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***Consultants, depoliticisation and new forms of governance***

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This paper addresses two growing trends in contemporary politics: the depoliticisation of areas of public policy and the presence of management consultants in new forms of governance. Despite the fact that both developments raise concerns about the legitimacy, accountability and transparency of representative democracies, there is still a lack of conceptual and empirical research on these topics. This paper addresses this gap and draws links between literatures on the two to illuminate some of the interconnections between this prominent form of expertise and political practices. It does this, first by locating depoliticisation and the rise of consultants in the broader context of the restructuring of political authority through economic globalization, neo-liberalism and notions of 'governance'. The paper turns to the literature on depoliticisation and, following Flinders and Buller, defines it not as a shift from political to apparently neutral forms of decision-making, but as a shift in the *arena* of political decision-making. This problematises the notion of depoliticisation and, through linking it to the emergence of new forms of governance, allows it be tackled it as a research object. Management consultants, as a consequence of their much sought-after business and management knowledge services, are often agents of depoliticisation: both as advocates for and actors within these new arenas of decision-making. It is argued this is problematic as such new forms of governance are often not subject to nor defined by the formal designation of roles and rules associated with the traditional institutional processes of representative democracies. This is particularly true of the ad hoc forms of governance which emerge, for example during the policy-making process, in what Hajer called an 'institutional void'. Drawing on the literature on management consultants in politics, the paper explores some of the critical issues raised and develops an understanding of them as 'rule intermediaries' (Majone; England and Ward) in these new arenas of governance. As such they and processes of depoliticisation are crucial to the contingent processes through which private sector practices and knowledges are translated into new systems of governance.

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