

STATISTICAL BARGAINS

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLITICIANS AND STATISTICIANS

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THE POLITICS OF STATISTICS

- Is the independence of official statistics under threat?
- Are governments increasingly defunding and manipulating their own experts?
- Relationships in official statistics have not been studied systematically.
- This study: interviews with statisticians in Australia, Canada, Sweden, UK and USA.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Hood and Lodge (2006): relationships between governments and public servants are a product of **public service bargains**.
- Bargains come in two types: **trustee** and **agency**.
- Technical areas tend to have trustee bargains, but ...
- Parties can **cheat** on and **terminate** bargains.

CASE STUDY: AUSTRALIA

- A **trustee bargain**: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is formally independent.
- ABS's base budget was cut significantly beginning in the 1980s.
- 1990s: introduction of user-funding and revenue retention.
- Agency internally divided over whether to pursue new business.
- Oscillating attitudes of leadership.

... AUSTRALIA

- Who is **cheating** on the bargain?
- Government now invests in significant statistical capacity outside ABS.
- Recent changes in attitudes: ABS staff see risk government will **terminate** bargain.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The theory of public service bargains captures the nature and drivers of relationships.
2. Experts disagree about how they should bargain with governments.
3. There is little evidence of a war on expertise.