

Public Administration
and Public Policy
in Ireland
Theory and Methods

Edited by Maura Adshead and
Michelle Millar

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Public Administration and Public Policy in Ireland

Designed specifically for students of Irish Politics and Public Administration, this textbook provides a comprehensive introduction to public policy and administration in Ireland, thereby bridging the gap between general texts on public policy and books on Irish politics. Each chapter examines an alternative approach to policy analysis, such as rational choice or corporatism, and includes a review of recent developments in the field and its major criticisms. All chapters are illustrated with an empirical Irish case study. In this way the editors highlight the wide variety of alternative explanations available to students who are interested in understanding how policy is made.

Students of policy analysis, comparative politics and public administration will find this an invaluable introduction to the role that different theories or approaches can make in furthering an understanding of the policy process. With the inclusion of further reading, overviews of main concepts and original source material, the editors provide a student-friendly textbook which fills an important gap in the available literature on Irish politics and public administration.

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**For S airse, Mancur, Se n and Kate,
from their Mammies with love**

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Preface

Policy, politics and public administration

This book is designed as a course text for students of Irish Politics and Public Administration. It may also be used to accompany courses in introductory politics, policy analysis and comparative politics or public administration. A range of Irish public policy topics are presented and explained—each by reference to a distinct framework for analysis. The book is intended to highlight (through readily presented Irish examples) the variety of alternative explanations available to students of politics and public administration who are interested in understanding how policy is made.

Aims and objectives

The book is conceived in response to a current gap in the literature for students studying Irish public policy and administration. Generally speaking, most studies in this area tend to be empirically based, with a preference for historical/descriptive modes of explanation. Despite their obvious utility to students of public policy and administration, such studies do not facilitate students in developing an advanced understanding of the policy process and public administration. At the moment, a range of texts already exist that deal exclusively with methodology and political explanation, or that are devoted to detailed descriptions of distinct topics in Irish politics and administration. This book does not seek to supplant either of these literatures. Rather, it is intended to provide students of public administration and public policy in Ireland with concrete illustrations of the operationalisation of alternative methodological approaches in relation to specific issues and topics in Irish politics and public administration. In doing so, it will provide students of Irish politics, public administration and public policy with a unique collection of Irish case studies and source material for further study.

Organisation of the book

Each chapter examines the main concepts and primary advocates of a particular mode of analysis, together with a review of recent developments in the field and the major criticisms of it. All chapters include a select Irish case study, designed to illustrate the particular approach or framework for analysis outlined by that chapter. A review section at the end of the chapter assesses the utility of the approach in the explanation of the case and provides a guide to further reading, plus a range of sources for the policy area under consideration.

Still, however, the book represents the views, ideas and opinions of a range of authors,

who are each experts in their field. As a result, although we have tried as much as possible to keep the format uniform, we have left our contributors with a free hand to determine the logic and development of their arguments. Notwithstanding, each chapter is organised around the following themes:

- introduction to the main concepts and concerns of the approach;
- brief review of the evolution of this approach;
- mainstream variants in contemporary usage;
- major criticisms;
- select Irish case study;
- summary review of the theoretical utility.

Study themes

The content of the book is divided thematically. The first part examines where alternative theories situate the location of power in the policy-making world and deals with elitism, pluralism, Marxism and feminism. The second examines alternative approaches to explaining the distribution of policy-making authority, looking at corporatism, clientelism, policy network and institutionalist approaches. The third looks at alternative modes of explaining policy change and discusses the explanatory idioms provided by rational choice theories, policy transfer, Europeanisation and globalisation approaches.

This division of themes is necessarily a loose one, since it is clear that many of the approaches outlined above may fit as easily in one section as another. Moreover, whilst some approaches may be used at one or more levels of analysis, others are best suited to only one. In this respect, the primary concern of this book is not to explain *all* the different approaches to study that exist or to detail *all* of the ways in which the approaches that we do consider might be used. Our more modest ambition is to introduce students of public administration and policy in Ireland to the idea that there are different theoretical, methodological or idiomatic approaches to the explanation of policy outcomes—each of which focuses to a greater or lesser degree on the significance and importance of alternative explanatory variables.

Students should therefore be aware that the explanatory framework they choose to explore any given policy will affect both the terms of their explanation and the conclusions drawn from the study. Key questions such as who holds power?, how does policy change?, and the relative importance of structure versus agency, may receive different answers when different approaches are used to frame the study. Thus, for example, in answer to the question of who holds power: in Chapter 1 the discussion of elite theory points to the importance of individuals, whereas Chapter 2's review of pluralist approaches highlights the significance of groups. By contrast, Marxian approaches, outlined in Chapter 3, focus on the predominance of class, whereas feminist approaches, discussed in Chapter 4, point to the overriding significance of gender.

Chapter 5, dealing with social partnership and corporatism in Ireland, suggests that policy change is brought about primarily by the interplay of sectional interests. The discussion of Clientelism in Chapter 6 by contrast, suggests that in many respects policy output reflects the mass of individual contracts and bargains made. Chapter 7's review of

the policy network literature, however, argues that it is the specific configuration of sectional and/or individual interests that is responsible for distinct policy outcomes. Notwithstanding, the analysis of institutionalist approaches contained in Chapter 8 suggests that the attitudes of all interests (sectional, individual, or any combination of the two) are determined primarily by deeply embedded structural and sociological norms and values. This idea is challenged by Chapter 9's examination of rational choice approaches, which focuses on the significance and importance of individual choices made by actors and agents in the policy process.

The significance of both structure and agency is highlighted in Chapter 10's exposition of the policy transfer literature, as well as in Chapters 11 and 12, which deal with Europeanisation and globalisation, respectively. Of all the chapters, these last three highlight the importance of exogenous—as opposed to endogenous—drivers of policy change, that is, those occurring outside the state as a consequence of transnational, supranational and multinational influences. As with all the other chapters in the book, the intention is to show readers that all forms of explanation or analysis carry their own assumptions about the importance of different explanatory variables and may therefore influence the conclusions drawn. If this book helps students to clarify why this is so, our ambition is achieved.

Maura Adshead
Michelle Millar

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1

Elitism and agri-environmental policy in Ireland

Mark Evans and Liam Coen

Introduction

Elite theorists argue that the history of politics has been characterized by the history of elite domination. Elite theory therefore challenges the key premises of most western liberal assumptions about politics, the organization of government and the relationship between the state and civil society. As Gaetano Mosca puts it:

In all societies—from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawning of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies—two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first.

(Mosca 1939:50)

Hence, for elite theorists the nature of any society—whether it is consensual or authoritarian, pacifist or totalitarian, legitimate or illegitimate—is determined by the nature of its elite. This chapter provides a critical review of the content and nature of elite theory and assesses its contribution to our understanding of contemporary political science in general and the study of the Irish policy process in particular. It develops three central arguments. First, it argues that elitism still provides an important focus for the work of political scientists and political sociologists, particularly in the United States, and continues to present a compelling critique of the liberal democratic model. Second, the chapter observes that one of the most striking features of modern and contemporary elitist perspectives lies in their convergence with once-opposite theoretical traditions. Third, it argues that contemporary variants of the elitist approach focus less on providing a grand narrative on who governs and more on highlighting the nature and role of privileged elites in decision-making centres.

Brief review of the evolution of elitist approaches

Although the seeds of elite theory were sown in the ideas of Plato, Machiavelli and others, elitism as a theory of social power is most associated in its earliest form with the

work of Pareto, Mosca and Michels. Their common thesis was that the concentration of social power in a small set of controlling elites was inevitable in all societies and they rejected the feasibility of Karl Marx's vision of evolutionary change towards a classless society with power equality. This section provides an overview of the core propositions of classical elitist thought focusing on: Vilfredo Pareto's (1935) reworking of Machiavellian realism and the circulation of elites; Gaetano Mosca's (1896) idea of *The Ruling Class*; and Robert Michels' (1911) main work *Political Parties*, which drew attention to the inevitability of an 'iron law of oligarchy.' Each one of these three texts engages in a critique of Marxism and pluralism which emphasizes the rejection of both class domination and the diffusion of power on pluralist lines. A critical discussion of these texts will enable us to identify a partial, if weak, theory of elite domination.

Pareto and the concept of elite circulation

Pareto argued that historical experience provides testimony to the perpetual circulation of elites and oligarchy. Every field of human enterprise has its own elite. Pareto (1935) borrowed two categories of elites from Machiavelli, 'Foxes' and 'Lions' (1961:99–110), in order to illustrate the nature of governing elite structures. The two categories stand at opposite ends of a continuum of governance. 'Foxes' govern by attempting to gain consent and are not prepared to use force; they are intelligent and cunning, enterprising, artistic and innovative. However, in times of crisis their misplaced humanitarianism leads them towards compromise and pacifism. Hence, when final attempts to reach a political solution have failed the regime is fatally weakened. 'Lions' represent the opposite pole. They are men of strength, stability and integrity Cold and unimaginative, they are self-serving and are prepared to use force to achieve or maintain their position. 'Lions' are defenders of the status quo in both the state and civil society. They are likely to be committed to public order, religion and political orthodoxy. For Pareto, the qualities of 'Fox' and 'Lion' are generally mutually exclusive. History is a process of circulation between these two types of elites. Pareto's ideal system of governance would reflect a balance of forces which exhibits characteristics of both 'Fox' and 'Lion.' This ongoing process of elite renewal, circulation and replacement illuminates the thesis that an elite rules in all organized societies.

Pareto's (1935) focus upon the concentration of power in the hands of a political elite represented a rejection of both vulgar Marxist economism and the weak but popular liberal/pluralist view. It undermined the Marxist conception of the state as a mere tool of the capitalist class. It rejects Marx's view that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle (for a more detailed discussion of Marxism, see Chapter 3). At the same time, Pareto's (1935) elitist claims are also at odds with the pluralist conception of the state as a co-coordinator of the national interest in a plural society (for a more detailed discussion of pluralism, see Chapter 2).

Mosca and the idea of the ruling class

Mosca (1939) argued that elites were inevitable as all societies are characterized by the dictatorship of the majority by the minority. He posited the existence of a ruling, but not

necessarily economically dominant, class from which key office holders were drawn. Within Mosca's (1939) formulation, each ruling class develops a political formula which maintains and legitimates its rule to the rest of the population. Elite circulation will usually occur through inheritance, but, from time to time, power will pass into the hands of another class due to the failure and collapse of the political formula. Mosca's (1939) conceptualization of the political formula has much in common with the concept of hegemony, which springs from the view of Marx and Engels (see Chapter 3) that the ideas of the ruling class are in every historical stage the ruling ideas. Hence, the capitalist class, which is the dominant economic group in society, is simultaneously its ruling intellectual force. In other words, a Marxist would say that those people owning the means of production also control the process of government and can use this source of domination to impose their views on society. This results in a false consciousness among the proletariat, whereby they accept their subordinate position in capitalist society and do not question the existing social and political structure. Mosca (1939), by contrast, failed to develop the concept of political formula in any systematic way, unlike his Marxist contemporary Antonio Gramsci (see Chapter 3, pp. 00–00). The centrality of the ideological dimension to an understanding of the dialectic of power domination and control is an important consideration which Mosca's (1939) research clearly overlooked.

Michels and the 'iron law of oligarchy'

Michels (1911) work needs to be understood in the context of his own personal struggle against the German academic establishment. He wrote from the standpoint of a radical socialist whose ability to secure an academic post at a German university was impaired by his ideological position. However, it was the German Social Democratic Party and its propensity for oligarchy, and not the establishment, which bore the full brunt of his frustrations. Michels' (1962:364) central explanation of the inevitability of elites represents a further critique of pluralism and Marxism. With regard to the former, Michels (1911) argued that the practical ideal of democracy consisted in the self-government of the masses in conformity with the decision-making of popular assemblies. However, while this system placed limits upon the extension of the principle of delegation, it fails 'to provide any guarantee against the formation of an oligarchic camarilla' (Michels 1962:364). In short, direct government by the masses was impossible. Michels (1911) applied a similar argument to political parties. In his view, the technical and administrative functions of political parties make first bureaucracy and then oligarchy inevitable. Hence, for Michels, '[w]ho says organization, says oligarchy' (1962:364). This maxim clearly determined his conception of the nature of elites. The notorious notion of the 'iron law of oligarchy' provides the key to Michels' thoughts on the nature of elite structures, for it ensures the dominance of the leadership over the rank-and-file membership. Elite circulation is maintained by the inability of the masses to mobilize against the leadership view. This ensures their subjugation to the whim of the elite. In essence, it is the very existence of this system of leadership which is incompatible with the tenets of liberal democracy and pluralism.

The work of Robert Michels (1911) is remembered more as a series of 'sound bites' than a seminal contribution to political thought. As a case in point, others than he have

given his phrase the 'iron law of oligarchy' For example, the notion of organization as the basis of oligarchy has been developed much further in the research of organizational theorists such as J.G.March and H.A.Simon (1958), amongst others. The major impact of Michels' work has been on pluralist thinking, insofar as it has compelled pluralists to acknowledge the existence of elites although they continue to reject the argument that elites act cohesively McConnell, for example, writing from an American perspective, observes:

The first conclusion that emerges from the present analysis and survey is that a substantial part of the government in the United States has come under the influence of a narrowly based and largely autonomous elites [*sic*]. These elites do not act cohesively with each other on many issues. They do not 'rule' in the sense of commanding the entire nation. Quite the contrary, they tend to pursue a policy of non-involvement in the large issues of statesmanship, save where such issues touch their own particular concerns.

(McConnell 1996:339)

The classical elitists in perspective

Pareto, Mosca and Michels generally assume the integration of elites without any rigorous empirical investigation. Pareto failed to demonstrate a theory of elite domination in his native Italy Mosca showed that governments in the past were often characterized by a self-serving elite, but did not establish that this was always the case. Further, while Michels argued that Western European political parties were characterized by elite domination, his fondness for selecting convenient empirical evidence to support his arguments is vulnerable to counter-critique. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, subsequent elite theorists have strongly disagreed about the nature, causes and consequences of elite rule in western industrialized societies. This debate will be considered in the following section, which deals with more modern elitist perspectives.

Mainstream variants of elitism in contemporary usage—from radical elitism to tfae statistis

This section reviews some modern elitist perspectives, from the radical elitists to the statistis, by focusing on two key areas of consideration within elitist thought: national elite power network studies and epistemic communities; and state-centered perspectives.

National elite power network studies

The study of national elite power networks (NEPNs) has long been a focus of study in the United States and Britain. The key concern of this literature has been to identify the degree to which national elite structures are unified or diversified. The origins of these studies lie in the pluralist-radical elitist debates of the 1940s and 1950s in the United States. These had two chief protagonists: C. Wright Mills, who in *The Power Elite* (1956) provided an account of the role of power elites within the US Executive; and James