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Researching the ‘Depoliticised Polity’

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Abstract

This paper suggests how governance researchers may contribute towards studying the ‘depoliticised polity’, defined as an organised society that appears from a number of analytical perspectives to be witnessing declining ‘political’ activity. Stagnating political participation, the reluctance of governments to take responsibility for political decisions, and the growth of rationalistic, technocratic discourse all represent interlinking aspects of the depoliticised polity, and should, this article argues, be analysed as interrelated phenomena. Existing governance research only analyses one ‘face’ of the depoliticised polity, however: the ‘governmental’ face that focuses on politicians and their strategies of statecraft. This misses out two other ‘faces’: ‘societal’ and ‘discursive’, which extend across society, representing aspects of the wider ‘depoliticised polity’. The aim of this article is to set out each ‘face’ of depoliticisation, how they interrelate, and the theoretical underpinnings and empirical research agendas of scholarly work on each ‘face’. It is argued that while we can untangle these conceptions in analytical terms, in reality they are indelibly entangled in the wider ‘depoliticised polity’ and hence we can analyse the interrelationships between them. The article concludes with compelling conceptual, empirical and normative reasons for why researchers should use the ‘three faces’ approach to analysing depoliticisation.

Key words: Depoliticisation; Depoliticised Polity; Governmental; Societal; Discursive.

Over the past 20 years a number of academic commentators have argued that we live in an age of ‘anti-politics’ in which the foundations of western liberal democracy are withering away (Ranciere, 1995, 2009; Boggs, 2000 Bourdieu, 2003; Crouch, 2004; Marquand, 2004; Rosanvallon, 2008; Keane, 2009). Participation in mainstream politics has declined drastically (Norris, 2011), technocratic, rational choice discourse strangles political debate (Hay, 2007), and politicians have lost the will to take responsibility for important political decisions (Flinders, 2012). There are various terms used for this state of affairs (‘post-democracy’,

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1 It might of course be argued that these trends have weakened, or even reversed in a process of ‘politicisation’ after the global financial crash. Such evidence for ‘politicisation’ is fuzzy at best currently, but research into converse processes of politicisation is of course important, as has been argued elsewhere (Hay, 2007; Wood, 2011). There is insufficient space, however, to grant the concept consideration here.
'democratic winter', ‘the end of politics’ to name but a few), but this essay will use the umbrella term the ‘depoliticised polity’, defined as an organised society that appears, from a number of analytical perspectives to be witnessing declining ‘political’ activity.

To date, analyses of the ‘depoliticised polity’ tend to take a very broad brush analytical perspective, emanating from critical political and social theorists (Ranciere, 1995; Zizek, 2002; Bourdieu, 2003) and normatively-orientated political analysts (Crouch, 2004; Marquand, 2004; Flinders, 2012). Such rhetorically sweeping accounts provide a broad canvas on which more fine-grained analysis may fill in the detail. There is already a significant research agenda within governance studies aimed at providing just such a fine-grained conceptual and empirical analysis of ‘depoliticisation’, gaining momentum since the New Labour government was elected in 1997 (Bonefeld and Burnham, 1998; Burnham 1999, 2001, 2006, 2007; Flinders, 2008; Flinders and Buller, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Kettell, 2008; Newman, 2009; Rogers, 2009; James, 2010; Kerr et al, 2011; Beveridge, 2012). These studies analyse depoliticisation as a tool of political statecraft, used by politicians to shift responsibility for political outcomes whilst retaining arm’s length control over governance mechanisms (Burnham, 2001; Flinders and Buller, 2005). In a recent overview of developments in British governance studies, David Marsh (2012, p.48) marks out this version of ‘depoliticisation’ as one of the most ‘interesting’ emergent concepts for analysing the ‘meta-governance’ of ostensibly devolved governance systems.

Yet, as should be clear from the first paragraph, the governance literature only analyses one aspect of the depoliticised polity – that of the (un)willingness of politicians to take responsibility for political outcomes. The most influential conceptual model (Flinders and Buller, 2006) reflects this state-centrism, focusing only on the ‘tactics and tools’ used by politicians themselves – their governance mechanisms or rhetorical strategies. What about the decline of participation in the political process by citizens, or the growth of obscurantist technocratic language throughout society? This essay will argue that in the main the governance literature only analyses one ‘face’ of depoliticisation, relating to the strategies of governments, which is termed the ‘governmental face’ of depoliticisation. Although this state-based agenda has the merit of analytical parsimony, it can be argued that it precludes an analysis of the society-wide dynamics of depoliticisation at work in a more broadly conceptualised ‘depoliticised polity’ (an agenda this article promotes). Such a wider agenda would be in line with most governance literature, which emphasises the power of non-state actors in governance relationships (Rhodes, 1994; Skelcher, 2000; Marsh, 2011).

As such, this article introduces two other ‘faces’ of depoliticisation, alluded to above, which describe depoliticisation outside the state, namely:

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It might also be said that the very term ‘depoliticisation’ is itself ‘problematic’ (Dean, 2009) or a ‘misnomer’ (Flinders and Buller, 2006a). Though these criticisms are certainly important to the conceptual debate on depoliticisation, it is beyond the scope of this article to deal with them directly. Hopefully, the conceptual delineation offered within the article will serve to further the debate regarding terminological clarity.
1. **Societal depoliticisation**, which occurs when citizens withdraw from public deliberation, or when political issues move away from the public agenda (Hay, 2007; Bluehdorn, 2007), and;

2. **Discursive depoliticisation**, when political discourse becomes more technocratic or managerial, closing down the possibility of exercising transformational ‘political agency’ (Jenkins, 2011; Kuzemko, 2012).

Research into these second and third ‘faces’ of depoliticisation is based loosely around distinctive theoretical backgrounds, which broaden the conception of ‘the political’ and hence generate a focus on wider empirical phenomena. Yet, while we are able to ‘disentangle’ these ‘faces’ of depoliticisation analytically, it will be argued that in reality they are intrinsically ‘entangled’ in the broader depoliticised polity. Hence, it will be argued that the relationship between these ‘faces’ of depoliticisation may legitimately be analysed, and that such an analytically pluralistic task is worthwhile for bringing together a wealth of diverse research on ‘depoliticisation’ towards a common research agenda. It may also help to further distinguish conceptually different forms of depoliticisation and avoid conceptual confusion, building upon the work of Flinders and Buller (2006a) (c.f. Mishra, 2012).

The article is thus divided into five sections. The first introduces the three faces of depoliticisation. The second, third and fourth sections take each ‘face’ in turn, detailing the primary literature studying each ‘face’, and the theoretical underpinnings and empirical research agendas of scholars researching them. A concluding section then offers three compelling empirical, conceptual and normative reasons for utilising the ‘three faces’ approach to analysing the ‘depoliticised polity’.

### Three ‘Faces’ of depoliticisation

Table 1 sets out the key aspects of the three ‘faces’ of depoliticisation: governmental, societal and discursive. Each will be explained fully below, but the overarching argument is that the governmental face, with a state-based conception of the political is challenged firstly by the societal face, which encompasses the actions of all ‘public’ actors in narrowing the field of public deliberation by withdrawing towards the private sphere. It then faces a second challenge from the ‘discursive’ face, which makes no distinction between public and private – depoliticisation can occur through any speech act which denies ‘political agency’. It is argued ultimately, however, that while we can separate them analytically, these ‘faces’ of depoliticisation are intrinsically ‘entangled’ within the wider ‘depoliticised polity’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Face’</th>
<th>Approach to politics</th>
<th>Conception of ‘the political’ relates to:</th>
<th>Act of depoliticisation</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Key texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governmental</td>
<td>‘Weberian’</td>
<td>The State</td>
<td>Withdrawal of state from direct governance of society</td>
<td>Government creates a quango</td>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>Burnham, 2001; Flinders and Buller 2006a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal</td>
<td>‘Tocquevillian’</td>
<td>Public Deliberation</td>
<td>Withdrawal of people, organisations and issues from public deliberation</td>
<td>Membership of political parties decreases</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Hay, 2007; Bluehdorn, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discursive</td>
<td>‘Gramscian’</td>
<td>Political Agency</td>
<td>Denial of the capacity for radical change through ‘speech acts’</td>
<td>Need to cut fiscal deficit presented as ‘common sense’</td>
<td>Anyone</td>
<td>Jenkins, 2011; Kuzemko, 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Venn diagram in Figure 1 explicates this ‘entangled’ nature. The faces are ‘entangled’ in the sense that while this article emphasises the theoretical distinctiveness of the ‘faces’, they are not mutually exclusive. Research on all three ‘faces’ tends to come from a broadly qualitative methodological outlook, emphasising the importance of interpretation, and uncovering processes which remain largely hidden from the empirically focused eyes of researchers (Flinders and Buller, 2006a, p.314; for one exception see Himmelstrand, 1962). Moreover, research on contemporary democratic culture which either implicitly or explicitly uses the term ‘depoliticisation’ sometimes implicitly focuses on the relationship between empirical phenomena that would be classed within this article’s typology under different ‘faces’ of depoliticisation (as do Mair, Hay and Pettit identified at the intersections). Ultimately, all of these studies converge on a more general analysis of the ‘depoliticised polity’ (in the centre of the diagram). This article returns to briefly discuss these overlapping studies in the conclusion, but focuses next on the three ‘faces’ themselves.
A brief disclaimer is perhaps in order first. The reader should bear in mind that this article is an attempt to impose some sort of discipline upon a diffuse body of literature. Hence, where the article relates a particular theoretical position or conception of ‘the political’ to particular studies, it inevitably glosses over the many intricate theoretical approaches employed by the studies themselves. It is hoped, however, that as an exercise in synthesising existing approaches and attempting to uncover underlying theoretical and empirical trends the article may contribute towards a critical discussion of how different conceptions of depoliticisation interrelate, and may be studied in tandem. Hence, the aim will not be to recount the arguments of any of these studies in great detail, but to offer a flavour of how research has developed, the theoretical understandings implicit within similar studies and the main empirical focus of studies relating to each ‘face’.

**Figure 1: ‘Faces’ of depoliticisation within the existing literature**

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**Governmental Depoliticisation**
The most prominent and widely researched ‘face’ of depoliticisation is what is termed ‘governmental’ depoliticisation. Depoliticisation here is defined as the withdrawal of politicians from direct intervention in governing the economy and society (Burnham, 2001; Flinders and Buller, 2005). Interest in this ‘face’ of depoliticisation arose out of two debates in the 1990s and early 2000s regarding on the one hand the use of ‘non-majoritarian institutions’ (NMIs) by European governments to increase the long term credibility of government policies in the face of short term electoral or popular pressures (Majone, 1994, 1996; Thatcher and Stone Sweet, 2002), and on the other hand work by scholars such as Peter Burnham and Werner Bonefeld on how states responded to narratives of ‘globalisation’ by withdrawing from direct management of the economy (Bonefeld and Burnham, 1996, 1998; Burnham, 1999, 2000). These debates culminated in Burham’s seminal (2001) article on depoliticisation as a method of ‘statecraft’ employed by the British New Labour government (for a discussion on ‘statecraft’ see Bulpitt, 1986). Governance research has since grown substantially on this topic, mainly regarding Britain (Grant, 2003; Flinders and Buller, 2005; Kettell, 2008; Wilks, 2007; Oppermann, 2008; Newman, 2009; Rogers, 2009; Kerr et al, 2011), although studies in Europe (Beveridge, 2012), political economy (Krippner, 2011), and comparative governance (Roberts, 2010; Landweher and Bohm, 2011) have also engaged with this literature. In development studies, Hout and Robison (2009, p.4) express a similar conceptualisation of depoliticisation as ‘autonomy for technocratic authority from what are seen as distributional (political) coalitions’. This notion of depoliticisation may hence be said to be the most widespread.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The governmental ‘face’ of depoliticisation relates implicitly to a loosely-termed ‘Weberian’ conception of politics and ‘the political’, linking both to matters of state institutions and their transformation towards ‘depoliticised’ modes of governance (Weber, 1978 [1922]). The number of actors who can ‘depoliticise’ is quite narrow, effectively limited to government ministers or those in government with the power to delegate policy making and implementation powers, structure policy networks, appoint and dismiss advisors or adopt rules limiting formal discretion (Flinders and Buller, 2006a, p.296). As such, this ‘face’ of depoliticisation also attaches to a broadly ‘elitist’ theory of the state, whereby a state-based political elite largely dominates decision making (Wright Mills, 1956), or to an ‘Open Marxist’ account which emphasises the state’s power to embed unequal class relations by asserting a separation between the ‘state’ and other areas of society (Bieler and Morton, 2003).
Relating to lower level conceptual models of the liberal democratic polity, this approach also links implicitly to an ‘asymmetric polity model’, which assumes that despite an increasingly diverse number of actors involved in governance, the state continues to wield superior power over civil society (Marsh et al, 2003). Depoliticising ‘tactics’ are employed by politicians to exercise power over the citizenry, who are (supposedly) tricked into believing that inherently ‘political’ issues cannot or should not be the responsibility of politicians.

**Empirical Focus**

For Flinders and Buller (2005, p.527) ‘to research depoliticisation...is to study a relationship between those who articulate and implement this governing method and those who are affected by it’. The core focus of the literature is hence on the mechanisms politicians employ to create the illusion of depoliticisation, and whether they are ‘successful’ or not in duping citizens (Kettell, 2008; Burnham, 2011). In the existing literature we can distinguish four areas in which ‘governmental depoliticisation’ may be said to take place (see Table 2):

**1. Institutions:**

Flinders and Buller (2006a, p.298) identify ‘institutional depoliticisation’ as ‘perhaps the most frequently employed tactic’ of governmental depoliticisation. Such a form of depoliticisation relates to the creation of ‘non-majoritarian organisations’ to govern policy issues separate from central government (Majone, 1996; Blinder, 1997; Ramirez, 2000; Thatcher and Stone Sweet, 2002; Flinders, 2004; Wilks, 2007; Hay, 2009; Newman, 2009; Roberts, 2010). Governments establish ‘a formalised principal-agent relationship’, with elected politicians setting ‘policy parameters’ while an arm’s length body ‘enjoys day-to-day managerial and specialist freedom’ (Flinders and Buller, 2006a, p.298). In other words, as Burnham (2001) puts it, the ‘political character of decision-making’ is placed ‘at one remove’, or as Flinders and Buller (2006) suggest, the ‘arena’ of politics is ‘shifted’. Examples include the creation under New Labour of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, which transferred decisions on the recommendation of drugs away from ministerial discretion to scientific experts, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which had similar implications for decisions regarding primary and secondary school exams. Under the present Coalition government the creation of the Office for Budgetary Responsibility, which provides ‘independent’ ‘expert’ guidance on fiscal prudence, can also be seen as a manifestation of governmental depoliticisation in institutions.
2. Rules:

Flinders and Buller (2006a, pp.303-307) also identify the creation of ‘rules’ governing the scope of politicians’ discretion on policy matters as another type of governmental depoliticisation. Governments often set targets or rules (or accept them from a higher administrative body, like the European Union) which they promise to abide by in order to achieve long term policy aims (Kopits, 2001; Kettell, 2004, 2008; Burnham, 2011). Examples include Britain’s membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism during the early 1990s, Gordon Brown’s ‘golden rule’ limit on government borrowing, and a ‘one-in-one-out’ rule regarding the introduction of new regulations on small and medium sized enterprises, as introduced by the subsequent Coalition government. The privatization of government services can also be seen as a ‘rules-based’ form of depoliticisation, since this tool of policy effectively promotes adherence to a set of ‘grown’ or commonly agreed ‘rules’ (competitiveness, open entry, profit-maximization, etc.) defined and reinforced by the common practice of private sector companies (Hasnas, 2008, p.550).

3. Networks:

Eberlein, and Newman (2008) and James (2010) offer an interesting addition to the ‘tactics’ of depoliticisation by arguing that the creation of formal policy and delivery ‘networks’ constitutes a strategy of depoliticisation. By spreading responsibility and blurring direct lines of accountability through the creation of ‘networks’ of multiple public, private and voluntary bodies (as distinct from merely delegating a decision to one agency), politicians can deny their ability to exert direct control over policy outcomes (Papadopoulos, 2007; Kunz, 2011). Examples here are numerous, but may include the maintenance of policy networks in, for example, the governing of food safety standards (Smith, 1991), managing offenders coming out of the prison system (Needham, 2009), and providing care for the elderly through multiple public, private and voluntary bodies (Bode and Firbank, 2009).

4. Public appointments:

There is a significant body of literature which focuses on the ‘depoliticisation’ of policy advisors (Fischer, 1991; Lewis, 2008; Beveridge, 2012) and civil servants both in advanced western countries (Peters and Pierre, 2005; Di Mascio, Forthcoming), and post-communist countries (Meyer-Sahling, 2004, 2011; Grzymala-Busse, 2004, 2007). The primary concept here is the opposite to that of most studies as it takes ‘politicisation’ as its starting point, as
Peters and Pierre (2005, p.2) define politicisation as ‘the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards and disciplining of members of the public service’. Depoliticisation hence involves the opposite - selection according to ‘objective’ levels of ‘merit’, and independence in the sense of becoming increasingly ‘professionalised’ and non-party political, as well as the development of bureaucratic autonomy and a sharp (formal) separation of ‘policy’ and ‘politics’. Examples here include the struggle to separate civil servants in newly democratised Eastern European countries from the tradition of strong ideological influence (Beblavy, 2009; Meyer-Sahling, 2011; Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2011), and particularly in Anglophone democracies, the creeping influence of political advisers increasing party-political incentives within the civil service (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empirical focus</th>
<th>‘Tactic’ of Depoliticisation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Delegating responsibility</td>
<td>Politicians delegate to ALBs</td>
<td>Flinders, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Limiting discretion</td>
<td>Politicians impose or accept rules that limit their scope for exercising authority</td>
<td>Kettell, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>Diffusing responsibility</td>
<td>Networks of delivery and policy are created to diffuse responsibility</td>
<td>James, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public appointments</td>
<td>Reducing patronage</td>
<td>Politicians appoint civil servants and advisors on ‘merit-based’ criteria</td>
<td>Peters and Pierre, 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above overview it is clear that research on the governmental ‘face’ of depoliticisation is widespread and continuing to grow. We have not even mentioned the potential to develop research on the depoliticisation of issues between different levels of government (from central to local, or from national to international levels of governance), which presents the as-yet unfulfilled possibility of a fertile linkage between depoliticisation and multi-level governance theory (see Bache and Flinders, 2004). Yet, as this article argues, there remain severe conceptual challenges to this very state-centric approach to studying depoliticisation, a dilemma which is brought up within the literature which studies our second ‘face’ of depoliticisation.
The ‘societal face’ of depoliticisation challenges the state-centric conception of the governmental ‘face’ as it is related to a broader conception of depoliticisation, encompassing both state and civil society actors. One of the key analysts of societal depoliticisation, Bluehdorn (2007, p.314), argues that, within the governance literature, ‘depoliticisation has been defined and discussed in a very narrow way as a ‘form of statecraft’ or a ‘strategy for governing’’. Against this conceptualisation he argues that ‘depoliticisation and delegation are far more than just...strategies of government...instead (they) should be regarded as phenomena which are relevant at all levels of advanced modern society’ (Bluehdorn, 2007, p.314). Hay (2007, p.79) concurs with this conception, arguing that ‘the political realm is inclusive of both governmental and public spheres’, and that depoliticisation can occur between these different spheres. Hay’s conceptualisation posits a concentric circles model in which depoliticisation involves transitions in deliberation – from the state to broader public sphere, from the public to private sphere, and finally to the ‘realm of necessity’ or personal responsibility (Hay, 2007, pp.82-87). Combining these perspectives, ‘societal’ depoliticisation can hence be defined as the process by which ‘political’ issues become subject to less public deliberation (Harder, 1996, p.61), and individuals and organisations in civil society participate less in that deliberation (Bluehdorn, 2007). The analytical focus is hence upon the transition of subjects in politics from the broadly ‘public’ arena of state legislatures and civic deliberation towards a ‘private’ arena of low public salience, assumptions of ‘necessity’ and inevitability (Hay, 2007, p.80).

The development of scholarly analysis of ‘societal’ depoliticisation finds its roots in debates over the previous two decades on the decline of public participation in formal democratic political processes (for a review see Norris, 2011). This debate was kick-started in earnest by the work of Robert Putnam (2000) on declining ‘social capital’ in the United States and its effect on civic participation, and subsequently developed into a vast literature on ‘disaffected democrats’ (see Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2004). These growing concerns for declining public engagement have been expressed across the political science discipline in analyses of party politics (Pellikaan et al, 2003), development (Harriss, 2002), sociology (Boggs, 2000) and European studies (Hooghe and Marks, 2008), which posit ‘depoliticisation’ as a polemical or broadly descriptive concept encapsulating a stagnation of democratic culture or decreasing salience of ‘political’ issues of power and resource distribution. Perhaps due to its often polemical nature, the literature found here is often suffused with implicit or half-realised conceptions of depoliticisation. It is only with the work of Hay and Bluehdorn that this conception of depoliticisation really gained conceptual wings, and has proved influential enough that Flinders (2008) incorporates Hay’s societal
model alongside a revised conceptual framework of delegated governance both within and outside the state.

_Theoretical Relationships_

The literature on societal depoliticisation employs a usually implicit conception of politics as a process of public deliberation: written or verbal communication addressing issues considered to be of public importance within for instance state legislatures, newspapers, the internet, civic bodies, etc. This relates implicitly to a conception of politics as participatory ‘citizenship’, which, arguably, can be seen as ‘Tocquevillian’ in nature, as it emphasises ‘civic responsibility, participation, and associational life for the health of democracies’ (Walters, 2002, p.378). Depoliticisation is hence conceptualised as the decline of citizen participation in the public sphere (Bluehdorn, 2007), and the shifting of political issues away from public deliberation towards the ‘private sphere’ or ‘realm of necessity’ (Hay, 2007). In contrast to the ‘Weberian’ governmental conception of depoliticisation, various actors in the public sphere can enact societal ‘depoliticisation’, from pressure groups, political parties, businesses, the media and social movements to individual citizens themselves. All of these groups may encourage citizens to be apathetic or disengage from public deliberation, or indeed contribute by disengaging themselves. They may also affect the salience of political issues in the public sphere by de-emphasising certain issues and emphasising others.

We can place this ‘face’ of depoliticisation in the context of broadly ‘pluralist’ theories of the liberal democratic state, as they see power as being exercised from multiple sites both within and outside the state (Dahl, 1978). There is also a link more recently with the ‘differentiated polity model’ (DPM), whereby actors beyond the state in civil society and the market play as great a role as (if not a greater role than) the state in governing societal interactions (Rhodes et al, 2003). It is pertinent here to qualify that, unlike in a pluralist perspective, societal depoliticisation is not a process in which power is evenly distributed among actors within and outside the state. Newspapers, for instance, have a lot more power to encourage citizen apathy towards the public sphere than do most citizens individually. However, unlike the ‘Weberian’ perspective, the concept of societal depoliticisation takes the study of political strategies outside the state, just as pluralism and the DPM highlight the importance of non-state actors in the policy process.
Empirical Focus

In terms of researching this ‘face’ of depoliticisation, the focus falls upon three empirical areas: Civil society, public participation, and deliberation. These areas of societal depoliticisation are detailed below (and summarised in Table 3):

1. **Civil society:**

   Bluehdorn (2007, p.314) argues that one dimension of depoliticisation exists in ‘institutions’, which ‘implies that bodies ranging from environmental organisations and alternative self-help groups to building societies and retail cooperatives shed their ideological commitments and political agendas and focus on their core business. De-ideologization, professionalization, pragmatism, managerial best practice, and the pursuit of efficiency gains are the principles that guide this transformation of social institutions’. Essentially, social organisations ‘withdraw from deliberation in civil society to concentrate on fulfilling a particular role or task, often simultaneously enveloped in wholesomely positive values such as cooperation, cohesion, caring and neighbourliness’ (Gaynor, 2011, p.27).

   Harriss (2002) links this to the growth of ‘social capital’, suggesting that the building of social capital ‘promote(s) consensus at the expense of addressing inequalities of power’ (c.f. White, 1996; Williams, 2004). Examples of this co-optation of social organisations to the narrow demands of the state can be found in the numerous ‘development’ projects throughout Asia (Chhotray, 2004, 2007, 2011; Elliot, 2009), Africa (Ferguson, 1994; Oldfield and Stokke, 2007; Lange, 2008; Büscher, 2010) and Latin America (Silva, 2004). In Britain we also find an example, with the current Coalition government’s ‘Big Society’ agenda seeking to turn social organisations away from their role as participants in public deliberation, towards a more professionalised role as service delivering bodies.

2. **Public Participation:**

   Bluehdorn (2007, pp.313-314) also argues that another dimension of depoliticisation concerns ‘people’: when ‘citizens which had previously been interested and engaged with public affairs withdraw from political arenas and retreat into the non-political pursuit of their personal affairs and well-being. Widespread disengagement from political organisations…may be seen as evidence for the depoliticisation of citizens’. Boggs (2000, p.30) agrees that ‘one of the most visible and easily measurable signs of depoliticisation is sharply fading voter participation’. Empirical studies of depoliticisation as declining public
participation are scattered but distinctive. Gunther et al (1988, p.55) identified depoliticisation in Spain with very few potential voters suggesting they had even considered which party to vote for. More recently, Ruiz-Rodriguez (2005) identifies decline in voter turnout and decline in left-right voter polarization as evidence of ‘depoliticisation’ in Chile during the 1990s (c.f. Waugh, 1992). A diffuse body of literature also defines depoliticisation as decreasing participation and political convergence both between parties and between voters (Huber, 2011; Hall and Loeber, 2010; Pellikaan et al, 2003; Joignant, 2003, p.90 Quoted in Carlin, 2006, p.639). We may hence suggest that, from this perspective, the huge 10 per cent drop in voter turnout in Britain between 1997 and 2001 arguably represented a form of societal depoliticisation, as does party-political or voter convergence, a sign of voter apathy and disengagement.

3. Deliberation:

Declining levels of debate around what were previously highly contested or salient topics is a core feature of Hay’s (2007) conceptual model of (de)politicisation. Hay identifies three forms of depoliticisation which gradually remove an issue firstly from the state to civil society, then to the ‘private sphere’, then to the totally non-political ‘realm of necessity’. This model dovetails with Jasper’s (1988, p.365) model of political ‘cycles’ with issues going from a ‘pre-political’ period of reliance on ‘experts’, politicisation onto the government and public agenda with growing contestation, followed by ‘depoliticisation’ as government takes action and the issue burns out and finally a ‘post-political’ period of acceptance and non-deliberation (c.f. Bluehdorn, 2007, p.313). This interest in ‘depoliticisation’ as a description of part of the political cycle of issues has been applied to nuclear energy (Jasper, 1988) and unemployment (Mutz, 1992). Briggs (1996) also shows how one can determine levels of ‘politicisation’ by measuring the extent to which individuals involved in the British miners’ strike of 1984/85 became more ‘class conscious’ in terms of awareness of resource inequalities as a political issue. There is also research into the (de)politicisation of the European Union (EU), or the extent to which a country’s membership of the EU is considered a salient and polarizing political matter among a country’s electorate (Schmitter, 1969; Hooghe and Marks, 2008; DeWilde, 2011). The depoliticisation of substantive political ‘issues’ to be replaced by stale debates surrounding ‘personality’ and personal preferences has also been studied (Sim, 2005; Langer, 2010).

Table 3: Types of societal (de)politicisation

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<thead>
<tr>
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</table>

Two points should be made about this literature on the second ‘face’ of depoliticisation. Firstly, as is the core argument of this article, societal depoliticisation is highly entangled with governmental depoliticisation. While the focus moves away from the state towards wider societal debates and modes of participation, depoliticisation in terms of delegation from the state is often given as a proxy measure of issues moving into and out of the state and public sphere. It does, however, make the important contribution that processes of depoliticisation are not uni-directional – from the state down towards society. They can emanate from within civil society towards the private sphere as well. Hence, while in reality societal depoliticisation is intrinsically entangled with governmental depoliticisation, by disentangling it conceptually we can point towards the wider process of depoliticisation taking place within the ‘depoliticised polity’.

Secondly, the focus in particular of Hay (2007, p.77) and Bluehdorn’s (2007) models falls upon a common theme of ‘agency’ as the key to ‘the political’ – depoliticisation involves the curtailment of ‘agency’ via discursive moves to narrow the scope and potential for collective action and change. This emphasis on the discursive nature of depoliticisation is extremely useful, as it serves to move us away from what are arguably ‘static’ modes of ‘statecraft’ present within the first ‘face’ of depoliticisation towards a more dynamic interrogation of the processes of depoliticisation (Jenkins, 2011, p.158). However in terms of translating this into conceptual models the implicit assumption is that when issues are moved formally or informally into the public sphere then that necessarily entails a growing recognition of ‘agency’, while moving them outwards towards the private sphere necessarily entails a curtailment of ‘agency’. This potentially ignores the ‘content’ of the discourse itself, focusing too heavily on the ‘arenas’ of deliberation (Krippner, 2011, p.146), and it also constructs a boundary between the private and public that some more radical analysts find problematic. These positions are represented in analyses of the third ‘face’ of depoliticisation.
Discursive depoliticisation exhibits similar aspects to societal depoliticisation as it can be initiated both from within and outside the state; it primarily relates to debate and deliberation; and it involves expressions that constrain ‘agency’ (Jenkins, 2011). The key difference, however, is that this ‘face’ of depoliticisation is radically ‘de-centred’ in the sense that it gets rid of the public-private distinction altogether. Essentially, depoliticisation can occur through any ‘speech act’ by any individual or organisation – public or private – which seeks to form ‘necessities, permanence, immobility, closure and fatalism…concealing/negating or removing contingency’ – in essence, any discursive act which seeks to displace ‘agency’ (Jenkins, 2011, p.160). Depoliticisation hence does not take place because the discourse on political issues gets removed from public view, it takes place when debate becomes technocratic, managerial or disciplined towards a single goal and hence changes in content – the arena is relatively unimportant. Hence, while for instance a ‘security’ narrative may increase the ‘salience’ of an issue by alerting people about dangers and hence stimulating deliberation on the issue – politicisation in a societal sense, it can be argued (as we shall see below), that security narratives can also be seen as depoliticising since they construct a single dominant consensus narrative around an issue (eliminating a predetermined threat) (Kuzemko, 2012, p.241).

Analyses of the discursive ‘face’ of depoliticisation developed from radical theoretical literature during the post-Cold War period. This literature pointed out that contemporary ‘anti-political’ culture attempts dangerously to transcend political divisions creating the illusion of ‘consensus’, and scholars instead posit the need for new forms of radical democratic action that focus on antagonism and ‘difference’ (Ranciere, 1995; Zizek 2002; Mouffe; 1993, 2000, 2005; Bourdieu, 2003; Bauman, 1999; Gamble, 2000). Ranciere, (1995, p.5) sums up the attitude of this literature to the post-Cold War world, arguing that we live in a ‘depoliticised’ society to the extent that politics qua activity ends ‘as a secret voyage to the isles of utopia’ - of grand ideological projects, to become ‘the art of steering the ship and embracing the waves, in a natural, peaceful movement of growth’ – technocratic discourse in a deterministic transition to neoliberal utopia.

The aim of the radical literature was to ‘disrupt’ the seeming ‘triumph’ of neoliberalism by proposing a radical notion of ‘the political’ as relating to conflict, antagonism and the importance of ‘difference’ (Mouffe, 1993). ‘The political’ is hence distinguished from ‘politics’, as Zizek (2002, p.193) explains:

‘The difference (is) between ‘politics’ as a separate social complex, a positively determined sub-system of social relations…and the ‘political’ (le politique) as the moment of openness, of undecidability, when the very structuring of society, the fundamental form of the social pact, is called into question – in short, the moment of global crisis overcome by the act of founding a ‘new harmony’.’
'Politicisation', in this sense, is hence a revolutionary act of recognising ‘the political’, that is, the possibility that society can be constituted differently. Andrew Gamble (2000) contrasts this form of politicisation to ‘fatalism’ or the denial that such a different society may ever come about. Similarly, Mouffe (2005) relates depoliticisation to a context in which antagonisms and dualistic ideological debates are said to have been ‘transcended’ or rendered irrelevant, supposedly rendering the radical alternatives they propose similarly irrelevant.

This conception of depoliticisation has had a growing level of influence recently on the depoliticisation literature in mainstream political science, in particular as scholars have emphasised the ability of politicians to use certain discursive tools to influence the beliefs of citizens to secure legitimacy for policies (Rogers, 2009; Kerr et al, 2011). Indeed, Flinders and Buller (2006a) identify discursive ‘preference-shaping’ as the third of their ‘tactics’ of depoliticisation (albeit a process that seemingly only politicians engage in).

**Theoretical Relationships**

Much of the contemporary discourse analytic, post-modern and psycho-analytical literature described above finds its origins in a Gramscian conception of politics (Ives, 2004, p.3). Antonio Gramsci’s path-breaking concept – hegemony – describes a set of dominant articulated ideas within societal discourse which reinforces the economic dominance of the bourgeoisie (Ives, 2004, p.3). However, ‘Gramsci’s analysis was originally concerned not just with the analysis of a dominant set of ideas (hegemony) but with the forging of an alternative, a challenge to hegemony’, the key question hence being ‘what are the agencies and forces that could bring such a new world order into being?’ (Schwartzmantel, 2009, p.9). Gramsci’s core concern was hence with identifying the drivers of, and constraints against, ‘agency’ defined as the forces which drive revolutionary change.

There are several theoretical traditions emerging from a broadly Gramscian tradition that attempt to do a similar thing – identify discursive strategies that may drive, or constrain, radical societal change. For instance, Foucauldian theories of ‘governmentality’ focus on how discipline and consent towards a political authority is generated via cultural means (Dean, 1999). Foucault argues that discipline is created through a discursive method which articulates a dominant ‘political rationality’ through ‘the delineation of concepts, the specification of objects and borders, the provision of arguments and justifications, etc’ (Lemke, 2001 p.191). This articulation becomes ingrained throughout society in how people rationalise the world, ultimately constraining their ability to enact radical alternatives.
A quite different theory of how discipline is generated is offered by Jurgen Habermas, who uses the concept of ‘scientism’, that is, ‘the conviction that the natural sciences represent not merely one source of knowledge, but are the only source of knowledge’ (Edgar, 2006, p.135). This privileging of ‘science’ leads to what he terms ‘decisionism’, that is, where ‘value judgements, for example in ethics and political philosophy…are not susceptible to (value-based) rational resolution, and so can be resolved through more-or-less arbitrary decisions’ (based on what the ‘evidence’ says) (Edgar, 2006, p.36; see also Habermas, 1996, p.45). Decisionism impedes the enactment of radical alternatives, as it curtails debates based on ‘reflective experiences about ourselves as free moral agents guided by our own interests, values and norms’ (Ingram, 2010, p.34).

While the above theories develop from political philosophy, on a lower analytical-theoretical level of conceptualisations of the state, the discursive face of depoliticisation is relevant to interpretivist and constructivist approaches, as well as a range of critical discourse-focused theories such as feminism (Togeby, 1995; Machin and Thornborrow, 2006). Bevir and Rhodes’ (2010) theory of the state as a ‘cultural practice’, a set of traditions and norms, which ‘de-centres’ the often reified concept of the state dovetails well with a discursive approach to depoliticisation that attempts a similar thing. Constructivist approaches to analysing political institutions such as that developed by Vivien Schmidt (2010) and Mark Blyth (2002) similarly relate to this discursive approach to depoliticisation, as they emphasise the construction of ‘no alternative’ narratives, and the ‘deconstructing’ of those narratives.

**Empirical Focus**

The core literature on discursive depoliticisation tends to be more theoretically orientated than research into the first two ‘faces’. Empirical research that relates to this more theoretical concepion of politics has, however, been conducted into changes in the content of policy and societal discourse. Depoliticisation can hence be identified in three fields (summarised in table 4):

1. **Ideological discourse:**

Perhaps the most obvious arena for empirically analysing discursive depoliticisation is in the study of the ideological content of political discourse. Where the political ideologies of actors are veiled in technical, managerialist language, hence obscuring the subjectivity and contestability of political decisions, we can observe a process of depoliticisation (Jenkins,
The empirical research of Ulf Himmelstrand (1962) was ahead of its time in this respect, constructing a framework for quantitatively analysing how ‘depoliticised’ (or hidden) the ideological content of the Swedish opposition party’s political discourse was. More recently research tends towards an assessment of the institutionalisation of ideological doctrines as ‘common sense’ narratives in, for example, free market economic values in the United States (Swanson, 2007), attitudes towards immigrant populations in Australia (Pickering, 2001), discourse on (un)employment policy in the EU (Muntigl, 2002; Weiss and Wodak, 2000), the acceptance by New Labour of a crude ‘business school’ interpretation of globalisation (Watson and Hay, 2003), environmental politics writ-large (Swyngedouw, 2010; 2011), and the (unsuccessful) institution of ‘post-political’ forms of consensual air traffic management in Belgium (Oosterlynk and Swyngedouw, 2010). Wodak’s (2011) analysis of the practice of ‘politics as usual’ in the everyday life of politicians in the European Parliament is a particularly relevant study, as it seeks to uncover the ways in which political thinking is structured and certain modes of thought are blocked off at an ‘everyday’ level by the institution of ‘habitus’ or a subconsciously pre-determined mode of thought. There have also been analyses stemming from the governance literature on ideological ‘preference-shaping’ (Flinders and Buller, 2006a, pp.307-311) in, for example, the discourse around the 1974-79 Labour government’s Social Contract (Rogers, 2009) and economic reform during the late-1980s and early-1990s in New Zealand (Gregory, 2006).

2. Scientific discourse:

Empirical studies also analyse depoliticisation as an effect of the growth of scientific discourse, often drawing from Habermas’ theory of the effects of ‘scientism’. Where scientific ‘expertise’ or scientifically/mathematically determined solutions are evoked as the sole criteria by which political questions should be determined, we may argue that this sidelines the notion of collective control and autonomy, and is hence a manifestation of depoliticisation (Habermas, 1996). Haines (1979) provides an early example of this literature. He argues that depoliticisation can be seen in the ‘medicalisation’ of discourse on deviant social practices, such as drunkenness. Drunkenness is seen as an ‘illness’ or ‘addiction’ which can be treated through the use of scientifically mandated medical techniques which are used as ‘treatment’ for the ‘problem’. This can be seen as a form of depoliticisation as ‘a virtual consensus has been established as to (the) undesirability (of drunkenness)’ – objective ways of ‘treating’ drunkenness are then identified, and potential alternative collective ways of dealing with drunkenness as a social problem are foreclosed (Haines, 1979, p.124). A range of literature on medicalization can hence be seen as relating to the discursive ‘face’ of depoliticisation, though the mentions of depoliticisation in this literature are quite sparse (Edkins, 2002, p.246; Howell, 2007, p.39; Conrad, 2007, p.64; for a critical review of the medicalization literature see Hafferty, 2006).
Martin Marcussen’s (2006) more recent research on the ‘scientization’ of banking regulation heads a different body of research focused on the primacy of ‘scientific’ expertise. Marcussen argues, through a broad comparative analysis, that central banking since the 2000s has become ‘a-politicised’ or scientized in the sense that ‘central banking in many ways transcends formal politics’ - it is seen as an essentially scientific exercise in complex econometric modelling (Marcussen, 2006). This work on the presumed scientific ‘expertise’ of a certain political group is reflected in a wider literature on the role of scientific ‘expertise’ within political discourse as a delimiting factor which narrows political debate to follow supposedly objective experimental ‘findings’ (Weingart, 1999; Fischer, 2000; Timmermans and Scholten, 2006; Hoppe, 2009; Kinchy, 2010).

3. ‘Risk’ and security

The prevalence of discourses of ‘security’ and ‘risk’ can also been related to depoliticisation as the curtailment of political agency (Salter, 2008; Douglas, 1999; Kuzemko, 2012). Any rhetorical argument which posits the necessity of a particular course of action created by an existential ‘threat’, and the risk that this ‘threat’ may have an impact upon the material or moral wellbeing of citizens can be seen to foreclose the discussion of alternative responses to the assumed ‘threat’, hence acting to ‘bracket’ the possibility of collectively determined solutions to the ‘problem’ (Beck et al, 2000, p.23; Balzacq, 2005, pp.171-173). This discursive process may be called ‘securitization’, in the sense that Edkins (1999, p.11) argues security narratives make issues ‘more firmly constrained...decisions about them are taken in technical terms’. This goes against the view presented by Buzan et al (1998) that securitisation is a form of radical politicisation, since it creates heightened public attention around a social issue (c.f. Salter, 2011, p.120). The difference here is that whereas Buzan et al (1998) see securitisation through the frame of societal politicisation (whether issues are part of public discussion), Edkins (1999) sees securitisation as a matter of the content of the discourse, a perspective on the ‘third face’ of depoliticisation.

We may hence argue that the substantial body of literature on ‘securitization’ strategies in a variety of policy areas may be grouped under the umbrella of literature studying one empirical manifestation of the ‘discursive face’ of depoliticisation (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2010; Salter and Piche, 2011). This literature draws on Foucauldian conceptualisations of governmentality and Habermasian ‘speech act’ theory to argue that any instances in which ‘security’ or ‘risk’ are evoked to advocate certain forms of policy (say, for instance, the introduction of Identity cards) effectively attempt to close down public debate and assert broad agreement on normative aims, or to ‘discipline’ citizens into following certain official procedures and norms, as opposed to discussing them critically (Balzacq, 2005, p.175). Especially prescient studies here focus on discourses of risk and security relating to the ‘war on terror’ (De Goede, 2008a, 2008b; Balzacq, 2008; Salter, 2011), illegal immigration (Huysmans, 2000, 2006; Buofino, 2004), banking (De Goede,
2004), crime (Parnaby, 2006) and climate change and resource depletion (Carvalho and Burgess, 2005; Trombetta, 2008; Corry, 2012). While again these studies do not all make explicit the connection between securitisation and depoliticisation, the link is clear – securitisation is a manifestation of discursive ploys which attempt to block any recognition that the issues under consideration should be subject to collective control and change.

Table 4: Types of discursive (de)politicisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empirical focus</th>
<th>Tactic of Depoliticisation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Key text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Logic of No Alternative</td>
<td>Actors make ideological convictions appear ‘practical’ or ‘common sense’</td>
<td>Jenkins, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific discourse</td>
<td>Scientization</td>
<td>Actors invoke purportedly ‘objective’ scientific analysis and expertise</td>
<td>Marcussen, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security and risk</td>
<td>Securitization</td>
<td>Actors invoke fear of uncertainty and system failure</td>
<td>Edkins, 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One critical point may again be noted about this third face of depoliticisation: it is intrinsically entangled with the other two ‘faces’. In relation to the governmental face, Flinders and Buller (2006a, pp.307-311) identify ‘preference-shaping’ as a key tactic of depoliticisation for politicians, alongside their more formalistic governance tactics. In relation to the societal face, there is a close, but not identical, relationship between the level of debate around a political issue and the ‘content’ of the debate itself, as can be seen in Hay’s (2007) model of depoliticisation which seamlessly and convincingly merges the ‘arena’ of deliberation with the content of the discourse itself. In other words, to go back to the original aims of this article, while we have disentangled the theoretical roots and areas of empirical application of studies which see depoliticisation as inherently related to the content of discourse, specifically the de-emphasis of political agency, in reality the three faces of depoliticisation are intrinsically *entangled* in a wider ‘depoliticised polity’. 
Discussion and Conclusion: Towards Researching the ‘Depoliticised Polity’

This article has identified three distinctive ‘faces’ of depoliticisation by synthesising a wealth of literature on the subject. It has been argued that the first governmental ‘face’ does not account for the wider social processes of depoliticisation encompassed by the second societal and third discursive faces. However, it was suggested that although these ‘faces’ can usefully be disentangled analytically, in reality they are intrinsically entangled within what has been termed the ‘depoliticised polity’. In these concluding remarks the article will drive home why the three faces of depoliticisation are useful, both conceptually and empirically, and ultimately why researchers should care about interrogating the ‘depoliticised polity’ from the ‘three faces’ perspective.

Conceptually, analysing depoliticisation in terms of the ‘three faces’ can be beneficial in that it clears some of the murky conceptual misunderstandings that often pervade depoliticisation. An issue or policy area is sometimes said to be depoliticised in one sense (perhaps government no longer takes responsibility for it), but simultaneously ‘politicised’ in another sense (perhaps it is a ‘hot topic’ of the day). One example of this might be drug administration. Decisions on whether certain drugs will be administered for free by the state are often delegated to arm’s-length bodies like Britain’s National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, in a classic case of ‘depoliticisation’ (as understood by the governance school). However, at the same time the issue of drug availability can become a ‘hot topic’ as patient groups complain about a ‘post-code lottery’ in which access to life-saving drugs comes down to the (unequal) capacities of local Care Trusts to pay for treatment. We hence see a seemingly contradictory process of politicisation in society, and depoliticisation in government. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this argument that politicisation can occur in society while depoliticisation dominates in government, it opens up a lot of interesting analytical questions. The point is, however, that to say an issue can be simultaneously depoliticised and politicised is at once bafflingly counter-intuitive and conceptually suspicious, prompting the immediate question: ‘well what do we mean by depoliticisation anyway’? This murky misunderstanding requires us to carefully disaggregate what we mean by these terms in each area of their application, and by teasing apart the three ‘faces’ of depoliticisation this article has contributed towards the advancement of conceptual clarity in this respect.

Empirically, this article points the way towards an original and innovative avenue of research, analysing the relationship between governmental, societal and discursive faces of depoliticisation. One might hypothesise, for instance, that discursive depoliticisation may produce a knock on effect of societal depoliticisation, or that governmental depoliticisation may create a form of institutional legacy or path dependency that drives discursive depoliticisation. Similar questions to these are already being asked by scholars who are placed within the intersections of the Venn diagram in figure 1. Phillip Pettit (2004, p.63; c.f.
Pettit, 2001) is placed between discursive and governmental depoliticisation, since his work on depoliticisation and deliberative democracy argues that measures of ‘depoliticisation’ such as arm’s length appointments and constitutional constraints are ‘obviously a part of the institutions necessary for forestalling contestation, reducing the contestatory burden (in political deliberation)’. He is hence making a causal connection between delegation to arm’s-length bodies (governmental depoliticisation) and a move towards non-partisan political discourse (discursive depoliticisation). Hay (2007) argues convincingly that disengagement from formal politics is influenced by a ‘rational choice’ discourse which encourages the public to see politicians as self-interested and duplicitous, hence shutting down debate about values and interests – he identifies a connection between discursive and societal depoliticisation. Finally, Mair (2003, 2006) connects declining levels of participation in political parties with increasing delegation to depoliticised policy advisory boards and the European Union, arguing that this transfer of power leaves party politics relatively unimportant in the political process, which discourages involvement – he thus establishes a relationship between governmental and societal depoliticisation. Building upon the work of these scholars by defining the processes they identify in terms of different ‘faces’ of depoliticisation, we may move towards a more integrated analysis of depoliticisation dynamics that brings together the vast and disparate literature on this topic towards a common research agenda for analysing uninvestigated questions of how different forms of depoliticisation interact within the ‘depoliticised polity’.

It is with this very notion of the depoliticised polity which this article now finishes on, making a more normative argument for using the three faces of depoliticisation in governance research. The broad phenomenon of ‘anti-politics’, ‘post-politics’, ‘democratic winter’, ‘death of democracy’ – however one wishes to term it, is one of the most pressing issues of our time. As citizens withdraw further from the public realm of deliberation, politicians lose faith in their ability to govern directly, and political discourse becomes increasingly technocratic, short-sighted and uninspiring, we are once again faced with the potential of a ‘betrayal of the democratic ideal by democratic practice’ (De Benoist, 2011, p.72). These broad themes identified by a range of scholars appear to be worryingly ingrained, and require serious, empirically rigorous explanatory analysis from a politically conscious governance discipline. However, to date analyses of the ‘depoliticised polity’ have been broad-brush, and polemically or theoretically orientated. What is missing is a more detailed analysis of the constituent parts of the depoliticised polity, encompassing analyses of the three faces of depoliticisation posited by this article. Such a task, as should be clear from the range of empirical areas identified as analysing one ‘face’ of depoliticisation or another, is a substantial one, but one which a broad range of scholars may engage with, from numerous theoretical orientations and empirical backgrounds. It is hoped that this article has succeeded in broadening out the study of depoliticisation and convinced governance scholars to engage in just this normative agenda.
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