the decisions of "Retain and substantially reform," "Merge," or "No longer an NDPB," but without a specific reform completion date.

[21] There are 15 Agricultural Wages Committees but they jointly received a single decision. To reflect this, they are considered as one observation in our dataset.

Food from Britain	August 2014
Natural England	Reform in progress
Passenger Focus/Passengers' Council	June 2011
Railway Heritage Committee	April 2013
Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission	July 2012
Appointments Commission	October 2012
General Social Care Council	September 2012
Health Protection Agency	March 2013
Equality and Human Rights Commission	August 2013
Independent Safeguarding Authority	December 2012
National Policing Improvement Agency	October 2013
Security Industry Authority	Reform in progress
Serious Organised Crime Agency	October 2013
Legal Services Commission	April 2013
Parole Board of England and Wales	Reform in progress
Capacity builders	March 2011
Commission for the Compact	March 2011
Hearing Aid Council	August 2010
Local Better Regulation Office	April 2012
SITPRO Limited	April 2011
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency	March 2011
Children's Workforce Development Council	April 2012
National College for School Leadership	April 2012
Partnerships for Schools	April 2012
Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority	April 2012
School Food Trust	October 2011
Training and Development Agency for Schools	April 2012
Community Development Foundation	March 2011
Firebuy	July 2012
Standards Board for England	March 2012
The Office for Tenants and Social Landlords (also known as Tenant Services Authority)	March 2012
Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation	April 2012
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment	January 2012
UK Film Council	March 2012
Sustainable Development Commission	March 2011
Design Council	April 2011
National Endowment for Science, Technology and Arts (NESTA)	April 2012

Renewable Fuels Agency	March 2011
Alcohol Education and Research Council	July 2012
Royal Marines Museum[22]	Became a part of the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Spring 2011
Royal Navy Submarine Museum[23]	Became a part of the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Spring 2011
Infrastructure Planning Commission	April 2012
Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence	December 2012

[22] The Royal Marines Museum and the Royal Navy Submarine Museum did not individually receive decisions but instead, the National Museum of the Royal Navy, which includes both museums, received a decision of "Retain." However, as the museums were not part of the Museum of the Royal Navy until 2011, they are considered as terminated NDPBs in our dataset.

[23] Same as above.