**Christopher Kam. 2000. “Not Just Parliamentary ‘Cowboys and Indians’: Ministerial Responsibility and Bureaucratic Drift.” *Governance* 13(3):365-392.**

**Approach**

Rational choice institutionalism / quantitative

**Thesis**

Using game theory, it can be demonstrated that retaining the strict doctrine of Ministerial responsibility provides Ministers with more incentive to police the bureaucracy than a modified system in which civil servants become directly accountable to Parliament.

**Key Findings**

* The modern interpretation of individual ministerial accountability holds that Ministers should only resign in the event of a mistake if the Minister knew or should have known about it
* However, the fact that the Minister is still the one who is accountable to Parliament is seen to restrict Parliament’s ability to actually hold the person responsible for the mistake to account (this is a principal agent question – the agents, bureaucrats, should be punished, not the principals, ministers).
* Moving to hold bureaucrats to account rests on the idea that the Minister can be responsible for policy while the bureaucrats handle administration, a division that is difficult to identify in practice.
* Kam admits that his model assumes that parties are unitary actors, which is questionable given that Ministerial scandals seen as opportunities for backbenchers to try to advance their own interests.
* Establishes a game model examining the incentives for Ministers to correct misadministration by the civil service if they fail to correctly implement the government’s policies
* The model shows that the doctrine of Ministerial responsibility is helpful since it creates an incentive for opposition parties to more closely monitor the government (i.e. if the blame for a scandal falls on a non-partisan civil servant rather than a government member, then the opposition has little incentive to uncover it).
* Odds of the opposition monitoring also increase as the distance between their policy preferences and those of the government increase.
* The failure of ministerial resignations should not be seen as the failure of ministerial accountability since ministers take corrective action in the face of embarrassing attacks from the opposition.

**Contribution**

Identified by Malloy as the first article to examine the benefits of the “responsible government approach” using formal theory instead of a normative argument.