Unexplained and Anomalous Policy Output Patterns in Punctuated Equilibrium Theory: Challenging the Dominant Paradigm and Building a Better Theory

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Abstract

Punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy replicated from biological punctuated equilibrium theory has determined that public policies occasionally oscillate between stasis and sharp punctuation. What is the usefulness of using biological punctuated equilibrium theory to understand punctuated equilibrium in public policy? Nearly all policy research finding policy punctuation patterns has focused on a social construction-oriented “tone” that is based in normative-valued media reporting of variables impacting the policy process while studies determining no punctuation despite an attempt to do so have focused on policy outputs or end governmental action or inaction based on a complex variety of variables resulting in diverse policy output patterns. Major problems also exist when public policy borrows from evolutionary biology’s model of punctuated equilibrium theory including time frames for change, causes of outside disturbances of equilibrium, venues of punctuated equilibrium, levels of analysis for change, and patterns of change. One emerging challenge to the orthodoxy of social construction analyses of policy change in punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy is social policy realism theory. Social policy realism examines patterns of policy output change or what governmental institutions including executive, legislative, and judicial does or does not do based on a complexity of factors. Contingent and complex factors that can shape the policy process or have a significant influence on public policy output patterns include security state structures, media influence, political culture, crises, ideologies, political leadership, political institutions, elites and classes, interest groups, social movements, revolutionary movements, and foreign interventions. Ultimately, social policy realism examines the complex and hard-core realities of the impact on society and the natural environment by various policy factors (some with more weight than others) resulting in a complex array of policy output patterns.
INTRODUCTION

Punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy can be traced back to the mechanistic social science theories of structural functionalism including system equilibrium and disequilibrium theory where policy systems may be in relative equilibrium or in disequilibrium due to an exogenous shock to the system. In conjunction with system equilibrium and disequilibrium theory, many modern punctuated equilibrium theorists in public policy also focus on a social construction-oriented media analysis of the coverage of policy events in the policy process rather than what government ultimately does or does not do including court decisions, executive orders, or legislation. One emerging challenge to this orthodoxy of punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy is known as social policy realism. Social policy realism focuses on what government does or does not do with respect to societal issues and the natural environment. Social policy realism bases its conclusions on varying policy output patterns over time due to a complex array of policy variables, some of which can be more influential than others.

Overview of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory in Public Policy

In 1993 and again in 2009, political scientists Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, borrowing Gould and Eldredges’ 1972 findings of punctuated equilibria in evolutionary biology contended that the degree of change in public policy often happens relatively slowly and incrementally (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). However, occasionally, Baumgartner and Jones argued, public policy change can also occur “sharply,” “explosively,” and in a “short period” due to an outside exogenous shock (such as a trigger event) followed again by a new pattern of gradual and incremental policy change (Baumgartner, 2006; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). In 2006, Baumgartner also clarified the definition of punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy
as being based in a mechanistic and self-correcting positive and negative feedback process that results in policy equilibrium or disequilibrium (Baumgartner, 2006). Positive feedback is defined as policy influences causing significant system change while negative feedback is defined as influences that support the status quo and little system change (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Central to this notion of system equilibrium change is the concept of bounded rationality where decision making is based on limited and non-comprehensive information (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Bounded rationality allows, for instance, for a sudden reversal of former policy positions resulting in significant policy change (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009).

Factors Causing Positive Feedback

In 2009, Baumgartner and Jones argued that positive feedback in punctuated equilibrium can happen through “disruptive dynamics” (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Disruptive dynamics can include interactions between political parties, interest groups, and politicians (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Other factors illustrated by punctuated equilibrium policy theorists that can cause positive feedback and sharp policy change and disequilibrium include disruptive events caused by crises, new politicians or political parties in power, wars, new technologies and scientific changes, radical economic change, and reformist mobilizations by interest groups opposed to policy monopolies (Baumgartner, 2006).

Maintenance of Policy Equilibrium and Political Status Quo

Central to understanding how negative feedback and policy equilibrium and political status quo is maintained is the role of policy monopolies or powerful and influential groups or coalitions that can thwart outside groups to promote through advocacy significant reformist or radical policy change (Givel, 2006). Here, a focus on the maintenance of the balance of power (or not) between opposing groups or advocacy coalitions including policy monopolies is a
primary variable (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Givel, 2008). This continual conflict between these opposing groups results in policies that are either in equilibrium or occasionally disequilibrium due to a punctuation of policy equilibrium (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Givel, 2008). Maintenance of the political status quo and relative policy equilibrium can occur by powerful policy monopolies and interests employing lobbyists, policy specialists, lawyers, and public relations specialists (Givel & Glantz, 2001). Policy monopolies also provide campaign contributions, gifts, honoraria, and entertainment events for politicians, employ third party front groups, and build political alliances with other powerful groups (Breunig & Koski, 2006; Givel & Glantz, 2001; Givel, 2006).

In addition to the influence of powerful policy monopolies, a myriad of single district governmental jurisdictions such as is in the U.S. can hinder widespread political changes simultaneously in numerous political jurisdictions (Baumgartner, 2006). Other important factors that hinder punctuations of equilibrium include courts that overrule reformist and radical policies such as significant changes in property rights, entrenched policy entrepreneurs, and group or individual resistance to new policy ideas (Baumgartner, 2006).

*Structural Functionalism, Social Constructionist, and Punctuated Equilibrium Theory*

The theoretical origins for modern punctuated equilibrium theory can be traced to the 1950s when various scholars following the lead of Talcott Parsons and the structural functionalist school in sociology utilized policy equilibrium theory to explain societal functions (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1986; Huntington, 1968; Johnson, 1982; Merton, 1957; Parsons, 1967, 1969, 1978; Smelser, 1963; Turner, 1985). A central tenet of the structural functionalist school is a view of political policymaking systems being in equilibrium and homeostasis or disequilibrium due to shifting balances of power from political demands and conflicts between interest groups.
Political systems under structural functionalism are due to a policymaking system in a holistic model based on important constituent parts. These parts included policy inputs emanating from the total social, cultural, and political environment, conversion of demands into outputs including policy implementation, and feedback (Easton, 1965). Cultural norms, customs, and political institutions play a primary role in influencing these separate parts in the policy process related to the whole system. Policymaking under structural functionalism often focuses on the process of how a policy is developed. When a system is in extreme disequilibrium, then a punctuated policy reform or even a political revolution can occur (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Foran, 1993; Goldstone, 2001). Critics of structural functionalism and systems theory, on the other hand, argued that equilibrium theory was conservative and reactionary, did not adequately encompass human suffering and poverty and is mechanistic, positivistic, collectivist, dehumanizing, biology-oriented, and upheld the political status quo (Coser, 1956; Habermas, 1981; Skopcol, 2003).

Modern punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy like the earlier structural functionalism posits that the analysis of policy change is based on equilibrium or homeostasis or disequilibrium (Baumgartner, 2006; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, 2002, 2009; Jones & Breunig, 2007; Jones, Sulkin, & Larsen, 2003). Only an exogenous shock that creates a “tipping point” leads to a radically new policy. However, modern punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy also has combined traditional structural functionalism with structuralism or social constructionist theory to explain and predict policy change and behavior (Baumgartner, 2006; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, 2002, 2009; Jones & Breunig, 2007; Jones et al., 2003).

Punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy is a social constructionist-oriented analysis
of how various factors contribute to the “tone” including the frequency of media coverage (Baumgartner, 2006; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Jones et al., 2003). According to social constructionist theory (which is a source of the more recent postmodernist theory) understanding of phenomena and social reality is explained as developing in social contexts based on their constructed meaning or the reframing of a policy issue for political advantage (Baudrillard, 1986; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 1995; Derrida, 1976; Eco, 1984; Foucault, 1970, 1977, 1990; Hacking, 1999). Meaning in social constructionist entails comprehending in a textual, discourse, metaphoric, or symbolic manner how individuals or groups construct their perceived version and beliefs of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 1995; Hacking, 1999).

Current Policy Critiques of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory in Public Policy

Almost entirely, this social constructionist media analysis in punctuated equilibrium theory has focused on an element of the policy process such as favorable or unfavorable coverage of legislative committee hearings or the reframing of a policy issue by a particular group to advance their policy agenda rather than on a final vote or implementation that actually impacts society as well as the natural environment (Baumgartner, 2006; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Jones et al., 2003). A primary source of media information by several scholars to analyze media coverage and the reframing of policy issues have been news stories on various issues from select elite media outlets including the New York Times and Congressional Research Quarterly (Jones et al., 2003). Despite this practice of using seemingly neutral news sources, in a recent article in the Review of Policy Research, Crow who analyzed possible policy punctuations in Colorado water law concluded:

Finally PE (Punctuated Equilibrium) research has used media coverage as a proxy for measuring the agenda status of policy issues. While this makes sense, this
research reinforces the notion that measuring elite newspapers on the East Coast (of the U.S.) may not measure the public agenda status of issues. Instead, local media may be a much more effective measure of agenda status (Crow, 2010).

In tandem with this finding of local versus national reporting bias is a 2005 study by Groseclose and Milyo published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* that concluded:

> Our results show a strong liberal bias: all of the news outlets we examine, except *Fox News’ Special Report* and the *Washington Times*, received scores to the left of the average member of Congress. Consistent with claims made by conservative critics, *CBS Evening News* and the *New York Times* received scores far to the left of center. The most centrist media outlets were *PBS NewsHour*, *CNN’s Newsnight*, and *ABC’s Good Morning America*; among print outlets, *USA Today* was closest to the center (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005).

Thus, in addition to the issue of focusing on the tone of the policy process by media analyses another crucial problem with modern punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy is whether the sources being cited are normatively biased and thus flawed.

Moreover, recent policy research in such areas as Pacific Northwest forest policy, U.S. state tobacco policy, and U.S. auto efficiency policy alternatively have utilized a methodological approach that relies on examining a pattern of public policy output patterns rather than tone as a basis of analysis to determine if major changes in the policy equilibrium has occurred (Cashore & Howlett, 2007; Givel, 2008; Perl & Dunn, 2007). Public policy outputs is defined as government actions or inactions regarding the executive branch, judicial decisions, and legislation with respect to laws, regulations, and funding for a particular issue.

In a 2006, a paper by Perl and Dunn concluded that an attempt at punctuating U.S.
corporate average fuel economy criteria reached a political impasse from 1981 to 2005 (Perl & Dunn, 2007). A 2007 paper by Cashore and Howlett that examined forest policy in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, found from 1976 to 2005 no punctuations in policy by environmentalists with respect to controlling the harvesting of timber, protecting old growth forests, and preserving ecosystems (Cashore & Howlett, 2007).

Another study in 2008 in the area of U.S. state tobacco policy has also found, despite a vigorous attempt from 1990 to 2006 by health advocates, sympathetic politicians, litigators, and regulatory agencies, punctuation of equilibrium in nine key state anti-tobacco policy areas did not occur (Givel, 2008). These nine key indicators included: state clean indoor air laws for government, private workplaces, restaurants, and hospitals, higher tobacco taxes, state preemption of stronger local clean indoor air and youth access ordinances, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) minimum state spending levels for tobacco control programs, and state tobacco licensing requirements (Givel, 2008).

State anti-tobacco policy patterns for this period indicated that the number of states enacting: tobacco license legislation was linear and increasing, minimum CDC spending for state anti-tobacco programs was linear and constant, higher tobacco taxes was oscillating and increasing, and preempting stronger local youth access and clean indoor air laws was exponential and constant (Givel, 2008). Also, the number of states enacting state clean indoor air laws for government, private workplaces, restaurants, and hospitals was exponential with no bound (Givel, 2008). In none of these key state anti-tobacco policy areas did a dramatic and sharp punctuated policy change occur with a vast majority of states enacting anti-tobacco legislation in a short period. However, a moderate increase in effective anti-tobacco legislation was enacted in some states.
Summary

Ultimately when the methodological focus in a social constructionist manner has been on the tone of media coverage or the like for the policy process but not policy outputs, the research has often concluded that punctuated equilibrium occurred. When the methodological focus has been on patterns of policy outputs or what government does or does not do, the research has concluded that punctuated equilibrium did not occur.

Punctuated Equilibrium Research in Biology

Darwin argued in his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species* that some individuals in a species are better able to survive in a specific environment due to a variation in their genetic traits, which is passed on to their offspring (Darwin, 1859). Darwin based this revolutionary theory on the observed behavior of various isolated species including finches and tortoises on the Galapagos Islands and breeds of domesticated animals (Darwin, 1859). As variations in genetic composition in a population accumulated over time they slowly evolved into a new species (Darwin, 1859). Ernst Mayr theorized that biological evolution does not occur gradually as was maintained by Charles Darwin in 1859 (Darwin, 1859; Mayr, 1954). Rather, Mayr argued rapid biological evolution occurred through mutation, recombination, and natural selection in peripherally isolated populations (Mayr, 1954). In order for evolution to occur isolated populations required genetic variability (Mayr, 1954).

In alignment with Mayr’s theory, in 1972, paleontologists Stephen J. Gould and Niles Eldredge argued in *Models of Paleobiology* that biological evolutionary change was not always “slow and steady” or gradual. Like Mayr’s argument in 1954, Gould and Eldredge argued from fossil evidence of the rise-and-fall of snail populations that often after long periods of incremental changes new species evolved quickly in “small, peripherally isolated” populations.
due to a sharp environmental change (Eldredge, 1979, 1985, 1989; Eldredge & Gould, 1972; Gould, 1982, 1984, 1997; Gould & Eldredge, 1977). This occurred through macro evolutionary processes including phylogenetic drift, speciation, and species selection (Eldredge, 1989; Stanley, 1979). Gould and Eldredge analyzed the fossil records of the 300,000 year evolution of a pulmonate snail *Poecilozonites bermudensis* and discovered that there was a distinct difference of color banding for the western and eastern varieties in the Bermudian Pleistocene (Eldredge, 1989). Both of the varieties went extinct very suddenly and were quickly replaced by *P. b. bermudensis*, which had originally developed in the St. George’s Island area (Eldredge, 1989). They called this alternative tempo of biological evolutionary change punctuated equilibria (Eldredge, 1989).

After vigorous scientific critique and debates, Gould and Eldredge altered their original 1972 argument (Eldredge, 1989; Gould, 1997; Gould, 2002; Gould & Eldredge, 1977) in 1977 by arguing:

> We never claimed either that gradualism could not occur in theory, or did not occur in fact. Nature is far too varied and complex for such absolutes; Captain Corcoran's "hardly ever" is the strongest statement that a natural historian can hope to make. Issues like this are decided by relative frequency (Gould & Eldredge, 1977).

They acknowledged that advocates of phyletic paleo-biology and phyletic gradualism had long dominated reflecting Darwin’s original theory of evolution (Eldredge, 1989; Stephen Gould, 1989). They also argued that punctuated equilibrium theory is not a theory of saltational or instant species change but based on slow change over thousands of years but faster than the slower species change that evolutionary gradualists argued occurred (Dawkins, 1996; Eldredge,
Gould also disputed the notion that evolution was a uniform process, instead calling for “evolutionary pluralism” where gradualism and punctuated equilibrium both occurred (Gould, 1989; Gould & Eldredge, 1977).

**Conceptual Differences Between Punctuated Equilibrium in Biology and Public Policy**

Table 1 provides a contrast between punctuated equilibrium theory used in evolutionary biology and public policy. Included in the comparison are the bases of punctuated equilibrium change, the time frame for change, what constitutes outside disturbance to a current equilibrium, the venues in which punctuated equilibrium occur, the levels of analysis for the change, and the patterns of policy change.

Biological punctuated change according to Gould and Eldredge is based on macro evolutionary genetic factors and environmental factors. Policy change according to Baumgartner and Jones is based on a variety of outside and often-complex disturbances that punctuate established policy monopolies. Punctuated equilibrium theory as described by Baumgartner and Jones tends to be saltational or near saltational with “explosive” and “dramatic” policy changes. Punctuated equilibrium as redefined by Gould and Eldredge is not saltational, but slow change, that is faster than gradual evolutionary change. Factors resisting punctuated change are also quite different with a lack of genetic variability and stable environments causing evolutionary biological stasis and various institutional factors, policy entrepreneurs, and policy monopolies thwarting punctuated equilibrium in public policy. The venues for punctuated equilibrium are also dissimilar with biological punctuated change occurring in various geographical and ecological niches while punctuated change in public policy occurring in between and amongst governmental jurisdictions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em><em>TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF THE PRIMARY THEORETICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM IN PUBLIC POLICY</em> AND BIOLOGY</em>*</th>
<th><strong>Public Policy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Biology</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bases for Change</strong></td>
<td>Disturbance and disruption of equilibrium of policy monopolies</td>
<td>Macro phylogenetic drift, speciation, species selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Frame of Change</strong></td>
<td>Saltational or very short-term defined as dramatic and explosive</td>
<td>Over thousands of years but quicker than gradual change; not saltational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside Disturbances that Punctuate Equilibrium</strong></td>
<td>Interest groups, political parties, elected officials, legislative committees, crises, wars, new technologies, scientific changes, radical economic change, and reformist mobilizations</td>
<td>Genetic variability in geographically isolated populations adapting to new environmental conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors Resisting Change</strong></td>
<td>Political entrepreneurs, courts and rule of law, policy monopolies, bounded rationality, acceptance of new policy ideas tied to a public policy, fragmented political system</td>
<td>Lack of genetic variability in a population and stable environmental conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Venues for Change</strong></td>
<td>Various governmental jurisdictions</td>
<td>Geographical and ecological venues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Levels of Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Between and amongst levels of government</td>
<td>Genetics and higher levels of organisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patterns of Change</strong></td>
<td>According to Baumgartner and Jones, if measured by tone and political communications, alternates between stability and punctuation. According to other recent research, if measured by policy outputs, pluralistic policy output patterns occur with no change, limited change, and punctuated change</td>
<td>Evolutionary pluralism where gradual and punctuated change both occur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009)

Perhaps the most significant difference is that Baumgartner and Jones currently rely on
an early conceptualization of Gould and Eldredges’ theory of punctuated equilibrium. Gould and
Eldredge’s early view of punctuated equilibrium was subsequently revised and replaced with evolutionary pluralism. Evolutionary pluralism is the notion that evolutionary change in biology can be gradual or punctuated but not saltational.

**Summary**

Punctuated equilibrium in public policy is not in sync with punctuated equilibrium as currently used in evolutionary biology. Borrowing from punctuated equilibrium theory in evolutionary biology represents a faulty analogy. Nor is public policy punctuated equilibrium in sync with recent research findings in U.S. state tobacco policy, U.S. Northwest forestry policy, and U.S. auto efficiency policy that concluded that punctuation of equilibrium did not occur despite concerted attempts to alter public policy. Moreover, these recent research findings using final policy outputs rather than describing the purported tone of the policy process have found no punctuations despite attempts to do so. These findings provide a powerful and growing null hypothesis that punctuated equilibrium theory is an inadequate model to describe and predict public policy change.

**Emerging Alternative Challenging Punctuated Equilibrium Theory in Public Policy**

One emerging alternative that is challenging the orthodoxy to punctuated equilibrium theory in public policy is social policy realism (Givel, 2006, 2008, 2011). Under social policy realism, public policies occur due to a complex mixture of independent factors resulting in complex policy output patterns. This is in contrast to punctuated equilibrium theory with its homogenous model of policy output patterns reflected by oscillations between incremental and sharp policy output patterns. By contrast, a central premise of social policy realism is that the world is too complex for history to exactly repeat itself. While the social constructionist focus on metaphors, discourse, and textual indicators that purportedly determine and measure policy,
Social policy realism is based on a broad and varying mix of contingent factors explaining how public policy is formulated and implemented. These contingent factors might be, for example: security state structures, political culture, political ideology, media coverage, political leadership, elites and classes, interest groups, political institutions, social movements, revolutionary movements, and foreign interventions. In this paper, elites are defined as comprising a small group of people who are a governing elite. Class is defined and divided between the owners of the means of production in contrast to a working class that does not own the means of production. There are often varying factions among business owners and differentiations such as middle class or the working poor among those that do not own the means of production.

In addition, social policy realism utilizes interdisciplinary approaches representing complex analyses and explanations of societal phenomena to explain and predict public policy processes and policy output patterns. Social policy realism also acknowledges the possible and actual role of national and universal structures and policies linked to sub-national policies as a highly probable and complex explanation of how public policy is created and implemented. In addition, social policy realism emphasizes that empirical methodological approaches are not value free but rather are based on value-laden normative assumptions. Ultimately, social policy realism examines the complex and hard-core realities of the impact on society and the natural environment of a pattern of final government actions or inactions due to a variety of complex factors (Givel, 2008).

Which Theory Describing Patterns of Policy Change Is Most Significant?

Not all independent variables carry the same weight in impacting how patterns of public policy outputs occur. A key question in the study of policy is explaining and predicting what are the crucial variables linked with an array of possible other and less significant complex variables
that best explains what policy output change and patterns will occur. Reviewing in a rigorous and scientific manner the nature of ongoing policy output patterns provides the foundation for generalized conclusions as to who dominates or not in the policy process. Directly tied to these findings are important and often relevant conclusions about the nature of public policymaking and the impact of public policy on society and the environment. In particular, these findings also can be linked scientifically to which independent variables such as class or elites, political institutions, or political ideology, individually as well as collectively, have the most influence or not in determining and describing public policy outputs.

Currently, in the field of public policy in the U.S., (Table 2) a diverse set of theories grounded in the theory of pluralism are considered “more promising theoretical frameworks” (Sabatier, 2007) to explain public policymaking (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Berry & Berry, 1992; Ingram & Schneider, 2005; Kingdon, 1984; Ostrom, 2006; Sabatier, 2007; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Pluralists argue that a myriad of interest groups competing and cooperating in the political process is the core reason explaining and predicting public policy (Dahl, 1972). Different groups may have unequal power in a policy niche but none are a dominant class or are elites with ongoing political dominance (Dahl, 1972). Some pluralists have also recently argued that business groups often have greater resources to advance their policy agenda (Lindblom, 2001). Besides punctuated equilibrium theory with group conflict leading to incremental or sharp policy change, these variations of pluralist policy theories include: institutional rational choice, social construction, “garbage can” theories, advocacy coalition framework, policy networks, and policy diffusion (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Berry & Berry, 1992; Ingram & Schneider, 2005; Kingdon, 1984; Ostrom, 2006; Sabatier, 2007; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF THEORY</th>
<th>KEY POLICY DRIVERS</th>
<th>PREDICTED POLICY CHANGE OUTPUT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Rational Choice</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; pluralistic arrangements of individuals primary drivers of policy process</td>
<td>Rational material self interest of individual results in policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Construction</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; pluralistic arrangement of groups primary drivers of policy process</td>
<td>Policy design impacts policy; beneficiaries of policy change depends on social construction of which group benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Garbage Can&quot;</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; pluralistic arrangement of groups primary drivers of policy process</td>
<td>Focuses primarily on how policies reach policy agenda and not policy output change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Coalition Framework</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; pluralistic arrangement of groups primary drivers of policy process</td>
<td>Coalitional behavior and action influence policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuated Equilibrium</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; pluralistic arrangement of groups primary drivers of policy process</td>
<td>Oscillation between relatively stable policies and sharp patterns of policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Networks</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; pluralistic arrangement of groups who control the state primary drivers of policy process</td>
<td>Focuses on whether power is concentrated or shared in influencing policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Diffusion</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; pluralistic arrangement of political jurisdictions primary drivers of policy process</td>
<td>Policy occurs by political jurisdictions enacting policies adopted in other political jurisdictions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, other than punctuated equilibrium theory, none of these distinct theories based in pluralism offer an integrated and comprehensive explanation of how to assess patterns over time of public policymaking outputs and change (Schlager, 2007). Without the ability to test, assess, and predict policy patterns over a given period of time with clear axioms, crucial and relevant
questions on the real impact of policies such as who may be dominating remain potentially obscure or unanswered.

*Other Theories of Policy Pattern Change*

Excluded from the list of “more promising theoretical frameworks” are other recognized theories that describe how public policy output patterns may occur (Table 3) (Domhoff, 2009, 2011; Dye, 2011; Stone, 1989, 2010). Urban regime theorists argue that policy favoring elite groups and economic stratification dominates in U.S. urban areas (Stone, 1989, 2010). Central to urban regime theory is the role of “informal arrangements” between a stable group such as local business interests, which also has access and control over governmental institutions and decision-making. Influential members of groups have differing opinions, which they often resolve through coalitional efforts (Stone, 1989, 2010).

Non-Marxist elite theorists also argue that a small elite group dominates based on their preferred policy preferences manifested into their desired policy output patterns (Domhoff, 2011; Dye, 2011). From the elite perspective, society is divided between the few who have power and the many who do not who essentially have no role in public policy. Moreover, elites tend to be from the upper class in a society. Elites also share a basic value consensus on the rules of the games of a society such as the sanctity of private property rights (Domhoff, 2011; Dye, 2011).

Finally, Marxist theorists assert that public policy output patterns are predicated on class struggle through historical materialism resulting in policy output patterns and phases transitioning from capitalism to socialism (Engels, 1989; Harrington, 1972; Marx & Engels, 2002). In particular Marxist theorists of all stripes argue that owners of the means of production dominate in public policy making in a capitalist society by controlling the functions of the state (Engels, 1989; Harrington, 1972; Marx & Engels, 2002). According to Marxist theorists, society
TABLE 3. COMPARISON OF HOW SOME OTHER RECENT ALTERNATIVE POLICY THEORIES DESCRIBE AND PREDICT POLICY CHANGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF THEORY</th>
<th>KEY POLICY DRIVERS</th>
<th>PREDICTED POLICY CHANGE OUTPUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban Regime Theory</td>
<td>Coalitions of groups with greater economic resources primary drivers of policy process; private groups and businesses have access to institutional structures of government that manage conflict and adapt to social change</td>
<td>Patterns of policy change often, but not always reflect social stratification, economic bias, and uneven distribution of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Marxist Elite Theory</td>
<td>Policy elite often through instruments of government drive public policy</td>
<td>Public policy output patterns reflect the interests, values, and requirements of elites and not ordinary people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marxist Theory</td>
<td>History transpires dialectically through an economic class struggle under capitalism that will eventually lead to abolition of capitalism and the installment of socialism</td>
<td>Economic determinist and historical materialist policy output patterns as society moves in stages from capitalism to socialism by the abolition of private property, state ownership of means of production, and collective cooperatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and history evolves in a dialectical clash of a thesis and anti-thesis and then synthesis based on the theories of Hegel. Here, the key policy driver of policy is the contradictions of capitalism between the owners of the means of production who extract the surplus labor value of workers for profit at the expense of undermining the workers’ ability to survive in society with livable wages and benefits (Engels, 1989; Harrington, 1972; Marx & Engels, 2002). Eventually, class contradictions and the deprivation of workers will become so severe that workers will overturn the rule of the capitalist class through class struggle and institute socialism. Under socialism, government and cooperatives will own the means of production and ultimately private property
and allocate in an egalitarian manner societal resources (Engels, 1989; Harrington, 1972; Marx & Engels, 2002).

Deciphering How Policy Pattern Change Occurs

Currently, the pluralist punctuated equilibrium theory joined by urban regime theory, non-Marxist elite theory and Marxist theory provide a clear orientation or explanation of how public policy output patterns over time ought to occur. The pluralist group struggle and cooperation embedded in the social constructionist theory and equilibrium and disequilibrium theory of punctuated equilibrium though has been found inadequate in such areas as U.S. Northwest forest policy, U.S. automobile efficiency standards, and U.S. state tobacco policy. This practice of scientifically assessing and comparing theory and actual policy output patterns can also be applied to urban regime theory, non-Marxist elite theory, and Marxist theories in terms of how public policy output patterns will develop in the short and long term. Analyzing and describing the key policy determinants and premises of the theory can accomplish this. The policy determinants can then be compared with expected government policy outputs over time in various policy niches. For example, if a tiny power elite is expected to be the main reason for control over labor policy, then a viable approach to examining this question is to research either quantitatively or qualitatively the complex factors and variables associated with that control including possible elite influence. Along with this line of research inquiry can be a short and long term analysis of whether specific labor policy output patterns, in whole or part, favored business or labor.

Challenging Orthodoxies: A Proposal to Move Forward

Recent peer reviewed research based on a case study of U.S. state tobacco policy found that no punctuation of policy had occurred despite a vigorous move to enact tough new state
tobacco control programs and higher tobacco taxes (Givel, 2006, 2008). Instead, the tobacco lobby, consistently, in all fifty U.S. states has been able to counter this effort by pro-tobacco control forces. In some cases though, there has been various patterns of non-punctuated policy enactment by some states of some new tobacco control legislation. Various complex reasons occurred to counter this effort such as political jurisdiction fragmentation hindering sweeping changes, tobacco lobby corporate lobbying and influence, failure of health groups to run robust advocacy campaigns to enact new tobacco control legislation, political party ideologies of state legislatures, and the impact on tobacco control policy in tobacco growing states. Ultimately, the influence of the tobacco lobby has been shown to be a primary independent variable in thwarting a concerted policy output pattern of punctuated change (Givel, 2006).

As has been discussed extensively in this paper, this finding counters the central premises of punctuated equilibrium theory that several variables may cause exogenous shocks to a policy system that will create system disequilibrium and sharp policy change. Preventing this from occurring in this process was corporate power in conjunction with various other complex and less significant factors. Nor does this finding coincide with non-Marxist elite theory where a tiny elite almost always wins. In this case, the tobacco lobby did not always win.

In addition, if this was a vestige of significant class struggle as postulated by Marxist theorists, then in the past two decades this scenario also conflicts with that premise as well as there were moderate regulatory reform victories from the perspective of pro-tobacco control advocates. The owners of the giant tobacco companies did not entirely win but nor did the sanctity and legitimacy of tobacco companies to operate as a capitalist profit making entity selling a deadly product also change. In the much longer term, such a contradiction may be (or more than likely not) resolved with the abolition of private tobacco companies to make a private
profit and sell a harmful product as postulated by Marxist theorists, but this has certainly not been the case, so far.

In the present, what tends to fit best in this case study is the notion that there was economic bias and stratification in the policy system but those with clout like the tobacco lobby did not always win as postulated by urban regime theorists. The primary reason for this development as eloquently discussed by Clarence Stone is due to democratic participation and demands by the less powerful health groups (Stone, 1989, 2010). In essence, a complex set of political economy reasons that were examined from a social policy realism analysis of policy output patterns found a nuanced and complex set of factors driving tobacco control policy including popular democratic demands and participation in the political process. This led to a pattern of varying policy output patterns that tend to be congruent with urban regime theory. That is, there is an economic bias in the political process that tends to favor on an ongoing basis those with superior economic and political resources.

Will this finding hold in other policy niches? Only by conducting a thorough research examination by using a social policy realism approach will we begin to move out of the quagmire, balkanization, and fragmentation that now is prevalent in public policy studies. Almost all preferred public policy theories do not focus on patterns of policy outputs. In turn, relevant questions and analyses of who dominates or not and the actual impact on policy outputs on society and the natural environment remain murky or unexplained. This quagmire has stymied theoretical development and advancement in public policy studies, in recent times, and needs to be reversed.
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References


