

Baumgartner, Frank R. **Conflict and rhetoric in French policymaking**. Pittsburgh, 1989. 287p bibl index ISBN [0-8229-3616-X](#), \$34.95. Reviewed in 1990apr CHOICE.

Baumgartner (Texas A&M) explores why some matters are decided quietly by a few experts while others become public controversies. It is not the issue's inherent importance, Baumgartner avers, but rather the intensity of political conflict within the policy-making group that determines the course. Many decisional groups contain "contractors" who wish to keep the issue quiet and technical, and "expanders" whose political advantage is to get the issue into the press and parliament. Controlling the size of the arena is political strategy, and "expansion" typically is the strategy of those losing. Baumgartner used 30 questions of French education policy in 1984 and found that ten cases were decided quietly because there was no political incentive to expand participation. In another ten cases, expanders succeeded in getting the issues before broader groups, but in only three cases did issues become major public controversies. At least two of the issues--major university reform and greater state control of Catholic schools--really were public matters that could not have stayed "contracted" long. Much of the author's information is from articles in *Le Monde*. A significant study of a major question. Upper-division undergraduates and above. -- *M. G. Roskin, Lycoming College*