

Analyzing Multi-Dimensionally

Political Patterns - Situations - Rhythms - Dynamics

Politics by governments, parties, organizations, and movements can be multi-dimensionally analyzed. That approach implies a bunch of new options of Political Science, political consulting, and practical analysis.

1. Governmental Routine Patterns

Let's start with governmental action. Governments are usually structured according to **policy areas** like security policy, foreign policy, economic policy, education, ecological policy and so forth. A minister is responsible for a certain policy area. That's why he or she tries to find and to apply factual experts on that policy area. Governmental communication, so far, is specified regarding individual policy areas, and special policy networks are influencing everyday politics around in within the ministry.

Such policy structures usually result a) from specific policy challenges and capacities, b) from domestic and governmental traditions, c) from international policy learning and diffusion processes. Of specific relevance is the given **political system** that implies specific world views and norms-settings. In so far institutional systems (polity) and operational policy structures (policy) correspond with each other. A specific example is the policy area of religion in fundamentalist authoritative states like Saudi Arabia or Pakistan where ministries for religious and religion police units are usual. Another example is environmental ministries in the most developed OECD countries that correspond with strong environmental movements in these countries.

All these policy and institutional features given, governmental routines are massively influenced by political interaction and power (the politics dimension of the **political process**). The starting idea for that insight results from the fact that any policy has to be politically pursued, that is made real under given power relations - in democracies by reaching political majorities. As a consequence of that fact politics is very often realized by political deals

between the most powerful actors - politics as a *dirty job*. Even if a minister disposes of the power to enact an ordinance or something like that, he or she has to enact and to implement it by given preconditions of interest and power. Hence the politics dimension may be considered the most practical dimension of political affairs.

Beyond that political actors try to look good in public. Particularly the top actors, such as prime ministers, ministers, and party leaders, always have to *look on the bright side* - preparing coming elections and political power battles. That may stimulate these actors to compete about a trust worthy image, but above all it fosters the tendency of representative actors to adapt oneself to current opinions - up to forms of opportunism.

That's why **multi-dimensional politics differs from claims or demands of pure public policy**. So ministers are often not qualified by outstanding performances or education within *their* policy area; their real qualification instead consists in being the best possible person in terms of political interests, party wings, and current public standing. See for instance the recent filling of the position of a defense minister in Germany by a mother of seven kids with a very good standing in public. A politically qualified minister in that sense has then to acquire the necessary knowledge and knowhow of the new field.

2. Situation Types

Governmental routine patterns presuppose that the current power relations are not queried. Under these preconditions substantial decisions are often handed over to administrators on lower levels. Routine rules and procedures prevail by far.

Differing from those routine situations, political crises, cases of public emergency, and situations of dynamic innovation can be analyzed according to their multi-dimensional features:

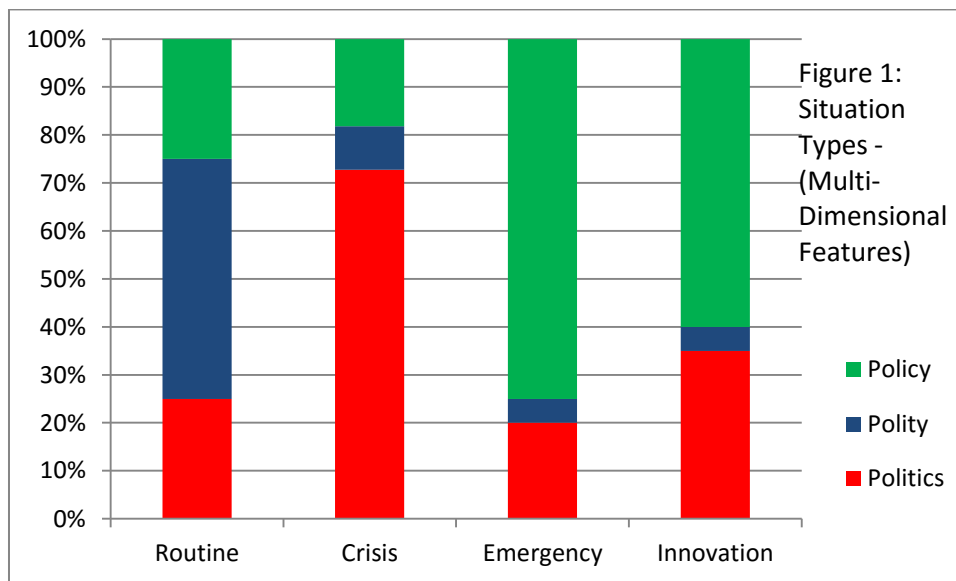
- **A political crisis** occurs once a publicly addressed problem cannot be met to a sufficient degree, or - even worse - once the given power structure, particularly the given governmental majority, gets in trouble. The most fundamental type of crisis occurs once the whole political system is jeopardized. Comparing these cases we see different

dimensional accents: While in the first case (policy problem) the policy dimension seems to prevail, in the second case (crisis of governmental majority) the power-dimension is by far the most significant one. In the third case (system crisis) above all the institutional dimension (polity) seems to be at stake. In any case, however, interactional aspects (politics dimension) are very significant: Policy problems usually fail to be solved because of incompatible interests. System crises imply above all deep crises of given power.

- Also in cases of **public emergency** speeches of *crisis* are usual. But here, in the contrary to a political crisis, the power of given government is massively strengthened to match the upcoming hazard. So political power resources are not at all scarce. Cases of emergence, rather, are situations of energetic public policy where *taking is over, action is on*. At that, institutional barriers (fair procedures, human rights) that seem to be an obstacle for effective action tend to be relativized or even to be dissolved - see George W. Bush's *War on Terror* as response to the 9 - 11 offense. This absolute dominance of real or alleged public action massively strengthens central power - a risk of limiting and endangering democracy.
- Situations of **dynamic sociopolitical innovation** show some similar features to cases of emergency. Also in these situations there is a great emphasis on public policies. In contrast to public emergencies, indeed, political legitimation does not refer only to the given government. Instead also the parliamentary opposition and sometimes even oppositional movements out of parliament get more influence. Insofar situations of dynamic innovation are characterized by more ambivalent and precarious power structures that enable particularly rich ways of politics.

Altogether we can compare the outlined situational patterns according to the proportions of policy, polity, and politics elements (theoretical estimation), as done in Figure 1.

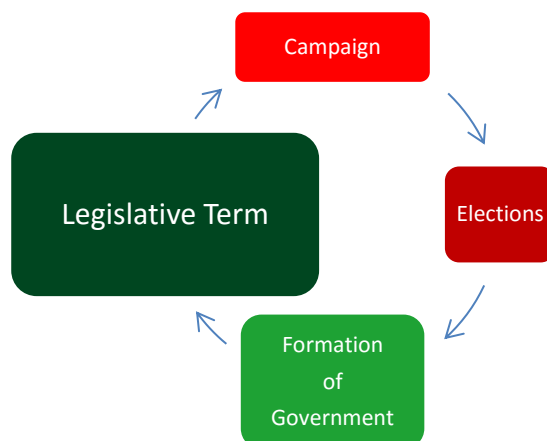
Figure 1: *Multi-Dimensional Situation Types*



3. Political Rhythms

While politics often was linked to natural rhythms in earlier centuries - see the US elections that have been traditionally fixed to a special day after crop harvesting or the time schedule of the Swedish parliament to fix financial sessions to months of autumn - meanwhile politics (in democracies) operates in a specific rhythm of elections and time periods between these elections. Looking at this rhythm even more thoroughly we see two additional characteristic process elements, electoral campaigns before elections and formations of governments after elections. So politics proceeds as presented in Figure 2:

Figure 2: *The Cycle of Democratic Politics*



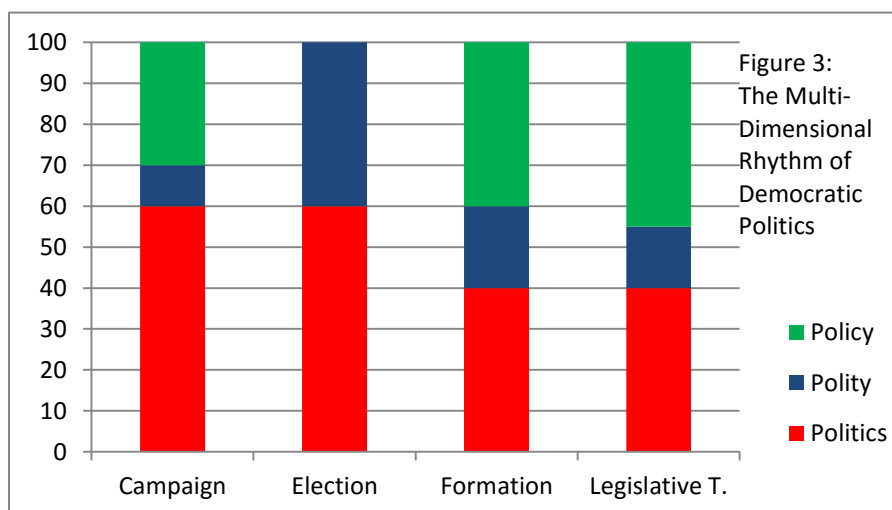
These regular phases are characterized by distinctly different dimensional features:

- **Elections** are to elect and to select political personal and to distribute power to representatives of the people in a procedurally bound manner. Accordingly the candidates compete about votes of the electorate - a clear political interaction in the process dimension.
- **Electoral campaigns**, indeed, at first glance seem to focus on personal and party programs (Policy dimension). These programs yet should not be changed with concrete action plans; they rather serve as symbolic media of indicating attractive attitudes and capacities of the candidates and parties - pointing at getting votes from the electorate. Hence they are formulated and represented in forms as attractive as possible. That's why electoral campaigns are - seemingly - the time of the people when the parties and candidates have to present themselves as near to the people. But that competition often leads to a competition of opportunistic and diffuse presentations. Also personal battles, possibly reaching up to personal injuries, may belong to such campaigns (more or less corresponding with different national styles). Altogether electoral campaigns are primarily about getting power while policy programs are prevailing tools than substantial core of interaction.
- **Formation of government** constitutes the transition phase between elections and legislative term: On the one side the results of just happened elections are the basis for the formation process, on the other side the involved actors have to take into consideration what they really plan to do and what might come. A stimulus for focusing on policy aspects is the structuring of governments according to policy areas (ministries and so forth). As told in the first chapter, the qualification of the political personal (ministers and so on) is not so much substantial expertise. At least to a similar degree other qualifications, above all power within the victorious party or a good public standing, are crucial. Insofar we see in this phase a particularly intensive mixture, transfers and interdependencies between policy and politics elements.

- **Legislative terms** offer the chance and challenge of effectuating own ideas and interests into political decisions. They are about decision-making that combines (substantial) policy elements and challenges of interaction; since substantial programs usually can only be pursued by winning and activating majorities. When and how that is possible depends not only on given power relations and skills of developing and using own power, but also on institutional rules of how given power resources may be changed into effective power (see for instance different electoral systems, such as majoritarian and proportional systems.) That's why political processes in legislative terms may be considered as **rich politics** (comprising and combining interaction, institutions, and policy programs).

Altogether we see certain ups and downs of how significant certain political dimensions get in (democratic) political processes: While electoral campaigns and elections show a clearly predominant significance of interactive power, the formation of government and above all routine action in legislative terms reflect intensive combinations of policy, politics, and polity dimensions. Institutional rules are particularly relevant in (democratic) elections, whereas campaigns are clearly less limited through institutional rules.

The resulting process constellations are displayed in Figure 3.



Once we include concrete facts, such as the fact that other elections on lower or higher state levels may also get relevant in the process, the significance of the politics dimension increases. In contrast, extraordinary policy challenges,

such as cases of emergency or situations of dynamic innovation, give more power to the government and stimulate substantial policies.

Starting from those events, political processes may get certain **dynamics**. So it may be that a long-term situation of dynamic innovation, that induces successful innovations, amends the chance of discussing substantial policy elements in the longer term. Then the whole constellation between politics, polity, and policy is shifting a little towards greater dynamics respectively towards rich politics. Vice versa, once counter-productive situations get more influence, a dynamic towards poor forms of politics may come about.

4. Conclusions

It is possible to understand political processes systematically in terms of multi-dimensional analysis. Dynamic constellations between politics, polity, and policy elements are then the subject of scientific analysis, consulting, and practical (including tactical) deliberations.