
The Interaction of Political Elites and Skill Elites in Modern Public Policy Fields: A Theme of the IPSA Research Section on Political Elites

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Three scholarly themes have been established by the International Political Science Association's Research Section on Elite Stratification and Elite Behavior, with a view both to stimulating investigations and facilitating communications in these areas. One is formulated as "The Interaction of Political Elites and Skill Elites in Modern Public Policy Fields."¹ At the next World Congress in Montreal, August 19-25, 1973, a public session on this theme is planned. In addition, it may be possible to hold a number of workshops and conferences, to edit and publish research papers, and to perform certain clearinghouse functions for those interested in this topic.

This prospectus is meant to clarify the kinds of "elite interactions" that are seen as relevant. The first task is to learn who is working in this research area. Interested scholars are urged to write to the secretary of the Research Section, informing him of the work they are doing or that others are doing, perhaps sending outlines or manuscripts, and indicating their research plans.

This then is an effort to "take inventory." The research theme is meant to link two well-established problem areas: policy analysis and elite analysis. In modern policy analysis, much attention is given to decision-making sequences and resources, and special stress on the complexities introduced by science and technology. It is problematic whether any significant amount of research and study has yet centered on the personnel involved in these processes. The topic of "public policy analysis" lends itself to many modes of inquiry. The theme as formulated by our

Research Section emphasizes the importance of giving systematic attention to those who are the key participants — their backgrounds as well as their performances.

In modern elite analysis, on the other hand, both the provenance and the functionally-defined performance of elites are much in evidence. What tends to remain undifferentiated is the interaction process in which elites perform. Elite analysis has concentrated on the attitudes, skills and contact patterns that become explicable in light of social origins, avenues of ascent, subcultural adjustments and experience in particular institutional contexts. Far less attention has been given to the constraints on elite power that are "given" in the interaction situations which characterize public policy-making fields.

In our formulation, political elites are those who hold key positions in the governing institutions of a society. They are the "custodians" of the machinery for making public policy. And in every policy field, the political elite's performance is found to be intertwined with that of strategically-placed "skill elites," to use Lasswell's term. Politicians and doctors must work together; educators and elected officials must cooperate; scientists and public figures must understand each other. Those who dominate the communications media, the transportation industry, banking and insurance, the professions and the various sectors of commercial life — those in short who are the custodial elites of every semi-autonomous sector of modern society — must inevitably worry about the intentions of political decision makers. Modern public policy arises from the matrix of interaction between political elites and skill elites.

On every side and at all levels, the custodians of governmental and political processes are in close and persistent working relationships with those whose status and skills make them the strategically-placed elites that dominate each public policy domain.

Both modernizing countries and those already modernized are experiencing the effects of elite differentiation. Once a sector of society is institutionally differentiated, however, serious constraints operate to hamper its ability to adjust to change on its own terms. In the interdependent, mass-media serviced, urbanized, industrial world, segmental

¹ The other themes are "Charisma in the Twentieth Century" and "Leaders and Militants of Political Parties and Unions." Inquiries about them should be addressed to M. Mattei Dogan, Research Director, CNRS, 82, rue Cardinet, Paris, 17e, France.

elites, whatever their domain, find it difficult to sustain a communication net, to decide upon distinctive policy positions, or to invoke an effective coordination of efforts. The medical elite is locality-bound; the military services feud with each other; scientists are preoccupied with their specialties; commercial elites are fragmented; industrialists are rivals.

Whenever a problem of common concern is identified, it is the instrumentalities of modern government that provide the organizational scaffolding and the policy guidelines for its solution. This is not to say that the public sector takes over the job, however. Those in political life itself are preoccupied with the tactics and details of electoral and legislative campaigns; public officials tend to worry about only part of the problem — the scope, tempo and form of the bureaucratic tasks that must be done. For the rest, in the politically-nurtured societies of the twentieth century, public policies are both formulated and implemented through the services of skill elites — experts, specialists and scientists working in government agencies, in ancillary structures, with labor unions, with large firms, or in professional groups.

On every side governmental machinery is being invoked to create and sustain high levels of health, education, welfare services, economic stability, environmental protection, community integration, etc. To control and direct that governmental machinery is the continuing expectation of the political elite. At the same time, to have an influential voice in fixing policies and guiding their execution is the clear expectation of the strategically-placed elites in every policy domain. Between these two groupings are those knowledgeable specialists actually charged with policy responsibilities — the functionary elites who make up the meritocracy. For various reasons, they often tend to see themselves as indispensable to the policy-making processes in question. Since their contributions are based on skill and merit, the dominant roles they sometimes play seem *inherently* right and natural. By the same token, the intrusions of legislators or other political elites into their policy domain often seem unreasonable and unjustified.

With such political dynamics, and with the countervailing strains that operate on all participants, the study of elite interaction patterns in public policy fields presents challenging research opportunities.

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Your APSA and ours share an acronym and a common purpose. Little else — we operate with hardly any resources. *PS*, with its news of executive meetings, contested elections, committees, planned budgets, etc. leaves me with a feeling of wry amusement tinged with envy.

Our APSA is very informal. The half-page Constitution keeps getting lost. Elections at the annual conference are never contested. Presidency and Vice Presidency are formal positions which rotate. We've never passed any policy resolutions. There's an Executive Committee but I don't think it has ever met.

What we do is governed by our lack of resources and given that lack we are in fact pretty active. There are only 2-300 academic political scientists in Australia and New Zealand. They are an eclectic lot. The latest US fashions take some years to trickle through, so at times just when we feel all isolated and backward we find that we've skipped one or two US waves of fashion and are in the vanguard. See Veblen on the advantages of backwardness.

Distances are huge, fares high, grants almost non-existent. APSA has about 400 full members with voting rights and 600 associate members. Most of our money goes into the journal which has a circulation of round 2000. Except for the Subscription side, all work is voluntary and done with no clerical help.

What we do: 1. There's an annual 3-day conference, usually late in August. In 1972 it will be August 15-17 at Victoria University, Wellington, N.Z. Visitors and papergivers are welcome — contact Prof. R. H. Brookes, P.O. Box 196, Wellington, N.Z. 2. Since 1966 we run the bi-annual *POLITICS* with about 10 papers and a few notes in each issue. We try to run each round a theme. Keith Legg will be in our May 1972 issue, Fred Greenstein and William Riker have contributed. We get too many long and constipated papers from the US, not sufficient short wild and

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