



Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking.

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author's claim that the conservative economist's supposedly objective and empirical analysis of politics and markets is deeply partisan. At times, the book's criticisms are repetitive; but this, I suspect, is unavoidable given that conservative economists tie everything—democracy, morality, justice—to the market principle. The author has little choice but to go where their ideology leads him. Nonetheless, even those who resist the book's conclusions will find this an intelligent analysis of the connection between how we think about political economy and the way that thinking governs our political aspirations. While the author never denies that markets are good for some things, he reminds us of how much our expectations for public life are narrowed once we view the market as good for everything.

Alfonso J. Damico, *University of Florida*

Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking. By Frank R. Baumgartner. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989. Pp. 287. \$34.95 cloth.)

This book makes an important contribution to our knowledge about agenda setting, especially from a comparative standpoint. In *Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking*, Frank Baumgartner argues that policy actors use sophisticated rhetorical strategies in the struggle to gain policy objectives. In his words, "Those hoping to move the issue away from the province of experts and toward that of political generalists strive to portray the issue as a question with the broadest social and political implications. Those hoping to push the issue away from the political generalists and toward the specialist portray the issue as a technically complex amendment to an established policy. Depending on the side that prevails in this rhetorical debate about the proper characterization of the issue, the question will attract the attention either of a large number of policymakers and the mass media or of a small, limited number of specialists" (3).

None of this is startlingly new, of course, as an interest in expanding or contracting participation in a political conflict, as well as the extensive use of symbols and images by all sides, goes far back in time and reaches across many cultures. Baumgartner's contribution in this study is notable, however, for two reasons: He passes his evidence through a fine sieve and constructs a remarkably systematic, rich analysis of policymaking in the education domain in France. This enables him, first, to demonstrate the cross-national applicability of his agenda-setting arguments, and second, to suggest some of the ways that his analysis is generalizable across policy domains.

The research for this book is based upon Baumgartner's field work in France from 1983–1984. During this period, he analyzed the unfolding of 30 cases of policymaking in education. These ranged from those issues charac-

terized by highly restricted participation with decisions made largely by experts (such as the transfer of elementary school teaching personnel) to those issues characterized by highly expended participation, up to and including the mass public, with decisions made in more public, political arenas by coalitions of generalists and many other nonexpert parties (such as the reform of medical education or the reform of the private schools). Baumgartner interviewed over 100 politicians, highly-placed civil servants, and interest group leaders. He also administered a comprehensive mail survey to interest groups active in education policy and tracked all the coverage in *Le Monde*, France's newspaper of record, during the period for the each of the 30 cases.

In this study, Baumgartner follows in the footsteps of two great political scientists, E. E. Schattschneider and Murray Edelman. Like Schattschneider, Baumgartner stresses the ways in which the number of participants in a given policy conflict changes the final outcome, often dramatically. Schattschneider referred to this as the "privatization" or "socialization" of conflict and likened it to the difference between a boxing match and a street brawl. In the boxing match, a ring encloses a very small number of participants who compete by well-defined rules. In the street brawl, there is no ring to limit participation, a very large, unpredictable number of participants become involved, and few standard rules govern the conflict. In this study, Baumgartner analyzes at great length the strategies that are used by policy actors to, in his words, "expand" or "contract" the policy debate to larger or smaller political arenas.

Like Edelman, Baumgartner also recognizes and dwells upon the importance of images and symbols in the manipulation of political conflict. All sides sense, at least implicitly, the importance of symbols. Even poorly organized groups use them, though often less consciously. For Baumgartner, those actors best skilled at recognizing and using symbols and images stand a better chance of either expanding or contracting the political debate, all other factors being equal. But Baumgartner, of course, also recognizes that all sides are not equally endowed with good symbols and images, so some sides may in this respect be disadvantaged in spite of great manipulative skills. This last point, however, does not receive the emphasis that perhaps it deserves.

Also like Edelman, Baumgartner laments to a certain extent the fact that in so much of democratic policymaking "the most important policy debate takes place not over the policy itself but over the terms in which it should be explained" (215). This means, of course, that often the issues which are of more "objective" importance never come to the attention of the mass public. On these "important" issues, even relevant policy actors are often screened out. This constitutes Schattschneider's "privatization" of a conflict *par excellence*. Other issues, however, of less importance to the general interest may become very highly charged. These issues often displace others from the po-

litical agenda and engage policy actors in nasty polemics that distract them from more important issues.

To be fair, Baumgartner also recognizes that it is difficult to conclude categorically that such a system is bad. On the one hand, tight groups of specialists dominate the policy process for many issues of great import. Their understanding of the general interest may or may not correspond with what is really in the general interest or with the preferences of society as a whole, were society to be consulted. On the other hand, political generalists and the mass public are so often so poorly educated on important issues and so easily distracted by misleading symbols and images that good decisions are difficult to make. Making decisions both authoritatively *and* democratically has always been difficult to do. There is, of course, no way to construct a system that perfectly reconciles the two.

Much of Baumgartner's book focuses on issues that in fact escaped the grasp of the legendarily centralized French Ministry of National Education and became the foci of great polemic. He spends much time on medical school reform and on private school reform, in part because of the intense, society-wide conflict that these two issues engendered. He does not, however, spend much time on other lower-profile issues, those which probably dominate 90% of French education policymaking. If there is an important criticism to be made of Baumgartner's book, it is this: on the one hand, he "exposes" all the ways in which the Ministry of National Education does *not* get its way on important issues and how the centralized structures of the French state are more susceptible to outside pressures than their reputation would have them to be. This is, of course, a legitimate point, one made in the past by Ezra Suleiman (e.g., *Politics, Power and the Bureaucracy in France*, 1974) or Harvey Feigenbaum (e.g., *The Politics of Public Enterprise: Oil and the French State*, 1985), just to name two examples. However, it is a point that loses some of its force when viewed from an explicitly *comparative* perspective, something Baumgartner does at the close of the book, almost as an afterthought, without realizing its significance.

What Baumgartner has really demonstrated in this study is one of the great paradoxes of French politics: Most issues are decided by tight specialized subgovernments dominated by civil servants who often seek the advice of a very few outside experts. Compared to the United States, for example, there is little parliamentary involvement on most issues. Compared to the United States, this is a political process much more heavily dominated by an unelected, but highly trained bureaucracy. In this system, a few issues, however, become the center of explosive conflict, participation in the debate expands with great speed, and polemic reigns, sometimes for weeks. Much of the "participation" in such issues is characterized by direct action, that is, participation outside the channels of normal politics, which, in France, after all, are closed off to most political actors most of the time. In a regime lever-

aged from the top, pressures for change build up, and—like an overheated pressure-cooker—the lid blows off.

Baumgartner himself alludes to this, but without developing it systematically. Almost as an afterthought, he mentions that “all political systems do not provide the same opportunities for expansion and contraction of the policy process” (219). This is, however, the key to understanding how politics in France is similar to or differs from politics in other advanced, industrial democracies. As Baumgartner notes, the fragmented American system makes it easier to expand debates. But in France, “the dominance of the executive branch over the legislature, the centralized administrative structure, the minor role of the courts in most policy questions, the tame press, and the great power of the career civil service all make it easier for the government and for the administration to get things done, but they also allow fewer opportunities for losers in the policy process to appeal to outside allies for help. Limiting the number of opportunities for expansion is one of the most significant ways in which the institutions of the Fifth Republic differ from those of other countries, and from the United States in particular” (220).

A lesser criticism of Baumgartner’s study is his choice of the education policy domain as reasonably representative of French policymaking in general. One could argue, however, that in one important respect, the education domain is not representative: It constitutes one of the few policy areas in which almost every citizen is or has been personally affected. In this respect, mass publics are perhaps much more likely to have opinions about proposed reforms and are therefore more easily activated in the polemical expansion of the policy debate. Therefore, education policy in France may be most similar to health policy or taxation policy, in which vast numbers are personally affected, but different from fiscal policy, science policy, or energy policy, which are relatively more restricted to experts and elites.

Nonetheless, Baumgartner’s study is an excellent one that merits wide notice. Unless it were to be published in paper, it probably will not receive the distribution to graduate students and upper-division undergraduates that it deserves. But it should be, as it constitutes an important study both of agenda-setting that is in many ways cross-nationally applicable and of an increasingly important domain of public policy in the advanced, industrial democracies. It is also, simply, a fine book on France.

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Ordinary People in Public Policy: A Behavioural Analysis. By Richard Rose.
(London: Sage Publications, 1989. Pp. 189. \$45.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)

Richard Rose has authored a very interesting book in which he attempts to look at public policy from an “underall” perspective, that is, from the view-