

The Selection of Cabinet Ministers in the Australian Federal Parliament

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March 2012

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National
University.

Declaration

The contents of this thesis are the results of original research and have not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. A section of the work in Chapter 3 is due to appear in an abridged form in an ANU publication in 2012.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis reflects a number of influences on my way of thinking. My approach to using statistics effectively began in 1984 at Monash University when the late Professor Keith Septimus Frearson taught me the value of using statistics to try to understand complex phenomena. Several years later as a student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide I was introduced to artificial neural networks and the ideas associated with machine learning. More recently, Dr Fred Gale of the University of Tasmania provided me with encouragement, support and intellectual direction in using these techniques when he supervised my honours thesis.

The current thesis could not have reached its current form without the input from my supervisor Professor Keith Dowding. From the time of my first phone call in late 2007 with Professor Dowding I found that he was open to considering all types of approaches to intellectual problems, the one requirement being that whatever approach is taken, it should be subjected to rigorous analysis.

Many others have helped me on my way, particularly the advisors on my panel, Professor Ian McAllister and Professor Paul t'Hart. Furthermore, all members of the Political Science and International Relations department have, at some time or another, provided me with insights and ideas. In particular, John Nethercote has been an invaluable source of information on Australian politics as has Jane O'Dwyer. Further afield, Professor Peter John of Manchester University provided me with excellent advice on sections of the thesis.

Proof reading was done by Dr Kim Wells. His contribution complied with Standards D and E of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice as specified by the ANU Policy on the Editing of Research Theses by Professional Editors.

I must thank Ian Wood for his input on data mining and machine learning. My ability to apply the latest methods from this sphere is largely due to his encouragement and advice. I must also thank Penelope and Ian Marshall for their support and encouragement over the last four years.

On a personal note I would like to thank Leila for her love and support as well as her tolerance of my chaotic lifestyle.

Abstract

The two fundamental questions addressed in this thesis are 1) what are the characteristics that are associated with an Australian federal parliamentarian becoming a cabinet minister, and 2) how do these characteristics help a parliamentarian become a cabinet minister? I examine the standard representational and institutional explanations for cabinet appointment decisions such as geography, party/faction, gender and house (Senate vs House of Representatives) and find they do not account for more than 25% of cabinet appointments. I therefore turn to individual characteristics of cabinet ministers. I use education, linguistic/cognitive style, and biographical data to develop a classification model. Using data mining, I isolate three characteristics that explain a high proportion of the appointments to cabinet over the period under examination. These variables are: i) having a legal qualification: ii) entering parliament at an early age: and iii) using abstract language. These three variables explain approximately 78% of cabinet appointments over the period under investigation. I argue that these variables are associated with cabinet appointment because they tap into a particular set of cognitive and behavioural characteristics that are beneficial in demonstrating cabinet potential. An important insight from the analysis is that, in selecting parliamentarians to serve in cabinet, personal factors are more important than representational factors.

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