

Title of workshop:

Beyond Class Politics. How Parties, Voters, Media and Unions shape Public Policy

Subject area:

Comparative politics, comparative public policy, political parties, electoral research, welfare state reform, political communication

Abstract of workshop:

When and why do governments reform public policies? The workshop's ambition is to contribute to the development of an encompassing theory that integrates how parties, media, unions and voters shape public policy. This question begs new attention due to the demise of class politics, which has transformed mass-class parties into professional cartel parties and electoral machines, de-institutionalized party-union linkages, increased electoral volatility and rendered mass media more important. For the purpose of developing an encompassing theory this workshop is looking for papers that provide answers to the following questions: How are governments, parties and interest groups connected and how does that influence the political goals pursued by governments, parties and interest groups? Have voters changed their behaviour and does it possibly create new forms of political uncertainty or constraints on decision-making capabilities? Have parties changed their internal decision-making procedures, and do parties seek to build new coalitions. How is the media platform exploited by political actors and how does that influence decision-making on public policies?

We invite papers that deal with such questions theoretically and empirically. We welcome especially contributions based on cross-sectional and/or cross-country comparisons, and we welcome papers that use qualitative, quantitative, formal as well as mixed method techniques. Young and established researchers from various sub-disciplines (public policy, welfare state studies, party politics, media, and interest groups) are invited to apply.

Name of workshop director(s):

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Outline of topic and background for the workshop proposal

Comparative public policy research combines research on party behaviour, electoral behaviour, institutions and economics and thereby unites people from various political science sub-disciplines. Existing studies, however, rarely combine all these aspects into one theory of public policy reform. Our mission is to work towards a theory of public policy reforms that integrates the role of parties, voters, unions and the media. Our workshop encourages fellow researchers to explore, describe and explain the (changing) role of these actors in the processes that produce public policy reforms.

This mission is especially important in the context of the demise of class politics and its effect on the structure of democratic politics in Western democracies since the 1970s. Party research informs us that mass-class parties have transformed into professional cartel parties and campaign organizations. We know from governance researchers that the strong relationship between parties and organized interests has weakened and de-institutionalized. From electoral studies we know that voter volatility has increased and therefore electoral outcomes have become more uncertain. From studies of political communication we take that the mass media has become the central arena for the dispersion of political information and political mobilization. But we know surprisingly little about how these trends collectively affect the behaviour of political actors when they engage in decision making on policy reform and institutional change in the welfare state.

The workshop focuses on four central societal developments that have taken place since the 1970s. First, according to conventional wisdom corporatist forms of political decision-making fit well in a political

context structured along the class-cleavage. The inclusion of societal interests facilitated consensus and compromises between different classes. While the standard assumption is that a consensual style of political decision making constrains capabilities of political change, declining corporatism has produced a more conflictual style of decision making which in turn might increase the independent power of the government vis-à-vis the organized interests to execute political reforms. Despite popular resistance, significant reforms have taken place during the past decades. It is, consequently, necessary to investigate the role, the behavior and the strategies of organized interests in decision making processes in the period of declined class politics. Does corporatism still matter for certain public policy decisions? When are governments liable to share policy making prerogatives with organized interests as for example labor confederations? Do answers to these questions depend on the strength of the government, group capability of political mobilization, the reform measure at hand, or the partisan composition of the government?

Second, party organizations have changed as party membership declined and parties became dependent on state funding. This has made parties more autonomous in their handling of affairs, but has this changed the role and functioning of political parties? Have parties become less ideological and more geared towards the competitive struggle for political power? In other words, have policy goals become less important than the goals of office and votes? How do these changes influence the role of parties in public policy change?

Third, electoral volatility has increased since the 1970s, new parties have emerged on the political scene and the electoral power of traditional class-based parties has eroded. Does (increased) uncertainty about electoral outcomes affect the public policy capacities of governments? Do voters punish governments for public policies failures, and if so, how do governments seek to avoid the blame for failure?

Fourth, the mass media has become more important to politics in Western democracies during the past generations. Without huge numbers of rank and file members and without strong ties to organized interests within civic society, parties and governments are forced to communicate their messages through the media and do so in accordance with the media's implicit norms and routines. How do the requirements of political communication and the new role of the media affect the ways in which political reform are pursued? Do the media provide new opportunities or new obstacles to reforms? Is strategically crafted political communication equally important when proposing and implementing all kinds of reforms? Alongside the increased need to communicate reforms, modern governments are forced to appeal to a wider group of voters without strong party preferences, which renders the reform environment more risky, but also widens the discursive opportunities. Whereas mass-class government parties needed

to appeal to the heart and minds of loyal supporters and affiliated interest organizations, ideology and class loyalties do not limit the communicative strategies of today's reform governments. Does this mean that the communicative framing of reforms has changed over time from being driven by ideological class-based appeals to rational and non-ideological arguments?

In sum, it is time to evaluate the impact that the changes in the Western European political structure have had on public policy making. Such evaluation is not least timely because of the global economic crisis that has put the reform politics in general and welfare state retrenchment in particular on the political agenda. Political science as a discipline should be able to describe, understand and explain such reform processes.

Considerations on the type of papers preferred

We invite papers that deal with questions highlighted above in both a theoretical and empirical fashion. We are especially interested in contributions based on cross-sectional and/or cross-country comparisons, and we welcome papers that use qualitative, quantitative, formal as well as mixed method techniques.

Considerations on possible participants

Young as well as established researchers from various sub-disciplines (public policy, welfare state studies, party politics, media and interest groups) are invited to apply. In particular we believe that the workshop would be of interest to scholars as Kees van Kersbergen (Aarhus), Carsten Jensen (Aarhus), Christoffer Green-Pedersen (Aarhus), Christoph Arndt (Aarhus), Barbara Vis (Amsterdam), Patrick Emmenegger (Odense), Paul Marx (Odense), Anton Hemerijck (Amsterdam), Menno Soentken (Amsterdam), Moira Nelson (Amsterdam), Nathalie Giger (Mannheim), Silja Hausermann (Konstanz), Alexander Petring (Berlin), Sabina Stiller (Wegeningen), Georg Wenzelburger (Frieburg), Johan Bo Davidsson (Lund), Giuliano Bonoli (Lausanne), Bruno Palier (Paris), Johannes Lindvall (Lund) and Anders Lindbom (Uppsala). We would make a special effort through our own networks to engage scholars interested in parties and political communication since they might not automatically be aware of the workshop.

Considerations on funding:

The co-directors are strongly inclined to seek funding, e.g. by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung or by NordForsk. Moreover, the workshop is thematically related to the research project "Beyond Class Politics" directed by Michael Baggesen Klitgaard at the University of Southern Denmark, and we have preliminary indications that some funding would be available here.

Biographical notes on the co-directors

Dr. Christian Elmelund-Præstekær

Assistant Professor

University of Southern Denmark

Current research:

How do governments communicate reform proposals in the mass media? My current works is about the political communication of welfare state retrenchment. Two questions are of special interest: First, how can governments frame initially unpopular reforms in order to increase the public popularity of it? And second, in which ways do governments try to prime major reforms prior to their adoption. Here variation of in reform type is essential, as I expect different strategies to apply for policy reforms and institutional reforms respectively.

Recent publications:

1. Elmelund-Præstekær, C & M. Baggesen Klitgaard (2012). Policy or Institution? The Political Choice of Retrenchment Strategy. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 19(7).
2. Elmelund-Præstekær, C., D. N. Hopmann & A. Sonne Nørgaard (2011). Does Mediatization change MP-Media Interaction and MP Attitudes towards the Media? Evidence from a Longitudinal Study of Danish MPs. *International Journal of Press/Politics* 16(3): 382-403
3. Hopmann, D. N., C. Elmelund-Præstekær, R. Vliegenthart, C. de Vreese & E. Albæk (2012) Party Media Agenda-Setting: How Parties Influence Election News Coverage. *Party Politics* 18(2): 173-191
4. Elmelund-Præstekær, C & P. Emmenegger (2012). Strategic Re-Framing as a Vote-Winner: Why Vote-Seeking Governments pursue Unpopular Reforms (*under review*).

Dr. Gijs Schumacher

Postdoctoral Researcher

VU University Amsterdam

Current research:

How do parties change and how do these changes affect public policy-making? My works finds that variation in party organization between parties explains whether parties are office-motivated or policy-motivated. These varying motivations explain why similar parties have responded differently to similar conditions, and thereby have a varying impact on public policy-making;

Recent publications:

5. Schumacher, G. (2012). Choosing 'Marx' or the Market? The intra-party balance of power and when Social Democrats enact Welfare State Retrenchment, *West European Politics*.
6. Schumacher, G. (2011). "Modernize or Die"? Social Democrats, Welfare State Retrenchment and the Choice between Office and Policy. *VU University Amsterdam Dissertation*.
7. Schumacher, G. (2011). Signalling a Change of Heart. How Parties Short-Term Ideological Shifts Explain Welfare State Reform. *Acta Politica*, 46, 4.