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**The Policy Termination
Approach: Critique and
Conceptual Perspectives**

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The Policy Termination Approach: Critique and Conceptual Perspectives

The article examines the policy analysis literature on the concept of policy termination. It will discuss both the changes made to the concept during its development as well as the still remaining deficits of this area of research. In view of the growing evidence of an increasing number of recent termination and retrenchment processes in western welfare states, the article shall highlight empirical as well as methodological and conceptual approaches to make the concept of policy termination fruitful again for contemporary policy research and for the sake of generating explanation.

Keywords: Policy Termination, Policy Analysis, Policy Process, Policy Cycle, Retrenchment, Policy Dismantling

1. Introduction

Are public policies particularly immune to termination? What factors facilitate or systematically impede the termination of a policy? What does it mean for democratic systems in general and for the governance capacity of the public sector, in particular, when the dismantling of once established programs is a tedious political endeavour, which most frequently lacks any prospects of success? These are some of the crucial questions that were first raised in the mid-1970s by early scholars of policy analysis.¹ The subsequent debates on terminology, concepts and the theorization of “policy termination” are the main focus of this article.

The impetus to systematically place termination on the policy-analytical research agenda came from Garry D. Brewer at the beginning of the 1970s. Brewer’s main intention was to complete the project of the “policy science”, which was initiated by his mentor Harold D. Lasswell, and thereby establishing termination research firmly in

¹ Besides the application of the termination concept to policies, there also exists a broad array of literature dedicated to the dismantling of organizations, the life-cycles of organizations and the expansion and reduction of organization populations (see Kaufmann 1976, 1987; Hannan/Freeman 1977; 1985; Levine 1978; Carroll 1983, 1984; Kimberly 1981; Whetten 1987; Hood/Dunsire 1981; Norris-Tirell 1997, 2001; Brown 1997; Lewis 2002; Corder 2004). This extensive literature can only be addressed in this article to the extent that it is imperative for understanding policy termination as a policy analysis concept.

professional American political science.² The first years of termination research were enormously fertile.³ Retrospectively, however, only the works of Bardach (1976), Behn (1978a), Brewer (1978) and, in particular, deLeon (1978a) were of lasting significance. In the 1980s only a few scattered publications attended to the subject of policy termination. Starting in the mid-1990s a tiny boom in termination literature occurred again, which has continued on a small scale until the present (Sato 2002; Sato/Frantz 2005).⁴

The overall disregard of the analysis of policy termination is surprising because there are practical and theoretical reasons suggesting rising demand for systematic knowledge about policy dismantling and retrenchment. As regards practice, since most western states have come to see their policy-making capacity restricted by what is known as permanent austerity (Pierson 2002), a diffuse sentiment appears to prevail that political steering ability is increasingly lost due to the incapacity of public authorities to push back state activities to a (financially) feasible level. In other words, knowledge about the termination conditions for public intervention is in fact in great demand (Biller 1976; Daniels 2001; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2005). As regards theory the gradual neglect for policy termination also is astonishing from the perspective of academic policy analysis whose aim and *raison d'être* is the quest for comprehensiveness and generalizations. Contemporary policy analysis must be interested in both the analysis of the purported link between increasing governance *incapacity* and the unsuccessful dismantling of tasks on the one hand as well as the systematic theoretical categorization of the phenomenon of policy termination (as successful or impeded) on the other. Neglecting deliberately such termination questions means that policy analysis must abandon its claim to being the main instrument for a *comprehensive* and *systematic* understanding of the policy process.

Against this background, the article offers an introduction to the classical concepts of policy termination (Section 2) and highlights significant conceptual revisions (Section

² Just like some years before had been successfully done by analysts of policy implementation process (see Pressman/Wildavsky 1973).

³ Of the total of approximately 50 scientific articles, which constitute the core of this branch of research, (see index of literature), around one-quarter originated during this first wave of research.

⁴ The "revival" was heralded in 1997 by a special edition of the *International Journal of Public Administration* edited by Mark D. Daniels (Daniels 1997; deLeon 1997; Frantz 1997; Greenwood 1997; Harris 1997; Norris-Tirrell 1997) and reached its ultimate climax with a symposium also led by Daniels in the same journal (Daniels 2001; Geva-May 2001; deLeon/Hernández-Quezada 2001; Norris-Tirrell 2001; Harris 2001).

3). Subsequently, the remaining shortcomings of the concept will be addressed (Section 4). The main focus will be placed on the question whether there is potential to make the termination concept fruitful in explaining current policy processes (Frantz 2002, 2003; Geva-May 2004). Section 5 outlines the theoretical and methodological requirements for such an endeavour. Although no attempt can be made to empirically put them into practice within the ambit of this article, section 6 proposes a particular conceptual revitalisation by differentiating the concept and by developing explanatory hypotheses to guide further empirical research in the area. The article concludes with a summary and outlook (Section 7).

2. The Foundations of the Termination Approach

Even though policy termination was referred to as special stage or phase in the policy science process already in early policy-analytical writings, Eugene Bardach was the first to formulate research hypotheses (on the basis of a few topical case studies edited in a special issue of the leading policy science journal) and to draw some preliminary conclusions. Bardach conceives policy termination as a political process, whose main focus is on conflict, similar to the phase of policy formulation. Accordingly, policy termination is “a special case of the policy adoption process: there is a struggle to adopt a policy A, the substance of which is to eliminate policy B” (Bardach 1976: 126). Bardach sees five factors, in particular, which impede termination: first of all, significant “sunk costs” must be written off in the form of set legal norms and existing budgetary mechanisms. Secondly, the conflict structure has a particularly “brutal” impact, and politicians would thus preferably avoid deliberately provoking the resistance of citizens, who must do without something they were previously accustomed to.⁵ At the same time, particular significance can be attached to coalitions of opponents to termination – usually those who benefit from the program, private suppliers and the personnel entrusted with the public task. Thirdly, politicians would preferably not be associated with termination decisions, because they face the danger of being confronted with the argument “If it’s as bad as you and others now say, why did you permit it to go on for so long?” Fourthly, it is also understandable that politicians and managers shy away from damaging the existing organizational structure or alienating personnel, when they too will be dependent on

⁵ Today one would probably say pay-offs from termination are diffuse while losses are concentrated and therefore losers are more likely to mobilize against termination plans.

their loyalty and efficiency, in particular with regard to successfully implementing programs and projects in the future. The general orientation of social criteria for success can also be viewed as a final reason for the aversion to policy termination. "The American political system, like most others, rewards novelty and innovation" (Bardach 1976: 129). On the other hand, factors can also be pinpointed which increase the probability of policy termination: firstly, a change in government; secondly, changes to the overall ideological climate and the resulting loss of legitimacy of a public policy. Thirdly, "a period of turbulence", which Bardach defines as a phase during which dismal expectations about societal developments prevail, which already put people in a psychological mood that the future outlook will worsen, unless painful changes are made. Fourthly, softening the impact of a termination decision (generous transitional regulations, employment guarantees for the affected personnel, etc.) can have positive effects on the termination process. Finally, far-sighted policy design (in terms of zero-base budgeting or sunset regulations) can also increase the probability of policy termination during the further course of events (Bardach 1976: 129-130; see also Biller 1976).

An additional influential article in this regard is Robert D. Behn's "How to Terminate a Public Policy: A Dozen Hints for the Would-be Terminator" (Behn 1978a). With 12 recommendations, Behn evaluates in ironic fashion his empirical findings on policy termination as the "neglected butt of the policy process" (Behn 1978a: 413; see also Behn 1976, 1977, 1978b). However, one should not be deceived by the soft tone of the article, as Behn implicitly develops a model for the minimization of resistance to policy termination and thus "radically" places the main focus on the *politics* dimension (Daniels 1997b: 59). By evidently drawing on the implementation study by Pressmann and Wildavsky, Behn sees an increased likelihood of successful policy termination when there are fewer decision items or options available to the opponents to the termination opponents to influence the process and when the termination decision is linked to an ideologically based negative evaluation of the terminated policy which is portrayed as such in the media. Behn does not forget to underline here that policy termination itself will probably always remain a "loss-making business" in practical political terms: terminating policies "...is not likely to be a very rewarding undertaking. Your chances of succeeding are poor, and even if you prevail, you will not make friends doing so" (Behn 1978a: 393). However, when only

the political cunning of the actors ultimately determines the success of policy termination decisions, basic questions beyond Behn's twelve recommendations arise with respect to the ethical and democratic legitimacy of such strategies.

Towards the end of the first wave of termination studies, Garry D. Brewer, who provoked the debate on policy termination, summed up the somewhat ambivalent research efforts. In his view, "termination (is) frequently only the replacement of one set of expectations, rules, and practices with another. In this sense, termination signals a beginning as much as it does an end" (Brewer 1978: 339). Following Brewer's footsteps, Peter deLeon took on the task of systematizing the previous results of the termination debate and drawing conceptual and theoretical conclusions (deLeon 1978a,b). DeLeon's work is somewhat ambitiously entitled "A Theory of Policy Termination" (deLeon 1978a). However, it does not present the promised theory of policy termination, but instead rudimentarily theorizes the obstacles to termination – quasi ex negativo. The components of his "termination *prevention* theory" are a definition of the termination itself, a typology of what can be terminated at all in public policy, as well as an explication of six main reasons, why it is so difficult to plan and carry out policy termination. His aim is to move policy termination into the context of the other phases and make ascertainable their ramifications for policy termination – and conversely the influence of the policy cycle process on policy termination. Policy termination is accordingly defined as "the deliberate conclusion or cessation of specific government functions, programs, policies or organizations" (deLeon 1978a: 280).⁶ The typology of what can be terminated according to the concept of policy termination includes individual programs, policies, organizations, and state functions. The obstacles to termination increase in this very sequence. State functions – such as defence, maintaining domestic security, material redistribution – are never terminated de facto. Organizations, which deLeon conceives as "groups of individuals that constitute what we call institutions" or who are used to "respond to a specific need" (1978a: 284), are somewhat easier to terminate in this hierarchy than state functions themselves, but are characterized –

⁶ In order to reduce the restrictiveness of his termination definition, which also does not allow for considerable political changes to be comprised as termination, deLeon additionally puts forward the concept of "partial termination", "in which specific government functions, programs, policies or organizations significantly redirect their activities" (deLeon 1978a: 280). Since the literature did not follow up on this concept, it will not be further elaborated on in this section (see section 6).

obviously in view of Herbert's Kaufman's results⁷ – by a high degree of resistance and longevity. Policies as “generalized approaches or strategies toward solving a particular problem” (deLeon 1978a: 284) are, on the other hand, easier to terminate, because the respective organizations that are entrusted with their implementation tend to sacrifice individual policies instead of putting themselves in danger of being terminated; and, besides that, because organizations generally have a broader network of supporters than individual policies, the more so as policies normally also generate serious criticism due their differential impact on society. The destiny of individual programs, on the basis of which a policy is ultimately implemented and also defined, is most uncertain. “They are closest to the problem and therefore their impact can be most directly measured and, if found lacking, blame most easily affixed” (deLeon 1978a: 285). In the main part of his article, deLeon identifies six reasons for why policy termination is rarely planned and even less often implemented: cognitive aversion, institutional longevity, dynamic conservatism, anti-termination coalitions, legal obstacles and high costs of initiation (see deLeon 1978a: 286 ff.; see also Biller 1976: 139). These reasons, or better: factors, impeding policy termination are repeated over and over again in the termination literature. Most of them obviously reformulate insights already discussed when going over the work of Bardach and Behn. It thus suffices here to remind that the “cognitive aversion” refers to a supposed human resistance to tackle issues of “end” and “death” (actually never systematically tested in the termination literature). “Institutional longevity” points to the fact that most organisations and policies are actually created to last – and they are thus naturally difficult to dismantle (an argument anticipating Pierson's new politics of welfare state retrenchment – see Pierson 1994). “Dynamic conservatism”

⁷ In an influential study, which can also be categorized within the context of the early policy termination debate, Herbert Kaufman (1976) addressed the question “Are Government Organizations Immortal?” Kaufman compares the number of “federal agencies” in the year 1923 with that of the year 1973. “There were 175 organizations in the 1923 sample. No less than 148 of them (nearly 85 percent) were still going in 1973” (1976: 34). According to this study, a total of only 27 “agencies” were dismantled. Furthermore, during these 50 years 166 new organizational units emerged, which were not eliminated by the year of comparison 1973. Kaufman compares the “death rate” of public organizations with private enterprises and comes to the conclusion that the termination probability is twice as high in the private sector as in the public sphere (1976: 54). The greatest threats for the state organizations stem from “competition, changes in leadership and policy, obsolescence resulting from routinization and adherence to past methods, and completion of mission. ... Organizational death seems to claim victims in all age categories without systematic discrimination. There was, however, a faint tendency for the oldest organizations to fare better than their juniors, particularly the youngest” (Kaufman 1976: 60). Hence, Kaufman appears to empirically demonstrate that public institutions indeed do possess an impressive capacity for sustaining themselves and adjusting to changing framework conditions. For a long time, Kaufman's hypothesis was regarded as a paradigm in the termination literature. However, it was already criticized at an early point in time and could not be confirmed by more recent empirical studies (see Peters/Hogwood 1988, 1991; Lewis 2002).

refers to a phenomenon studied in public administration and organisational sociology. Organisations usually attempt to acquire new jobs when demand for their traditional tasks declines. DeLeon concludes with several ideas on how to increase the chances of terminating ineffective policies more frequently than in the past despite enormous resistance. Among other things, he proposes incorporating “decisional items” *ex-ante* into the program design, on the basis of which termination decisions can be made. On the whole, though, the incentives must be changed to the extent that the concerned actors do not conceive termination as a failure to be prevented or even as a threat to their livelihood, rather as an opportunity to optimize tasks and thus strengthen their own position in the policy process (deLeon 1978a: 296).

3. Criticism by the Second Generation of Termination Scholars

Second generation scholarship targeted three major problems in the initial policy termination research that may be summarised under the headlines ideology, succession, and practical irrelevance (Brewer 1978; Cameron 1978; Bothun/Comer 1979; deLeon 1982, 1983).

Ideology. The first criticism focussed attention on the anti-rational components of the termination process (observable in reality) and thus attacked directly the explanatory premises of most of the initial work on termination according to which policy termination, if it occurred, should be firmly rooted in rational actor behaviour (reflecting the “enlightenment” impetus of early policy science). The point here is that in political reality termination is not effectuated despite clear evidence of policy failure. The reason for such disregard of relevant facts is the persistence of ideological positions of the main actors that would be called into question by accepting policy failure. However, if non-termination is the result of ideological struggles and parochialism it appeared that early termination scholars just did not focus on the right questions, i.e. not the characteristic of the policy in question is the crucial independent variable but the relationships between policy, ideology and the political power of significant actors. That however is bad news for the (immodest) policy analysts of that time whose desire was to overcome the then traditional science of politics by a new policy science. This criticism was both warranted and unwarranted. In their efforts to bring together all factors influencing termination, the

authors of the first wave indeed failed to put the identified variables in a hierarchical order. Thus, on the basis of concrete case studies, it was relatively easy to pinpoint the power of ideas, values and worldviews as the main sphere of influence in the political debate on policy termination (Cameron 1978; Harris 1997). But ideology arguments have always played a prominent role in empirical policy termination studies.

Succession. Brian W. Hogwood and B. Guy Peters addressed another key issue, i.e. that of policy termination as both a beginning and an end (Brewer 1978, deLeon 1978b). According to their concept of policy succession, public policy making is a process of dynamic change and plans to terminate a policy generally end in its modified or adjusted continuation (Hogwood/Peters 1982, 1985; see also Grafton 1984 as well as Weaver 1988).⁸ Essentially the aspect of policy succession did not remain concealed from the early work on policy termination. Drawing on the seminal work by Edward L. Katzenbach in 1958, the termination researchers were also always interested in the notion of policy “renaissance” or the paradoxical absence of policy termination (see Kotz 1988).⁹ The succession concept – though meriting itself critique for various inconsistencies (just to mention the more than a dozen different concepts of succession and the related difficulty to consistently operationalise them for empirical investigation) – dealt a serious blow to the termination community and redirected crucial intellectual efforts just at a time when the policy sciences as an academic undertaking experienced a first crisis and self-critical re-orientation (Windhoff-Héritier 1987; Héritier 1993).

Practical Irrelevance. Early termination works responded to real world developments. The fact that leading representatives of the policy sciences devoted themselves to the issue of policy termination also is related to the fact that the then new Carter administration was preparing to systematically introduce “sunset” regulations into American policy legislation for the first time on a large-scale, in order to force the

⁸ According to Hogwood and Peters, the analytical decision to bring a phenomenon of policy termination into the main focus of analysis is often “like talking about the death of the caterpillar without mentioning the birth of the butterfly” (1982: 227). The authors also ascertain that genuine policy innovations take place just as seldom as actual policy terminations.

⁹ In a case study, Katzenbach (1958) examined the astonishing longevity of the United States Cavalry, even though the usefulness of horses in military terms had been replaced by advances in weapons’ technology years ago. Nick Kotz (1988) outlines the repeated discontinuation and return of the B-1 bomber project.

Congress to vote on the continuation of certain policies after a certain period of time and in view of the potentially available results. A (related) project to revolutionise public spending controversial was “zero-base budgeting”. According to ZBB policy individual budgetary items were to be debated annually “from scratch” and not on the basis of the previous year’s amount. Unfortunately for the termination researchers these incentives to end unsuccessful policies did not come about. With the disenchantment of such termination mechanisms in practice, the enthusiasm for termination research as a means to improve U.S. policy making in practice (and thus important incentives for further investing intellectual efforts to develop this research agenda) also vanished (Behn 1977; Daniels 1993, 1997b; Frantz 2003).

4. Lasting Weaknesses of the Termination Approach

There are five major deficits – missing comparisons across countries, dominance of single case study designs, conceptual standstill, lack of dialogue with other research agendas and methodological shortcomings – that haunt the termination debate until today. I will briefly turn to each of them.

Missing comparisons across countries: The debate on the conditions for, obstacles to, and stimulators of policy termination is restricted to American political scientists. Hardly any empirical and no theoretical contributions emerged outside the USA or are based on non-American data (deLeon 1997: 2201; exceptions: Greenwood 1997; Harris 1997; deLeon/Hernández-Quezada 2001; Sato 2002). Given this US bias it does not come as a surprise that the policy termination literature has failed to create systematic country comparisons. This is even more tragic since the comparative perspective is the most promising research strategy for isolating the causal factors relevant for the discontinuation and termination of policies. Thus, one of the essential benefits of a renewed concept of policy termination should be that it links the peculiarities of political systems and their institutions with termination processes in comparative fashion (Peters 1998).

Dominance of single case study designs: Corresponding to the U.S. focus of termination studies the exclusive research design used is single case studies – with their well-known limitations as regards theoretical development. Comparative case

study designs were applied much too seldom (Lambright/Sapolsky 1976; Greenwood 1997), which is essentially one of the greatest weaknesses of the termination research. This lack of comparative strategies helps to understand why virtually all the conceptual and theoretical insights were generated in the early “explorative period” of policy termination research (Bardach 1976; Biller 1976; Kaufman 1976; deLeon 1978).

Conceptual standstill: Subsequently, the later work primarily only applied these traditional termination concepts to new cases and thus illustrated (rather than tested) their relevance (or lack of in individual cases); this diminished chances of reaching a serious theoretical re-conceptualisation. The few articles with innovative content also restrict themselves to the critique or the fine-tuning of individual aspects of the concept (Frantz 1992, 2002; Daniels 1997b; Lewis 2002), without aiming for new or improved foundations of the policy termination approach. Thus, the theoretical boundaries in the debate have by and large remained approximately where Peter deLeon drew them in 1978 (Greenwood 1997: 2122).

Lack of dialogue with other research agendas: Only seldom were the gained insights of termination studies applied constructively to other political science debates and thus placed within a broader scope.¹⁰ What remains incomprehensible here is the complete separation of the termination literature from the neo-institutionalism discourse, which has been increasingly making its mark on political science since the middle of the 1980s, even though the longevity and the reproductive capacity of institutional arrangements as well as their persistence even in light of strong pressures for change clearly suggest common topics of research (Hall/Taylor 1996). It would have also been productive to discuss what, if any, difference exists between the theoretical explanation of policy termination as a particular policy making stage and explanations of policy outcomes in the political decision-making process developed elsewhere during the last two decades. There may well be a huge

¹⁰ Among the exceptions to this are the contributions by Hogwood and Peters (1982) as well as Lewis (2002) and Frantz (2002) more recently. Lewis, in particular, demonstrates that the termination research is absolutely capable of challenging arguments from other debates. For example, his results point out that independent agencies are dismantled much more frequently than assumed, which delivers a blow to several premises of modern agency theory (McCubbins et. al 1989; Moe 1989; Majone 1996). However, these insights are more meaningful for the branch of organization termination which is not the main focus of this analysis. Janet E. Frantz, on the other hand, attempts to reassess the political resources available to the proponents of termination on the basis of the constructivism-oriented “policy paradox” approach by Deborah Stone (see Stone 1997).

potential of cross-fertilisation since virtually all relevant political science theories explaining policy outputs of a political process are – at least in parts – potential theory candidates from such a process-to-outcome perspective on policy termination.

Methodological shortcomings: Finally, the termination literature was not able to offer satisfactory solutions for some crucial methodological problems. Firstly, the used concept of policy always remained peculiarly vague. If policy analysis is the study of policy content in the context of political processes and structures, it is even more astonishing that termination researchers have not systematically attempted to tackle the phenomenon of policy termination by means of a consistent typology of policy content or effects. Wherever this took place on a rudimentary basis, the descriptive and analytical insights gained were indeed convincing (Lambright/Sapolsky 1976; Kirkpatrick/Lester/Peterson 1999). Secondly, the explanandum, i.e. policy termination as the dependent variable was unnecessarily stripped of crucial variation. Most of the studies did select their cases for examination from only one end of the outcome continuum (termination) neglecting the other end of the possible outcome (non-termination). Thus their research designs inevitably were biasing their results. By just looking for cases of complete termination authors also imprudently refrained from developing more subtle heuristics in order to detect partial terminations as well or for the gradual desiccation of policies instead; hence potentially interesting but lower intensities of termination activities remained disregarded. Of course, the boundary lines between tactical political rhetoric and serious attempts at termination cannot easily be defined abstractly (see Daniels 2001: 252). However, in individual cases they indeed must be empirically distinguishable. Regardless of what this distinction might be, only an increase in variation of the dependent variable offers chances for arriving at theoretically rich conclusions with regard to causal relationships that influence policy termination.

5. Five Challenges for a New Policy Termination Approach

When striving for an empirically substantiated renewal of the policy termination, we must find tenable solutions for the subsequent conceptual challenges: distinguishing termination from other forms of policy change, engaging in systematic comparisons across countries and policy areas, clarifying the relationship between policy failure

and termination, bringing the policy content back into the study of *policy* termination and paying more attention to party politics.

Distinguishing termination from other forms of policy change: It is crucial to distinguish the concepts policy termination and dismantling from other forms of policy or organizational change (see Hall 1993; Dunsire/Hood 1989; Tarschys 1985; Levine 1978; Gourevitch 1986; Pierson 1994). Where does the boundary run between change, renewal and termination? The political arsenal of modern welfare states is subject to a continual, for the most part incremental process of change (Lindblom 1959; Hogwood/Peters 1985). However, change and reform do not only “turn over a new leaf”. They also generally have the effect that – at least – certain policy instruments, services, or individual policies are no longer applied or provided and certain overall or partial policy objectives are no longer pursued. The question whether it is possible to systematically explain why certain policy goals or policy instruments have lost their meaning and were terminated is generally not addressed.

Engaging in systematic comparisons across countries and policies: Robust generalizations on interdependences during the termination processes can also only realistically be expected in comparisons between different policy areas (reducing subsidies, cost savings in social programs, discontinuing regulations) and between different countries. The comparative approach has the decisive advantage of being able to draw on the experiences and existing explanatory mechanisms in institutionally as well as socio-economically different countries. In view of this, the prospects for success appear to be the greatest when it comes to systematically testing theoretically derived hypotheses and revealing actual causal relationships by means of a quasi-experimental research design. By doing so, we are able to test standard hypotheses according to the relevance of differences in the socio-economic level of development as well as the traditional veto-player variation between consensual and majoritarian political systems. Furthermore, questions must be addressed with regard to the impact of membership in international regimes such as the European Union or the WHO on national termination processes.

Clarifying the relationship between policy failure and termination: Another objective should be to track the relationship between policy failure and the probability of policy

termination and to find an explanation for why the inefficiency of policies frequently does not have negative effects on their persistence. In the administrative sciences, the paradox of the continuation of organizational units and policies in the execution and abolition of tasks is well known (Seibel 1997). The systematic explanation for the persistence of policies in light of their obvious inefficiency is a further challenge and could substantially complement the revised policy termination approach – in particular by means of systematically integrating non-termination phenomena in the face of the sub-optimal provision of services.

Bringing the policy content back into the study of policy termination: Should policy termination actually (again) become a fertile *policy*-analytical concept, the policy content must be brought to the fore more than in the past. Different program effects (distributive, redistributive), applied regulatory principles (incentive or offer-based regulation), and characteristics of the program structure (material services, immaterial services, regulatory) must be systematically scrutinized from the perspective of their specific effects on potential termination processes. It is only too probable that political conflicts over avoiding the termination of a policy in the area of research grants, social policy or taxation legislation are of a very different nature and ultimately characterized by different groups of actors as well. Termination research has yet to sufficiently tackle this challenge.

Paying more attention to party politics: Ultimately, classical party politics could also emerge as an important variable in the context of the policy termination research (see Schmidt 2003). Once again, it can be ascertained that the effects of party politics have yet to be attributed systematic explanatory power in the termination debate. The dominance of American literature may have had constrictive effects here, as the critics of “big government” – in particular at the level of the federal states on which most case studies are based – cannot be clearly assigned a particular partisan ideology. This is different at least in parts of Europe, though. The conservative and social-democratic or socialist camp often have relatively fixed views on whether priority is given to the responsibility of individual citizens or the state’s obligation to provide for citizens (see Bräuninger 2004).

6. Taking the Termination Approach a Modest Step Forward

It is obviously unrealistic to expect that within this short article it could be possible to remedy all deficiencies of the termination approach and to deliver satisfactory solutions for all of the key challenges suggested above. However, in this section I will show *one* possibility to take the termination approach a modest step forward by further differentiating termination concept and by extracting empirically testable hypotheses from the already existing termination literature. More precisely, I will take up the last challenge of a renewed termination approach mentioned in the previous section: party politics.

Initially, we should aim to rethink the classical categorization of policy termination, i.e. according to deLeon's program, policy, organization and function. This holds the more so as "organization" has remained somewhat "out of place" in this scheme and "functions" including essential state tasks such as redistribution, domestic security or defence (deLeon 1978a; see section 2), can indeed hardly be "dismantled" or terminated at this abstract level. A more realistic differentiation would allow us more fine-tuned insights into termination activities. I thus propose a distinction between the level of a provided service, instrument/type of service, program, policy aim, and state task.

Service, understood here as the extent of service includes the specification of certain levels of transfer payments or limits, which determine the distribution of subsidies or taxation privileges. Should – to take an example from Germany - recipients of unemployment benefits (type II) receive 400€ or 350€ or at what income level can certain deductions or benefits no longer be taken advantage of? Instruments are understood as a state payment in kind, a state service, a financial transfer or another regulatory service. A program bundles several instruments and several programs together to form a policy aim (nature protection, reducing the elderly poverty rate, policies for handicapped persons, equal opportunities). These policy aims in turn form state tasks (environmental protection, generation equality, solidarity, equal opportunity), which are either generally accepted or usually based on consensus.

Furthermore, the justified criticism that incremental political change prevails in western welfare states and revolutionary breaches with the past are seldom

(Lindblom 1959; Hogwood/Peters 1982, 1985; Weaver 1988; True/Jones/Baumgartner 1999) is to be taken seriously, but should also be made fertile for the termination perspective. For example, a categorization of the intensity of termination activities would be in order. In doing so, the term policy termination should be conceptualized as a special characteristic of political change. As regards the results, one might ideally distinguish between *status quo*, *substitution*, *reduction* and *elimination* as categories of policy termination with different intensities (see below). The intensity of the termination and thus the expected resistance by the involved actors would range from partial substitution to complete elimination without substitution. At the same time and following up on the distinctions made in the previous section, we may assume that termination decisions with regard to the provision of services, programs, political aims and state tasks are increasingly difficult for the politically responsible actors, because the necessary political support for termination will be increasingly difficult to generate in the indicated sequence.

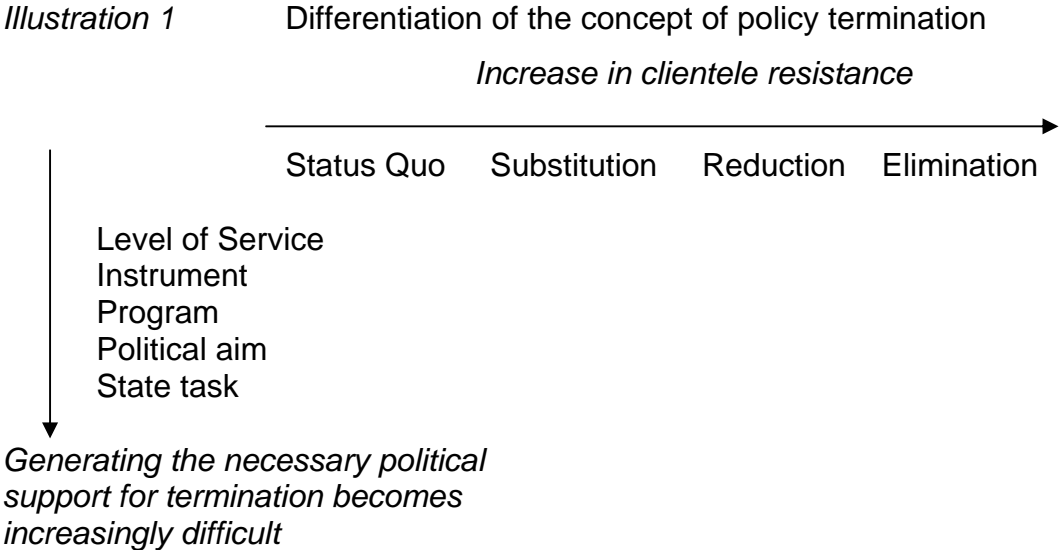


Illustration 1 helps to describe termination action. I would now like to take this illustration as a stepping-stone to develop an explanation for an intriguing question of the termination approach. How are we able to distinguish between policies with a high risk or a low risk of being terminated? After what has been said above about the methodological limitations of the termination debate, it should be obvious that a central challenge is to subsume policies or measures into certain groups and specify our expectations about how and with what intensity we expect them to be at risk of termination. Only if we advance on this analytical component, we can hope to

improve our research designs and thus to accumulate systematic knowledge about policy termination.

The explanation for the varying termination risks policies suffer that I will propose can be named “isolation thesis”, because I focus on two particular aspects both related to the extent of “embedded-ness” (or lack of it) of a particular policy; the less entrenched in the ideological struggle and the less embedded in the clientele support structure a policy is, the higher the risk of being singled out for termination. I call the first factor “profile aspect”. This means that public policies (in their specific form) are the result of political struggles between parties or between ruling coalitions and opposition. These party political actors usually have a specific identity or ideological self-perception which they hedge to be distinguishable for voters and which is the more salient the more it is a matter of the actual political struggle and internal cohesion. The closer a particular policy is to the ruling party’s “ideological core”, the more it is embedded therein and the lower the risk for termination. I call a second factor the “clientele aspect”. The point here is whether a termination – from the perspective of a ruling party or party coalition – affects negatively groups whose electoral support is needed to stay in power. In other words, how threatening is the resistance of those who are to suffer from a particular termination for the politician in power. It is clear that this is not just a matter of great number, but rather one of political clout and potential to mobilize and thus to avoid marginalisation on part of those potentially affected by termination. The logic here is that the higher the clientele weight, i.e. the more a particular policy termination affects negatively crucial parts of the clientele structure of a ruling party, the lower the risk that such a policy is actually be terminated. Hence, the profile aspect and the clientele aspect point to two different mechanisms operating on a continuum between embedding and isolating; the more politically isolated a policy thus becomes, the higher its risk of being terminated. These two crucial mechanisms can be combined in the following simple typology.

Illustration 2: Typology of Termination Risk Based on the Isolation-Thesis

		Importance to Party-Ideology Struggle	
		<i>Core</i>	<i>Periphery</i>
Clientele Weight	<i>Major</i>	sacrosanct policy	negotiable policy
	<i>Minor</i>	orthodox policy	dispensable policy

The likelihood of termination is very low for a *sacrosanct policy*. It is too important for the party-political power struggle as regards the ideological identity as well as clientele relationships and thus highly protected even in face of clear indicators of policy failure. From the termination perspective, we can expect the continuation of the status quo. The *orthodox policy* is important for the party-political identity, but the clientele factor plays only a minor role (see also Olson 1971). Still, imminent termination of an orthodox policy is unlikely due its strong ideological foundations. While some dismantling in the short-term appears possible as long as it remains on a low scale, in the middle- and long-term reassessments of the pay-offs of keeping certain party-ideological positions may suddenly however lead to a greater termination risk for policies in that quadrant. If the policy is at the party-ideological periphery with a high degree of clientele threat, we arrive at the type *negotiable policy*; i.e. especially in times of quickly changing governments or ruling coalitions policies in that quadrant face a termination risk since previously important party-ideological political struggles lose in significance. This may be the case, for example, if die-hard ideological adversaries of the past suddenly have to build a coalition government or when a party unexpectedly abandons traditional positions when formulating a new party manifesto. Finally, being at the periphery of the party-ideological struggle combined with weak clientele weight is probably the most uncomfortable policy position, thus the quadrant is named *dispensable policy*. Here neither party-political ideologies nor clientele weight protect the policies, which thus are the most isolated of the four developed categories as regards ideological profile and clientele weight. Such policies bear the greatest risk of being chosen for termination action.

The point here is not accuracy or innovation as regards the studying of party competition (see Katz/Mair 1994) but just to illustrate how the termination approach may be fruitfully brought to communicate with other relevant political science literatures. Thus, the explanatory factors developed on the basis of the proposed “isolation thesis” allow us to construct meaningful hypotheses and an analytical typology which helps us to construct groups of policies characterized by varying degrees of termination risk. The isolation thesis rests on crucial insights of classical termination theory – in particular those texts dedicated to anti-termination coalitions (Behn 1978) and ideological obstacles for termination (Cameron 1978). It appears empirically promising especially when – as has been suggested above – the termination focus lies on policies and includes the possibility of various termination intensities.

7. Outlook

Policy termination as a heuristic concept is only useful when it allows us to integrate certain phenomena or outcomes into special, delineated categories and thus subjects them to a systematic analysis. This article has made a modest step in the further development of the termination approach with the proposed differentiation of the policy termination concept in terms of outcomes (dismantling, substitution, elimination) as well as objects (level of a service, instrument, program, policy aim, state task). The isolation hypothesis grounded on aspects of ideological profiles and clientele structure in the context of party-political power struggle provides the basis for the presented analytical typology that may enable us to build such sub-groups of policies with varying risks of termination – a precondition for discovering patterns and better explanations in the future. Ultimately though, the explanatory utility of a renewed termination approach also depends on whether phenomena of policy termination and dismantling are actually of relevance in the real world. It is precisely here where I would see the most convincing argument for engaging further in policy termination analysis, since currently examples of policy retrenchment and dismantling states appear rather common in western welfare. Finally, this article is unlikely to settle the discussion whether policy termination research justifiably is the “neglected butt” (Behn 1978a: 413) of policy analysis. However, in light of increasingly intense

debates on the necessary reduction of public tasks of western welfare states, it appears to be justified and imperative to reassess the issue of political science's contribution to our understanding of termination processes.

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