

MS #33410

Rev. 2

Manuscript Review – “Punctuated Equilibrium in Comparative Perspective”

Let me begin with a sincere apology for the lateness of this review. Let me to proceed to say that the manuscript is an article-in-the-making. On the one hand, it poses an interesting research question, it designs a novel way to address this question, and it provides a clear and, for the most part, well-written expression of an attempt at an answer. On the other hand, the manuscript needs to improve in several areas. These areas are motivational, theoretical, conceptual, analytical, and stylistic.

First, in terms of motivation, the authors pose an interesting research question about the proportionality of government attention and activities to policy inputs and outputs. But, they let it go in favor of what becomes an exercise in trying to assess how well the Jones-Baumgartner proposition travels outside the United States to other countries. This could be a useful exercise but, as conducted right now, it makes the manuscript read as a minor emendation rather than an innovative extension.

Second, the theoretical framework invites reconsideration. First, it would serve the interested and intelligent, but uniformed, reader better by giving a brief (one paragraph or so) introduction to the theory of punctuated equilibrium, as proposed in evolutionary biology to offset the stasis, or extreme gradualism, of Darwinism evolution. Second, it also would serve the reader better by clarifying how this theory, as imported into political science in general, or policy research in particular, meets the criteria of “theory,” as opposed to the characteristics of a predictive descriptive or observational statement. Third, simple insights into policy systems do not provide enough grounding for the hypotheses that are generated about distributional forms. Thus, the author(s) are encouraged to justify why the initial state of nature for the distribution of inputs, even as  $N$  gets big, behaves according to the Central Limit Theorem, and how the indicators used here meet theorem requirements. Fourth, there are many moving parts in the manuscript in general and the first section in particular. With respect to the latter, tighter statements making tighter connections among theory, the models, and the hypotheses are needed to offset the impression that the first section, titled “A Model of Institutional Friction,” specifies neither a model nor a concept of institutional friction

Third, in terms of concepts, key ones beg for more definitional rigor and precision. What is meant by efficiency in government policymaking? Are “policymaking,” “decisionmaking,” and “lawmaking” synonymous processes? What is friction and, more precisely, what are its types and sources?

Fourth, at least three points about the analysis deserve attention. One is that more compactness in the presentation of the logic of comparative analysis is needed. At present, it consists largely of textbook descriptions of institutional characteristics, rather than careful discussion of the properties of the policymaking machinery in each country, and of the similarities and differences among them that make them good testing grounds

for the hypotheses proposed. The second point is that it remains unclear, at least to this reader, whether and how the forms of different statistical distributions provide the evidence that is necessary to test the general punctuation hypothesis and the progressive friction hypothesis, and whether the evidence that is presented might be consistent with an alternative, unspecified proposition. The third point is that the author(s) need to provide justification that the data series under investigation can be reliably assumed (or analyzed) to be time-to-time independent, rather than time serially correlated, and to think about what the implications of both processes are for the behaviors of the mean and the variance over time.

Fifth, in terms of style, the first two sections are verbose and not straightforward; these need to be judiciously edited. And, the conclusion is anemic – the manuscript makes a very strong start but puts in a weak finish, with a few sentences of summary and a few comments about pathways for future research. A bigger idea, one that links back to the beginning, about comparative policy systems, would be much more helpful for people trying to understand efficiency, stability and dynamics in government policy behavior.

Summary Evaluation: Good/Very Good

Overall Recommendation: Revise and Resubmit