Political Processes and Policy Content: On Politics as Causes and Policies as Effects

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One disturbing finding in the literature on politics and policies is that policies are best explained by socio-economic factors, while political processes and political structures play a minor explanatory role. For political scientists, who hold the belief that they are investigating important things, such a result clearly offers a challenge, and the aim of this paper is to critically discuss and evaluate the reasoning and the methods applied in this field of research. Section 2 of the paper gives a short review of some studies advocating the non-importance of politics, and on the basis of this review some major points are selected for closer scrutiny:

(1) The literature stating that political variables exert little influence on policy variables has usually ignored the temporal sequence of variables. Consequently, dynamic inferences concerning the relationship between politics and policy have been drawned from a cross-sectional model of analysis. However, such a model diverts attention from important causal chains. For instance, policies exert influence on the social environment — when stating that socio-economic factors determine the content of policies, one is really explaining with the aid of an independent variable which includes aspects of the dependent one: policies are to some degree at least explained by policies. Interactional relations between systems on different levels should also be given attention in this respect: when for instance stating that political variables do not explain municipial expenditures, one should keep in mind that such expenditures often are determined through **political** decisions at a higher systems level. And further: one is of course entitled to ask whether policy is a variable that may affect the political process. The answer should obviously be in the affirmative, this meaning that the independent variables, when affected by the dependent ones, take other forms and other explanatory values.

(2) Most studies aiming at explaining policies employ public expenditures as a dependent variable. Thus, when maintaining that politics cannot explain policies, one really maintains that politics cannot explain public expenditures. This, however, should to some extent be self-evident, as the level of expenditures to a considerable degree is dependent on environmental economic conditions. However, there are sectorial differences between public expenditures: those pertaining to the have, have-not struggle (welfare, eduction) are more closely related to political variables, such as party competition, than those not belonging in this category. The same inconsistent pattern appears also in studies dealing with other policy measures (laws, innovations, redistribution ratios). The basic issue thus remains unsolved. The problem is, by and large, that policy is really not a variable. The concept stands for a variety of

things (decisions, activities, results), and this being the case, one is not surprised to find a corresponding variety of results: sometimes politics emerge as an important explanatory variable, sometimes not. The comparability of different studies cannot be achieved, unless the categorization of »policy» is considerably refined — one possible way has been indicated by Ilkka Heiskanen and Tuomo Martikainen in a recent paper **(Scandinavian Political Studies,** 1974).

(3) When turning to conceptions of politics as an independent variable, two arguments immediately come to one's mind. Firstly, it should be quite obvious that social and economic factors cannot in themselves be inputs. They have an impact on policies through the mediation of political processes and structures, which accordingly at any rate are to be regarded as important intervening variables. An secondly, the explanatory values given for socio-economic variables do not account for total variations in the dependent policy variables, this clearly indicating that the explanatory patterns are insufficient ones. As the operationalizations of the political system often are very crude and thus unfit for catching the interactive complexity of decision-making, it is very much possible that more refined ways of looking at politics would add considerably to these patterns. Thus, the argument is that politics is grasped in a noninformative manner. Some steps towards more refined conceptualizations and operationalizations of politics are suggested. For instance, it is pointed out that linear assumptions concerning the relationship between cause and effect should be replaced by nonlinear assumptions; consequently, nonlinear techniques should be used whenever possible.

Methods of Proportional Representation: A Theoretical Analysis

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Stein Rokkan, Douglas W. Rae, Victor Hanby, John Loosemore, Arend Lijphart and Robert W. Gibberd have done the pioneering work in trying to establish the relationship between vote shares and seat shares in an electoral district as precisely as possible. They have derived the formulas for the thresholds of representation and exclusion in the three principal variants of list systems of proportional representation: the d'Hondt, Sainte Laguë and largest remainder systems. The purpose of this article is to widen and specify their results. The general formula for all the methods of proportional representation based on the number series is derived. Furthermore a new threshold formula is defined; a threshold of winning all the seats.

The following symbols are used throughout the paper:

n = the number of parties in a given electoral district
m = the number of seats in a given electoral district
     (district magnitude)
k = the first divisor of a number serie
v_r = the threshold of representation
v_w = the threshold of winning all the seats

The general condition for the threshold of winning all the seats is presented using Raschauer's formula (see Ehto 1). According to Raschauer the different methods of

proportional representation can be described by (a · m — b) where a and b are constants. Table 1 (Taulukko 1) shows the values of a and b for electoral methods studied.

Formulas for the threshold of winning all the seats are presented in Table 2 (Taulukko 2). In turn from the condition 2 (Ehto 2) the formula for the threshold of representation is derived and the results are presented in Table 3 (Taulukko 3).

Theoretical results and empirical applications show the wellknown fact that Sainte Laguë is more proportional than d'Hondt. The Danish method for allocating seats, however, is the most proportional number series method studied in this paper (number series 1, 4, 7, ... , 3 m—2).

Formulas for theoretical limits of maximum distortion originally presented by Loosemore and Hanby are also derived on the basis of the v_r and v_w thresholds. Results are presented in Table 6 (Taulukko 6). The information content of the D index is much the same as obtained on the basis of the aforementioned threshold formulas.

The rest of the paper is devoted to the problem of the first divisor of the methods of proportional representation. This is a very important problem particularly in Scandinavia. Denmark, Norway and Sweden apply the Sainte Laguë method modified through the stipulation of a 1.4 »barrier» against party fragmentation. Because there is also in Finland pressures to change the electoral system in the direction of the other Scandinavian countries this question is also one of the main points of the constitutional reform in our country. The analysis based on the threshold formulas shows that the Scandinavian model of the Sainte Laguë rule has no theoretical basis. It is hard to find any reasonable argument why the first divisor of the number series should be just 1.4. This question needs, however, further studies also using empirical election results.