

Ms. Review – Ms. 33410 Reviewer 3
“Punctuated Equilibrium in Comparative Perspective”

This manuscript provides a cross-national comparison of distributions of a variety of policy outputs in examining the “efficiency” of government. The work is based on notions about punctuated equilibrium for which the authors demonstrate differences across output type and country in observed patterns. The findings add to evidence about policy punctuations and contribute to notions about the role of policymaking “friction” in affecting outputs.

The manuscript contains a wealth of information and analyses, but in its present form is underdeveloped in terms of key theorizing and explicating key assumptions. I suggest encouraging a revision that addresses these key limitations. In particular:

1. The notion of efficiency in governmental policymaking is vague. A critical assumption is that inputs are proportionally translated into outputs in the absence of friction. But, that of course assumes inputs are equal with respect to their meaning, power, or ability to address.
2. Similarly, the notion of friction is under-developed. The manuscript presents several paragraphs of examples of different sources of policymaking friction and a table that lays out increasing forms and sources of friction with reference toward the end to a “progressive friction hypothesis.” These aspects need sharper theorizing both with respect to country and policy sources.
3. A key assumption that is highlighted at several points is that the Central Limit Theorem in effect saves the day for expected distributions in the absence of friction in suggesting inputs should be converted to outputs as a Normal distribution. But, there is no reason to assume the distribution of inputs is normally distributed – even with large numbers of inputs (as the authors seem to state). The CLT refers to distributions of summary statistics (e.g. means, proportions) for which the authors need to state more clearly how their measures fulfill these requirements.
4. Much of the theorizing and early discussion is highly dependent, and somewhat derivative, of Baumgartner and Jones and their colleagues’ efforts to test similar proportionate models of decision-making. This leaves the reader wondering what this manuscript contributes beyond their work – the contributions need to be highlighted earlier in the manuscript.
5. The abstract is very obtuse. The first paragraph is one long sentence.