

Policy theories in the crisis ?

Comparing the explanatory power of policy theories in the context of crisis

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Abstract

Policy theories aim at explaining policy decisions in general. But do these theories also contribute to our understanding of how policies come about in exceptional situations, such as major crises? Can the behavior of policy actors under business-as-usual conditions be analyzed with the same theoretical framework as their decision-making in situations characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity and urgency? The present article sets out to answer these questions by comparing two major strands of policy theories – policy process theories and policy output theories – and by assessing how their explanatory models fare under the specific circumstances of crisis. The main contribution of this paper is, therefore, theoretical: Based on the comparison of existing approaches and by evaluating their explanatory logic under the crisis circumstances, we develop a model of policy-making in crisis which puts the political actor center-stage. We argue not only that the crisis context enhances the chances of policy change, but that it also increases the influence of policy entrepreneurs, such as policy experts and interest groups, of political ideology and of international actors. In an empirical illustration using the Spanish pension reform of 2011, we probe our theoretical arguments and find that the majority of our expectations are confirmed – especially concerning the influence of political actors on the international level.

“The feeling of being overburdened is widespread within the Bundestag”¹

1 Introduction²

Policy-making in a crisis is different from policy-making in business-at-usual situations. As the introductory quote from the President of the German Bundestag concerning the decision-making mode during the financial crisis indicates, political actors in crisis situations have to cope with many different challenges: They face complex problems to which ready-made solutions are not available. They are subject to high uncertainty which is created not only by the complexity of the underlying problems but also by the uniqueness of the situation in which “agents can have no conception as to what possible outcomes are likely, and hence what their interests in such a situation in fact are” (Blyth 2002: 32). And, finally, they are often time-pressed and have to reach far-reaching decisions within a time-frame of 24 hours or less.

This, perhaps slightly exaggerated, description of policy-making in the crisis challenges existing theories of public policymaking. If highly complex policies have to be decided upon within several hours and if political actors are highly uncertain not only with regard to what might be appropriate policy solutions for a problem but also with regard to their own interests – how can scholars of public policy then analyze systematically the forces which explain the policy outcome? And what theories would help us to analyze the decision-making process in such situations? It is to questions like these that the present paper seeks to respond.

Our main contribution is *theoretical* in nature. We first discuss how different influential policy theories fare when they are used to explain policy-making in the crisis. Based on the insights from the comparison of different theories, second, we develop a model of crisis-policymaking which draws heavily on policy process theories (PPT) like the multiple streams approach (MSA) (Kingdon 1984) and punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Baumgartner *et al.* 2009) but also integrates some concepts of policy output theories (POT) such as partisan theory (Schmidt 1996) and institutionalism (Immergut 1990;

¹ Norbert Lammert, President of the German Bundestag, in an interview on the decision-making process in the context of the laws on the financial and euro crisis (Source: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/interview-mit-norbert-lammert-es-gibt-ein-gefuehl-der-ueberforderung-im-bundestag-a-788994.html>, translation by the authors).

² We acknowledge funding from the Nachwuchsring of the TU Kaiserslautern.

Tsebelis 1995). Unfortunately, efforts to systematically bring together these different theoretical perspectives under one roof have remained very limited. Apart from Real-Dato's (2009) proposal to include different approaches within the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (Ostrom 2007) and Schlager's (2007) suggestion to use ACF as the overarching theoretical structure, not much ink has been spilled on the questions how the different PPT relate to each other and if their integration is possible or advisable in analytical terms. Therefore, our endeavor is not only theoretically relevant in that it asks how different policy theories can explain policy-making in the crisis but also in that it discusses how the different theories relate to each other.

On the *empirical* level, we add to the existing literature by examining a prime instance of crisis-policymaking – namely the pension reform that the Spanish government implemented in 2010 in the midst of the financial and euro-crisis. This empirical illustration enables us to assess our theoretical model.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section (2) briefly discusses the main characteristics of policymaking in the context of a crisis. Building on these insights, we then discuss (3) how different existing policy theories model the policy-making process and in what ways they account for the specificities of the crisis context. This comparison is used to develop a theoretical model of crisis-policymaking in the second part of section 3. The empirical illustration of crisis policy-making is to be found in section 4. A final section discusses the results and concludes laying out prospects for further research.

2 The characteristics of crisis politics: Complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity and urgency

Crisis politics have always been a key concern of political scientists (see for instance: Haggard 2000 on the Asian financial crisis; Scharpf 1987 on policy-making during the oil crisis; Skocpol 1979 on social revolutions in political history). However, the nature of crisis has changed in the last decade or so. According to the literature on crisis management³ we

³ There is a rather extensive literature on crisis management and public policy which deals for instance with the importance of leadership in crises (see for instance the special issue edited by Boin 2009). However, this literature usually deals with more specific crisis events, such as natural disasters (Boin *et al.* 2010) or terrorist attacks (Nohrstedt and Hansén 2010), whereas we are more interested in the effects a more enduring crisis context exerts on public policy-making. We will therefore occasionally draw on this literature but do not build our theoretical model entirely on these studies.

have entered a new phase characterized by “transboundary crises” (Boin 2009: 367) which set themselves apart from the traditional crisis by their potential to cross different boundaries: of sectors, e.g. from the financial system to production; of regions and countries, e.g. by transnational actors; and of time, e.g. by the longevity of their effects. Clearly, the current crisis which originated in the financial sector but spilled over to many others (economy, state, society), was global in scope and has now lasted for several years, is a prime example of such a transboundary crisis. Consequently, it is a good example for examining in what ways patterns of public policy-making change in crisis situations and how policy theories can account for this development.

The notion of transboundary crises affecting different sectors and regions is closely linked to the concept of systemic risks (for a broader discussion: Goldin and Mariathasan 2014). Systemic risks “are not confined to national borders or a single sector, and do not fit the mono-causal model of risk” (Renn *et al.* 2011: 234) and if these risks result in a crisis, it will certainly cross different boundaries. Besides the fact that systemic risks are not constrained to national and sectoral boundaries, they are characterized by three qualities: a high degree of complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity (Renn *et al.* 2011: 234). Political actors facing such transboundary crisis situations have to cope with these three elements of the crisis. However, in addition to these elements, political actors usually have to make decisions under high time pressure, too, which makes urgency the fourth characteristics of their situation (Boin *et al.* 2005: 3). In what follows, we will briefly deal with these four elements and describe in what way they are useful to characterize the context of the financial and euro crisis in which governments had to take decisions.

Undoubtedly, crisis situations are characterized by *complexity*. For policy-makers, crises “unsettle long-held beliefs and disturb routines taken for granted during normal times without replacing them with something new (Starke *et al.* 2013: 5). This description is clearly appropriate if we look at the financial crisis. In the most acute phase, the complexity of the issues and the lack of readily available solutions to deal with them was one of the major problems that policy actors were confronted with. Given that the structure of the banking system and the financial sector as well as their regulations were (and still are) highly complicated (see the work by Busch 2009), Guy Peters argues even that “many governments did not even know what was happening in their banking sectors or in the economy more generally” (Peters *et al.* 2011: 14).

From this description, it is obvious that the enormous complexity of the underlying policy problems and their dynamics lead to high *uncertainty* with regard to what possible solutions could be effective (Boin *et al.* 2005: 3-4). The problems that caused the financial crisis in the banking sector were linked to very specific products and the regulation of these – an area where mainly specialists were involved. However, because even the experts put forward different measures without being sure that they would help, the political actors were in a paradoxical situation: On the one hand, they were confronted with lots of information and expert proposals, but, on the other hand, very uncertain in terms of possible outcomes of the policies. This description is very much in line with the understanding of uncertainty put forward in the literature on risk and crisis. This literature characterizes uncertainty as a situation where agents cannot be sure of the outcome of a decision because the complexity of the context as well as the cognitive limits of the actors themselves (in terms of information processing) prevents them from calculating the associated risks and probabilities.⁴

Besides complexity and uncertainty, systemic risks and the associated crises also cause ambiguity. Ambiguity is different from uncertainty in that it means that “there are different legitimate viewpoints from which to evaluate whether there are or could be adverse effects and whether these risks are tolerable or even acceptable” (Renn *et al.* 2011: 235). For policy-makers, ambiguity boils down to the fact that one and the same policy proposal can be evaluated completely differently from different angles and that even more information would not help to overcome this problem (in contrast to uncertainty). During the economic and financial crisis ambiguity was clearly present, as many of the policy problems could be interpreted from multiple perspectives opposing, for instance, the budgetary necessity of welfare cuts and the raising inequality and unemployment rates. As a result, policy actors are not only confronted with diverging interpretations of a policy problem but also uncertain on what elements to base their policy decisions.

A fourth element, which is not part of the original concept of systemic risks but of utmost importance in the context of almost every crisis, is time pressure: “Time compression is a defining element of crisis: the threat is here, it is real, and it must be dealt with as soon as possible (at least that’s the way it is perceived” (Boin *et al.* 2005: 3). *Urgency* was especially pertinent during the most acute phase of the financial crisis, when the banking sector was in turmoil and the governments put together emergency measures in order to save banks, to

⁴ It is this common understanding of uncertainty which lies at the heart of Herbert Simon’s idea of bounded rationality (Simon 1957).

offer guarantees for private savers, and so on. The need to act quickly was still clearly present when government decided upon major macroeconomic stimulus packages with the aim to strengthen demand. Sometimes, decisions had to be made within few hours as the markets were highly nervous. But also within the legislative process, the time pressure was very high, so high that parliamentarians were increasingly uneasy with taking far-reaching decisions within the time frame of a week or so (see the introductory quote).

Complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity and urgency – if crisis policy-making is characterized by these four elements, it is more than probable that the policy process and, eventually, policy outcomes and their explanations follow different logics than in the business-as-usual situations of day-to-day policy-making. However, the literature on crisis management has remained rather silent when it comes to the theoretical models explaining public policies introduced in reaction to the crisis. Clearly, in the aftermath of the recent financial and economic crises, scholars of public policy have increasingly addressed the question of how policies are made in the crisis: There is increasing literature on whether crises change the modes of governance (Boin 2009; Braun 2013; Peters *et al.* 2011) and a growing number of case studies inspecting the question whether crisis have led to substantial policy change (Casey 2012), as expected by historical institutionalists, or not (Starke *et al.* 2013; Vis *et al.* 2011). Besides, on a theoretical level, Starke *et al.* have shown that partisan differences are not completely ruled out when policy-making moves into the “crisis mode” – but that the partisan effect depends on the size of the welfare state (Starke *et al.* 2013: 176-179) . What is missing, however, is a more systematic account of how policy-making in the crisis characterized by complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity and urgency can actually be modelled theoretically. In other words: How do crisis characteristics affect our theoretical models of public policymaking? It is to this question the next section turns.

3 Policy theories in the crisis

Theories of public policy analysis fall into two broad categories. The first category consists of different theoretical approaches which focus primarily on the policy process – and which we therefore label policy process theories (PPT). The main goal of these theories is to retrace the process of public policy-making, usually starting with the problem definition and agenda setting phase and ending with the stage of the final decision of a policy in the political sphere (and, more seldomly, the phase of policy evaluation). The policy output is therefore explained

by looking very closely at the policy-making process and the different factors that shape this process, such as institutions, actors or exogenous forces. As the explanation involves a profound analysis of the policymaking process, contributions from this tradition are generally built on in-depth case studies or small-N-comparisons. The most influential theories in this tradition are the multiple streams approach (MSA) (Kingdon 1984), the advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier and Weible 2007) and punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Baumgartner *et al.* 2009).

The second category of policy theories is less concerned with the meticulous description of the policy process that generates a certain policy output. Instead, policy output theories (POT) are more concerned with identifying overall relationships between major characteristics of the political system (in a certain country, at a certain time) and the policy output. They often involve large-N-quantitative analyses and search for correlations between characteristics a selection of countries and the policies. Manfred G. Schmidt identifies six different theoretical approaches which all look at the specific influence of a certain characteristic on public policy outcomes (Schmidt 2002: 173-174): (1) partisan theory, which argues that the partisan complexion of the government affects its policies; (2) socio-economic theory which models policy outputs as functional responses of the state to societal or economic demands; (3) power-resource-theory that “explains public policy differences mainly in terms of power resources of social classes” (Schmidt 2002: 173); (4) the neo-institutionalist approach which argues that policies can be explained by the institutional setup of a country; (5) “policy inheritance”-theory which explains today’s policies as a result of feedback from policy choices in the past; And, (6), the view that international forces, such as globalization or Europeanization affect public policies of nation states.⁵ In the empirical literature on different policies, these approaches are usually combined – a prominent example being the explanation of public policies by the impact of partisan ideology and political institutions (e.g. Jensen and Mortensen 2014; Kittel and Obinger 2003; Wenzelburger 2014). Moreover, in regression models, variables representing the socio-economic approach, are most often included as “controls” as they impact quasi-automatically on policy outcomes (think, for instance, of the impact on a larger share of old aged people in the population on welfare state spending). However, although POTs do only seldom model the policy process directly, they at least implicitly acknowledge that the variables that shape public policies

⁵ This initial framework put forward by Schmidt has meanwhile be extended including additional categories, such as cultural variables (Wolf 2014), geographic constellations (Wolf and Pfohl 2014: 266), personal characteristics (Wagschal and Wenzelburger 2008) or discourse and political strategies (Wenzelburger 2011)..

affect the policy process at different stages and in different ways. One example is the modelling of institutional effects on public policies as conditioning variable on partisan effects, which basically comes down to the argument that the policy-makers and their ideological preferences which affect policy decisions are embedded in an institutional context that may or may not affect policy outcomes.

In what follows, we will discuss if and how these two different strands of policy theories can be useful when crisis policy-making is to be explained. From the PPTs, we draw mainly on the MSA and PET which are not only two of the major theories within this family but whose concepts have also influenced other theoretical approaches considerably (think for instance of the term “policy entrepreneur” which has not only been used MSA-studies where its origin lies, but also in research based on PET or ACF (Mintrom and Norman 2009), or of the idea that “windows of opportunities” facilitate policy change, originally put forward by Kingdon (1984) but also included in many policy studies outside the MSA-framework (Jacobs and Weaver 2014; True *et al.* 2007: 161)). From the POTs, we mainly focus on partisan and institutional accounts, but also include insights from the other four approaches. Aiming at a systematic comparison and inspired by Hofferbert (1974), we distinguish between (1) the influence of political actors, (2) the proximate context in which they interact and take decisions and the (3) distant context which provides the general setting of the policy process.

3.1 Policy actors and crisis policymaking

3.1.1 Policy actors in PPT and POT

“[H]uman beings have to act for there to be a policy” (Hofferbert 1974: 226) – this quote from Hofferbert’s book points to the crucial role that political decision-makers play in the policy process. This is also true when policymaking in crisis situations is to be analyzed – some observers even argue that the role individual policy actors play is even more crucial in such contexts (Boin *et al.* 2005: 139). However, political actors are treated rather differently in PPTs and POTs in several respects. *First*, political actors play a more prominent role in PPTs than in POTs. POTs usually only focus on the entire government and/or political parties as collective actors and do not give individual decision-makers a decisive role.⁶ Partisan

⁶ Only rarely do POT-style studies acknowledge the possibility that individual actors and their leadership qualities play a major role in the policy-making process (Wagschal and Wenzelburger 2012: 68).

theory, for instance, argues that the political ideology of the government affects policy outputs – without accounting for possible influences of individual actors and their preferences (Schmidt 1996). In contrast, the individual decision-makers and their cognitive capacities to process information and take decisions are in the center of PPTs. A particularly prominent role is ascribed to policy entrepreneurs. In PET, policy entrepreneurs are actors that influence the perceptions of the public (and decision-makers) related to a policy problem. They use framing strategies, argue that a specific issue needs to be addressed and push it on the governmental agenda. Policy entrepreneurs “labor to introduce these policies into the political system, probing for receptive venues and petitioning for widespread policy adoption” (Boushey 2013: 146). Even more central are individual policy entrepreneurs in MSA, which is probably the most actor-centered policy theory. According to MSA, without a skillful entrepreneur who couples the policy, politics and political stream and seizes the window of opportunity to implement change, the status quo will prevail. A skillful individual actor therefore is a necessary condition for policy change. Kingdon also gives three indications about the individual qualities of successful policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon 1984: 190): Policy change is more likely, (1) if a person has some claim to a hearing (experts, leaders of interest groups or people holding a formal position such as a committee chairman), (2) if a person is known for her political connections, and (3) if a person is persistent and not giving up easily.

Second, POTs and PPTs present different micro-foundations when they model the influence of political actors on public policies. Within the category of POTs, studies based on partisan theory usually treat governments as collective actors made up of parties and sometimes develop a micro-foundation based on the preferences of these parties (Häusermann *et al.* 2013)⁷. Usually, parties are expected to be either vote-seeking or policy-seeking (or both), and their preferences are mostly modelled spatially by taking into account party-voter-linkages relating the partisan position towards the policy to the position of their constituencies (or, more rarely, the party members (Schumacher *et al.* 2013)). In a recent article, Häusermann *et al.* (2013) present a third micro-foundation which connects parties to particularistic and clientelistic interests which exchange policies against vote blocks – a particular vote-seeking-link which might be important in certain circumstances and in certain political systems (Afonso *et al.* 2014).. Ultimately, in terms of the micro-foundation, the typical partisan theory

⁷ Admittedly, the need of a micro-foundation of the partisan theory is open to discussion. One could also argue that impact of partisan ideology on policies occurs on the macro-level without any relation to the micro-level. Individual policy-makers have certain ideologies which they implement – without taking into account the position of the voters, constituents or particularistic interests at all.

is therefore built on the claim that parties behave mostly rational. Governing parties look at their voters and implement the policies which please their constituents. In sharp contrast, PPTs model “bounded rational people interacting in institutional settings characterized by parallel and serial information processing” (Schlager 2007: 297). MSA and PET underscore the fact that political actors have to decide in ambiguous situations and within short time periods – which makes rational decisions unlikely: “[Q]uite often time constraints force politicians to make decisions without having formulated precise preferences” (Zahariadis 2014: 27). Differences between MSA and PET emerge only in details: Kingdon’s theory draws heavily on the garbage can model (Cohen *et al.* 1972) and stresses the ambiguity of the situation, Jones and Baumgartner have focused on information processing and have developed a nuanced understanding of the decision-making process which serves as micro-foundation for PET. Following the concept of bounded rationality and serial information processing developed by Simon (1957) they argue that political actors are unable to cope with all the information relevant for a decision on a certain policy problem and “are prisoners to their limited attention spans” (Jones and Baumgartner 2012: 3). Due to this information overload, individuals will be influenced by emotions and feelings of urgency when they have to decide how to deal with a policy problem (Baumgartner and Jones 2015). This handling of information is one of the main reasons for abrupt policy change:

“Policymakers are bombarded with diverse information from many different sources, with varying reliabilities. Much of this information has implications for the prioritization of policy action. Policymakers, as boundedly rational decision makers with human cognitive constraints, focus on some of this information and ignore most of it. This selective attention process has critical consequences for policymaking, and especially how the political system prioritizes problems for policy action.” (Jones and Baumgartner 2012: 7)

Summing up these points, PPTs emphasize the fact that individual political actors are key if we want to understand how policy outputs come about. However, according to PPT the decision-making situation is characterized in a way that makes rational decisions highly unlikely. Hence, a political actor in PPTs looks more like a “bricoleur” (Carstensen 2011), who deals with the problem at hand using the toolkit she has available at that moment. In contrast, partisan theory, the theoretical account within POT which takes into account political actors most prominently, models governments and parties as collective actors which decide rationally according to their preferences upon policies with the aim to satisfy their needs in terms of votes or policies.

3.1.2 *Policy actors in the crisis context*

We have argued above that the context of a crisis is characterized by complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity and urgency. Given this setting, it is crystal-clear from the discussion above, that the way how PPTs (MSA and PET) think about the environment in which political actors make decisions seems to be fulfilled particularly well. In such situations, political actors are confronted with uncertainty, urgency and complexity and have “many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena” (Feldman 1989: 5), which is the definition Zahariadis gives for ambiguity (Zahariadis 2003: 3). According to PPTs, policy change is probable in such situations: As political decision makers are confronted with ambiguity and information overload, they can only shift their attention to some policy-relevant issues and have to ignore others. Factors from the distant context, such as societal demands, socio-economic developments (as shown by indicators) or focusing events delineate some issues as more relevant than others. It is these problems that political actors shift their attention to, and it is these problems that may be addressed subsequently by public policy.

In contrast, POTs seem to be less well equipped to explain policy actors’ behavior. If one adheres to the vote-seeking perspective, governments in a crisis context will have a very hard time (or, literally, no time) to calculate the optimal ideological point of a certain policy with respect to the voters’ ideological positions. Hence, a micro-foundation of governmental behavior in a spatial model of vote-seeking parties based on a rational calculus of the policy-makers seems not to be appropriate in the crisis context. Instead, more than ever, such a situation would enhance the chances for policy entrepreneurs⁸, such as interest groups or policy experts to influence the policy-making process as they approach the policy-makers with policies and present them as solutions to the problem at stake. If interest groups can convince the political actor that adopting the solution would, additionally, make him win the votes of (at least) the interest group members, the vote-seeking motive might even play a role in such contexts (Häusermann’s argument on the impact of particularistic interests, see above).

⁸ Clearly, very different actors can be policy entrepreneurs (Mintrom and Norman 2009). In this paper, we primarily focus on interest groups and policy experts who try to push a reform proposal. These two categories comprise a large set of actors, such as NGOs, lobbies, corporatist interest groups, scientific experts, think tanks etc.. However, we do not model the political decision-makers as policy entrepreneurs in order to keep the theoretical model as parsimonious as possible. But it cannot be ruled out that a decision-maker acts as entrepreneur herself – e.g. for a certain lobby group.

From a policy-seeking point of view, however, one could also argue that ideology still matters: In a crisis situation where actors have to decide quickly on complex matters with high uncertainty could also lead political actors to either trust only their most deeply entrenched political values – and hence lead to clear-cut ideological differences in the policies adopted, say, by left-wing and conservative parties.⁹ In any case, these questions are left open in POTs but should be addressed if crisis policymaking is analyzed (for such a more profound analysis of partisan impact, see Starke *et al.* 2013).

Consequently, the insight from partisan theory that the ideology of political actors may or may not play an important role in crisis contexts can be integrated in the larger context of PPTs. If individual actors indeed behave in crisis situations as modelled by PPTs, this will either (from a vote-seeking-perspective) lead to a situation where vote-seeking calculations are impossible and access for interest-groups exchanging votes against policies or experts presenting readily available policy-solutions are strongly increased; or it will (from a policy-seeking point of view) lead to a situation where partisan ideology may actually play a particularly important role as a yardstick which is used to gauge the multiple policy proposals put forward in a situation of high complexity, uncertainty and urgency. We therefore expect that *the crisis context will increase the chances of policy change as political actors will be forced to shift their attention to certain outstanding policy problems and treat them as such. At the same time, either partisan ideology plays an important role serving as a simple yardstick according to which overloaded and time-pressed policy-makers choose among the proposed policies or experts and interest group representatives get access to the political actor and succeed in getting their policy proposal into the process.*

3.2 Proximate context and crisis policymaking

Political actors are embedded in a proximate environment whose characteristics affect their policy decisions. According to Hofferbert (1974: 228) mass political behavior, i.e. the impact of public opinion, and governmental institutions shaping the room for maneuver of a political actor are crucial. Additionally, a third influence which needs to be accounted for relates to the configuration and behavior of interest groups.

⁹ Admittedly, one could also argue that partisan differences should vanish if all parties “rally around the flag” during a crisis.

3.2.1 Proximate context in PPT and POT

POTs and PPTs do not attach the same importance to factors from the proximate context. *Institutions* are clearly more relevant in POTs. Theories from this tradition cover a wide range of institutional characteristics and to derive hypothesis on the impact of specific institutional features on a certain policy (e.g. constitutional courts on tax policy (Ganghof 2006)). Moreover, veto player theory (Tsebelis 2002) or veto point approaches (Huber *et al.* 1993; Immergut 1990; Schmidt 1996) aggregate different institutional characteristics into composite indices, examine the overall effect of institutional constraints on public policy-making and argue usually that the higher institutional barriers, the less probable is policy change. In addition, several studies have analyzed the institutional setup as a context variable conditioning the influence of partisan ideology on public policies (Kittel and Obinger 2003; Wenzelburger 2014). In sum, there is ample evidence from studies in the POT-tradition that the institutional setup of a country limits the room of manoeuvre a government has and therefore impacts heavily on public policy-making.

Although less prominent, the institutions are not absent in PPTs. However, their prominence varies from approach to approach. Whereas MSA has been criticized for its neglect of institutions (Schlager 2007: 306; Zahariadis 2014: 44), institutions play a major role in PET. They explain stick-and-slip-dynamics – long periods of stability and incremental change interrupted by large-scale policy change. The general argument is as follows: In normal times, institutions help policy-makers confronted with information overload and limited agenda space as they enable them to delegate decisions to subsystems and their actors. This results in a stable policy monopoly, whose members share a common policy image and have no benefits from big policy change, and which produces policy stability.¹⁰ However, at the same time, institutions can also explain why big changes happen. If an issue receives system-wide attention and is put on top of the agenda, the policy monopoly that had formerly assured policy stability collapses and policy change occurs. The extent of the change depends again on the institutional characteristics as policy change will be much more substantial, if institutional rules have prevented smaller adjustments from occurring in the past because, in

¹⁰ Differentiating between institutions in terms of decision costs (Jones *et al.* 2003), one would expect that institutions which are more reactive to external pressures for change might indeed adjust policies gradually in reaction to the changed environment whereas gradual policy change is less probable when institutional decision costs are higher (this even holds in comparative settings: Baumgartner *et al.* 2009).

this case, the need for change is most dramatic. In contrast, if the less stable institutions have already implemented some gradual adaptations, policy change will be smaller. Hence, although PET treats institutions as imposing gridlocks and constraints to policy change in line with POTs, it adds not only a micro foundation to this process but also explains dramatic change with institutional characteristics.

The impact of *public opinion* is more thoroughly modelled in PPTs. In POTs, public opinion only finds its way into policy decisions through the backdoor: Political actors are said to care not only about policy programs but also about re-election and, thus, about the popularity of policies (vote-seeking, see above). In PPTs, public opinion helps political actors to sort out important from less important problems and thereby affects the probability of policy change. In MSA, the public mood (Kingdon 1984: 153) as part of the politics stream may enable a political entrepreneur to push a certain policy proposal on the agenda and eventually get it adopted. And according to PET shifts in mass political attention are an important prerequisite for positive feedback cycles which cause policy change: “Positive feedback cycles result when mass political attention focuses system-wide attention to new dimensions of a policy problem. When this occurs, policy change occurs rapidly as new political actors and new jurisdictions become involved in policy-making” (Boushey 2013: 139). An important aspect in this connection is the “policy image”, which can be broadly defined as “the interaction of beliefs and values concerning a particular policy” (Baumgartner and Jones 1991: 1045) or as a collective understanding of a certain problem. Changing public opinion may challenge this policy image and lead to a breakdown of a policy monopoly which was stabilized by the image – resulting in substantial policy change (positive feedback, see above) is possible. In their study of crime policy, for instance, Baumgartner and Jones show not only how the change in public opinion towards crime paved the way for policy change but also that the new policy image also affected policy decisions (Jones and Baumgartner 2005: 260-262). In sum, changes in public opinion play a major role in PPTs as they facilitate policy change. POTs only account for this link via the vote-seeking preferences of the policy actors which is why they miss the important dynamics between individual preferences, the media and the policy dynamics at the macro level.

Concerning *interest groups*, POTs and PPTs converge in that they argue that interest groups raise the attention of policy-makers to certain issues (or dimensions of issues) which then increases the chances of a policy change. However, slight differences emerge when one digs deeper: Within PPTs, MSA focusses more on campaigns whereas PET pays more attention to

the question of venues and access points that organized interests have to the political system (e.g. Holyoke 2003). This is a striking similarity to the work of Immergut (1990) on political institutions as well as to the corporatism literature (Lehmbruch 1982; Siaroff 1999) which – within the POT tradition – deal with the question how interest groups get access to the policy-making process. In this respect, the corporatism literature can significantly add to the PPT tradition which is more closely related to the pluralistic American interest group system. A second tradition within POTs relates to the power resources theory (Korpi 1983) and is more concerned with how organized interests manage to push forward their concerns in terms of strikes, campaigns etc. Here, power resources theory is generally in accordance with the MSA concerning the impact of campaigns, but it is at the same time much more nuanced in the understanding of how the power resources of organized interests find their way into the political sphere and affect policies (Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 1983). Finally, interest groups can also be treated as powerful policy entrepreneurs according to MSA. From this perspective, MSA actually gives them a very central role within the policy making process as they can effectively push issues on the agenda and, ultimately, affect policy change.

3.2.2 *Proximate context in the crisis context*

How do the theories model the influence of proximate context factors in a situation characterized by complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity and urgency? In terms of institutions, PET is the only model which tackles the question how the effect of institutions may change in a context of information overload, whereas POTs always treat institutions as constraining factors for policy change irrespective of the context. Again, the micro-foundation is critical here. If we compare the rational-choice-based framework of Tsebelis (2002) and the reasoning of Jones and Baumgartner (2012) on how institutions shape information processing dynamics, the differences are obvious. Hence, from this perspective, it is straightforward to expect that *the crisis context will change the rules of the institutional game and may result in slip-dynamics characterized by the breakdown of institutionally generated policy monopolies and resulting in substantial policy change.*

In terms of public opinion, neither POTs nor PPTs clearly differentiate between business-at-usual situations and crisis context and it is rather difficult to deduct what the theories would expect in such a situation. Instead, the claims that public opinion plays a role are more

general in nature and it is difficult to make an argument based on the theories whether it should matter more or less to policy decisions in a crisis context.

This is different for the influence of interest groups. Here, PPTs seem to fit the crisis context better as they model active policy entrepreneurs seeking access to policy-makers in order to implement their policy proposals – an endeavor which is more promising in the context of a crisis where ready-made policy solutions are badly needed. In contrast, the picture that POTs draw of interest group influence – governments negotiating in institutionalized subsystems with interest groups on policies – seems to be much more appropriate when business-as-usual policy-making is to be explained. We therefore expect that *the crisis context gives considerable leeway to policy entrepreneurs from interest groups because time-pressed and overburdened decision-makers might be very open to their ready-made policy solutions.*

3.3 Distant context and crisis policymaking

3.3.1 Distant context in POT and PPT

The general environment in which policy-making takes place has an important impact on policy decisions taken by political actors. This is the conclusion of both, POTs and PPTs. However, POTs and PPTs differ in two respects: concerning (1) the specification of the causal relationship that is said to be at work between distant context factors and public policies, and (2) the question how to deal with external forces affecting the policy-making system which arise from the international environment (e.g. globalization).

Addressing the specification of causal relationships first, PPTs deliver a theory of why external factors from the distant context impact on public policymaking, whereas POTs remain silent when it comes to the specific causal mechanisms. The argument of PPTs draws on the micro-theory of information processing in the case of PET (Jones and Baumgartner 2012) and the garbage-can model in the case of MSA (Cohen *et al.* 1972), but the logic of the argument is comparable (see above). As policy-makers are confronted with information overload and limited attention spans (PET) and ambiguity (MSA), factors from the distant context, such as societal demands, socio-economic developments (as shown by indicators) or focusing events delineate some issues as more relevant than others. It is these problems that political actors shift their attention to, and it is these problems that may be addressed subsequently by public policy. In contrast, POTs do not address the causal mechanisms and

merely argue functionally that demands (socio-economic (e.g. Wilensky 2002) or value-based (e.g. Heichel *et al.* 2013)) arise from the socio-economic or international context and that political actors react somehow to these demands (Knill and Tosun 2012: 71-73).

The second point of divergence between PPTs and POTs in terms of distant context concerns the role of the international environment in general and globalization in particular. The “international hypothesis” within the POT-tradition argues that globalization affects public policy because “it changes the cost/benefit relations for certain policies” (Zohlnhöfer 2009: 109) and treats globalization as a major explanatory variable from the distant context. Moreover, globalization-induced diffusion of policy solutions from the international level to the national policy-making system is discussed in more recent studies, too. PPTs, in contrast, do not model international factors from the distant context explicitly – although they could introduce them in the existing concepts as globalization-related pressures to change tax policies could for instance arise from focusing events (such as a prominent de-localisation) or the gradual change of indicators (such as the income from corporate taxes).

3.3.2 *Distant context in the crisis context*

From the discussion of distant context above, it is self-evident that both POTs and PPTs account for the crisis context. Crises contain major “focusing events” (in PPT-parlance) or socio-economic pressures (in the terms of POT) to which governments will react. It is also clear from above that PPTs provide a micro-link explaining why major policy changes occur in crisis situations. In line with both strands of the theoretical literature we therefore expect that *the crisis context opens up a window for opportunity (via, for instance, focusing events, or changing indicators) which makes policy change more probable.*

Beyond this very general claim, POTs point out a second major source of influence, which is the international context – especially if crises are not limited to one region or country (see the definition of “transboundary crises” above):

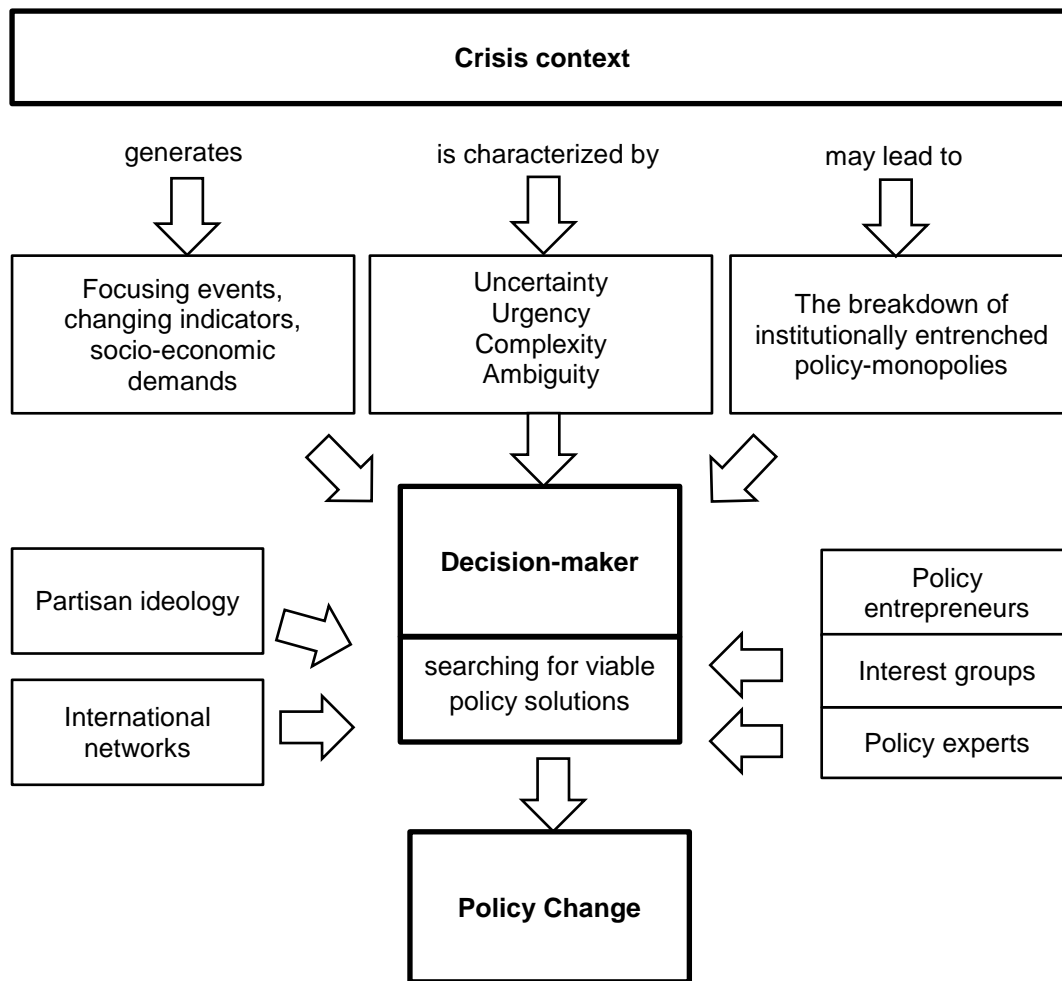
“Given the simultaneously experienced problems, the interdependence of domestic economies and the globalization of policies in various fields, national debates increasingly occur against the backdrop of a transnational discourse on appropriate crisis management. (...). The interest in transnational exchanges about appropriate crisis responses, which clearly also occurs during ‘normal times’, is especially strong in the aftermath of economic shocks.” (Starke *et al.* 2013: 8-9)

This expectation that the influence of international forces on public policy-making is especially strong in times of crisis has not been integrated in PPTs yet. However, as international forces are nothing more than one additional source from which policy solutions could find their way into the national policy-making process (think of G8-meetings during the financial crisis, for instance), they could be implemented in PPTs. What is still missing from this literature, yet, is a micro-foundation of this influence of international forces on national policy-making. Clearly, the reasoning of PPTs can help here as it gives us an idea why and under what circumstances political actors pay most attention to the policy solutions discussed at the international level. Summing up this point we therefore expect that *the crisis context increases the impact of international forces on national policy-making because (1) solutions adopted by other countries serve as a major point of reference for national policy-makers seeking policy-solutions for their problems and because (2) the transboundary character of crisis increases the chances for internationally coordinated policy responses.*

3.4 Building a model of policy-making in the crisis

The arguments and expectations from the discussion above enable us to develop a model of policy-making in the crisis drawing mainly on PPTs while including some aspects of POTs (see Figure 1). At the heart of our explanatory model is the decision maker in the context of crisis. The crisis situation challenges the decision-maker in at least three respects: First, it generates focusing events and socio-economic demands that put certain policies on top of the agenda and pressure the decision-maker to deal with them. Second, they challenge the decision-making process of the actor as they are characterized by uncertainty, urgency, complexity and ambiguity – a situation which the decision-maker has to cope with. And third, the crisis context may lead to a breakdown of institutionally entrenched policy monopolies that have dealt with policies in a certain subsystem hitherto – a situation which challenges the information processing capacities of the decision-maker even more. In such a situation, the policy theories discussed above suggest that substantial policy change is possible.

Figure 1: A theoretical model of policymaking in the crisis



What are the forces which affect the policy decisions that are finally taken in the crisis context? From the discussion above, three factors can be distilled: First, the partisan ideology of the political actors should make a difference. In times of crisis, political actors may resort to their core values and evaluate policy solutions according to them. Second, international networks could play a major role as an arena where policy solutions are discussed and evaluated. Moreover, agreements in such contest as to which policy solution should be adopted can affect national policy-making directly. Third, the influence of policy entrepreneurs should be especially relevant in the crisis context. Experts in a certain policy area and interest groups can be credibly present readily-made policy solutions to the time-pressed and uncertainty-plagued decision-makers. Their impact on the policy change should therefore be non-negligible. From this model, we can therefore deduct three concrete expectations which will guide our empirical analysis of two illustrative cases:

E1: Partisan ideology should be clearly visible in the crisis context as it can serve as a yardstick to decision-makers confronted with time pressure and information overload.

E2: Interest groups and policy experts should affect the policy-making substantially because they can credibly present ready-made solutions for the policy problem at hand.

E3: Policy proposals discussed on the international level should affect national policy-making in the crisis context because policy-makers are in need of quick solutions to be presented.

4 Empirical illustrations from pension policies in the crisis: The 2011 pension reform in Spain

This section aims at probing our theoretical expectations presented above in an empirical case study on the pension reform in Spain. We chose the case of Spain for this endeavor as the country was seriously affected by the financial and economic crisis in a way that comes close to our description of the crisis context characterized by urgency, complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. At the same time, the Spanish government maintained its autonomy in terms of fiscal and budgetary policies (unlike the countries participating in the bailout EU/IMF-programs¹¹) which is important if the crisis policymaking is to be assessed. In the following, we will briefly describe the context of the 2011 pension reform and discuss if and how the expectations developed above help us understand the crisis policymaking in Spain.

4.1 The context: Spain in the financial crisis

In 2008, after a first term characterized by strong economic growth and expansionary social policies, the Spanish citizens re-elected the PSOE and Prime Minister Zapatero who formed a Socialist minority government. However, the first signs of the fiscal and economic crisis became soon visible in the Spanish economy. In fact, the Spain was hit very hard by the crisis, especially due to debt accumulation in the housing and construction sector. With the credit-crunch unfolding, this sector suffered massively and the country experienced a deep recession with declining revenues from taxes, rising unemployment resulting in a steep increase in public deficits and debt. The first reaction of the Zapatero government was to implement a massive fiscal stimulus package which was among the largest within the group of OECD countries (Armingeon 2012: 552). In fact, the government refused to acknowledge that the country was strongly hit by the crisis and that austerity policies would be needed –

¹¹ The ESM-payments to Spain were earmarked and only directed at the financial sector.

maybe essentially underestimating the magnitude of the economic downturn (del Pino 2013; Kennedy 2011: 10). However, with the public finances deteriorating constantly during 2009, the government was urged to change course and announced a series of measures – and most importantly a pension reform.

4.2 *Spanish pension policy in the crisis: The way to the reform of 2011*

The initial step towards a pension reform was taken in January 2010, when the government announced to the surprise of the public, the political parties and the interest groups its determination to reform the pension system and, most importantly, to raise pension age from 65 to 67 years (Rodriguez 2010: 13). This announcement was made unilaterally by the government and meant a major departure from the tradition to discuss such issues with the opposition parties and the social partners.¹² In fact, only 1.5 years before, the Zapatero government had reaffirmed its commitment to a social dialogue with the social partners by the creation of a new commission “Comision de Seguimiento y Evaluacion del Dialogo Social” to deal with a wide range of social and economic issues including inter alia the adjustment of the pension system. This confirmation of the dialogue with the social partners “appeared to indicate that regular social concertation had become an institutionalized part of the policy-making process” (Hamann 2013: 131) and the creation of the new commission “led to the formation of new bargaining arenas to assess a multitude of issues” (Hamann 2013: 130). The announcement of pension reform measures by the government was unexpected, too, because the Zapatero government had initially chosen to address the question of the pension in its traditional way – by the announcement to hold a meeting of the Toledo-commission, a non-permanent parliamentary commission on pension issues in November 2008 (Rodriguez 2010). This commission had already heard some experts and a major debate between the members of the committee had surfaced in April 2009 when the governor of the Bank of Spain demanded a substantial and quick pension reform (Rodriguez 2010: 11) – a proposal which representatives of the government and especially the Minister of Labor as well as the unions criticized publicly. After this confrontation in early 2009, the debate on pensions slowed down and the nothing (apart from the deteriorating budgetary situation) seemed to point to a fast action by the government.

¹² In fact, pension policies in Spain are very much based on the Toledo-pact – a social pact initially adopted by an all-party compromise in 1995 and endorsed by employers and trade unions (Molina 2005; Molina 2011). The

Against this background, the powerful step towards a major pension reform undertaken by the government has to be seen as a major departure from the established policymaking path which is why the unions organized protests against the government's policy. However, not only the unions were upset, but also the representatives of the other parties in the Toledo-pact- commission. They "complained that the commissioners had been neither consulted nor informed about this initiative" (Chuliá 2011: 300). In contrast, the employer's association, the main opposition party and a number of experts, such as economists or the insurance employers association, welcomed the reform initiative and urged the government to act quickly (Rodriguez 2010: 13). The government, given the refusal of the reform proposal by the opposition and factions within their own party, announced that the announcement of the reform only was meant to be a proposal and not a policy – and that negotiations with the social partners on the substance of the reform were still possible.

Only a few months after the announcement of the pension reform plans, the government enacted a supplementary retrenchment bill by decree – including a five percent pay cut in for public sector employees and a pension freeze. Again, the unions were not amused – UGT secretary General Mendez stated that "the decree law has found its first victim: the social dialogue between public sector unions and the administration" (cited according to (Hamann 2013: 131-132)). The background for this additional cutback has to be found not only in the deteriorating public finances, but also on the international level:

"After returning from the EU summit on May 9, under International Monetary Fund Pressure, and after having received personal calls from Barak [sic!] Obama, Angela Merkel and Hu Jianto [sic!], Zapatero presented a comprehensive plan for deficit reduction." (del Pino 2013)

Whereas the pension freeze in the May package was primarily directed at mere budget consolidation, the pension reform announced in February was more structural in nature. The government, obviously trying to get the unions back on board, made an additional effort to reach an agreement with the social partners in early 2011 and announced that a consensus on the pension reform had to be found by January 2011 at the latest (Chuliá 2011: 300). If not, the government would act unilaterally. With the time frame firmly set, an increasing number of "experts" pointing to the necessity of a pension reform, and the public finances further deteriorating, the social dialogue proved to be successful and resulted in a tripartite agreement including not only the contentious pension reform but also measures directed at the labor market and social protection for the unemployed. In terms of pensions, the government succeeded in pushing through the symbolically relevant increase of the pension

age from 65 to 67 years, an adjustment of the calculation period for the pension from the last 15 to the last 25 years of a worker's earnings (leading to lower pensions) and a tightening of the conditions to access early retirement (Natali and Stamati 2014: 322). However, as part of the compromise, the deal also included the possibility for workers to retire at 65 years if they had contributed during 38.5 years.¹³ Finally, the agreement referred to “the introduction of an automatic review mechanism to adjust pension parameters to the demographic evolution from 2027 onwards” (Chuliá 2011: 300) – hence a sustainability factor whose exact mode of calculation was left open at that stage (Patxot *et al.* 2012: 6). The pension reform was finally approved in July 2011 by the Parliament with a slight majority.

4.3 Analysis

What can we learn from this brief description of the policy process that resulted in the first major pension reform in Spain after many years of status quo with regard to our theoretical framework developed above?

Concerning the factors affecting the probability of policy change, the results clearly illustrate the usefulness of our theoretical model. First of all, it is rather clear from the description that the economic and financial crisis indeed worked as a focusing event and opened a window of opportunity for the government to enact the pension reform (which would have been needed anyway according to many experts, given the demographic context in Spain). In fact, the crisis pushed the government to rapidly enact a major pension reform the consequences of which were not very clear to the policy-makers themselves – a prime example that urgent decisions are taken although the consequences are uncertain and the policies at stake rather complex:

“After so many years of sluggish pension reform, the hasty circumstances in which the 2011 reform was negotiated have hindered a suitable provision of data about the likely impact of the proposed changes on pension benefits. Neither before nor immediately after the publication of the agreement have the government or the social agents provided any indication of this impact” (Chuliá 2011: 301).

Second, it is also obvious that the institutionally entrenched policy monopolies which had produced only incremental change during the preceding years came under huge pressure in

¹³ All the changes will be phased in gradually from 2013.

the crisis context and that they were close to break down. The fact that the government acted unilaterally in several cases and that it essentially blackmailed the unions in January 2011 to reach an agreement (if not, it would enact a decree with the reform measures,) shows how the crisis context destabilized the existing policy monopolies of the Toledo pact and made substantial change possible. And finally, the crisis with its characteristics clearly pushed many other topics from the agenda and made pension reform the top issue the government dealt with. In sum, the context for rapid policy change was clearly set due to the conditions of the crisis.

The theoretical model developed above does not only identify facilitating conditions of policy change in the context of a crisis. Moreover, it suggests which forces shape the policy decisions in such situations. Again, using the example of the Spanish pension reform enables us to probe whether the expectations deduced from the theoretical model are present in the Spanish case. Our first expectation suggested that political actors would either resort to their core values in general and their partisan ideology in particular if they have to make decisions in the crisis context or embrace the policy solutions suggested to them by influential policy entrepreneurs such as experts or interest groups. The Spanish case delivers only mixed evidence with regard to this expectation. Concerning ideology, the contested pension reform was clearly not the ideologically preferred policy of the socialist Zapatero government. This was visible by the reluctance to address the issue in the first 1.5 years of the crisis and by the initial rejection of the proposals laid out by the Bank of Spain in early 2009. However, the partisan ideology might still have played a role in that the pension reform was not as far-reaching as some experts or the conservative opposition party (the PP) had demanded. Compared to the 2013 reform enacted by the conservative successor government led by Rajoy, the Zapatero-reform was rather modest in terms of welfare state retrenchment and ideological consideration might well have made the government shy back from even harsher cutbacks (such as a straight cut of replacement rates, as proposed by the Bank of Spain (Rodriguez 2010: 12).

Concerning the impact of interest groups and policy experts, which is also expected in our second hypothesis, the Spanish case provides at least some confirming evidence. Indeed, experts and interest groups did play a role during the negotiation process of the reform, but only to a certain extent. Clearly, interest groups were heard by the government during the negotiations of the reform, and clearly, policy experts such as the 100 economists assembled in the Spanish Foundation for Applied Economics or the Association of the Insurance

employers, did present policy solutions during the policy process. However, it seems from the case study that the international actors such as the IMF or the European Commission were at least equally important (see below).¹⁴ Consequently, for the Spanish case, although there is some evidence in line with the second expectation, it cannot be confirmed without reservation.

The third expectation of our model suggested that policy proposals discussed on the international level should affect national policy-making in the crisis context because policy-makers are in need of quick solutions to be presented. Here, the Spanish case seems to corroborate the expectation. The May package including the pension freeze was announced directly after the EU summit and resulted from increased pressure from several actors on the international level. This temporal dependence points to the relevance of the international level – and the EU in particular. Moreover, with regard to the debate on the more profound pension reform during the year 2009, several actors on the EU-level played a role. First, the Commissioner for Economic Affairs Joaquin Almunia, ex-boss of the governing PSOE and former trade unionist, came forward with statements on the urgency of a pension reform and the need to increase the de-facto pension age. And second, the Council in its statement on the Spanish stability program issued in July 2011 (just before the final adoption of the reform) urged the government to

“adopt the proposed pension reform to extend the statutory retirement age and increase the number of working years for the calculation of pensions as planned; regularly review pension parameters in line with changes to life expectancy, as planned, and develop further measures to improve lifelong learning for older workers” (Council of the European Union 2011).

Taken together, these indications seem to corroborate our expectation that the impact of international actors on national policies in times of crisis is particularly strong as national policy-makers are in search for policy solutions for the urgent problems they face at home.

Conclusion

This contribution aimed at examining how policy-making in the crisis differs from policy-making in business-at-usual situations. We have analyzed this question mainly theoretically and provided some illustrative empirical evidence. In order to build a theoretical model of the

¹⁴ For more thorough analysis of the European regulatory activities in terms of pensions (public, private and occupational schemes), see Wolf and Wenzelburger (2015)

policy-making in the crisis, we have, in a first step, compared how different policy theories fare when they are confronted with the specificities of the crisis context, namely that political decision-making is characterized by urgency, complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. We found that PPTs are generally better equipped to model the policy process under these circumstances, but that POTs can also offer valuable insights in certain phenomena, especially when it comes to the impact of partisan ideology and the international environment. Based on these insights, we have, in a second step, developed a theoretical model of policy-making in the crisis and deduced several expectations about how policies come about in such a context. In a third step, we have finally probed our arguments using the Spanish pension reform of 2011 as an empirical illustration. Although it was beyond the scope of this paper to present a fully-fledged analysis of the Spanish case, the description of the policy process which resulted in a major pension reform after many years of only incremental change enabled us to assess whether the theoretical model developed in the first section generates valuable insights in how policies are made in the crisis. The analysis suggests that indeed the basic pre-requisites for policy change as proposed in the model were clearly present in the Spanish case. The crisis context can to a large extent explain why the path of incremental policy-adaption was interrupted and why the 2011 reform finally enacted. In addition, some of the forces that we have expected to be influential when policies are made in the crisis seem to have affected the Spanish reform, too. This is especially true for the impact of international actors.

This illustrative case study is certainly not a systematic empirical test of our model. However, it sheds some light on the question whether policymaking differs in times of crisis and what forces gain importance compared to business-as-usual situations. More research in this direction is therefore clearly warranted – both on the empirical and on the theoretical side. Empirically, more case studies on different instances of reform policies in the crisis would enable us to test the arguments of the theoretical model more systematically. And theoretically, our model can surely be complemented by different theoretical streams. One major and obvious addition might be to integrate theoretical accounts which focus on the communication of reform policies, which certainly plays a role in crisis contexts. The literature on these issues is just starting to develop (König 2015; König and Wenzelburger 2014) and the insights from these studies could certainly be combined with our model of crisis policymaking focusing on the legitimizing efforts of policy-makers when justifying far-reaching policy change.

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