



The Role of the Center of Government

A Literature Review

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Abstract^{****}

This Technical Note presents a literature review on the Center of Government (CoG). This term refers to the institution or group of institutions that support a country's chief executive (president or prime minister) in leading the political and technical coordination of the government's actions, strategic planning of the government's program, monitoring of performance, and communication of the government's decisions and achievements. These institutions are becoming more and more relevant in a context where an increasing number of crosscutting issues demand whole-of-government approaches and coherent responses. In several countries, the CoG is also increasingly involved in promoting innovations to improve government performance and support departments and agencies in achieving results. This review discusses the conceptual definitions of CoG in the literature; presents their main functions; describes the organization, structure, and management styles of the units typically performing those functions; and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the current literature to inform an action-based agenda of CoG strengthening in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Acronyms

CEA	Council of Economic Advisers (United States)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
CLAD	Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo
CoG	Center of Government
CoM	Council of Ministers
CONPES	Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (Colombia)
CIU	Cabinet Implementation Unit (Australia)
DCI	Dirección de Coordinación Interministerial (Chile)
EOP	Executive Office of the President (United States)
LAC	Latin American and Caribbean
MININT & SP	Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública (Chile)
NEC	National Economic Council (United States)
NSA	National Security Advisor (United States)
NSC	National Security Council (United States)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMB	Office of Management and Budget (United States)
OPM/PMO	Office of the Prime Minister / Prime Minister's Office
PEMANDU	Performance Management Delivery Unit (Malaysia)
PMDU	Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (United Kingdom)
PMSU	Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (United Kingdom)
SEGEGOB	Ministerio Secretaría General de Gobierno (Chile)
UKP4	Presidential Unit for Development Monitoring and Oversight (Indonesia)
UPGC	Unidad Presidencial de Gestión del Cumplimiento (Chile)

1. Introduction

There is a growing interest among policymakers, practitioners, and academics, in particular in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, in the organization and functions of the Center of Government (CoG).¹ This concept refers to the institution or group of institutions that provide direct support to the country's chief executive, generally for the political and technical coordination of government actions, strategic planning, performance monitoring, and communication of the government's decisions and achievements.

The CoG is not a new phenomenon. The predecessor to the Cabinet Office in the United Kingdom dates back to 1916, when it was formally charged with the responsibility of coordinating policy and offering strategic direction to the government due to the exigencies of war (House of Lords, 2010; House of Commons Library, 2005). In the United States, the Reorganization Act of 1939 established the Executive Office of the President, after the Brownlow Committee declared, "the President needs help" (Relyea, 2008). The presidential office in Argentina has its roots in the 1940s (Bonifacio and Salas, 1985). In Mexico, the Secretariat of the Presidency was created in 1958, but its administrative support structures were established in the nineteenth century (Presidencia de la República de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2006).

However, a number of recent developments explain the increased relevance of the CoG. Many of the problems that governments have been facing for some years are crosscutting and "wicked" (Clarke and Stewart, 1997), meaning that they cross-functional boundaries and demand the involvement of multiple sectors. Therefore, stronger central coordination may be required to provide coherence to government actions. In addition, previous waves of government reforms have decentralized decision-making and implementation authority to autonomous or quasi-autonomous agencies (as proposed by the New Public Management) and to nongovernmental

¹ The following examples of this growing interest in the LAC region are worth mentioning: the project on *Alto Gobierno* launched by the Latin American Center for Administration and Development (CLAD, 2011); the projects to strengthen the presidential offices funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through its Management System for Governance and other programs; the creation in 2013 of a research group on the executive branch at the Latin American Political Science Association; and the meetings of the *Red Iberoamericana de Ministros de la Presidencia y Equivalentes* of the Ibero-American General Secretariat. The Inter-American Development Bank's own regional project, "Strengthening and Promoting Innovation in Center of Government (CoG) Institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean" (RG-T2258), approved in 2013 and of which this Literature Review is its first activity, is another example of this growing interest.

actors (as proposed by the Governance approach), leading to a diminished capacity of the political leadership to guide the workings of government (Dahlström, Peters, and Pierre, 2011).

In this context, several countries have rediscovered the importance of central steering. Finally, the expansion of government activity has increased the institutionalization of CoGs as defined by their value and stability, because chief executives are faced with new responsibilities and complexities that demand greater support (see Ragsdale and Theis, 1997, for the American presidency). Thus, the recently expanded role of many LAC governments in economic, social, and other policy areas underscores the importance of their CoGs.

The traditional mechanism of coordination, in the absence of strong CoG structures, was through the budget (Beschel and Manning, 2000; House of Lords, 2010; Keating, 2004). Ministries of finance or the treasury, which had control over public expenditures and thus great leverage over the other departments, could achieve a basic level of coordination across the government to sustain a fiscal balance. But with consolidated fiscal performance in most Latin American countries in the last 15 years and increased interest in improving performance, achieving results, and producing positive societal impacts, a different locus and type of coordination may be needed, one that goes beyond fiscal matters. This factor also helps explain the growing interest in the CoG.

Centers of government are regarded as the “engines” of government because they support the highest political authority and facilitate all government work (Haddad, Klouche, and Heneine, 2010; Institute for Government, 2013), although “steering wheel” and “central nervous system” (Beschel and Manning, 2000) may be more accurate metaphors. But, despite the importance that the literature grants to the CoG, there is limited evidence on the actual effects of different types of CoG on the quality of government policies. Although strong CoGs are recommended as an instrument to orient administrations toward results and evidence-based initiatives, the effects of CoGs *themselves* are still not clear. While it is certainly difficult to evaluate the effects of different CoG configurations because large institutional reforms generally do not present clear counterfactuals, it is still puzzling that a literature so focused on results has neglected a rigorous assessment of the effects of its object of study.

This literature review aims to present the most important issues related to the effectiveness of CoGs in performing their tasks. It is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the various definitions of the CoG, as well as the boundaries that establish which institutions are

included in this concept. Section 3 presents the typical CoG functions identified in the literature. Section 4 lays out the structural and organizational forms that CoG institutions take in different countries to perform these tasks, with schematic representations for certain countries. Section 5 concludes with a brief discussion of the strengths and limitations of the current literature on CoGs, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, and suggests avenues for future work to promote an action-based agenda of CoG strengthening in the region.

2. Defining the CoG

This section reviews various definitions of CoG that appear in the literature. Two alternative ways of conceiving the CoG (one focused on its location within the structure of the Executive branch, and another focused on the functions performed by it) are present in the literature,² leading to either narrow or expanded definitions of the CoG concept.

2.1 The CoG in Different Systems of Government

The CoG refers to the institution or group of institutions that provide direct support to a country's chief executive³ (James and Ben-Gera, 2004; World Bank, 2010a). Therefore, when analyzing the definition of CoG, it is important to consider the differences between the most common systems of government: presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential. In presidential systems of government, which exist in every LAC country, the president is the sole authority that leads the administration (Sartori, 1994). In this form of government, ministers serve at the pleasure of the president, who appoints them and decides whether they will continue in their positions. Final authority and responsibility, as well as accountability to the electorate, lie with the president. Therefore, there is no doubt that the CoG serves him or her exclusively, even though the functions performed by the CoG benefit the entire government.⁴

² These alternative definitional strategies also derive from the goals of each paper. Focusing on the scope of the CoG (enumerating the institutions that comprise it) may be more useful for descriptive studies, while concentrating on the functions performed may be more appropriate for explanatory purposes.

³ Centers of Government can also be found at the subnational level (e.g., state or local). Moreover, some governments have incorporated performance management systems driven from the office of the top executive, such as governments in Baltimore (i.e., CitiStat) and New York City (i.e., CompStat) and in the states of Pernambuco and Minas Gerais in Brazil. Nevertheless, this literature review refers exclusively to the national level, which generally deals with a broader and more complex set of responsibilities that require greater central coordination.

⁴ It is interesting to note that the political science literature, since Neustadt's (1960) seminal work on the subject, generally focuses on how presidents and prime ministers use these support structures to lead their governments and control ministries, agencies, and bureaucracies, while the public administration literature concentrates on the

A collective executive (the cabinet or Council of Ministers [CoM]) characterizes the parliamentary systems, which are prevalent in Caribbean countries. This system applies a principle of collective ministerial responsibility, and thus in general the CoG refers not only to the institution serving the prime minister (the Office of the Prime Minister, OPM) but also to the Cabinet Office, a broader unit to which the OPM is sometimes attached. In the United Kingdom, the Cabinet Office formally supports the entire cabinet, while the Prime Minister's Office (a unit of the Cabinet Office) reports solely to the prime minister. In practice, however, the boundaries between these offices are not entirely clear, and with more dominant prime ministers, such as Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair, the full Cabinet Office has worked mainly to support these individuals (House of Lords, 2010).

In the "Westminster model" (Lijphart, 2003), which exists in the United Kingdom and several of its former colonies, the prime minister has traditionally been dominant and not just a *primus inter pares*. But many other parliamentary countries have also been experiencing a trend toward a "presidentialization of politics" (Poguntke and Webb, 2005), in which the prime minister is increasingly dominant over the rest of the Cabinet. In such contexts, it appears that the CoG functions are being performed by institutions that, in theory, should support the entire cabinet, but in practice are working for the prime minister. It could be argued that providing support and advice to the prime minister is a political function, while assisting the cabinet is largely technical and administrative (organizing meetings, collecting documents, keeping minutes, etc.). Separate units, with different types of staff (political appointees and civil servants, respectively) could perform these functions. However, a clear distinction between political and technical roles is not always easy to draw at the CoG, where much of the work is located at the interface between politics and administration (Goetz and Margetts, 1999). Therefore, the actual dynamics may not follow the formal separation of these units. Moreover, in countries where the cabinet as a collective body plays a strong policy-making role, CoG support goes beyond purely administrative tasks, as it seeks to ensure the coherence of the decisions adopted by the ministers.

Finally, semi-presidential systems consist of a "dual executive," comprising the president and the prime minister, each of who are usually supported by their own staff. However, since the

benefits of CoGs for the performance of the whole government. This tension will be inevitably present throughout this literature review, as papers from both perspectives are presented and discussed.

prime minister and the CoM make most of the domestic policy decisions, CoG tasks would primarily be carried out on behalf of these principals (James and Ben-Gera, 2004).⁵ In Portugal, for example, the expansion of the CoG support structures in the PMO has strengthened the prime minister's role in shaping policy vis-à-vis the president, the cabinet, the parliament and the political parties, which lack the capacities and resources available to the prime minister (Costa Lobo, 2012).

Regardless of the prevailing system of government, the actual institutions that provide direct support to chief executives vary from one country to the other (and sometimes from term to term) according to constitutional and legal requirements, contextual factors, and even the style and personality of the chief executive. Therefore, rather than presenting a general model of CoG structure, the following sections will discuss their typical functions and present examples of the types of institutions that perform them in different countries. It is important to note that, *unlike ministries and other agencies*,⁶ *CoG institutions are not directly involved in service provision, nor do they focus on a specific policy area; rather, they perform coordination and monitoring functions for the entire government* (James and Ben-Gera, 2004).

2.2 Narrow and Expanded Definitions of CoG

One issue that is presented in different ways in the literature is whether the finance or treasury department is included within the CoG. Although finance or treasury departments are usually considered line ministries, they fit within the functional definition of CoG described above, since their missions relate more to coordination than to service delivery. Even if administratively they are not part of the center, treasuries perform core government functions comparable to those performed by institutions located next to the chief executive. In particular, the budgetary authority tends to be involved in the planning and monitoring of government actions. They often play an influential role in the policymaking process, not only because of their funding authority but also because they tend to have highly professional staffs that do not change with each administration. Thus, studies of the CoG in many countries consider these ministries to be part of

⁵ Despite this general trend, in the prototypical example of semi-presidentialism (France), former President Sarkozy became far more involved in domestic policy issues than his predecessors, thus increasing the influence of his own staff in steering the government (Bezes and Le Lidec, 2011). In fact, several new units were created under the supervision of the presidential office.

⁶ This review uses “ministries” and “departments” interchangeably. “Agencies” are units within departments, unless they refer to the autonomous or quasi-autonomous agencies of the New Public Management type.

the CoG. See, for example, Egaña and Chateau (2011) and Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado (2013) for Chile, House of Lords (2010) for the United Kingdom, and Jensen (2011) for Denmark. However, other studies do not include finance departments in the CoG, in either Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Ben-Gera, 2004; Ben-Gera, 2009) or Latin American countries (CLAD 2011).⁷ Therefore, these divergent definitions can be classified in two categories:

- *Narrow definition*, which only includes institutions and units located next to the chief executive and serving him or her exclusively (for example, a Ministry of the Presidency or an Office of the Prime Minister). The position within the *structure* of the Executive branch is the defining criterion.
- *Expanded definition*, which also includes other institutions and units (such as finance departments or planning ministries) performing core, crosscutting governmental *functions*, even if they are not placed next to the chief executive serving him or her exclusively.

When conducting cross-country comparisons, an expanded definition may be more useful in order to ensure that all of the relevant CoG institutions are included in the analysis. In many countries, focusing only on the President's or the Prime Minister's Office would omit the institutions and units actually performing CoG functions to manage the government.

However, finance ministries also perform tasks unrelated to CoG functions. As an OECD (2007:13) paper notes, "these ministries perform a dual role within the policy system, both as line ministries with respect to their areas of competence and as horizontal ministries with a special role within the policy system itself." Moreover, finance ministers may hold an independent source of authority and power compared to other members of the CoG. This stems not only from their legal authority over budgetary issues, but also from the fact that they may be members of the assembly (in parliamentary systems) or require legislative approval to be appointed (in certain presidential systems). This authority may simply derive from their ministerial status. In some cases, the chief executive and the finance minister may be considered a "diarchy" (see Heywood and Molina, 2000, on Spain). Consequently, it may not be appropriate to consider the treasury just another member of the CoG. In addition, expanding the definition of

⁷ The Latin American Center of Administration and Development (CLAD) uses the term *alto gobierno* (senior level of government) instead of CoG, referring to the units in charge of providing strategic direction and coordination to the government.

CoG to include all of the functions of finance ministries may present the problem of losing specificity when speaking of the CoG.⁸

Both approaches present advantages and disadvantages. Constitutions and other government-organizing laws do not provide for a CoG, so it is unlikely that a single definition will fit every case. It is possible, for example, that political dynamics and the relationship between the finance minister and the chief executive may be relevant considerations when deciding which units form the CoG in a specific country. It is also possible that only some units within the treasury, such as those dealing with budgetary issues, may belong to the CoG, while others may not fit within its definition. Such delimitations require additional work when identifying the CoG of a specific country. Whenever possible, *focusing on functions performed, rather than structural location, may provide the right answer.*⁹ Thus, the next section discusses typical CoG functions. Nonetheless, the tension between alternative definitions of CoG will persist throughout this literature review, as papers with opposite perspectives will be used to present different topics.

3. The Functions of the CoG

A variety of functions undertaken by CoGs are presented in the literature. The most frequently repeated function is probably coordination, in both its political and technical aspects. Coordination has been defined as “the heart of the CoG’s mission” (Goetz and Margetts: 436). This section describes the five key functions identified by Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado (2013): political coordination, strategic planning, policy coordination (for both design and implementation), monitoring of performance, and communications and accountability of actions and achievements.

3.1 Political Coordination

The primary function of CoGs is the political coordination of the government. Chief executives must provide consistent direction to the policies of their administrations while negotiating with

⁸ This is a well-known tension in concept building (Sartori, 1984): broadening the scope of a concept allows it to “travel” and to compare cases in a variety of settings, but risks blurring the specific phenomenon under study.

⁹ Dunleavy and Rhodes (1990:4) define the core executive in this functional way: “all those organizations and structures which primarily serve to pull together and integrate central government policies, or act as final arbiters within the executive of conflicts between different elements of the government machine.” OECD (2011) takes a similar approach.

the legislature, political parties, civil society organizations, interest groups, and public opinion to implement their program. A single individual cannot do all of this alone. Chief executives need information from multiple sources to weigh their biases and come up with their own assessments, and they need to supervise or lead cabinet ministries and the bureaucracy from above to ensure a unified and coordinated direction (Bonvecchi and Scartascini, 2011). Centers of Government are the tool that they use to accomplish these goals. Moe (1993) has argued that, in the United States, presidents are the only actors who care about the global performance of government, while Congress and the agencies have more parochial concerns. Therefore, all presidents (regardless of party, ideology, or style) have an incentive to align political coordination, which requires a strong CoG.¹⁰

The importance of political coordination has increased because of factors already mentioned (the growth of “wicked” issues, the decentralization of authority to quasi-autonomous agencies, nongovernment actors, and subnational governments), but also because of external factors that have enlarged the salience of the chief executive, such as the role of media in politics, the personalization of electoral campaigns, and participation in international summits (Fleischer, 2011). All these elements increasingly lead to direct personal responsibility of the chief executive for the actions in all areas of his or her administration. Chief executives have responded to this challenge by strengthening the role of the CoG to ensure political control over the cabinet and the bureaucracy (Dahlström, Peters, and Pierre, 2011).

Chief executives may decide not to institutionalize the role of the units performing these functions. Neustadt’s (1960) classic recommendation was for American presidents to behave like Franklin Roosevelt, who organized the Executive in a radial way, with all other areas reporting directly to him bilaterally. He preferred fuzzy lines of responsibility and overlapping jurisdictions, he skipped over chains of command by reaching down to lower-level units, he discouraged cooperation and collaboration between his subordinates, and he fomented interdepartmental conflict and competition (George and Stern, 1998; see also Porter, 1980, who refers to “ad hococracy” as a highly informal management system in which presidents do not have established modes of interaction with their staff, but rather select who will address each issue and

¹⁰ Other authors argue that centralization also involves costs (mainly the loss of departmental expertise), so this strategy will be contingent (Rudalevige, 2002). Chief executives will be more likely to centralize when they want quick action, when they pursue new policies, when they seek to reorganize the government, and when the departments’ preferences are not aligned with their own.

how the procedures will operate). According to Neustadt, this style allowed Roosevelt to maintain full political control of his administration, with access to all relevant information without intermediaries. However, most presidents since Roosevelt, faced with an increasingly complex Executive branch, opted for a more institutionalized process of political coordination. It would be too demanding for a single individual to collect and process all of the information coming from bilateral relations. Thus, chief executives have generally preferred more formalized ways of structuring the units in the CoG.

The political coordination function refers not only to leading the Executive branch, but also to ensuring support from the Legislative branch and the governing party or parties. In parliamentary systems, party discipline is critical to guarantee the survival of the cabinet (Sartori, 1994). In presidential systems, the president's term is not tied to congressional support, but without it he or she could not drive a policy agenda. Chief executives need this task to be centrally directed in order to avoid having each department lobby the Legislative branch to obtain approval of their projects, disregarding the overall government strategy. In coalition governments, political coordination is even more complex (OECD, 1998): all parties may need to be consulted before launching important policies, especially if some of them do not have presence in the ministries where these policies were discussed. Only the center can conduct these consultations.¹¹ The CoG also has a broader perspective of the political situation than the departments to determine the best timing and sequencing of the administration's initiatives.

In certain contexts, the legal counsel of the chief executive requires political sensitivity, especially if it involves advising on the best strategies to advance the government's policy agenda, such as whether to send a bill to the Legislature or take unilateral executive action. This task may be more important in some cases than in others. In OECD countries, the legal counsel's function appears to be merely a technical one (Ben-Gera, 2004), but in Latin American countries it may also have a political role (Navarro Arredondo, 2010; Coutinho, 2013; Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013).

The political management of the government also involves interacting with the private sector and civil society organizations. Anticipating, managing, and resolving conflicts that may

¹¹ To do this successfully, CoGs need to avoid being perceived as favoring one or more of the parties in the coalition, which may occur if there is no clear distinction between the units serving the prime minister and those serving the government as a whole (Goetz and Margetts, 1999). A perception of impartiality may be obtained by including representatives of all coalition parties in the CoG, although this may lead to a proliferation of CoG units and coordination problems within the center.

arise, such as strikes, protests, and others, is typically a CoG function (Egaña and Chateau, 2011). Center of Government institutions in the LAC region appear to be stronger in their political tasks than in their technical ones, where there is greater need for improvement (World Bank, 2010a). Nonetheless, the analytical separation between political and technical functions should take into account a possible empirical linkage, because political resources and authority are required to perform the technical functions presented next.

3.2 Strategic Planning

Presidents and prime ministers are usually elected on a platform, presented to the voters during the campaign. Electoral programs vary greatly in their degree of specificity, but they never have the level of detail needed to become operational without further refinement. To translate their electoral platforms into government programs, chief executives may rely on a trusted team at the CoG (which could include an office of the president, a ministry of planning, or another structure) to work with departments and agencies in clearly defining each area's strategic goals and in setting the indicators that will measure progress. Centers of Government are useful in maintaining congruence among the objectives pursued by different agencies and in aligning them with the chief executive's priorities (OECD, 2007).¹² Moreover, ensuring that the regulations issued by ministries and agencies follow an overall consistent direction (regulatory oversight) (OECD, 2012) is a CoG task aimed at producing coherence in government actions.

The literature shows how this function is performed in different settings. Chief executives and their CoGs are sometimes more willing and able to impose these goals on line ministries, while in other cases they choose to be, or are forced to be, simply recipients and compilers of each area's plans. The style of the chief executive, the political dynamics within his or her cabinet, and the level of expertise available in the CoG and in the ministries appear to influence how this work is conducted. In Germany, the CoG has a very limited role in proposing policies to the ministries, due to the system's fragmentation of power and to the existence of highly competent political civil servants at each ministry. Governments are usually coalitions comprising several parties, and other actors—such as subnational governments and the

¹² Priorities are not just defined at the outset of the new administration. Issues that had not appeared during the electoral campaign emerge, become government priorities, and therefore get CoG attention. In the United States, Hurricane Katrina is an example of this (Evans, 2013). Thus, this function is more dynamic and ongoing than what traditional notions of planning would suggest. Strategic management, a frequent term in business administration (Nag et al., 2007), may be more appropriate to denote the flexibility of this task.

Constitutional Court—also impose checks on the chancellor’s initiatives (Fleischer, 2011). In the coalition government in Chile led by President Piñera, the CoG worked with the ministries to establish their goals, while acknowledging that it played a supporting and subsidiary role (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013). In the United Kingdom, traditionally led by single-party governments and less fragmentation of power, the CoG has taken a more proactive role in strategic planning, especially under certain dominant prime ministers (House of Lords, 2010).

Even when the ministries take the initiative to set goals, the CoG may be essential for ensuring that these goals are sufficiently specific and actionable; objectives that are too broad may just let the ministries insert whatever they were already doing within them. The CoG also needs to ensure that the budget is synchronized and aligned with the plan in order to meet the chosen objectives (Evans, 2013). A proper linkage between strategic goals and budgetary resources is needed to provide direction to the activities undertaken by departments and agencies. This linkage can be made by taking either a sequential approach, in which the development of priorities and performance targets is conducted first and the budgeting process then follows, or an integrated approach, in which both processes occur simultaneously, which demands greater capacity and better coordinating mechanisms (Haddad, Klouche, and Heneine, 2010). Regardless of the approach used or the institutions responsible for them, the key task is to ensure that planning and budgeting are synchronized.

Most studies in the literature argue that the CoG should focus on a few strategic objectives (Barber, 2008; Prats i Catalá and Villoria, 2011; Egaña and Chateau, 2011). Chakabarti (2007) notes that the CoG should not only just focus on a few strategic priorities; within them, it should be most heavily involved in those that are the responsibility of departments that have low capabilities and require more assistance. In the United States, the CoG has evolved from trying to track every single goal in the agencies to a narrower, higher-level focus. The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 required every agency to develop five-year strategic plans and annual performance plans and to submit them to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), one of the key units within the CoG. To strengthen the enforcement of this provision, the George W. Bush administration launched the Program Assessment Rating Tool, which allowed OMB to track the performance of over 1,000 programs across the government. But this broad coverage conspired against OMB’s ability to clearly convey the President’s priorities to the agencies. Therefore, to provide a stronger strategic

direction, the Obama administration's OMB instead focused on a few key goals and worked with the agencies on them. In addition, it established cross-agency goals on certain topics (improving energy efficiency, promoting math and science education, improving job training, among others) that were part of the President's agenda and that required efforts from multiple agencies. The passage of the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act was instrumental to these changes in the way strategic management is conducted (Joyce, 2011).

Chief executives in other countries have also sought to focus the strategic priorities of their administrations. The creation of the Prime Minister Strategy Unit (PMSU) in the United Kingdom and the adoption of a Government Strategy Document (GSD) in Finland, for example, have strengthened the CoG's capacity to provide coherence to government action. The PMSU, established in 2002, provided a cross-departmental perspective on strategic issues under the notion of a "joined-up government,"¹³ by engaging with the relevant departments to achieve certain strategic goals. Although the PMSU had institutional predecessors in the CoG under previous administrations (the Central Policy Review Staff, the Efficiency Unit, the Performance and Innovation Unit, the Forward Strategy Unit), it was probably the strongest effort by a British prime minister to provide strategic coherence to the government. The GSD played a similar role in Finland, a country of traditionally weak prime ministers; each coalition member, for example, chose the individuals that occupied the ministries corresponding to that party, with little say from the prime minister (Kekkonen and Raunio, 2011).¹⁴ Ensuring coherence and strategic guidance in countries with weak chief executives and strong ministers may therefore be a critical task.

An example of a powerful planning office in Latin America is Colombia's Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (CONPES), considered the most important unit within the CoG (OECD, 2013). CONPES approves the four-year National Development Plan, in which the president outlines his or her vision and key initiatives. Before its approval, the plan is subjected to an extensive consultation process: civil society organizations, regional governments,

¹³ Concepts like "whole-of-government" or "holistic government" refer to approaches that emphasize a common strategy for the entire government, rather than letting each department implement its own agenda.

¹⁴ Even in presidential system of government, the formation of coalitions may imply that political parties have a crucial role in nominating the individuals that occupy the ministries corresponding to each of them. See, for example, Siavelis (2013) regarding the role of *cuoteo* in Chile, especially in the early stages of democratic consolidation. This case also shows how, when presidents have to deal with ministers who are not personally close to them, they may develop powerful formal or informal networks of trusted advisors, like President Frei's *círculo de hierro* (iron circle) or President Lagos' *segundo piso* (the second floor of the presidential building), who actually run the administration.

and Congress provide input, ensuring the contestability of the initiatives.¹⁵ This is critical because contestability is one of the drivers of the policy process that help improve the quality of public policies (see World Bank, 2010a). CONPES is chaired by the National Planning Department, which coordinates the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the plan after its approval. This shows how the initial work on setting strategic priorities and defining indicators of progress is tied to the next two functions typically performed by CoGs: coordinating policy design and implementation, and monitoring performance.

Strategic planning also helps to sustain a systematic focus for administrations that may be distracted by everyday events and crises (Barber, 2008; Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013). The key element is that the plan actually guides the policy process; if plans only exist formally, decisions may be made on an ad hoc basis, without sufficient prior preparation and analysis, as Evans et al. (2010) have described in the case of Romania. This affects the predictability and quality of the policy review conducted by the CoG. This linkage between the planning phase and the decision-making process does not imply that the same staff should work on both tasks. Although a proper connection between them is needed to ensure alignment of day-to-day decision making with the administration's long-term goals, a separation between the teams that work on long-term strategic goals and on day-to-day matters is generally recommended in the literature.

3.3 Coordination of Policy Design and Implementation

Public administrations have traditionally been organized along vertical functional lines, which allows for division of labor and specialization but poses the challenge of fragmentation and lack of cohesiveness of the government as a whole. The coordination function is the response to these potential problems. This is not a novel idea. As early as 1937, Gulick (1937) suggested that public coordination could be achieved either by placing the units under the same manager or by instilling a dominant idea of how each sector's work contributes to the whole. Centers of Government were generally established to coordinate government actions. For the reasons

¹⁵ During the administrations of former Presidents Fox and Calderon, the Presidential Office in Mexico prepared the National Development Plan with civil society participation through an open and contestable process. A more specific government program was then developed through consultations between the CoG and the departments. Costa Rica also has a National Development Plan, although in this case it is a government program for its four-year term. Ministries then develop their own operational plans based on this overall strategy (see Ministerio de Planificación Nacional y Política Económica and Ministerio de Hacienda, 2012, for methodological details).

mentioned at the beginning of this review, however, coordination is currently a greater challenge for governments throughout the world. Lack of effective coordination can lead to problems being “dumped” by one agency onto the other and not being resolved, to unintended duplications that cause confusion and waste, and to an increase in bureaucratic conflicts, among other problematic situations (Gaetani, 2011).

James and Ben-Gera (2004) identified eight dimensions of coordination, which are tied to typical functions of CoGs in OECD countries:

1. Coordination of organizational arrangements for the CoM and ministerial committees
2. Coordination of the policy content of proposals for the CoM
3. Coordination of legal conformity
4. Coordination of the preparation of government program and priorities, and their linkage to the budget
5. Coordination of communications
6. Coordination of the monitoring of government performance
7. Coordination of relations with the parliament
8. Coordination of specific horizontal strategic priorities

The first and second dimensions apply mostly to parliamentary systems of government. In presidential systems, the president is not part of a collective body (the cabinet), and in fact cabinet meetings may not be held or may simply occur pro forma.¹⁶ Usually, presidential cabinets are not collective decision-making bodies, and therefore the CoG only has the president as its principal. Other functions (fourth through seventh) are considered independent functions in this literature review, outside the scope of coordination. Although they all aim to ensure a cohesive and competent functioning of government, it appears preferable to narrow the definition of coordination. In this review, therefore, coordination refers mainly to the adoption and implementation of decisions under the supervision of a certain organizational unit (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013), in this case, the CoG.

¹⁶ In Argentina, Cruz Barbosa (2010) documents only four formal Cabinet meetings between 1996 and 2002, and none since then. Nonetheless, in other presidential systems, cabinets may be more relevant. Lanzaro (2012) notes that the advent of a coalition government in Uruguay in 2000 led to a revitalization of the Cabinet as a collective decision-making body, because then President Vázquez had to ensure the support of all sectors within the coalition for the government’s agenda.

A policy coordination scale is sometimes used to distinguish different possible levels of coordination in government (Metcalf, 1994).¹⁷ The lowest possible level of coordination refers to a situation in which ministries make independent decisions in each policy area. This may occur when the CoG is weak vis-à-vis the departments, such as in certain coalition governments where parties choose the ministers and the prime minister has limited influence over them. The next level of coordination implies that the ministries communicate with each other through institutionalized channels and share information on decisions that may affect other areas. A third level involves not only information sharing but also consultation before making decisions. In this stage, there is still no strong role for the center, and coordination is weak.

At the next higher level, the CoG manages to avoid public disagreements between the ministries, generally by controlling communication. This negative coordination that hides disagreements only becomes positive when there are mechanisms to create consensus among ministries, for example, by forming effective joint committees or inter-ministerial councils. This coordination is still horizontal, that is, among the ministries themselves. At the next higher level, the center begins providing vertical coordination by arbitrating conflicts between departments. But at this level, the center is still reacting to policy initiatives developed by the ministries. At a still higher level, the center imposes its priorities and strategic orientation on the departments. Finally, the highest level involves not coordinating policy design but also defining strategic priorities to be implemented by the departments.

CoGs differ with respect to the degree of coordination that they provide to their governments. The literature suggests that higher levels of coordination are associated with better-quality policies. Nevertheless, there is also a risk that higher degrees of coordination stifle creativity and initiative by the departments, since the center is able and willing to impose the overall policy orientation on them. After all, it is in the ministries where the expertise on the various policy areas resides, and powerful chief executives may hurt the quality of policies by trying to micro-manage the entire administration (James and Ben-Gera, 2004). The right balance may be hard to strike in this regard. This is especially true because the distinction between policy coordination and policymaking may be blurred in practice, as policies are frequently made

¹⁷ A problematic aspect of this scale is that it suggests a linear, cumulative progression toward full coordination. In reality, countries may present “higher” levels of coordination without having achieved “lower” ones. Although the scale is useful to understand what is meant by coordination, the relationship between the levels is more complex than the scale would suggest.

through ongoing interaction between line ministries and CoG institutions (OECD, 2011). The OECD recommends that CoGs coordinate using four tools (Ben-Gera, 2004):

1. Adopting a broad perspective, pointing out to the departments the need to adjust proposals to fit the government's overall orientation.
2. Being "guardians of the process" by ensuring that proposals are submitted through the appropriate channels and receive the necessary consultations.¹⁸
3. Resolving conflicts, by chairing inter-ministerial meetings when disagreements arise.
4. Briefing the chief executive when these conflicts have not been resolved at the lower level and therefore require an executive decision.¹⁹

Many of these are the roles suggested by Daalder and Destler (2009) for the U.S. National Security Advisor (NSA). The NSA is conceived as an honest broker that coordinates the work of powerful agencies such as the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the Central Intelligence Agency, among others. These departments have multiple constituencies, including several congressional committees with budgetary authority over them, and strong internal subcultures, while the NSA has only one constituent (the president) to serve. Thus, the NSA does not have a separate institutional agenda and does not need to protect any bureaucratic turf, so he or she can provide a neutral forum in which to resolve conflicts between departments. Of course, this perception of impartiality has to be earned; if the secretaries believe that the NSA is only advocating for his or her own agenda with the president, they are likely to circumvent the NSA and seek unmediated access to the president, weakening the coordination procedure. A memo directed to President Kennedy by then NSA McGeorge Bundy summarizes this role: "The President's staff is to serve as an extension of himself—as his eyes and ears and his source of nondepartmental comment. The President's staff is his own instrument. It is not—though this is a hard rule—a place for men trying to peddle their own remedies without presidential backing" (Bundy, 1961).

The value of the NSA and similar figures can be understood because the U.S. form of government is characterized by a high degree of autonomy of the entities that shape policy

¹⁸ "Guardians" or custodians of the process also need to promote "multiple advocacy," to guarantee that alternative options are being considered (George, 1980). Several tools can be used to ensure that this effectively occurs, including balancing the resources and power of participants, empowering weaker advocates, and setting alternative channels of advice, among others. A more modest approach would at least require "devil's advocacy," encouraging a member of the team to challenge conformity and unanimity of opinion (George and Stern, 2002).

¹⁹ Former U.S. President Harry Truman had a desk sign that read, "The buck stops here," meaning that the ultimate responsibility for tough decisions that could not be made at a lower level was his.

(Peters, 2011). For example, executive branch departments respond not only to the president but also to other constituents (among them the “iron triangles” formed by bureaucrats, congressional committees and interest groups). But these high levels of autonomy may not be present in other countries if outside actors are weaker and chief executives are stronger vis-à-vis the departments.

Could this be the situation in some Latin American countries? There are no empirical studies to answer this conclusively. But if this situation existed, it may have an influence on why Latin American presidents have generally not followed their American counterparts in developing powerful CoGs to support them in the coordination function (Alessandro, 2010). In Mexico, for example, presidents have traditionally made their most trusted advisors ministers, so there was no need to replicate a mini-cabinet in the CoG to monitor them (Méndez, 2007).²⁰ The same can be said about most Argentine presidents (Bonifacio and Salas, 1985). Bonvecchi and Zelaznik (2012) found that since the return of democracy in 1983, 81 percent of ministers have come from the president’s party, with 16 percent independents—mainly the technocrats—and just 3 percent from other parties. Most ministers not only belong to the president’s party, but also to his or her sector within the party.

Thus, it would be worth studying whether the incentive to develop a robust CoG is associated with the chief executive’s perception of ministerial autonomy. That is, if the ministers are not regarded as too autonomous, strong coordination and monitoring mechanisms from the center may not be considered important. There is still little evidence on this connection, although it has been argued that presidents leading coalition governments may prefer a stronger CoG, as their personal relationship with ministers from different parties tends to be weaker (see Siavelis, 2012, explaining the expansion of the CoG’s role during the Lagos administration in Chile).²¹ With respect to Brazil, Inácio (2006) argues that when there are more intracoalition conflicts, chief executives have a greater incentive to centralize coordination of government actions. This being said, other factors also influence the role of the CoG. The expansion of government

²⁰ A partial exception occurred during the first years of the administration of former President Fox (2000–2006), who appointed several ministers who had no relationship with him (he even used head hunters to select them). At the same time, Fox strengthened the CoG by creating a new Executive Office of the Presidency, with units that would enhance support to the president (planning, policy analysis, innovation) and others to address specific issues (national security, regional development, indigenous peoples, among others), and that was in charge of the president’s close advisers (see DOF 12/04/2000). In the later years of his term, President Fox opted for a more traditional, and less prominent, role for the CoG (Méndez, 2007).

²¹ However, it is possible that, to hold the coalition together, the chief executive needs to effectively devolve more authority to the ministries, reducing the influence of the center (Amorim Neto, 2012). As the author admits, this is a theoretical argument not supported by data.

activity, for example, can increase the need for support to the chief executive, leading to an institutionalization of the CoG (Ragsdale and Theis, 1997). Thus, the relationship between the chief executive and the departments cannot be regarded as the sole factor shaping the role of the CoG.

Coordination is particularly relevant with respect to crosscutting issues. These may be specific issues in a certain context (such as the response to natural disasters), policy areas that necessarily involve multiple departments (regional integration, public administration reform, civil service regulation), or structural features of the system of government (relationships with subnational governments, particularly in federal systems). In Chile, 12 different ministries and 10 regional authorities were involved in policies affecting the country's indigenous populations. This fragmentation harmed the results achieved by these policies and generated discontent among these groups. Former President Bachelet created a new position to coordinate and review these policies, the Presidential Commissioner for Indigenous Affairs, and appointed one of her closest advisers. The persistence of the problems led her to shift jurisdiction over the issue to the Ministry of the Presidency, the core of the CoG (Egaña, 2011).

The literature warns about placing at the center certain institutions that have no other “natural” location in government, for this may overload the CoG and prevent it from performing its distinctive functions (Peters, Rhodes, and Wright, 2000). However, if issues are critical and crosscutting, they should rightfully be managed from the center. Therefore, it seems that the decision whether to include any of these areas within the CoG depends on their importance to the chief executive at any given time. In Brazil, a Secretariat of Civil Aviation was created within the President's Office in 2012. This issue had become more important because of the critical need to improve the aviation system in advance of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics (Rennó, 2013).

3.4 Performance Monitoring

By setting strategic priorities and coordinating policy design and implementation, chief executives seek to provide coherence to their administrations. A related CoG function is monitoring the achievement of these priorities. Ideally, chief executives would like to know the “production function” of each service delivered by the government, that is, what inputs are needed to produce one unit of the service (output) and one unit of whatever result is being

pursued (outcome/impact). Admittedly, this may be a formidable task but, even without reaching this level of detail, CoGs may have data at their disposal to monitor the performance of departments and agencies. With this information, chief executives can intervene appropriately when performance is lagging. However, monitoring should provide an incentive for ministers to improve performance *before* the chief executive needs to intervene.

Several recent cases highlight the importance that chief executives are assigning to strict follow through of their administrations' top initiatives by creating specific CoG units devoted to this task, as in the UK, Australia or Chile (Lindquist, 2007; Barber, 2008; Richards and Smith, 2006; Wanna, 2006; Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013). These units may have a dual role, providing both *ex ante* quality control of new policy proposals, by asking the right questions about how they will be implemented (a function more related to the CoG's role in policy design, discussed above), and *ex post* tracking of progress, including, when necessary, providing assistance from the center to remove obstacles (Lindquist, 2007). The CoG itself does not usually conduct the monitoring; rather, it coordinates and ensures that the appropriate ministries and agencies are conducting and reporting on the monitoring.

The characteristics of performance monitoring vary depending on the position of the chief executive vis-à-vis the cabinet. In parliamentary systems with strong cabinets, the monitoring process consists of ministers supervising themselves, and therefore they may lack the proper incentives to undertake this task rigorously. Thus, monitoring may be more effective when the chief executive clearly exercises authority over the rest of the cabinet. The capacity of the CoG to monitor departmental performance and to intervene when results are not being achieved ultimately depends on the relationship between the ministers and the chief executive and on the power that the latter delegates to the CoG. But the need for ministerial acceptance of the CoG's role also implies that departments and agencies must be persuaded to appreciate the value added by the CoG to their work (see Barber, 2008, on the importance of this persuasion when establishing the British PMDU).

Monitoring also works better with a few key strategic goals. In both the British and the Australian cases, for example, there was a deliberate decision to focus only on the government's major priorities, following between 20 and 30 goals in the United Kingdom and 50 goals in Australia. But these cases show that monitoring can take different forms. The monitoring process can be used as an early warning system for chief executives, with any policy corrections made by

the departments themselves. The Australian Cabinet Implementation Unit adopted this approach. In contrast, the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) in the United Kingdom was more involved in recommending and negotiating adjustments with the departments, establishing Joint Action Programmes (and, later, Priority Reviews) with the respective departments to identify the causes of lagging performance. This hands-on approach partially derived from the fact that the PMDU's monitoring activity was linked to the budgetary process,²² while in the Australian case these functions ran through separate channels. The PMDU's direct immersion in policy also reflected Prime Minister Blair's decision to involve himself in the achievement of his government's priorities (House of Commons Library, 2005; House of Lords, 2010; Richards and Smith, 2006). The Australian Cabinet as a collective body had traditionally been stronger than that of the United Kingdom. Thus, monitoring in Australia was more collaborative and collegial (Shergold, 2003), while monitoring in Britain was perceived as more adversarial. The PMDU even ranked departments in terms of achievements in order to foster performance improvement.

In Chile, the Piñera administration established the Presidential Compliance Management Unit (Unidad Presidencial de Gestión de Cumplimiento, or UPGC) to monitor progress on eight key strategic priorities (including 40 goals), raising red flags when targets were at risk of not being met. In cases of underperformance, the UPGC supported or assisted with the revision of the strategy or the activities implemented by the ministries, even though the responsibility for this task lies mainly with each ministry's staff. Other units within the CoG (such as the president's advisors) were also involved in requesting information from the ministries and monitoring their performance. This duplication of effort (performance monitoring was also conducted by the Ministry of Finance, the Budget Office, and the Ministry of Social Development for certain programs) caused a real "monitoring inflation" (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013), which led on occasion to excessive data-collection costs for the ministries. Eventually, it was decided that the UPGC would conduct systematic monitoring to ensure consistency between government actions and the government's program (taking a proactive approach), while the president's advisors would mainly intervene in situations where urgent

²² The PMDU could use the preexisting Public Service Agreements between the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Treasury) and the departments, which defined the targets to be achieved and the indicators that would be used to track performance, in exchange for budgetary resources. The PMDU, in fact, was initially located in the Cabinet Office but soon moved to the Treasury, although it continued reporting directly to the prime minister. The Australian Cabinet Implementation Unit did not have a strong focus on numerical targets due to concerns about the departments gaming the system (Shergold, 2003).

information was needed (reactive approach). That being said, the duplication of tasks is a strategy frequently used by presidents to ensure that they receive reliable and unbiased information (see Section 4.4 regarding management styles).

In Jamaica, the Cabinet Office has begun to implement a new performance monitoring system. Run by the recently established Performance Management and Evaluation Unit, it is expected to improve the capacity of the government to focus on its key priorities, monitor progress, and be accountable for results (Cabinet Office, 2010).

Although this literature review focuses mainly on OECD and LAC countries, performance monitoring units are being established across the world. Indonesia's Presidential Unit for Development Monitoring and Oversight (UKP4), Malaysia's Performance Management Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), and Thailand's Office of Public Sector Development Commission are examples of this trend (Chattaris and Juntima, 2012). The UKP4, created in 2009, was established to monitor the performance of ministries in a coalition government that the president did not fully control. This unit was conceived as a way to ensure that priorities were followed and that officials were held accountable for results. After three years, however, the effects of UKP4 are still not evident (Scharff, 2013). Malaysia's PEMANDU was set up in response to the public's concern about the quality of public services. Its initial results appear to be positive, although critics question the validity of the data reported by the ministries (Iyer, 2011). India has also created a Delivery Unit in the Prime Minister's Office and a Performance Management Division in the Cabinet Secretariat to oversee performance. Some African countries have also been establishing performance units in recent years (Friedman, 2011; Scharff, 2012).

The growing interest in the developing world in the creation of special delivery units may have to do with deficiencies in policy implementation detected in some of these countries (Evans, 2013). In contexts where implementation is more reliable, monitoring is usually performed through the cabinet offices or the finance ministries (which have authority over the budget and may define performance targets with the other ministries), or monitoring units may be created mainly to signal the importance that the chief executive ascribes to certain goals. In developing countries, the creation of such units may be more a response to inadequate implementation (or even lack of implementation) of the government's priorities. In both cases, the CoG's monitoring provides the chief executive with critical information about the government's performance.

Strengthening the monitoring function of CoGs is expected to produce better outcomes. However, the literature has not presented conclusive evidence that this actually occurs. Chief executives are surely better able to enforce their own priorities, but has this led to better policies? On the one hand, most accounts indicate that CoG monitoring has been useful in orienting the agencies' work toward outcomes and evidence-based interventions. On the other hand, it is not clear that those goals that were selectively monitored by the CoG were met any more than other ministries' goals. The United Kingdom's PMDU focused initially on four of the prime minister's priorities—health, education, crime, and transportation—which mostly involved monitoring the performance of five departments. There is limited published research showing that these areas performed better than less-monitored ones (exceptions are Propper et al., 2008; Kelman and Friedman, 2009; and Bevan and Wilson, 2013), although it is true that the goals chosen for special attention by the prime minister were the most complex ones, where achieving results is more difficult.

One other concern with respect to performance monitoring through quantitative progress indicators involves “gaming the system.” At least three ways of gaming the system have been found, in nontrivial amounts, in the British case (Hood, 2006):

1. The “ratchet effect,” by which managers set goals that they know are well below their actual production possibility frontier.
2. The “threshold effect,” by which excellence is discouraged and managers simply attempt to meet the targets.
3. The distortion or manipulation of reported results, which creates a disparity between reported and actual performance.

CoGs have ways to assess the validity of the reported data. “Mystery shoppers,” for example, can be useful in checking whether the services provided by agencies match their claims. But rigorous audits may be beyond the capacity of most CoGs, especially, as in the Australian Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU) or in the Chilean UPGC, if the unit is small, has no auditing authority, and cannot impose sanctions on cheaters. To avoid the shame of substandard performance, ministers in Australia have insisted to their subordinates that they do not want “red lights”²³ in their areas (Wanna, 2006). In fact, in certain reports none of the

²³ Traffic lights are a usual way of representing levels of progress. For example, Guatemala's Presidential Goals System, established in 2009, uses a similar approach (Díaz Velázquez, 2010).

indicators have red lights (major problems), only a few show amber ones (concerns), and the overwhelming majority have gotten green lights (satisfactory progress). Although the CIU cannot check the validity of the data, Wanna (2006) states that departments have other incentives to report accurate information. For example, they may prefer to disclose problems before they become disasters. Thus, the extent of gaming seems to have been limited. In these cases, it is often beneficial to rely on third party measurement of outcomes. For example, victimization surveys in Chile conducted by a prestigious NGO were used in assessing progress in crime reduction (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013). Similarly, a few economic indicators provided by an independent central bank or a statistical office can lend credibility to figures.

3.5 Communication and Accountability

When governments set strategic goals, coordinate the design and implementation of policies to achieve them, and monitor the progress made, they are able to present the results of their work to the citizens. This is another function usually assigned to the CoG, as it is usually in the best position within the government to provide a coherent and complete accounting of what has been done and what has been achieved, fulfilling a basic democratic principle of allowing access to the information needed to assess an administration's performance. In charge of the global performance of government, they are naturally suited to strike a good balance between various sectoral initiatives. However, since they are part of the government and very close to the highest level of political power, they also risk being perceived as not entirely objective in communicating results (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013).

The CoGs' communication units provide support to the chief executive in the form of speechwriting, managing relations with the press, and providing spokespersons. The CoG also coordinates with the departments and agencies on how the information is going to be presented, including establishing rules to ensure transparent and open government. In the United States, OMB has issued several directives in recent years instructing the departments and agencies on how to publish information in an accessible way, including "open data" initiatives to guarantee that the information is provided in machine-readable and open formats (OMB, 2009). This has led to the unprecedented publication of approximately 300,000 datasets, centralized in websites such as data.gov and performance.gov. It remains to be seen if this massive dissemination of information leads to increased accountability, or if citizens, the press, and interest groups will

simply be overloaded with data. In addition, these efforts may not come across as objectives for many actors, considering that governments are usually reluctant to voluntarily disclose information on targets that are not met (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013).

The role of the CoG is not easy in this regard. On the one hand, the CoG chooses which performance information it is reporting, and therefore has an incentive to exaggerate positive results and minimize or hide negative ones. On the other hand, it has the duty to openly and transparently communicate the administration's activities and achievements, and in certain cases this can be useful to encourage better performance from the departments (Kettl, 2011). There is a built-in tension in the CoG: some forces lead it to protect the chief executive's image at all costs, while others lean toward full transparency.

In Chile, a country with relatively high levels of transparency within the LAC region, think tanks and NGOs have signaled their doubts about the information presented by the CoG and the ministers in their accountability reports, noting that they rarely disclose instances of delays or underperforming government programs and opt to highlight only success stories (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013). For this reason, some former senior practitioners consider that performance data should only be used internally as a mechanism to drive improvements, not as an aid to the opposition to identify and disseminate cases of underperformance.

Ben-Gera (2004) points out that this tension between the duty to provide information and the need of any administration to sell its policies to the public can lead to a separation between the units in charge of information and those in charge of communications. The latter can be placed in the chief executive's closest unit (such as the Prime Minister's Office), generally composed of political appointees, while the former can be housed in another area of the CoG and managed by career civil servants. Nonetheless, the lines separating the chief executive's closest unit and the rest of the CoG are often blurred, and there is no guarantee that this rigid separation between information and communications can be maintained in practice.

The challenge for the CoG is to provide accountability without politically damaging the chief executive. Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado (2013) suggest a number of approaches that could be useful in reducing the tension between these two goals. They include agreeing with other governmental and nongovernmental actors on a format and timing for the publication of performance information to strengthen the credibility of the process and establishing public

forums, including social networks, to foster debate on the findings. Trust in public institutions and in the reported data would likely be increased if these procedures were adopted.

Finally, an excessive focus on media reaction can affect the CoG's capacity to perform some of its other core functions. Dählstrom, Peters, and Pierre (2011) find that CoGs may become too fixated on how issues are presented in the media, leading to inconsistent government actions that try to respond to the daily news cycle. This outcome conflicts with the CoG's main functions of defining an overall strategy, coordinating its implementation, and monitoring its progress in a systematic way.

4. Organization and Structure of CoGs

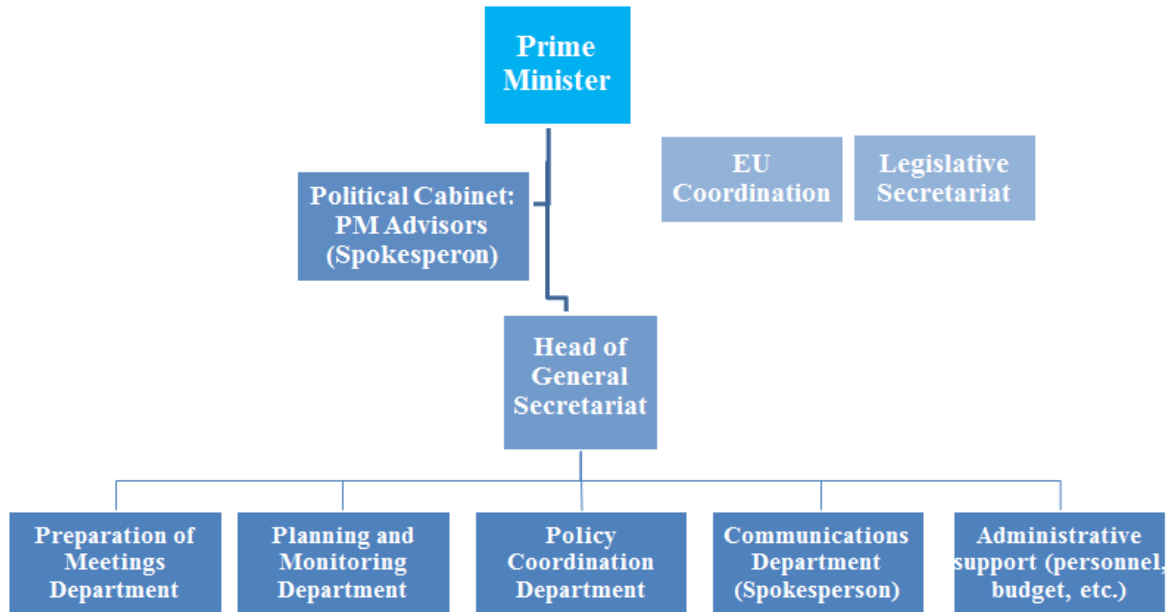
There are important variations across countries in the way CoGs are organized to perform the functions described in Section 3, depending on constitutional provisions, institutional constraints, and administrative traditions. Within the same country, different chief executives have structured their CoG in different ways, in accordance with their personal preferences or political realities. Sometimes, the same individuals have modified the organization of the CoG at different times in their tenure. Some examples are former Presidents Cardoso and Lula Da Silva in their first and second terms in Brazil (Gaetani, 2011) and former President Reagan in the United States (Rudalevige, 2005). This heterogeneity suggests that different ways of organizing the CoG may be appropriate in different contexts.

The boundaries of the CoG are not fixed and may vary from one country to the next. A narrow definition of CoG would refer only to President's or Prime Minister's Offices (which typically includes presidential advisors), ministries or general secretariats of the presidency, or similar institutions. An expanded definition would take into account other institutions, such as finance departments (in particular the Budget Office), the planning department or similar entities (Casa Civil, Jefatura de Gabinete).

The following diagram is a schematic representation of CoG structure in OECD countries (Ben-Gera, 2009), from OECD's fairly narrow notion of CoG:²⁴

²⁴ Truswell and Atkinson (2011) propose a different scheme, based on a different classification of functions than the one followed in this review. They consider that CoG institutions provide the following functions to the chief executive: (1) direction and focus (determination of priorities); (2) policy (coordination, critical analysis, dispute resolution, and in some cases policy origination); (3) implementation (delivery); (4) crisis management; (5) communications; (6) foreign policy (assisting the chief executive's personal role in the international stage); (7)

Figure 1. Schematic Representation of the CoG (narrow definition)



Source: Ben-Gera (2009).

This combination of units is generally present across these governments. Some may be subsumed within others (for example, the Legislative Secretariat can be a subunit under the General Secretariat) but there usually is at least some unit performing each of these functions. These typical units will be discussed next in greater detail.

4.1 Typical Units within the CoG

The literature presents a number of configurations of CoGs (Aninat and Rivera, 2009; Ben-Gera, 2004; Peters, Rhodes and Wright, 2000; Villoria, 2011), which include the following eight types of units: (i) chief executive’s direct support units; (ii) strategy units; (iii) policy coordination units; (iv) performance monitoring units; (v) press, communications and speechwriting unit; (vi) policy advice units and individual advisors; (vii) legal counsel unit; and (viii) an internal management unit. An expanded notion of CoG would also include the budget office, as it generally plays an important part in the strategic planning and performance monitoring functions of the CoG.

political advice (leading the party); (8) exercise of executive powers (advice on appointments and government structure).

4.1.1 Chief Executive's Direct Support Units

These are the offices that provide direct personal support to the president or the prime minister, including political and logistical assistance. In the United States, this unit is the White House Office, located within the Executive Office of the President (EOP). In the United Kingdom, it is the Prime Minister's Office, located at 10 Downing Street. The separation between this subunit and the broader one of which it is a part may simply be formal; the entire EOP provides support to the president, and the same occurs with the Cabinet Office in the United Kingdom, especially under dominant prime ministers.

These units manage both logistics and political affairs. Logistics may include managing appointments, scheduling, handling correspondence, and other types of personal assistance. Political affairs include linking the chief executive to the governing party or parties and to the legislature. In parliamentary systems, especially those of the Westminster type, the same majority controls both the executive and the legislative branches; therefore, this task involves mainly ensuring that Parliament supports the initiatives of the prime minister and the Cabinet. In presidential systems, the Congress usually has greater capacity to initiate its own bills, especially if the president does not command a majority there. Presidents need to coordinate the actions of their party in Congress, defining with its leaders the issues to include in the legislative agenda. In both systems of government, then, this political coordination is critical to provide the chief executive with legislative support for his or her program. Chiefs of staff, political advisors, and offices of legislative affairs are usually in charge of this task.

Several countries have strengthened these political capacities in recent years (Peters, Pierre, and Dahlström, 2011). This politicization strategy has been adopted to enlarge the “steering” ability of chief executives. However, the literature also provides examples of cases where the politicization approach has led to increased patronage and not to greater coordination capacities (Stolfi, 2011).

4.1.2 Strategy Units

Most OECD countries have CoG units devoted to the task of preparing the government's main strategic initiatives. The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU), which was part of the United Kingdom's Cabinet Office from 2002 to 2010, is an example of this. The PMSU did not have

day-to-day responsibilities, and could concentrate on establishing the long-term goals of the Blair administration. It could be regarded as an internal consultancy or think tank assessing the country's strategic priorities (House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration, 2007). The PMSU worked closely with the Prime Minister's Policy Directorate, a smaller unit in charge of providing day-to-day policy advice to the prime minister, as part of a broader strategy. In other countries, planning ministries may perform a similar role, setting the long-term priorities for the country and for the chief executive's period in office.

4.1.3 Policy Coordination Units

Center of Government units perform a coordinating function, either by supporting and facilitating environments for policy coordination to occur, or by being directly involved in the contents of policy. In the first approach, for example, these units (cabinet offices, technical secretariats, or others) may contribute to the preparation of cabinet meetings or other interministerial committees by managing their decision-making process and enforcing its rules (collecting the required documents in advance to the meetings, enforcing deadlines, planning the agenda, and ensuring that information is complete and that proper consultations have been followed, among other tasks). Cabinet meetings are also usually preceded by preparatory meetings, both within the CoG and with the different sectors of government, chaired by a member of the CoG. In many OECD countries, these are highly institutionalized bodies of policy coordination.

In presidential systems, cabinet meetings generally do not have the same decision-making authority as in parliamentary systems, so these tasks may not apply. However, interministerial committees (or sectoral cabinets) are a frequent feature also in presidential systems, and CoG units may provide support to them.²⁵ These interministerial committees are not generally units with their own structure or staff, but rather mechanisms used by governments to ensure coordination (see Box 1). Other coordinating mechanisms sometimes used by chief executives (such as "czars" and "super-ministries") are also discussed in Box 1.

Other types of units may be more focused on the substance of the coordination, not just on facilitating its processes but also in directing the contents of policy. These units may be

²⁵ Territorial cabinets are another possible mechanism for policy coordination, in this case along geographic rather than functional lines. They were recently established in Ecuador, for example, where they seek to articulate the government's actions in each province (Muñoz, 2012).

organized into policy areas (economic policy, social policy, foreign policy, etc.) to provide coordination to the departments that have a stake in these issues. In the United States, the director of the National Economic Council (NEC) coordinates the departments and agencies with influence over economic affairs, such as the Treasury, the State, Commerce, Agriculture, Labor, and Energy Departments, the Office of Management and Budget—another unit of the EOP—the U.S. Trade Representative, and the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), among others, with an important influence on policy decisions (Destler, 2012). Another prominent coordinating body in the American CoG is the National Security Council (NSC), chaired by the national security advisor. The actual authority of the NEC and NSC depends on a variety of factors, including their relationship with the president and the extent to which the other departments accept their coordination. In time, it is possible that a coordinating body with no direct operational responsibilities may play a diminishing role, as departments and agencies learn how to “work the system”. An established, ongoing effort to select relevant issues that need interagency review may mitigate this loss of power (Destler, 1996).

Box 1. Interministerial Committees and other Coordinating Mechanisms

Center of Government units or staff members often facilitate the work of sectoral cabinets that aim to coordinate government actions in different policy areas. In Costa Rica, for example, the sectoral Presidential Councils, established in 2010, are supported by Technical Secretaries located in the Presidency, who schedule their meetings, plan their agenda, provide information, keep minutes, and oversee the decisions made at the meetings, among other tasks (Presidencia de la República de Costa Rica, 2011). In Spain, a key CoG official (the deputy prime minister), chairs the Commission of Undersecretaries and Secretaries of State, where department deputies conduct initial assessments of policy proposals in order to decide whether or not to include them in the next Cabinet meeting (Paniagua, 2012).

Interministerial Committees may not focus on a broad policy area (economic, social, environmental), but rather on a specific issue or problem. In 2012, President Obama created the Inter-Agency Task Force on Military and Veterans Mental Health, chaired by the secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Health and Human Services, and with the participation of multiple CoG institutions and units (including OMB), to coordinate and improve policies related to this problem. The use of interministerial committees as a mechanism for horizontal coordination helps to solve conflicts at lower levels and removes the need for the chief executive to be constantly arbitrating differences between the departments. In Brazil, President Cardoso established two levels of interdepartmental committees. Differences not solved by the Technical Committees were passed to the Interministerial Government Chambers, comprising the ministers and coordinated by the Chief of the Casa Civil (a position that resembles a chief of staff to the president). Only if conflicts continued after this level would the president step in (Gaetani, 2011). It is true that chief executives with other styles may prefer to be involved early on, for the pressure to forge consensus at lower levels may lead to “groupthink” (Janis, 1972), where alternative or more controversial options are not even considered to avoid disrupting the cohesion of the group.

Another type of coordination mechanism is designating “czars” (Peters, 2011), officials with no direct authority to implement policy but whom the president appoints to oversee an entire policy area (recent examples in the United States include the cyber security czar and the consumer czar). In other countries, especially in parliamentary systems, ministers without portfolio may be appointed to coordinate certain crosscutting issues (the situation of women, of youth, of immigrants, etc.). However, lacking their own base of departmental power, they may not have the resources or the authority needed for effective coordination (Prats i Catalá and Villoria, 2011).

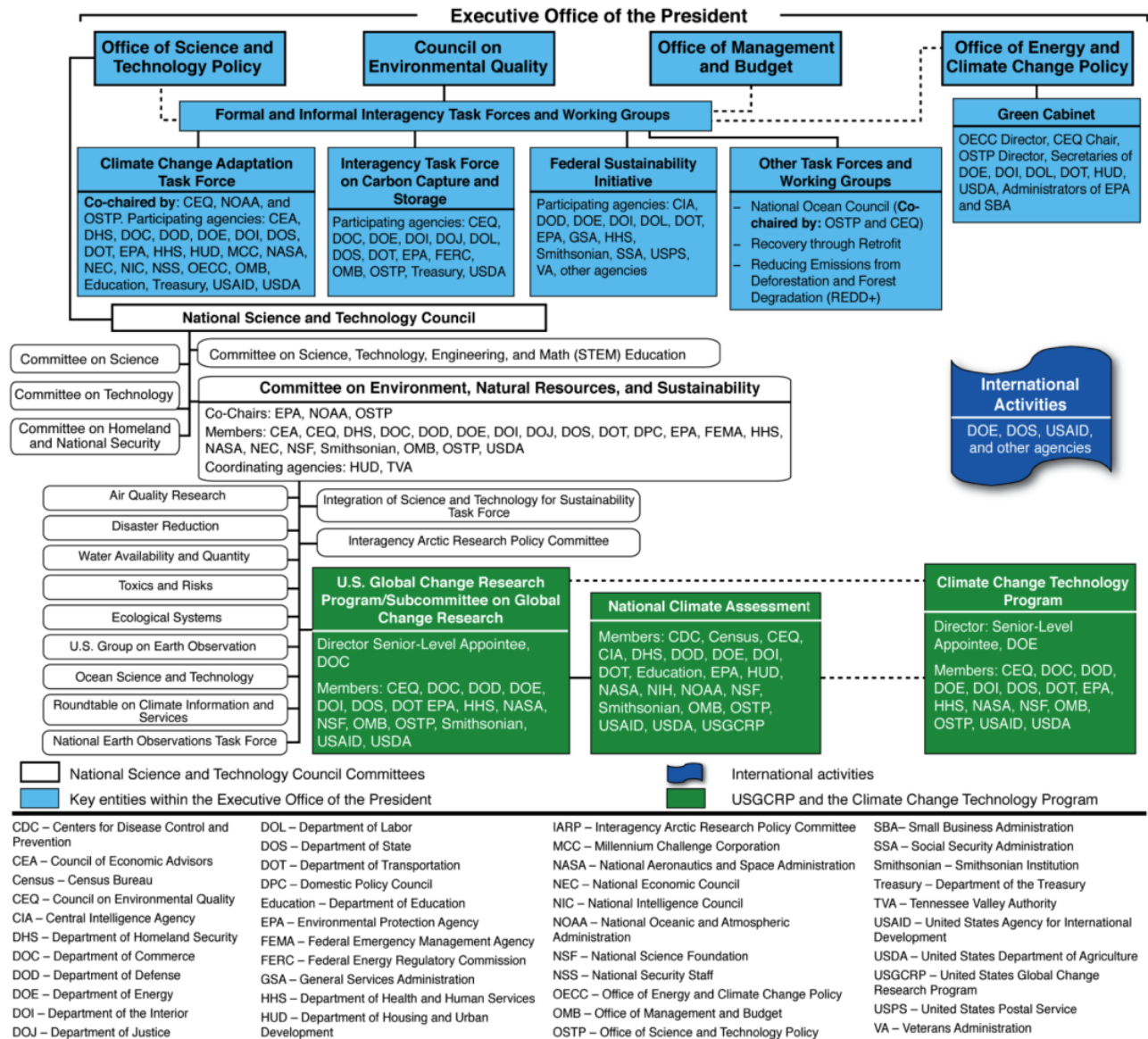
Still another approach involves the creation of “super-ministries,” which are expected to provide vertical coordination to the large number of units and programs included within them.^a In Ecuador, eight Coordinating Ministries have been created over the 27 sectoral ministries to lead each sector’s agenda, articulate their policies, and monitor their implementation. In addition, two CoG institutions (the National Planning Secretariat and the National Secretariat of Public Administration) participate in this process to ensure that the policies align with the government’s overall orientation and that adequate management practices are being followed (Muñoz, 2012). In Peru, the recently established Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion aims to coordinate the work of the multiple agencies involved in social development, but in a collaborative rather than vertical manner. In Argentina, economic ministers have frequently performed a coordinating role in the economic sphere, although presidents have also been sensitive to concentrating too much power over economic policy in a single individual (Gilio, 2013).

Finally, some countries have vice presidents or deputy prime ministers with no clearly defined roles. Thus, chief executives may use them selectively to lead or coordinate important topics in which multiple departments are involved (see Heywood and Molina, 2000, for Spain).

^a Bureaucratic reorganizations (“boxology”) are a traditional response to failures in coordination. In the United States, for example, a congressional commission on the 9/11 terrorist attacks argued that the agencies concerned had not properly shared information and, therefore, could not connect the dots to anticipate the planned attack. The response to this lack of coordination was the creation, in 2002, of the Department of Homeland Security, with authority over many of these agencies (Kettl, 2003). This traditional approach has lost some standing recently against approaches that try to promote coordination through networks and horizontal collaboration (see Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004).

Of course, the creation of any of these types of units or coordination mechanisms does not ensure seamless coordination, especially for crosscutting issues. The response of the American CoG to the problem of climate change is indicative in this regard. Multiple coordinating bodies have been established within the EOP to induce collaboration between the various agencies that work on the issue. Figure 2 depicts these collaborative mechanisms, as well as the agencies that take part in them. Although these bodies may help clarify responsibilities and bridge organizational subcultures, it has been reported that officials from the different agencies lack a shared understanding of priorities, interagency projects are infrequent, and budgetary decisions are not aligned with goals. Additionally, due to the size and complexity of this coordinating structure, many officials are not aware of what other agencies are doing (GAO, 2011). Thus, simply creating new coordinating bodies at the center does not ensure that coordination will actually occur.

Figure 2. Climate Policy Coordinating Bodies in the American CoG



Source: GAO (2011).

Many other issues necessarily cut across government departments. For example, initiatives to reform public administration affect all agencies, because they are all affected by the way that procurement or the civil service is organized and regulated. The CoG sometimes coordinates these types of initiatives (Ben-Gera, 2004). The same occurs in federal systems of government, where relationships with subnational units may be managed from the center. In addition, some international issues that cut across different ministries and agencies, such as

processes of regional integration that involve multiple policy areas, may also be coordinated from the center. In Sweden, for example, where two-thirds of the country's regulations come from European bodies, the importance of EU integration for domestic policy led to a decision to transfer the responsibility for EU integration to the Prime Minister's Office from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Dählstrom and Pierre, 2011).

Nevertheless, the literature notes that it is important to avoid imposing a "dustbin" function on the CoG, which occurs when units with no other natural location in the government are placed there (Peters, Rhodes, and Wright, 2000). This situation arises with respect to certain politically sensitive issues that cannot be placed in any single ministry, or when disagreements between ministers and agency heads lead to the relocation of these agencies to the CoG in order to reduce conflict (see Coutinho [2013] for Argentina). This can affect the CoG's capacity to perform its regular functions. As Chakrabarti (2007) quotes a British official as saying: "Only do at the center those things that only the center can do." In Paraguay, for example, the presidential office includes 15 institutions that report directly to the president, including some that cover issues that do not appear critical to the performance of government (Secretaries of Sports, Culture, Tourism, among others). This may be an extreme example, but several other Latin American countries have a large number of offices that fall under the president's purview, at least formally. In Brazil, in addition to the 29 ministers, nine presidential secretaries report to the president, although it is unlikely that the chief executive can devote sufficient attention to so many areas. This multiplicity of separate institutions also increases the need for coordination.

Evans et al. (2010) propose five criteria to assess whether or not a unit should be attached to CoG institutions:

1. It performs core CoG functions;
2. It deals with politically sensitive issues that demand direct engagement by the chief executive;
3. It is in charge of high-priority, crosscutting reforms (e.g., state modernization);
4. Its activities are of general importance to all ministries and agencies (e.g., gender issues, national minorities);
5. It requires independence from the line ministry that has responsibility for that policy area (e.g., certain regulatory functions).

In Romania, the authors found that only 13 of the 25 units reporting directly to the Prime Minister met any of these criteria. All of the others should be relocated to the appropriate line ministries.

4.1.4 Performance Monitoring Units

While departments and agencies have the primary responsibility for implementing and monitoring policies and programs, chief executives are responsible for the overall performance of government, especially in a climate of increasing dominance of many presidents and prime ministers over key policy issues. Although some CoGs take a formal or legal approach to monitoring, equating “implementation” with the passage of the appropriate legislation or regulation (Ben-Gera, 2004), there is a growing interest in actually measuring the results that the policies are producing. The Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU) in the United Kingdom is one of the first examples of this effort. The PMDU used quantitative indicators to measure how the departments were performing on the prime minister’s top priorities (initially these were four: health, education, crime and transportation), and was forceful in pushing for corrections where needed. The PMDU had also a budgetary component, which explained its location in the Treasury. Most testimonies gathered by the House of Lords (2010) on the effects of the PMDU in improving performance were positive, but certain critics pointed to a disempowerment of line ministries and an excessive role of political appointees in the unit.

The CIU in Australia was created to ensure a rigorous follow-up on the implementation of policies, but it lacked the focus on quantitative indicators and the more adversarial style that characterized the PMDU (Wanna, 2006). It was also a smaller unit, staffed initially with five public servants and expanding to 10 after two years. It was located in the Prime Minister’s Department and, unlike the PMDU, it was not tied to budgetary allocation decisions (although the PMDU’s role was limited to advising on outcome measures). Its limited authority and resources meant that the CIU was more a tracking team than a unit strictly monitoring performance.

The UPGC in Chile performs a similar function as the PMDU and the CIU, although it is also involved in defining strategic priorities and in policy coordination. With respect to its monitoring function, the UPGC does not appear to be as involved as the British PMDU in making adjustments to underperforming programs. It supports the ministries in this task but lacks

the sectoral expertise needed to play a more prominent role. The UPGC is also smaller than the PMDU, and more similar to the CIU. It has 10 temporary employees, most of them relatively junior, while the PMDU had approximately four times the number of staff. The UPGC also focused on too many actions—over 600, related to the 40 presidential goals in the eight strategic priority areas—which hindered its ability to advance the administration’s strategic priorities (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013).

None of these performance monitoring units seek to replace departmental expertise or to directly address broader long-term reforms. They focus on the continuous tracking of a few fairly simple indicators, and generally do not conduct long-term impact evaluations. Rather, they detect specific bottlenecks and assist departments in making the necessary adjustments. To accomplish these goals, they cannot simply rely on policing and punishment. Such an approach would lead to resistance by the departments and to data gaming. Moreover, the performance monitoring unit should not claim credit when things go right, or receive too much exposure in the press. This exposure would impose political costs on the departments when results are not good, so they may avoid working with the CoG units. Instead, performance monitoring units should seek out more productive avenues, such as collaborating with the ministries from a subsidiary role and helping them to solve problems, and advising program managers on how to enhance performance (World Bank, 2010b; Barber, 2008). As a necessary condition, they need to be empowered by the chief executive to initiate these problem-solving activities with senior officials (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013). They also need the existence of a formal planning exercise within the government to establish the indicators that the unit is expected to monitor. Even if strategic plans exist, they must actually drive the government’s agenda. If ministers have other directives, there is no point in monitoring the goals set forth in the plan.²⁶

4.1.5 Press, Communications, and Speechwriting Office

This office, which may be a subunit of the president or prime minister’s personal office, is in charge of coordinating the government’s communications, ensuring a coherent message across the different ministries and agencies. There may be separate units in charge of overall

²⁶ As stated by the head of Indonesia’s UKP4, “I want to know what his [the President’s] instructions to his ministers are so that I can then monitor them” (Scharff, 2013), noting the problem that the president may bilaterally reach other agreements with the ministers that are not known by the performance unit.

government communications and the chief executive's communications, as in Chile during the Bachelet administration (Egaña and Chateau, 2011).

4.1.6 Policy Advisory Units and Individual Advisors

In order to diversify their sources of information, chief executives sometimes have experts on their staff in areas that are the responsibility of line ministries. In the United States, the CEA, located within the EOP, offers the President analysis on domestic and foreign economic policy. It is composed of senior academics and has no management or coordination responsibilities. Since presidents generally do not design policies from scratch but rather choose between the alternatives presented to them (Arriagada Herrera, 2012; Ponder, 2000), policy advisers can have a critical role reviewing the alternatives presented by the departments. This is especially important in light of the well-known tendency of departments to present their preferred alternative as the middle option between two extreme positions that serve as straw men, guiding the chief executive's choice toward their own preference (Kissinger, 1979). Moreover, these advisers can ensure that the chief executive receives a broad range of realistic options, asking sharp questions, focusing the discussions, demanding clarifications, and providing him or her with frank and unvarnished views about them (Pffiffner, 2009). Finally, departments are sometimes regarded as having little interest in producing innovative responses, as they are limited by their standard operating procedures and by bureaucratic inertia; CoG advisers, on the contrary, may come up with fresh and creative ideas (Rudalevige, 2002).

In Chile, former President Lagos's personal advisers were located on the second floor of the presidential building, giving rise to the term *segundo piso* to denote this group of individuals. During 2010-2013, apart from those who provide assistance with communications or logistics, approximately 8 to 10 of these advisers provided policy expertise to the president in key areas, such as education, health, and poverty, allowing for a second source of information in addition to the ministries (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013).²⁷ In Mexico, President Peña Nieto recently established the Coordination of Presidential Advisers unit, granting it the authority to request data from departments and agencies in order to carry out its responsibilities (DOF, 2013).

²⁷ In the case of Chile, some scholars refer to a third floor, or *tercer piso* (Fernández Ramil and Rivera Urrutia, 2012) consisting of friends and contacts of the chief executive, although their presence is usually informal and thus not specifically a separate CoG unit. Peters, Rhodes, and Wright (2000:6) also discuss the difficulty of analyzing these "*éminences grises, visiteurs de la nuit* who enjoy direct access to the leader" but do not appear in official documents or organizational charts.

In some cases, it may not be easy to differentiate between policy advisers and those who perform the political tasks described in the section 4.1.1. Part of the increased role of the CoG under Prime Minister Blair in the United Kingdom involved the expansion of the Special Advisers of the Prime Minister, some of who were policy experts while others dealt with political matters (House of Lords, 2010). Thus, we may find individuals in the same formal position performing different tasks. It is also possible that the chief executive's closest aides are actually performing both political and policy functions, or what Rockman (2000) calls omnibus advisory functions, as policy crafting and political maneuvering may need to be connected.

In fact, units performing any of the other functions described in this literature review may advise the chief executive. Although here they are presented separately, in practice they may overlap. For example, the director of the NEC in the United States works on policy coordination, as described in 4.1.3, but is also a key economic adviser to the president. These two roles may conflict with each other. To be effective coordinators, they must be perceived by the departments to be honest brokers that convey all opinions to the president, while as advisers they may be tempted to advocate for their own views. Pfiffner (2011) argues that presidents who are deeply involved in policy issues can act as their own honest brokers, actively seeking alternative options themselves, but presidents who tend to delegate policy details would benefit from having someone else playing this role.

4.1.7 Legal Counsel Unit

The Legal Counsel Unit reviews the legality of the proposals sent by the departments to the chief executive. Chief executives sign bills into law or veto them, issue decrees and regulations, produce intraexecutive directives, and can usually send bills to the legislature for consideration. Advising the president or prime minister on these matters is both a technical and a political function that traditionally falls to CoG institutions or individuals. Most OECD countries do not consider this a central function of the CoG, as it is regarded as a purely technical task that is sometimes performed by a line ministry (Ben-Gera, 2004), but it may be more relevant in Latin American countries. In Argentina, for example, the Technical and Legal Secretariat has traditionally been part of the CoG, and presidents have appointed close advisors to this position (Coutinho, 2013).

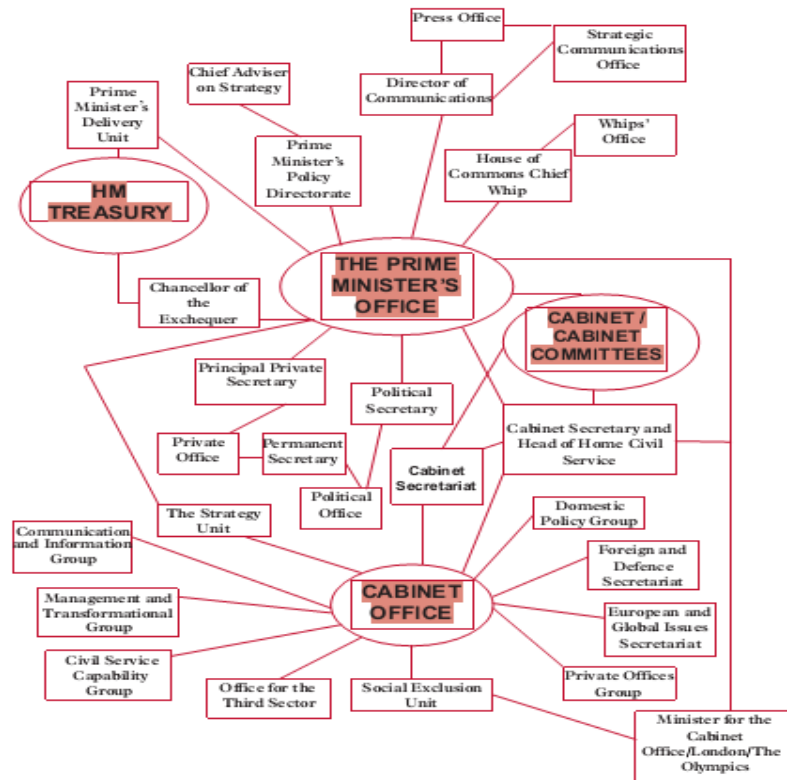
Finally, CoGs also include units in charge of the management of the CoG. These are mostly administrative duties needed for the CoG to properly function.

So far, the discussion has centered on the units that are typically included in the narrow definition of CoG institutions. There are important differences in the schematic representations of CoGs in different countries. Moreover, they are subject to frequent changes. In some countries, more expanded definitions of CoG apply.

4.2 The CoG in Selected Countries

This review has commented extensively on the organization of the British CoG during the Blair–Brown administrations. The following diagram displays a typical organization of the Center during those years.²⁸

Figure 3. “Expanded” CoG in the United Kingdom: Blair–Brown Administrations



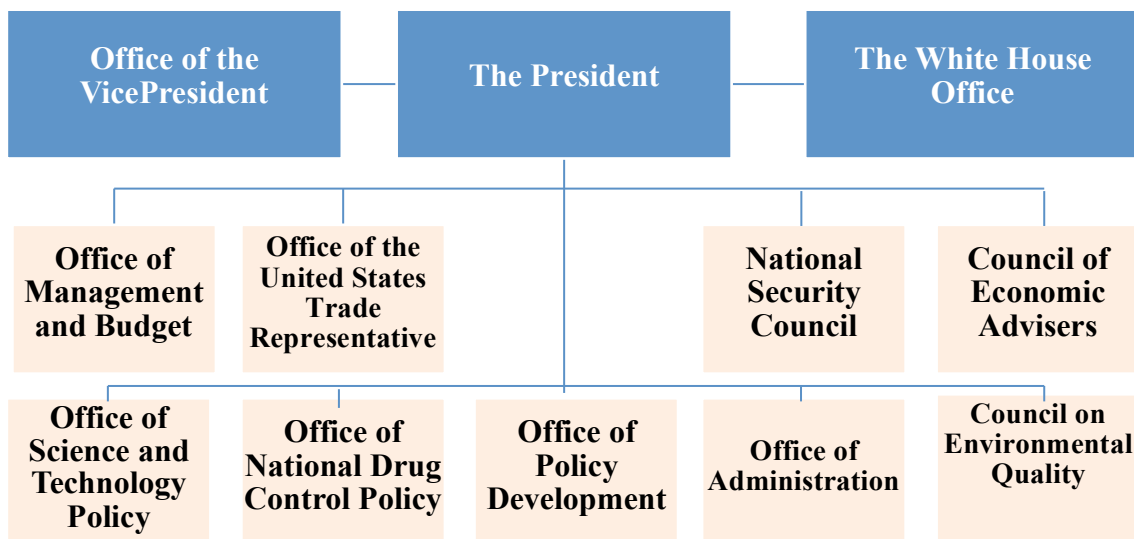
Source: House of Lords (2010).

²⁸ The configuration of the Cameron CoG differs from this model. Different actors appear at the center, including the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who join the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this commanding “Quad” (Butcher, 2013). The coalitional nature of this administration may explain the preference for these arrangements.

In this example, the Prime Minister’s Office is at the core of the CoG, despite its formal inclusion as a subunit within the Cabinet Office. This reflects the dominance of these chief executives over the Cabinet. As mentioned, the Treasury plays an important role in the British government, and the PMDU serves both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Most of the units described in Section 4.1 (CoG typical units) are present: policy advice units, in the Policy Directorate; communications and press units; policy strategy (PMSU) and policy monitoring units (PMDU); units that address crosscutting issues (i.e., the Social Exclusion Unit) or issues of critical but temporary importance (Olympics); political and legislative affairs units (Whips’ Office, Political Office); and support units for interministerial groups (Cabinet Secretariats, Foreign and Defense Secretariat). This model may work with a strong chief of staff, as Prime Minister Blair had, or without one, as during the Brown period.

In the United States, former President Carter was the only president in recent times to organize his CoG without a strong chief of staff. Most have tended to structure the CoG in a more hierarchical way. In several administrations, the chief of staff has performed a critical role in managing the EOP. The following figure depicts some of the main units within the EOP, and further details are provided below.

Figure 4. The U.S. CoG: The Executive Office of the President



Source: Edwards et al., 2010.

- The chief of staff, who in many administrations has played a commanding role, leads the White House Office. This structure includes multiple subunits that provide policy advice to the president, act as liaisons with Congress, manage communications, and provide logistic support to the chief executive.
- The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) may be the key body within the EOP. In recent years, many chiefs of staff had previously served as OMB directors. This unit aligns the work of the departments and agencies with the president's strategic priorities due to its budgetary capacity.²⁹ In recent decades, it has emphasized performance measurement and monitoring, as well as the need for interagency coordination to manage crosscutting issues.
- Other EOP units—such as the National Security Council, the National Economic Council (a subunit within the Office of Policy Development), and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative—perform key CoG functions in defense and foreign affairs, economic policy, and trade issues, respectively.
- Some units also seek to provide coordination for specific crosscutting issues (drug policy, science and technology, environmental quality, etc.), although their directors are generally not as close to the president. Therefore, their authority over the agencies they are expected to oversee may be more limited.

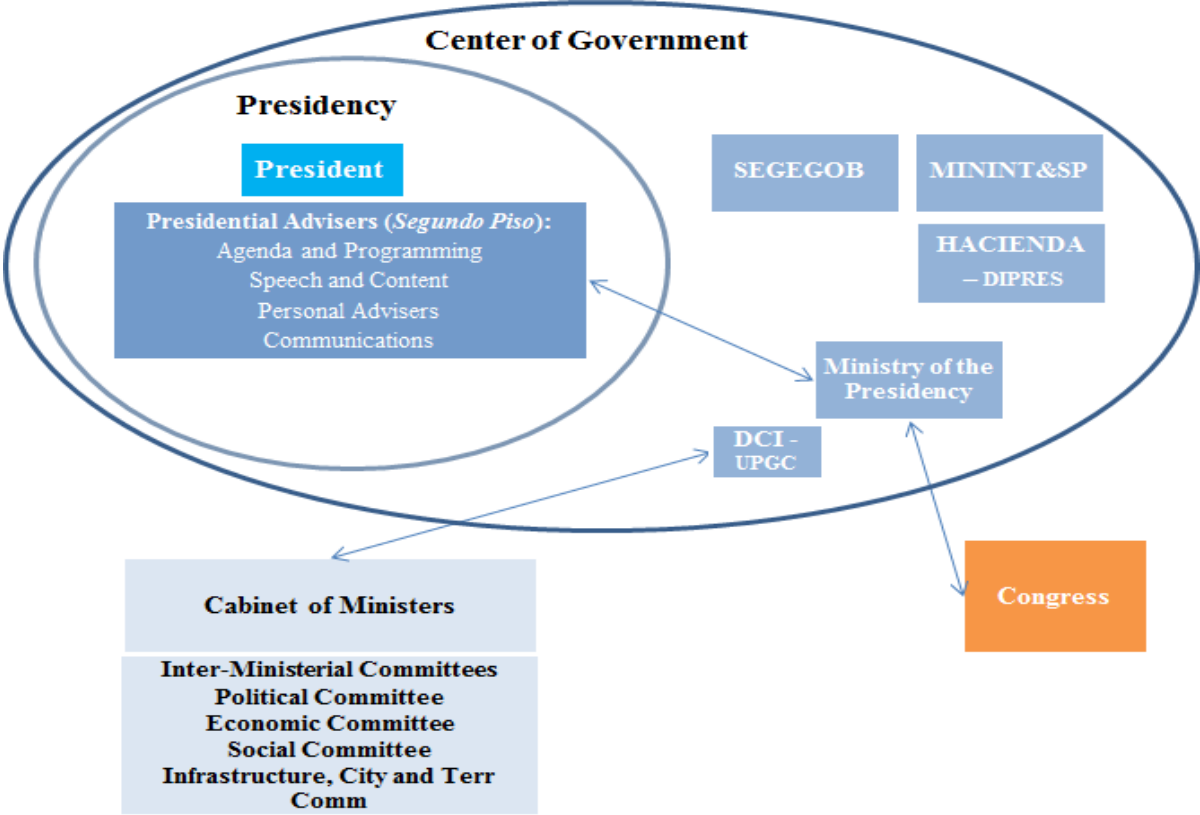
The American EOP is mostly organized along policy lines, with units that are in charge of performing the multiple CoG functions for an entire policy area. The NSC, for example, works in planning, coordinating, and monitoring national security policy. However, CoGs can also be organized functionally, with each institution or unit responsible for performing a certain function (planning, coordination, or monitoring) for all of the government's priorities (such as Delivery Units that oversee performance across the government).

Chile's CoG resembles this type of organization. The following chart presents the organization of the CoG in Chile during President Piñera's term. The Presidency includes the personal advisers to the chief executive, who provide policy advice in certain areas, and logistical staff, who coordinate the agenda, image, and speechwriting, among other tasks. The

²⁹ The fact that the budget office is not included in a separate department (such as Treasury) but within the Executive Office of the President is an indication of how the budgetary authority is tightly connected to core CoG functions like planning and monitoring performance.

Ministry of the Presidency is in charge of political relations with Congress. It coordinates policy through various subunits—for example, the Interministerial Coordination Division (División de Coordinación Interministerial, or DCI)—and monitors performance (UPGC, within the DCI). The General Secretariat of the Government (Secretaría General de Gobierno, or SEGEOB) coordinates communications, while the Treasury is responsible for budgetary issues. The Minister of the Interior and Public Security (Ministerio del Interior y Seguridad Pública, or MININT & SP) acts as a political coordinator of the Cabinet. Finally, a number of interministerial committees deal with crosscutting policy areas. To prevent situations in which one of the line ministries would take over the committee, the Ministry of the Presidency has chaired these committees since 2010. Once consensus has been reached at this level, the president, supported by CoG staff, meets bilaterally with the minister involved to make final decisions (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013).

Figure 5. The CoG in Chile

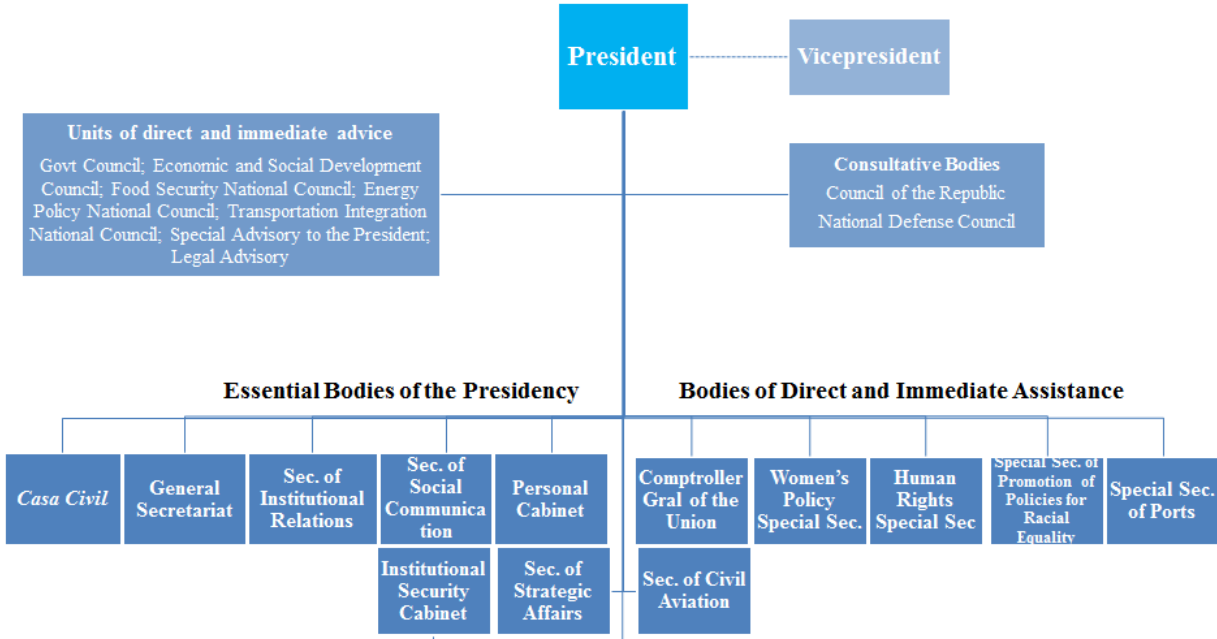


Source: Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado (2013).

The final example that will be presented is the Brazilian CoG. As previously mentioned, a large number of institutions report directly to the Brazilian president. This graph does not show the many units included in each institution, nor does it show the nearly 30 ministries that also report to the President, although the chief of the *Casa Civil* usually acts as a coordinator of the ministers (current President Rouseff led the *Casa Civil* during former President Lula’s second term).

The CoG consists of several institutions, including multiple advisory councils on sectoral policies, secretariats that perform the functions described in this review (strategic planning, communications, political and logistic support, etc.), secretariats that focus on specific issues, which presidents have decided to locate in the structure of the presidency (human rights, women’s issues, racial equality, among others), and secretariats that interact with civil society organizations, a topic that is generally absent from the CoG literature but that has received high priority by Presidents Lula and Rouseff (Rennó, 2013).

Figure 6. The CoG in Brazil



Source: Rennó (2013).

All of these CoGs appear to be “pluricephalous” (Goetz and Margetts, 1999), in the sense that several senior appointees are heads of separate institutions at the center. In a monocephalous structure, all CoG units would be placed under a single head of office, such as a secretary-general.³⁰ Although informally one of the individuals in a pluricephalous structure could assume a leading role (as do some chiefs of staff in the United States and Mexico), in such contexts different actors share the authority and responsibilities. Goetz and Margetts (1999) point to the potential risks of such a broad diffusion of responsibility (including unclear chains of command, duplication of efforts, lack of coherence),³¹ but chief executives may deliberately seek some of this ambiguity and overlap (see Section 4.4 on CoG management styles).

4.3 CoG Staff

Several papers present data on the size of the CoG staff. However, interpreting the country-level data in a comparable way is not easy, for two main reasons. First, there are differences in how certain units are classified as either within or outside of the CoG. In some countries, for example, treasury departments are usually regarded as part of the CoG, but not in others. Even if an expanded definition were agreed upon for all countries, it would be fair to ask if the entire staff of those institutions should be included in the CoG, or only those that are actually providing support to the chief executive. This latter distinction would require a level of expertise on CoG comparability that is not currently available in the literature.

Second, even if only units with a similar name (such as Prime Minister’s Office) were selected and compared, the information may be misleading. Peters, Rhodes, and Wright (2000), for example, describe the Canadian Prime Minister’s Office as small compared to most others, with a staff of just 85 employees. But, in the same compilation, it is said that although the “Privy Council” (like the British Cabinet Office) formerly serves the entire CoM, it mainly works for the prime minister (Peters and Savoie, 2000). The Privy Council has 600 staffers. Thus, it is debatable if institutions with similar names are comparable across countries, when their actual functions may differ.

³⁰ Another way of defining these alternatives is to divide them into “integrated” CoGs, when all of their units are part of the same entity, and “nonintegrated” CoGs, when different institutions carry out their roles independently (Haddad, Klouche, and Heneine, 2010).

³¹ See, for example, Argüello Hüper (2010) regarding the overlaps in Honduras between the Secretaría Técnica y de Cooperación Internacional, the Secretaría Técnica de Planificación y Cooperación Externa, the Unidad Técnica de Apoyo Presidencial, and other units.

The literature that presents cross-country data on CoG size does not fully discuss these comparability issues. Peters, Rhodes, and Wright (2000) describe the British Prime Minister's Office, with approximately 100 employees, as very small when compared to the American Executive Office of the President, which has a staff of 2,500, neglecting the fact that the British PMO is only part of the CoG in that country, while the American EOP includes all of the institutions and units usually included in this concept. James and Ben-Gera (2004), following a functional division of labor, appear to have come up with more comparable data for OECD countries, for example:

- Most CoGs have 10 or fewer staff members working on the strategic planning function, while a few have between 11 and 20. At its peak, the British PMSU had 90 employees, although it averaged approximately 45. Turkey reportedly has 337 employees devoted to this planning function, which raises again the question about the comparability of the data: are they referring to the same function?
- Units devoted to monitoring performance are generally fairly small: the British PMDU had approximately 40 staff, while the Australian CIU and the Chilean UPGC do not exceed 10 employees.
- Most CoGs have 10 or fewer staff working on the communications and accountability function, with a few having between 11 and 20 and some (Spain, Hungary, Portugal, Austria, United Kingdom) employing many more. The number for the United Kingdom (100 staff between the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office) is so much higher than for other countries that again caution is warranted when interpreting the data; it may be that the classification of units and their staff has not been consistent across countries.

Consequently, any assessments on CoG staff size presented in the literature are highly dependent on which institutions are included in this concept. For example, Alessandro (2010) presents data for the Argentine CoG adopting a narrow definition that includes only the General Secretariat of the Presidency, the Office of the Legal Counsel, the communications unit, and the logistics support unit, reaching a CoG size of approximately 2,000 staff. But a broader definition would include at least some units of the Jefatura de Gabinete, the ministry constitutionally in

charge of coordinating the Cabinet of Ministers,³² which includes, among others, a legislative liaison office and a public management office. Thus, any estimation of CoG staff size depends on a number of decisions about which institutions and units are performing CoG functions, suggesting that cross country comparisons of staff size should be taken with caution if CoG definitions have not been consistently applied.³³

Truswell and Atkinson (2011) present one of the few studies that estimates the size of the staff working directly to support chief executives. It focuses on six countries—Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. For the United Kingdom, it does not simply count the 100 staffers working in the Prime Minister’s Office, nor does it consider the entire Cabinet Office (staff: 1,300) either.³⁴ Rather, through official data and interviews, it estimates the total support staff of the Prime Minister at around 300. The estimates are smaller for New Zealand (150) and Sweden (200), and larger for Australia (550), Germany (620), and Canada (1,125). Units placed at the CoG that have their own portfolios, such as social inclusion, sports, or arts units, were not included in these estimates. Thus, focusing specifically on the leader’s support system implies applying a narrow definition of CoG. The estimates would be larger if more expanded definitions were applied.

Beyond staff size, other elements regarding CoG personnel can be analyzed. In some countries, CoG employees are almost entirely drawn from the civil service, while in others there is a larger presence of political appointees.³⁵ Within the OECD, countries with a Napoleonic administrative tradition, such as France, Belgium, and Italy, traditionally had a high proportion of political appointees in their CoGs, with the Scandinavian countries at the opposite end of the spectrum (Peters, Pierre, and Dalhström, 2011). Germanic and Anglo-Saxon nations appear to be in the middle, although with large variations within these groups; while the United Kingdom’s CoG is mostly staffed by civil servants, the American, Canadian, and Australian CoGs have a

³² Nonetheless, only rarely have presidents opted to use the chief of the cabinet as a strong coordinating figure since the creation of this position in 1994 (see CIPPEC, 2011).

³³ As another example of this, it would not be appropriate to compare the staff size of the U.S. EOP (2,500) to the Mexican presidential office (1,500), since a number of functions performed by the EOP, such as budget and personnel policy, are performed by the departments of Finance and Public Management in Mexico (Méndez, 2007).

³⁴ The report notes that focusing on formal structures could be misleading, as the units and individuals actually providing support to the Chief Executive may not correspond to those. Nonetheless, even with their detailed case-by-case analysis, they acknowledged that comparability across cases may be limited.

³⁵ Within the CoG, different institutions may have different proportions of political or career staff. In OECD countries, more than 95 percent of the CoG staffers are civil servants, but in institutions closer to the chief executive (such as Prime Minister’s Offices), this proportion is around 60 percent (Ben-Gera, 2004).

higher partisan presence (Truswell and Atkinson, 2011). What has been common in most countries in the last few decades (except in the countries with Napoleonic administrative traditions, whose CoGs were already highly politicized) is the growth in the number and in the authority of the political appointees, a strategy used by chief executives to enhance their control over the workings of government.

In the United Kingdom, for example, the strengthening of the CoG introduced during the Blair premiership involved the influx of political appointees. Civil service regulations were also modified to ensure that these “special advisers” would have the legal authority to instruct civil servants (House of Lords, 2010), altering a long-established accountability chain that went from the electorate to Parliament, then to the Cabinet members and finally to the bureaucracy. This order was revoked during the Brown premiership, and Prime Minister Cameron would later reduce the presence of political appointees in the CoG (at least initially), but the transformations of the Blair period were part of a more global trend toward greater central control of government.

Compared to Latin American and Caribbean countries, however, it appears that most OECD countries have a high number of civil servants at the CoG. In almost half of the OECD countries, for example, even the head of the CoG is a civil servant who would normally remain with a new Prime Minister (Ben-Gera, 2004). Very few LAC countries rely on professional cadres of civil servants who bridge the worlds of politics and policy implementation (World Bank, 2010a). Thus, trying to replicate this “politicization” strategy in the LAC context may not lead to greater capacities for central coordination but to a growth in patronage and clientelism, as reported in Italy (Stolfi, 2011), Greece (Featherstone and Papadimitriou, 2013), and Eastern Europe (Goetz and Margetts, 1999). In these countries, chief executives place trusted advisors in key positions, but these individuals may have limited technical expertise and, therefore, cannot provide adequate support and advice. Dickinson (2005) refers to a “paradox of politicization,” by which recruiting on the basis of personal or political loyalty ends up hurting the CoG’s ability to help the president manage the government.³⁶ Thus, chief executives should have the flexibility to designate political appointees as trusted advisers, while maintaining qualified technical staff that do not change with each administration (Díaz, 2012).

³⁶ Career bureaucrats are expected to provide “neutral competence”, while political appointees ensure “political responsiveness” to the chief executive’s preferences. A combination of these characteristics (“responsive competence”) is typical of a strong CoG institution, such as the American OMB (Dickinson and Rudalevige, 2005).

The varying proportions of career and political personnel imply differences also in terms of the degree of continuity to be expected at the CoG when administrations change. Political appointees serve at the pleasure of the chief executive, and they leave the CoG when the chief executive or his or her party leaves office. Civil servants, however, are not affected by these changes. Therefore, when power changes hands between different parties, the absence of a strong civil service at the center may affect the performance of the new administration, whose appointees lack knowledge and institutional memory about how the CoG should be managed (OECD, 1998). A country like the United States, with a large number of political appointees at the apex, can handle this situation because most of the incoming officials had been “training” (for example, in think tanks) during the years their party was not in power. Such training may not exist in other countries (Evans, 2013).

Civil servants at the center are not always permanently stationed at the CoG. According to Ben-Gera (2004), 14 OECD countries have only permanent staff at CoG institutions, nine countries partially second staff from the ministries, and in four other countries the CoG relies almost entirely on staff from the ministries. The rotation of personnel from departments to the CoG can ensure sectoral expertise and provide new ideas, but may adversely affect procedural continuity and institutional memory. In addition, personnel from the departments may be less sensitive to the chief executive’s need for central coordination, since they bring the agendas of their own institutions.³⁷ Overall, it appears that a combination of continuity and change in the center can be beneficial, but there are no data on the policy effects of these alternative CoG configurations.

In terms of skills, CoGs generally recruit administrative generalists, technical experts, and political agents (Peters, Rhodes, and Wright, 2000). The latter are political appointees designated by the chief executive. Regarding the first two categories, some countries recruit mostly generalists who, especially if they come from an administrative *grand corps* (as in Spain, France, and Italy) bring with them a network of connections that can be valuable as an unofficial tool of interdepartmental coordination. CoGs cannot normally replicate the level of specific sectoral expertise present at the departments but may contain units or individuals with knowledge of certain broad policy areas. Some institutions and units within the American EOP

³⁷ Even if personnel from the CoG are “sent” to the departments, a problem of dual affiliation may arise. Chile’s UGPC initially applied such a model only to abandon it later for this reason (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013).

are created precisely to duplicate the president's sources of information in certain policy areas (like economic or foreign policy); these bodies are staffed with experts in those fields. The German chancellor, on the contrary, does not have the expert support that is present in the departments and is therefore less able to shape policy.³⁸ A comparison of the British PMDU to the Australian CIU and the Chilean UGPC reveals that only the first had enough staff with sufficient sectoral expertise and seniority to challenge the performance of the departments and to recommend adjustments. Therefore, it is likely that the expertise present at the CoG vis-à-vis the departments is tied to its broader role: CoGs that expect to play a stronger policy role need a level of expertise and seniority that is absent where the departments are the main (or the sole) drivers of policymaking and policy implementation.³⁹

The level of expertise and seniority at the CoG may also depend on another factor: when chief executives can name trusted advisors as department heads, they may not feel the need to surround themselves with policy experts within the CoG. This may be worth exploring further if it explains the very different levels of expertise available at the CoG vis-à-vis the departments across countries. In Argentina, the presidential office is staffed with people whose level of education is among the lowest in the entire government. It also has a comparatively high proportion of employees in administrative, rather than professional, positions within the civil service system (Alessandro, 2010). The British Prime Minister's Office, in contrast, has a highly educated and generally distinguished staff (Clifford, 2000). These variations in relative expertise at the CoG may be linked to the degree of involvement of CoGs in policy formulation, compared to the departments, in different countries.

4.4 CoG Management Style

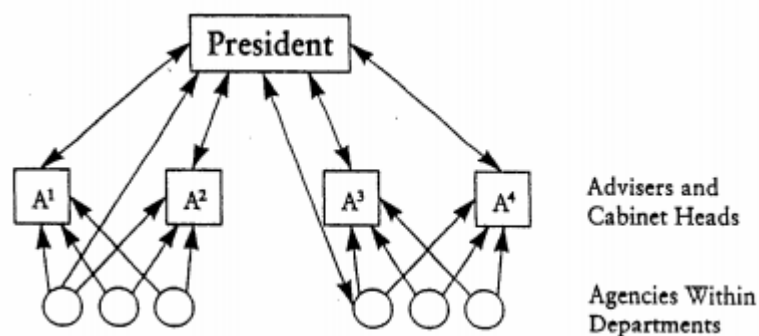
Centers of Government are expected to provide coordination to the entire government. But the organizational complexity of many of the CoGs discussed here implies that coordination and decision-making procedures also need to be established within the CoG. The growth and institutionalization of the CoG can lead to turf battles between their institutions and units, which

³⁸ Rudalevige (2002) argues that Presidents are always faced with the dilemma of "making" policy or "buying" it from a certain department. Although the CoG staff usually ensures a greater alignment with the President's preferences, the option to centralize the policymaking in his or her own staff will be contingent to the availability of sufficient expertise at the CoG.

³⁹ High levels of expertise can also help CoGs obtain acceptance from the ministries when trying to coordinate or monitor their actions, as the ministries may appreciate the added value that CoG institutions bring to their work (Goetz and Margetts, 1999).

chief executives need to prevent (Burke, 2000). Especially in those cases where the CoGs have mirrored the functional division of labor of the cabinet (such as in the U.S. EOP, with its multiple units devoted to economic policy, national security, science and technology, etc.), coordination is needed to ensure that the actions taken by these bodies are coherent. The ways that chief executives have organized their staffs, information, advisory, and decision-making processes can be summarized in the following models proposed by George and Stern (1998).⁴⁰

- *A competitive model.* Fuzzy lines of responsibility, overlapping jurisdictions, and the active pursuit of interdepartmental competition rather than cooperation characterize this model. From Lincoln’s “team of rivals” to Roosevelt’s command of the nascent EOP, different chief executives have resorted to this radial approach to ensure the availability of multiple sources of information and advice, avoiding hierarchies and formal structures to obtain them. The following figure provides a graphic display of this model:



Source: George and Stern, 1998.

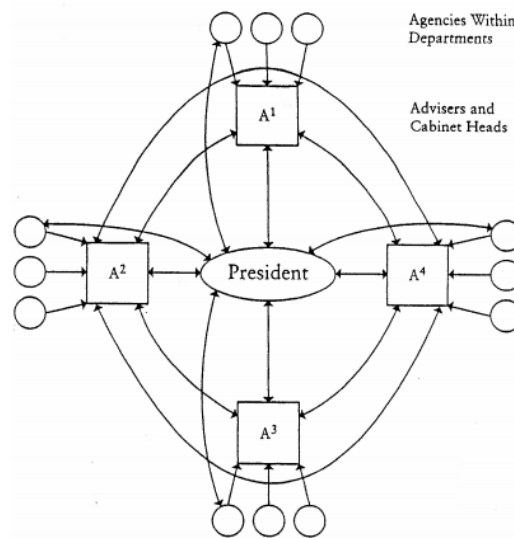
In the LAC region, former Argentine President Kirchner provides a recent example of this type of leadership, who avoided the institutionalization of cabinet meetings or interministerial committees, preferring a bilateral form of interaction with Executive branch officials⁴¹ (Cherny, Feierherd and Novaro, 2010). But this model demands a significant amount of the chief executive’s time, attention, and skills if it is

⁴⁰ A number of authors have looked at the effect of different styles of CoG structure on the policies adopted by Presidents (see Bonvecchi and Scartascini [2011] for a review). It seems, for example, that hierarchical processes favor incremental change in detriment of more innovative reforms.

⁴¹ President Piñera in Chile has also favored bilateral meetings to arrive to decisions (Dumas, Lafuente, and Parrado, 2013), but within a more formalized system of policy planning, coordination and monitoring described in this review.

to work properly. The risk is that coordination will fail, especially with the growth in the number and scope of the issues that require governmental action.

- *A collegial model.* A second way of setting the CoG processes is also disdainful of rigid hierarchies; in this model, chief executives also seek information from multiple sources, regardless of their bureaucratic position. But this approach does not encourage competition among the advisers. On the contrary, it promotes a more congenial give-and-take of ideas, sharing of information, contestability of options and group problem solving. The following graph depicts this dynamic:



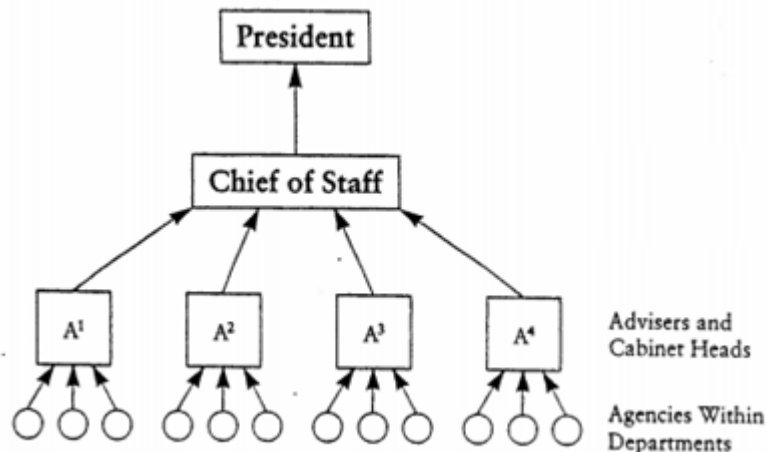
Source: George and Stern, 1998.

In this model, advisers are not sectoral experts; they are policy generalists, able to engage in debates about different areas. As with the competitive approach, a drawback of this model is the need for the chief executive to devote a significant amount of time and skill to manage the team. Additionally, in order to maintain a collegial relationship, advisers may prefer to reach decisions that protect the group's internal cohesion, rather than probing for policy alternatives that might be better but could strain the group.

Blondel and Manning (2002) have argued that collegial structures lead to greater ministerial reliability, meaning the probability that individual ministers will implement the policies decided by the government instead of pursuing their own

agendas. The collegial model is characterized by informal links and elevated trust among the ministers, which produce an ethos that discourages unreliability.⁴² Although hierarchical models imply the possibility that the chief executive may fire ministers who are not reliable, these authors claim that the actual control over the ministers is not as great as it seems. Nevertheless, these theoretical arguments have not been empirically tested.

- *A formalistic model.* The third option involves the rationalization of policymaking, with established procedures and channels for the flow of information, an emphasis on reaching agreements at lower levels to avoid overloading the chief executive with information, and sometimes with the presence of a top advisor (usually in the form of a strong chief of staff) to act as a buffer when the chief executive wishes to set some distance between himself and the other actors. Staffers are hierarchically organized, with clearly established purviews. The following graph summarizes this approach:



Source: George and Stern, 1998.

While in the previous models the chief executive is at the hub of the decision-making process, in the formalistic model there is a hierarchical organization that screens the information that reaches the upper levels. This type of structure was criticized by the classic study of the American presidency (Neustadt, 1960) as preventing presidents from obtaining diverse sources of information and viewpoints. However, in recent times, most presidents have tended to adopt such models due to

⁴² This ethos develops, in part, because the members of the group have known each other for a while and have risen together in the party's structure. Therefore, weak or volatile parties typically lead to more hierarchical models.

the need for systematic coordination and supervision in an increasingly complex EOP (Walcott and Hult, 2005). Orderly flows of information have become necessary to lead the administration, and clear lines of responsibility are needed to ensure the implementation of the president's decisions.

Chief executives may prefer different structures for decisions that occur in different settings. Each issue will have a different priority or level of interest to the chief executive, leading to different strategies to address them (Ponder, 2000). For example, on issues marked by uncertainty, they may prefer collegial or competitive approaches to ensure that all perspectives reach their desk (Bonvecchi and Scartascini, 2011).⁴³ Or, if they expect resistance from some departments to a certain policy innovation, chief executives may choose to bypass them and assign its implementation to another agency or to trusted advisors in the CoG (Peters, Rhodes, and Wright, 2000). However, the overall trend appears to be toward an increased institutionalization of the CoG, characterized by hierarchy, division of labor, specialization, and standard operating procedures. Most OECD countries, for example, have precise rules on deadlines for the arrival of information for cabinet and interministerial meetings, the inclusion of agenda items, the review of the material needed for those meetings, and other procedures that ensure a timely and orderly flow of information (Ben-Gera, 2004).

The potential pitfalls of a formalistic approach that divides tasks between specialized CoG subunits include compartmentalization and lack of coordination—the very same risks that the CoG was designed to solve. In addition, the adoption of a “pure” hierarchical model may leave presidents without needed information. Rudalevige (2005), for example, argues that the Iran-Contra scandal during the Reagan presidency occurred because the president did not receive alternative views. Informal and ad hoc relationships and meetings within the CoG may be needed to avoid the problems of the formalistic approach. In fact, these informal processes have been found even in the context of formalized CoG dynamics (George and Stern, 1998; Walcott and Hult, 2005), meaning that these models may be ideal types, but actual dynamics usually involve a mix of different approaches.

⁴³ An example of decision making under extreme uncertainty is the Cuban missile crisis (see Allison and Zelikow, 1999). President Kennedy established a group to address this issue, which operated in a collegial manner, with no rank and no chairman, and was characterized by open, uninhibited discussion of alternatives.

5. Conclusions, Limitations of the Literature, and Future Agenda

This literature review has attempted to summarize, classify, and discuss a fairly heterogeneous body of research on the CoG. This section sets forth four issues that should be addressed by future studies on the CoG, which represent gaps in the existing literature: (i) the lack of conceptual agreement on the structure of CoGs; (ii) the tension between different scholarly traditions; (iii) the paucity of studies of CoGs in LAC countries; (iv) and limited empirical evidence on the effects of different CoG configurations. Addressing these issues will be important to advance an action-based agenda of CoG strengthening in the region.

The first weakness is that there is no agreed upon definition of CoG. The lack of conceptual agreement limits the comparability of CoG studies conducted in different countries. Moreover, the definitions are seldom explicitly stated, so it is not possible to determine if variations across the CoGs are meaningful or just an expression of different definitions used by researchers. A few comparative studies for OECD countries seem to have addressed this problem by using a common definition, although the data provided by respondents in their surveys could suffer from similar consistency issues.

It is unlikely that a unique set of CoG institutions can be identified across countries. Should we regard a General Secretariat of the Presidency with strong political and technical coordinating capacities in one country as equivalent to a unit with the same name that only performs administrative tasks in a different country? Do budget offices perform different roles whether they are based in the chief executive's office or in the finance ministry? Basing the analysis on a unit's name or location on the organizational chart may be misleading. It appears more promising to define the CoG in terms of its core functions. In this view, the CoG is composed of the institutions and units performing certain critical whole-of-government policy management functions (planning, coordination, monitoring, and communication), regardless of their name or location in the executive branch structure. This approach may lead to greater conceptual understanding and comparability across countries.

A second problematic aspect of the literature is a built-in tension between two very different streams of literature on the subject. One stream (from a political science tradition) emphasizes that CoGs are support structures created by chief executives to empower them, enable them to centralize policymaking and control departments. The second stream (from a

public administration perspective, and adopted by international agencies providing technical assistance) argues that CoGs are devices that help improve the performance of the entire government by ensuring its internal coherence, strategic direction, and focus on results. The dialogue between these two streams appears to be very limited; thus, how they define and analyze the effects of the CoGs diverge considerably. In addition, the potential tension between these two goals (chief executive's control and performance improvement) is rarely addressed.

A third weakness in the CoG literature is that it appears to be geographically uneven. Multiple studies have been conducted on OECD countries, particularly on the United States and the United Kingdom. Much less is known about the CoGs of Latin American and Caribbean countries, with a few exceptions. Conclusions obtained from OECD experiences may not be applicable to countries with different administrative traditions or political contexts. For example, the strengthening of the CoG has been a response, in many European countries, to what prime ministers perceived as a problem of unresponsive bureaucracies, and in the United States, to what presidents perceived as the capture of departmental agendas by other actors, such as congressional committees, interest groups, and bureaucratic subcultures. The prescription to strengthen the CoG could thus be dependent on the existence of these types of situations. To what extent are these actual problems in LAC countries? Are presidents in Latin American and the Caribbean as constrained in leading the executive branch as in other countries? Could they need a different type of CoG strengthening, one that focuses on technical rather than political capabilities? If so, what types of technical capabilities are needed most? The answers most likely vary depending on the country and the policy area, but the scarcity of studies for LAC countries precludes reaching any definitive conclusions.

Finally, there is still scant empirical evidence on the effects of different types of CoG configurations on the quality of policies. There are solid theoretical reasons to believe that strengthening the planning, coordinating, and monitoring functions of CoGs leads to adopting evidence-based policies and improving performance and service delivery, but more empirical tests are needed. A few studies have shown that CoGs can indeed focus departmental attention on achieving results (Dixon, 2012), but there is still limited published evidence that the outcomes and impacts of policies are improved by the work of CoGs. It is certainly difficult to estimate this effect, due to the lack of clear counterfactuals, but it seems paradoxical that a literature so focused on results has not measured the effect of its object of study more systematically.

Thus, there is room for a research agenda that addresses these issues. Even in the absence of proper counterfactuals, case studies contrasting the outcomes of policies crafted and implemented under different CoG configurations can illustrate the influence of the center on the results achieved by government action. In addition, the availability of performance data collected by monitoring units may provide useful information on the effects of these mechanisms. Performance indicators can be compared before and after the mechanisms were operating to estimate the impacts of these mechanisms, and nonmonitored programs can be used as an additional control group.⁴⁴ In sum, it appears that the CoG literature is closer to conducting more rigorous studies and evaluations of the effects of different CoG arrangements. A precondition to advance this agenda is enhancing the conceptual understanding of what the CoG is; data can only be collected, classified, and compared if a working definition, and even a conceptual matrix, are shared across studies.

Despite the weaknesses of the existing literature on the CoG, there is clearly a growing interest in the subject. A number of factors, described in this paper, point to a greater role for the CoG in managing the government. This relevance suggests the need to “build the ship while sailing,” by taking actions to improve CoG performance at the same time that more research is being conducted to understand these processes. For Latin America and the Caribbean, connecting CoG practitioners through a network of institutions could contribute to strengthening knowledge on this topic, allowing for a better understanding of what has and has not worked in different settings.⁴⁵ Training activities may also help in this regard, especially for countries where CoG institutions are nascent.⁴⁶ Advancing this agenda would consolidate this emerging field and help the LAC governments in the planning, coordination, monitoring, and communication of their work.

⁴⁴ Of course, when comparing the evolution of the goals and indicators to which CoGs devoted more attention against those that received less attention, confounding factors, such as the greater complexity of the issues that demand CoG attention, may limit the robustness of the findings. But monitoring may not be applied in certain areas for reasons unrelated to performance, allowing for a valid counterfactual. For example, Propper et al. (2008) and Bevan and Wilson (2013) take advantage of the decentralization process in the United Kingdom to compare the evolution in health and education indicators in England, where performance monitoring from the center was undertaken, with those in Scotland and Wales, where such monitoring was not carried out.

⁴⁵ In the OECD, the Network of Senior Officials from Centres of Government has been meeting since the 1980s, with an enhanced role in recent years.

⁴⁶ Some of these training activities may serve the dual purpose of strengthening the skills of the participants and testing hypotheses that advance existing knowledge about the CoG. For example, workshops can be devised to conduct simulations of CoG dynamics under different structures and decision-making rules and styles, even incorporating experimental designs to enhance the robustness of the results.

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