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Historical-Institutionalism in Political Science and the Problem of Change*

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Continuity and change in political science

For nearly a century, 'change' *per se* was not regarded as a pressing problem in political science. Scholars studying politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were mainly concerned with the normative and procedural bases of politics, and tended to focus on constitutions – and, especially, the juridical principles embodied therein. Neither the politics of making constitutions nor the impact of these constitutions on everyday political life were particularly emphasized, although, to be sure, many writers in the tradition of Montesquieu also analysed the 'goodness-of-fit' between these formal, legal documents and the particular societies or cultures they had been drafted to govern.

The 'behavioral' revolution in political science of the 1950s and 1960s called into question the relevance of constitutions or other formal political institutions for understanding political life. Political scientists should focus their efforts on direct observation of political behavior, the new generation urged, and infer generalizations about politics directly from these raw data rather than from constitutional declarations of principle, or other subjective interpretations of political reality. Dahl's (1961) path breaking work, *Who Governs?*, for example, investigated power relations in the city of New Haven, Connecticut by directly observing local political decisions. Similarly, Truman's (1971 [1951]) equally renowned book, *The Governmental Process*, developed a theory of the political process based on empirical observation of the activities and achievements of interest groups in the United States. A great number of 'behavioralist' studies focused on public opinion and voter behavior. Here, investigators examined statistical relationships between social characteristics – such as religion, length of education or size of income – and voter preferences.

In the area of comparative politics, the concept of political development became a dominant term, as various studies sought to understand the relationship between economic growth and political democracy in terms of a unified 'modernization' model, whereby political structures became ever better adapted to the social functions (such as aggregation, integration, representation) they were to serve. (Almond and Coleman, 1960; Pye, 1965; LaPalombara, 1966)

Ironically, even though the behavioralist approach focused on dynamic themes – such as modernization, transformation and development – it can be viewed as sharing the older, formal institutional approach's neglect of the problem of change, if for very different reasons. Whereas the older approach focused on formal political institutions, but considered them largely as invariant givens – products of the sediment of time, so to speak – the newer approach assumed political institutions to be so malleable and efficient as to be virtually irrelevant. Change is part and parcel of the political process, but it is not in any way problematic. As a variety of external circumstances – ranging from economic development to technological breakthroughs, as well as new ideas – confront citizens with new problems, their demands on government – and hence, eventually, governmental policies – will change, such that responsive and effective democratic government automatically leads to renewal and change in public policies. As David Truman put it, 'The total pattern of government over a period of time presents a protean complex of criss-crossing relationships that change in strength and direction with alterations in the power and standing of interests, organized and un-organized' (1971 [1951]: 320).

This view of the political process has sometimes been called 'pluralism,' referring both to the empirical finding that a plurality of social interests – as opposed to a 'ruling class' or 'power elite' – is responsible for political outcomes, and to the normative view that, as the state is not infallible, governments should respond to societal pressures rather than attempting to effect an absolute separation between state and society, as in the classical continental doctrine.

The institutional approach

As is often the case in the study of politics, political events caused a reappraisal of the dominant paradigm. The large-scale social protests and emergence of new social movements in the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to various criticisms of the behavioralist model of politics (Katznelson, 1992, 1997; Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). If pluralist politics were so efficient, why did it take a hundred years as well as recourse to unconventional political methods – such as protest marches – for the grievances of the civil rights movement to be put on the political agenda? Indeed, comparative studies of both political disruption and the organization and activities of more conventional interest

groups led to skepticism about whether the problems and preferences of individual citizens could really account for variation in the level and success of political movements over time and across nations. Scholars of social movements developed the 'resource mobilization' approach based on empirical evidence that waves of social protest could be better accounted for by variations in the ability of groups to obtain the resources necessary for political activities, as well as political opportunities, than by changes in the level of social 'discontent' or feelings of 'relative deprivation' (Tilly, 1978; Kitschelt, 1986; Zald and McCarthy, 1987; Tarrow, 1993).

Studies of more conventional interest-groups, such as trade unions and employer associations, as well as agricultural groups, found patterns of interest-group activity to be quite stable over time, causing them to question the pluralist claim that the array of organized groups and their impact on government constituted an accurate representation or vector sum of the demands and preferences of individual citizens. Instead, the 'corporatist' theories argued, many groups had been organized not 'from below' by citizens, but rather 'from above' by states. Moreover, once formed, successful groups did not simply disappear once their particular grievance was re-solved, but continued to seek out new political issues. Indeed, one could question – as Michels had pointed out several decades before, referring to the case of political parties – whether leaders of groups really represented the interests of their members, or those of themselves. Furthermore, groups with long-standing relationships to government were privileged in the competition for political influence. Consequently, the pattern of interest-*intermediation* – a term coined to emphasize that the direction of influence did not necessary go from citizen to group to state, but could also be recursive – was a critical variable in politics, shaping and perhaps distorting, the political process (Schmitter and Lehmbruch, 1979; Berger, 1981b; Maier, 1987; Lehmbruch, 2001).

Increased attention to differences in the power and organization of both societal and government actors had ramifications for the discipline's understanding of the process of political development as well. An historically informed conflict theory questioned the modernization paradigm. Scholars like Moore (1966) and Anderson (1974) showed paths of economic and political development to be diverse, and forged by intense class conflict. Wallerstein (1974), as well as writers from the 'Dependencia' school, such as Frank (1978), viewed economic development as a conflictual result of regions' quest for dominance of the international division of labor. Whereas these studies were highly influenced by Marxist theory, scholars such as Tilly (1975), Poggi (1978) and Skocpol (1979) drew on heterodox thinkers from the modernization era, such as Bendix (1969) and Rokkan (1970), to re-emphasize the central political role of the institutions of the nation-state. By the early 1980s, a large volume of literature had accumulated that questioned the 'efficiency' model of political representation and political development.

The 'new' institutionalism

March and Olsen (1984) gave a name to this general trend in political science – which, they noted, extended to other disciplines, as well – calling the stress on how political life is organized, 'the new institutionalism.' They defined the scope of the new institutionalism so broadly as to include quite different approaches. However, despite the many differences, they do indeed share a renewed interest in the role of constitutions and political institutions, and have abandoned the assumption that the 'black box' of politics is efficient. In essence, a common lesson of these various studies of politics is that similarly-situated social movements and interest-groups have responded to their situations in very different ways, and these claims on the state have been met with very different responses from governmental policy-makers. Similarly, processes of political development have been fraught with conflict, and have certainly not been characterized by a uniform process of modernization or arrival at a uniform 'end destination' of economic, political and social organization.

If one takes the defining feature of the new institutionalism to be an interest in the inefficiencies of politics, there is no contradiction in including many varied approaches under this very broad label. Furthermore, it obviates the need for adopting a common definition of the term 'institution' or even a common theoretical or methodological framework. The new institutionalism is nothing more (in the view of this author) than an interest in the distorting effects of the political process, in whatever form or stage of the process they may be found. Having solved one problem, however, we have created another, which brings us back to the main topic of this essay, namely the problem of institutional change.

The problem of change

Departing from the March and Olsen definition, it has become common to divide new institutionalist writings into three groups: rational choice or positive political theory; sociological institutionalism (or organization theory); and historical-institutionalism (see Hall and Taylor, 1996; Rothstein, 1998; Peters, 2001). Despite their different analyses of the inefficiencies of institutions, however, all share a limitation when it comes to explaining institutional change. Rational choice institutionalism refers to the effort to understand political behavior based on micro-economic models of individual choice. One important building block of many rational choice analyses is the Condorcet paradox or Arrow theorem, which demonstrates that even if individuals have coherent preferences (they prefer chicken to steak to fish, for example), there may be a problem in aggregating these individual preferences into a collective choice using majority rule (a group cannot decide which restaurant to choose). One solution to this problem is that institutional

rules for political decision-making may allow for stable political outcomes by setting limits on the political process, such as granting some actors a monopoly on the setting of the political agenda, or the custom that more radical amendments are voted on first, the *status quo ante* last. Such a decision outcome has been termed 'structure-induced' equilibrium, in order to distinguish it from a 'preference-induced' equilibrium. (For good overviews see Riker, 1980; Shepsle, 1986, 1989; Weingast, 1996.) If particular rules stabilize outcomes, however, it is not clear why institutional arrangements should become unstable (Shepsle and Weingast, 1981; Colomer, 2001; Shepsle, 2001: 516–17).

Similarly, sociological institutionalism/organization theory emphasizes 'norms of appropriateness' and 'standard operating procedures' as guides to behavior (March, 1986; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). The idea is that human beings cannot possibly process all of the information they would need to make fully rational decisions – and the cost of gathering all of this information, if it were even remotely feasible, would be prohibitive. Consequently, they (and organizations such as business enterprises) rely on short cuts, such as calling the references listed on a CV rather than exhaustively investigating a job applicant's entire employment history, or reading each and every publication produced by an aspiring professor. If many individuals rely on the same 'standard operating procedures', coordinated action is possible. Similarly, if individuals within a society or an organization follow norms of appropriate behavior, one can explain certain societal or political outcomes. Some studies, such as that of Zucker (1991) provide striking experimental evidence for how quickly a norm of behavior may be introduced and made to persist over time. Following in the footsteps of anthropologists such as Boas, Sapir and Kroeber (see Elwert, 2001), Zucker shows that norms of appropriate behavior – in this case conforming to the expectations of work colleagues – change experimental subjects' reported-perceptions of the distance that a beam of light travels; cultural frameworks screen perceptions even of the natural world. The problem, however, is how to explain changes in these norms and standard operating procedures: why does routine behavior stop being routine?

Historical institutionalism

The third new institutionalist approach, historical institutionalism, suffers from two problems at once. First, the meaning of the term 'historical' is not generally well understood. Second, the problem of institutional change is particularly vexing for this approach. Indeed, efforts to improve the coherence of the term 'historical institutionalism' have in some ways made the problem of explaining institutional change appear to be even more challenging. Why is this the case?

'Historical' institutionalism refers to a rather loose collection of writings by authors that tend to mix elements of rationalistic and constructivist

explanations – or the 'calculus' versus the 'cultural' approach in Hall and Taylor's terminology (1996). This group was initially inspired by the historical studies mentioned above, which confronted modernization theory with a more conflictual approach, and led to a more serious focus on the state as holder of a monopoly on legitimate force – although newer generations have tended to abandon the quest to speak to larger questions of social change and social justice, in favor of a more limited, if more precise, research agenda (Katznelson, 1997). Thelen and Steinmo – drawing on the work of Ikenberry (1988) – define this approach in terms of an emphasis on how pre-existing institutions structure contemporary political conflicts and outcomes (1992: 2). On this view, the past influences present-day politics through a variety of mechanisms, ranging from concrete political institutions to patterns of interests associations to broadly accepted definitions of justice or even mundane ideas about the accepted way of doing things. As Thelen and Steinmo note, not only is this approach rather eclectic, but it is not necessarily distinct either in its theoretical framework or methodology from other types of new institutionalism, except possibly for its interest in explaining how distinct sets of political preferences develop, and for its rejection of absolute theories of human rationality. Indeed, a closer look at the competing 'institutionalisms,' as well as at the many 'border crossers' in this field have increased doubts about the existence of historical institutionalism as a distinct approach (Thelen, 1999: 370–1).

At the same time, the emphasis on the 'heavy hand of history,' as Ikenberry (1994) puts it, has led to a continuing focus on the problem of change – and in particular, institutional change – as a problem or 'frontier issue,' for this approach (Thelen, 2000, 2003). For, if institutions created in the past are thought to constrain future developments in some way – and particularly if they affect the preferences of political actors – it is not immediately obvious how the same account can explain both the lasting impact of institutions over time, and – at one and the same time – account for institutional change. Ironically, some efforts to better define the research agenda, theory and methodology of historical institutionalism have made the problem of explaining institutional change even more challenging.

Pierson (2000b) has suggested that models of 'path dependency' (which depend upon positive feedback loops 'locking in' particular institutional arrangements) could constitute a rigorous way to show that history matters, and that these models are applicable under conditions that are quite common for a range of political phenomena. Path dependency, in turn, is a specific case of a more general focus on the importance of 'timing' and 'sequence' in the analysis of politics, which, following discussions in the field of sociology, may be investigated with techniques such as 'event sequencing analysis' (Abbott, 1990, 1991, 1992; Pierson, 2000d). It is not unlike the concept of hysteresis discussed in Higgins' chapter (this volume) on climate change, and of course, it is identical to theoretical concept in economics, as discussed

in Castaldi and Dosi's and in Nugent's chapters (this volume) on path dependency and the new institutionalist economics. In political science (and sociology), however, the application of the concept has met with some controversy. Should it be used in the restrictive economic sense of maintaining an off-equilibrium outcome? Or does it just mean that the past somehow influences the present? (See discussion in Mahoney, 2000 and Thelen, 2003.) And can one really measure equilibrium outcomes in politics (Genschel 2001)? Further, stress on path dependency, and even sequences and events, have aggravated the problems of explaining institutional change. In order to explain institutional origins and development, an analyst must account both for institutional change *and* for institutional stability. That is, a convincing account of institutional change must contain within itself its own negation, and yet somehow remain consistent. This task is particularly difficult for models that contain feedback loops, such as those emphasizing path dependency and endogenous preferences. If institutions socialize actors and thus endogenize preferences, for example, then it is difficult to explain why these actors would suddenly prefer a new set of institutions. Or, if increasing returns reinforce a particular institutional set-up, it is not clear how one can explain a switch from one particular path to another. In classical social theory, these concerns resulted in such artifices as Rousseau's *deus ex machina* 'the Legislator' or Hegel and Marx' historicist focus on contradiction (van Parijs, 1982; Boudon and Bourricaud, 1994; Offe, 1996). In contemporary theory, formulations such as 'punctuated equilibrium,' 'critical junctures' and 'exogenous shocks' are more common, but these, also, have been criticized for being incomplete, as it is not clear what causes the switch from stability to instability (Krasner, 1989; Collier, R. B. and Collier, D., 1991; Hall and Taylor, 1996; Thelen, 1999).

Finally, the emphasis on 'path dependency' has met with some resistance from historically-minded scholars (see for example, Bridges 2000). The reason for this may be that much of 'historical institutionalism' is, in essence, a defense of the idiographic in political analysis. Many historical institutionalist scholars wish to study the 'poetry' in politics, and are concerned that 'we murder to dissect,' as Wordsworth put it. It may not be possible or desirable to make historical analysis more scientific and exact, if the very purpose of the historical approach is precisely to capture the unpredictable, contingent nature of human action, which stems precisely from the self-reflective capacities of human actors. 'History' may give observers a critical vantage point, from which one may understand better the times when human agency has made a difference, and to remind ourselves of the 'road not taken,' in order to expand the range of alternatives we consider to be within the scope of the possible. Further, scholars interested in 'narrative' and 'identities' often view history not as a set of objective facts, but as an interpretation or myth, which has an impact on the present as actors re-tell and re-consider their own histories. Indeed, in the full 'constructivist' view, actors construct and are

constructed by symbolic constructs such that culture and institutions are 'constitutive' of human agency (Sewell, 1985; Calhoun, 1991, 1994; Somers, 1994; Sabel and Zeitlin, 1997; Hattam, 2000; Jupille *et al.*, 2003).

The logic of historical explanation

The debate about 'path dependency' – and indeed even the larger ongoing debate about the role of qualitative research in political science – has some similarities to the discussion about the 'taming' of historical sociology. A specific model or method cannot capture the spirit of the larger enterprise, which is to pay closer attention to 'historicity' or 'temporalities' (Orren and Skowronek, 1994; Calhoun, 1996; Sewell, 1996; Katznelson, 1997). Event sequencing programs, for example, which have been developed by mathematical biologists for analyzing the genetic code, may indeed be suitable for analyzing encoded social products – like rituals, myths and texts (Abbott, 2001). But this perspective in 'events' is very different from that of Sewell, who focuses on how events can change the *context* for interpretation and action (1996: 262–3). In the new context, the same sequence can now mean something different. To be sure, there may be very exact models for specifying how such context effects may work. Fontana's chapter (this volume) on RNA-folding shows how many genetic mutations may have no effect; only when a mutation causes a non-neutral electro-static or steric change, does it have an impact on the phenotype – in this case, on molecular shape. Models such as informational or reputational cascades (e.g. Kuran, 1998) are examples of mechanisms that model context effects that could be used systematically in historical research, in the manner proposed by Hedström and Swedberg (1998). Nevertheless, as worthwhile as it is to undertake a search for such mechanisms, it is nevertheless important to stress that the *historian*'s program is definitely not one of developing 'arguments that can "travel" in some form beyond a specific time and place' (Pierson, 2000d: 73) or 'to try and "capture the impact of time in as timeless a way as possible" ' (Thelen cited in Pierson 2000a: 119). Instead, historians wish to travel through time themselves, to experience another time as experienced by those that lived it, just as anthropologists aspire to travel across societies.

What then is the relationship of historical-institutionalism to history, and how does this affect the explanation of institutional change? Just as there are a great many different research questions and methods that have inspired historical studies, the range of historical-institutionalist studies is quite broad. Nevertheless, there are some key, recurrent institutionalist themes and questions that lend themselves particularly to historical research. (For a more extended discussion, see Immergut, 1998; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003.) One is the issue of preference formation and the construction of interests. If one wants to study how institutions shape political outcomes by affecting actors' definitions of their own interests or selecting one definition

of an issue at the expense of another, one needs examples of how definitions of preferences, interests and issues change over time or vary across societies. It is not simply that historical research can provide such examples, but that the very nature of the historical endeavor – delving into the world views and mind-sets of persons with alternate views on what is rational in a particular situation – is particularly attuned to the research question at hand: what factors shape people's definitions of their political situation, their political goals, and their assessments of the best course of action? In any particular case of political behavior, it is difficult to show that there is anything unusual about the preferences expressed by political actors; it is really simpler to follow the behavioralist course of assuming that behavior reveals preferences. However, if one wishes to step behind the expressed preferences, political choices or decisions, and to analyse to what extent they are artifacts of institutions, then one needs a different method. One possibility is to use a formal model; another is to rely on a broader, comparative–historical perspective. A formal model can help one to disentangle the strategic effects caused by interactions amongst actors from the effects of the preferences themselves. A comparative–historical perspective can provide a critical vantage point for relativizing preferences. Thus, the work of economic anthropologists such as Malinowski, Boas and Mauss on phenomena like the Kula Ring, the Potlatch, the spirit of the Gift – or even Polanyi's depiction of the development of the 'satanic mill' – has called the Adam Smith's Robinson Caruso Myth of man's 'natural tendency to truck, barter and exchange' into question, just as Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* tried to discredit Hobbes' and Locke's myth of origin for the Leviathan. Similarly, historical studies, such as E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, have shown the relationship between objective economic situation and subjective understandings of this situation, and hence, definitions of interests to be complex and contingent. Thick description is one way to try to pin down the complicated relationships between institutions, actors and interests, even though it is in the nature of thick description to provide multiple and thickly-layered interpretation, as in Clifford Geertz' famous interpretation of the Balinese cockfight.

A second important common theme is the issue of contextual causality. Most – or at least many – institutional effects are interaction effects. They can indeed be measured by statistical analysis, but only if the institutional variable is correctly specified. It is rarely the case that a formal institution is directly linked to a specific political outcome. Instead, it is the interaction of political institutions with specific electoral results or preference patterns that is significant. 'Historical' research in the sense of looking at micro-political events, using standard historical methods, but without necessarily restricting oneself to any particular historical period, is a way of going into the 'black box' of politics to understand better the interactions of actors, preferences and institutions. Since institutionalism as a whole is concerned with the

distorting affects of the political process – or the 'mobilization of bias' in Schattschneider's well-known phrase – one needs methods that allow one to view these distorting effects. Consequently, Pierson warns that the causes of institutional design cannot be 'read-off' from any hypothetical functions they might have or inferred from their unintended consequences, but instead,

> one must consider dynamic processes that can highlight the implications of short time horizons, the scope of unintended consequences, the emergence of path dependence, and the efficacy or limitations of learning and competitive mechanisms. This requires *genuinely* historical research. By genuinely historical research I mean work that carefully investigates processes unfolding over time. (2000c)

Similarly, Hall (2003) stresses the importance of 'process-tracing' and hence an historical stance for institutional research. Thelen (2003) puts this into practice by showing how the meaning of institutions can change over time both as a reaction to their changing social and political context, but also as a constitutive part of this changing context.

The third area of selective affinity between institutionalist analysis and historical research is the role of contingency. Institutions do not generally exert their effects in a continuous manner. Political institutions, for example, may have a strong impact on a political decision taken at a discrete point in time. This decision may have lasting consequences, but there is no direct relationship between the institutions and the consequences. For example, the set of social programs we associate with the concept of a 'welfare state' are the result of individual political decisions taken for a variety of reasons – and there are not that many of them. Once such a law is enacted, it can have a large impact on the size of government. But although a specific political-institutional configuration may have been a crucial part of the story of the passage of the law, we would not expect a lasting and continuous relationship between the political system and size of government. And indeed, efforts to find such relationships – for example through analysis of variance methods – may be picking up mainly spurious correlations (Cutler and Johnson, 2001). Consequently, institutionalist analysis requires analysis of discrete events. These will be composites of unexplainable, random events and, possibly, some systematic institutional effects.

Change and continuity

If one takes this broader view of the 'historical' part of 'historical institutionalism,' it is clear that change is not necessarily problematic for this approach. If one does not posit that social or political phenomena are at equilibrium, there is no concern with explaining shifts away from equilibrium.

As Oakeschott states,

> And the only explanation of change relevant or possible in history is simply a complete account of change. History accounts *for* change by means *of* a full account of change. The relation *between* events is always other events, and it is established in history by a full relation *of* the events. The conception of cause is thus replaced by the exhibition of a world of events intrinsically related to one another in which no lacuna is tolerated. (cited in Roberts 1996: 39)

But this outlook does not lead one to any singular or arching model of institutional change. Nor does it eliminate the problems of causality in historical explanation. Indeed, in trying to fuse institutionalism with an historical approach, one may be embarking upon an inherently contradictory program, which does not do justice to the epistemological differences between and within both the historical and the institutionalist approaches. One way out this very complicated corner is to follow Robert's suggestion of focusing less on the theory of history and more on its practice:

> To this eminently sensible conclusion that it is wise to rely upon 'available generalizations' in guiding human conduct, one can add a second truth. Those 'available generalizations' will be more dependable, more useful, more profitable if they are based upon a right understanding of the causes of events in the past, which right understanding depends in large measurement upon a right understanding of the logic of historical explanation and of the logic of historical interpretation. (1996)

To be sure, Robert's view is controversial. Nevertheless, we may follow his lead in taking a pragmatic approach to the theory of knowledge, and asking ourselves, what is good scientific practice in the specific field of historical-institutionalism in comparative politics? This is a field of knowledge in which some objects – namely political institutions – have a good chance of working with law-like regularity, if one specifies the boundary conditions correctly. However, it is also a field where human agents interpret the workings of these institutions and adjust their behavior according to these interpretations, including acting in ways to change the institutions. Thus, it could be useful to follow the historical practice of studying these activities and events over time, as well as researching micro-political decisions, paying close attention not only to which actors were active, and what they did, but also to what they thought they were doing while they did it. Such an approach is not limited to one type of research question, model or method, but can draw freely on a variety of approaches. What gives it its coherence is an interest in studying the distortions of institutions, and a commitment to checking whether generalizations really apply to the self-understandings of real people in the

real world. An example may illustrate this pragmatic approach to study the history of institutional change.

A brief empirical example

The research presented here draws on two standard methods of historical research and historical interpretation: the construction of an historical counterfactual, and recourse to written documents available in archives. The case at hand is the partial revision of the Swedish Constitution, which was voted on in 1967 and 1968, and went into force in 1970. The historical puzzle in this instance was that the previous constitution was widely viewed as favoring the Social Democratic Party. Why then would members of the Party agree to give it up?

The provision of the old Constitution that had proved advantageous to the Social Democratic Party was the bicameral legislature, with an Upper House that was indirectly elected by the County Councilors, the local politicians at the County Council or provincial level. This Upper House (or First Chamber, as it was called) was the *quid pro quo* granted to the Nobility in 1866, for their consent to the dissolution of the Parliament of Four Estates. Once property qualifications had been abandoned in 1907 and 1918 (through laws that went into effect in 1909 and 1921, respectively), and after the phenomenal electoral successes of the Social Democratic Party of the 1930s and early 1940s, the First Chamber became an important element of Social Democratic Party parliamentary strength. For while electoral results averaging 47.6% of the vote from 1936 through 1968 rendered the party relative majorities of averaging 49.9% in the directly-elected Second Chamber, the indirect elections to the First Chamber, which were based on County Council elections in which the Social Democratic Party averaged 47.6% of the vote during the same period, rendered the Party absolute majorities averaging 51.7% of the seats in the First Chamber. Although these differences in the disproportionality between votes and seats may appear small, the difference between 49% of seats and 51% is highly significant politically. It means the difference between full control of government and legislation versus shared control. Moreover, under the old Swedish Constitutions, both Chambers were equal and both were required to approve legislation. Therefore, control of the First Chamber – which was guaranteed by the Social Democratic Party's absolute majority in this chamber from 1936 to 1969 – was sufficient for the Social Democratic Party to veto any and all legislation proposed in this period. In addition, votes on the budget were taken by the united parliament (a joint session of the two chambers), in which the First Chamber majority was sufficient to give the Social Democratic Party a majority in the united parliament, and hence, control over all budgets in this period. Given the significant enhancement of parliamentary power accruing to the Social Democratic Party through the indirectly-elected First Chamber, why would

members of this Party vote to relinquish the First Chamber at a time that the Party held either a relative (1967) or an absolute majority (1968) in the Second Chamber, and an absolute majority in the First Chamber (1967 and 1968)? Three theoretical possibilities present themselves. First, members of the Social Democratic Party may have found their advantages of the old Constitution to be unjust and incompatible with their vision of democracy or constitutional *principles*. Second, for some not immediately apparent reason, social democratic politicians may have decided that these provisions were not longer in their *interests*. Third, these decision-makers may have *miscalculated* or *misunderstood* the effects that the new Constitution might have on their parliamentary power. (Buchanan and Vanberg, 1989; See discussion in Vanberg and Buchanan, 1989 and 1996.)

In order to be able to even discuss whether political actors may have made errors of judgment, however, one needs two very different pieces of information. First, one needs to know what the effects of their actions were; second, one needs to know why these political actors made these choices. The first question raises a general problem for the analysis of institutional change. Namely, that it is extremely difficult to assess the impact of institutional change. Of course one knows which specific constitutional rules were changed through the partial constitutional revision of 1967/68, but the impact of these changes on the relationship between parliamentary and executive power and the sharing of parliamentary power amongst the various political parties – that is, the political meaning of these changes – is not evident from the changes in rules alone. For the impact of constitutional and electoral rules on politics depends upon electoral results. This is what makes it difficult to assess the impact of changes in the rules both looking forward into the future, and backwards into the past. To this end, a quantitative historical-counterfactual was constructed: Had the Swedish Constitution not been changed, what would have been the distribution of parliamentary seats amongst the political parties, based on the actual electoral results from 1970 through 1994?

Counterfactual reasoning has long been associated with the historical method, as it is one way to try to disentangle causally important factors from unimportant ones (Weber, 1978; Roberts, 1996; Lebow, 2000; Tetlock and Lebow, 2001). As has been superficially mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, however, the very notion of causality in history is controversial. So too, is the use of counterfactual reasoning. Some scholars consider counterfactual reasoning to be at the heart of *any* notion of causality; others consider to be suspect under all circumstances. (See discussions in Lewis, 1993; King *et al.*, 1994: 10–11; Edgington, 1995.) In this case, however, a counterfactual is not only defensible, but also necessary. It is defensible, because all that has been done is to use the constitutional and electoral rules applicable in 1968 (at the time of the constitutional revision) to simulate a 'counterfactual' parliament using the electoral results obtained from 1970

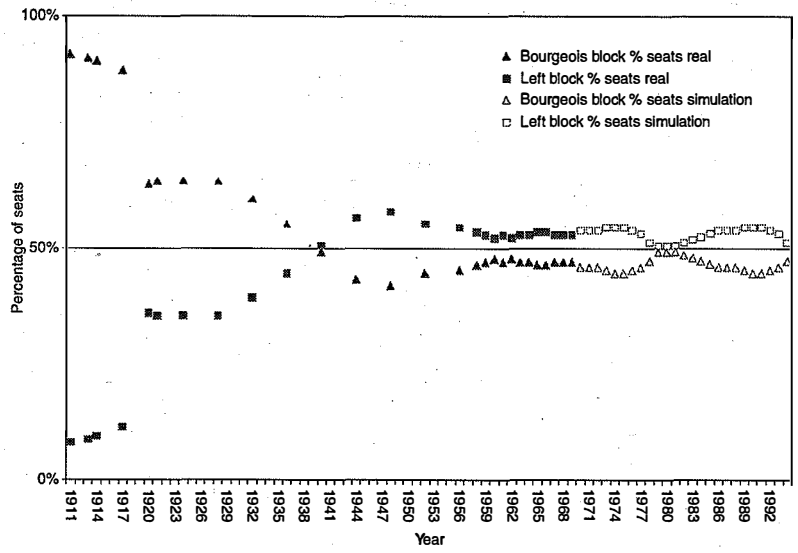

Figure 17.1 First Chamber real and counterfactual results, 1911–94

on. (For details see Immergut, 2002.) That is, both the rules and the electoral results are based on fact; indeed, as the First Chamber elections were indirect, and based on older electoral results, the electors for the first few years of First Chamber simulation were already elected when the constitutional change went into effect, and thus 'factually' existent. It is necessary, because, there is no other way to assess the magnitude of the constitutional change. As Voigt (1997: 19) points out, in analysing institutional change, one is always comparing 'the effects of a realized (unrealized) institutional arrangement with an unrealized (realized) one.' Consequently, counterfactual reasoning is central to the problem of institutional change. The results of the counterfactual are straightforward. As Figure 17.1 shows, under the old constitutional rules, the Social Democratic Party would have held a majority of seats in the First Chamber for all electoral results that it achieved in the 1970 to 1994 period.

One can note on the graph, as well, the steady rise of Social Democratic representation between 1911 and 1944, coupled with the abrupt increase caused by the constitutional reform implemented in 1921. One sees the steady absolute majority held by the Social Democratic Party in the First Chamber from 1944 through 1969, and sees that this majority continues uninterrupted until 1994 – except for a decline at the end of the 1970s. This decline is not sufficient, however, to cause a loss of the First Chamber majority. For technical reasons, the figure combines social democratic and communist

seats, but it should be noted that the numbers of communist seats are estimated to be minimal – at most 2 or 3 seats compared to 79 or 80 for the Social Democrats. The simulation experiment result presented here is based on two experimental conditions: the electoral results actually obtained from 1970 to 1994, and the use of electoral alliances exactly as they had actually been entered into during the 1966 and 1968 elections. Although the electoral results from 1970 to 1994 are on average lower than those from 1944 to 1968, the simulation shows First Chamber results with quite a bit of continuity with the 1944 to 1968 period. Indeed, under the new constitution, the electoral results from 1970 to 1994 led to several changes in government, with the Social Democratic Party out of office from 1976 to 1982 and from 1991 to 1994. Under the old constitutional rules, however, the same electoral results allow the Social Democratic Party to control the First Chamber for the entire period.

A second condition of the simulation concerns the use of electoral alliances. The alliances were a method by which the smaller parties could improve the number of seats they obtained; the parties wishing to enter into an alliance were required to campaign under a common party label, but the individual parties could then divide up the seats amongst themselves after the election. Even though the use of electoral alliances had increased dramatically during the 1960s, and reached a peak in the 1966 election, the application of these alliances to the 1970 to 1994 period does not eliminate the majority held by the left bloc in the First Chamber.

This 'instrumental' counterfactual can be used to raise questions about the historical process, thus providing one approach to the problem of how and when to 'cut into' history. It shows that the First Chamber would have provided a critical source of parliamentary power for the Social Democratic Party. Such a counterfactual can structure the research, and provide plausibility tests for various hypotheses that can help in disentangling whether principles, interests or miscalculation were responsible for the decision to eliminate the First Chamber. But it cannot substitute for an investigation of the history of the constitutional reform itself. A full description of this process – which lasted from 1948 through 1968, and on into the 1970s – is beyond the scope of this essay. But a few comments can be made on the basis of the parliamentary debates, the minutes of the meetings of the social democratic party's congresses, its parliamentary group and its executive council, as well as from newspaper accounts.

Constitutional principles

The Liberal Party was the driving force putting the issue of constitutional reform on the agenda. In early 1953, both Liberal and Conservative members of parliament submitted several motions calling for elimination of the First Chamber of the Parliament. In response, five Social Democrats submitted a motion for a full government investigation of the issue of Constitutional

reform. Strategically, this motion is surprising, because it widened the scope of the constitutional issue, and put it irreversibly upon the political agenda. As one of the elder statesmen of the Social Democratic Party, Per Edvin Sköld, said at the end of the reform process,

> We must not forget that it was the social democrats that breathed life into the constitutional issue. That happened because the government appointed a commission almost ten years ago. There does not seem to be great interest within the party now for constitutional reform and one can ask oneself whether the party wants a reform or not. My answer is that once we have started the ball rolling, we cannot stop it, even if the negotiations should lead to us not getting what we wanted from it[1]

Nine years earlier, in the meeting of the social democratic parliamentary group that discussed the social democratic motion for a complete investigation of constitutional reform, one of the signers of the motion, Ossian Sehlstedt, explained his motivations to the Social Democratic Parliamentary Group. On the one hand, it was important to update the constitution in line with societal changes, and to increase both the influence of the people and the effectiveness of parliament. Sehlstedt was particularly interested in the possibility of introducing a majoritarian electoral system, as in Britain. On the other, it was important to counter the fact that 'the opposition is in certain points using pure social democratic propaganda against social democracy. Without choosing to do so, now we are behind.' Gösta Nélzen concluded that the signers of the motion were united on only one point, namely that it was time 'to deprive the opposition of the initiative in this question.'[2] Thus, tactical and not just normative considerations were behind the proposal for reform, and there was certainly no groundswell of principled social democratic opinion against the First Chamber.

Constitutional interests

During the internal party debates about Constitutional reform in the early 1960s, many discussions focused on party interests, and how best to argue for these party interests with the opposition and to communicate them to the public. It was difficult to challenge the Liberal Party's arguments that 'each vote should count the same,' and that indirect elections based on outdated electoral results were counter to the principle of popular sovereignty. To solve this problem, various proposals were drafted that would allow for disproportional representation of the Social Democratic Party through various mechanisms for regional representation. Some of these proposals maintained the indirect elections, others called for regional representatives within a unicameral parliament, but all shared the common feature of giving slight overrepresentation to the Social Democratic Party. Rather than speaking of 'overrepresentation,' 'disproportionality' or 'indirect elections,' however, the Prime Minister

elaborated a new political term, *'kommunala sambandet'* or the 'local link' (Ruin, 1990; von Sydow, 1989: and primary sources; Stjernquist, 1996).

Up until the 1966 communal elections, the Prime Minister and the party leadership dragged their feet in the negotiations over constitutional reform. After the elections, however, in which the Party lost its majority in the County Councils, the Prime Minister decided that it was time to get the issue of constitutional reform off the agenda, and that it was necessary to enact a reform before the next parliamentary elections would be held in 1968. There seem to have been several grounds for this sudden urgency. First, the constitutional issue had been used as a campaign issue for the first time, and any delay was now viewed as a liability for the Party. Second, the loss of the County Council majority made the First Chamber seem vulnerable for the first time.[3] In these discussions, the focus was very much on the electoral alliances used by the bourgeois parties: 'It is necessary that one in the question of the electoral method take a position that can hinder in future the very disturbing electoral manipulations that have occurred in this year's electoral campaign, namely the alliance of the bourgeois parties in those areas where they stand the most to gain from cooperation, and that each party campaigns separately in those areas where they can gain by that solution. ... This cannot continue this way.' The solution chosen by the party was full proportionality. Calculations carried out showed that under a more proportional electoral method, electoral alliances made no difference to the final distribution of seats. The Prime Minister reasoned, 'It remains for us to find out whether the opposition could imagine accepting a ban on campaigning together. Perhaps instead of a prohibition one could stop the whole thing with such a [proportional] method.'[4]

Constitutional knowledge

Constitutional interests – as they were interpreted by the party leadership and in particular by the Prime Minister – can explain the timing of the constitutional reform, and its content. The 1966 elections created a sense of urgency for reform, and focused the party leadership on a fully proportional electoral formula. At the same time, however, the process contains many accidents of sequence and 'bounded' rationality. The Party leadership did commission simulation experiments almost identical to the ones whose results were presented here. However, the Social Democratic calculations focused exclusively on the Second Chamber, and did not take the First Chamber into account in any way. Although the vague term 'local link' had initially been used to refer to an electoral equivalent of the First Chamber within a new unicameral legislature, by the end of the negotiations, the term had been reduced to a common election day for national and local elections. Not only did the Social Democratic Party leadership give up the tremendous advantages of the First Chamber for the relatively paltry concession of a common election day, but many members of the party's executive council

were either unsure whether the common election day would benefit the party or opposed to it altogether. As one member of the executive council put it, 'I think that had we from the beginning been confronted with the choice of finding a form for the local link our solution would not have been the common election day. We cannot, after all the years that have gone by and we have campaigned for the local link, get out of this and therefore I accept with a sigh that the only way will be the common election day.'[5]

The causes for the Swedish partial reform of 1967/68 were thus the continued pressure of the Liberal Party's campaign against the First Chamber, the fear of younger Social Democrats that the Liberals were outflanking them on the constitutional question, the general lack of interest or commitment of party base to institutional issues, and the credible threat provided by the use of electoral alliances on the part of the bourgeois parties in the 1966 election. Not just these ultimate causes, but the twists and turns of the political process, changed the array of political alternatives and the final provisions that these actors chose. Indeed, there is quite a bit of evidence that many actors were dissatisfied with the final outcome. One can find direct historical evidence relatively easily for all of these causes and the effects of sequence, in the form of direct statements by the participants in these events. But no mono-causal explanation can be fitted to these events; the sorting out of the relative importance of each of these factors remains a question of interpretation and argument, and thus of ongoing debate amongst scholars.

Conclusions

Historical research based on a variety of methods can certainly be used to investigate institutional change. Some of the regularities of institutional effects lend themselves to systematic and even quantitative analysis. But the political process itself is so shaped by contingent events and subjective perceptions that it is highly unlikely that institutional change can be modeled systematically. In any case, no single model of change or the impact of past events can do justice to the multiple levels of causality at work in historical explanation. Instead, general models, even in the form of covering laws can be used to pose questions; but there is no substitute for empirical research in finding the answers regarding a particular case.

Notes

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1. ARAB, SAP Partisytrelsens Protokoll 1964–67, 'Protokoll vid sammaträde med Social demokratiska Partistyrelsen den 27 februari 1964 i Stora Partilokalen, Riksdagshuset,' p. 3.
2. Ossian Sehlstedt, 24 February 1953, cited in von Sydow, 1989: 90 and direct citation, ARAB, SAP Riksdagsgruppensprotokoll, 'Protokoll fört vid sammanträde i stora partilokalen med socialdemokratiska riksdagsgruppen tisdagen den 24 februari 1953 kl. 18.00,' p. 3. Gösta Nélzen, ibid., p. 7.
3. Tage Erlander, ARAB, 'Protokoll partistyrelsesammanträde 1 Oktober 1966,' p. 6, and 'Protokoll fört vid sammanträde vid den Socialdemokratiska riksdagsgruppen tisdagen den 8 november 1966 Kl 18 i Stora partilokalen,' p. 4.
4. Tage Erlander, ARAB, 'Protokoll partiytrelsesammanträde 3 November 1966 §26 Författningsfrågan,' pp. 1–2, 9.
5. Gunnar Lange, 3 November 1966, ibid. p. 11.

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