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Boekbespreking van: Policy and party competition

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heid dan Hampsher-Monk etaleert.

Hampsher-Monk zelf noemt zijn benadering van het onderwerp ouderwets. Hij bedoelt daarmee natuurlijk dat hij 'grote denkers' bestudeert en deze beschouwt als uitzonderlijk scherpzinnige individuen die, geplaatst tegenover de huns inziens onaanvaardbare politieke situatie in hun eigen tijd, probeerden principieel doordachte en universeel geldige oplossingen te bedenken. Zij slaagden daar uiteraard niet in. Toch leverden zij bijdragen tot ons inzicht in de politiek die ook nadat hun werkelijkheid al lang was verdwenen hun waarde hebben behouden. Zoals men weet hebben gezaghebbende historici als Pocock en Quentin Skinner deze vorm van geschiedschrijving gekritiseerd en gezocht naar een 'historistische' opzet. Men moest, ten eerste, in de teksten van de bestudeerde auteurs niet zoeken naar algehele consistentie en overerfbare waarheid maar deze plaatsen binnen hun eigen tijd, als reacties op tijdelijke problemen, gevangen in de 'talen', de 'discoursen' van de periode waarin zij ontstonden. Ten tweede kan men, volgens hen, een politieke discussie uit het verleden het beste begrijpen wanneer men naast de gecanoniseerde grootheden ook de theoretici van de tweede rang analyseert. Hampsher-Monk bestrijdt dit ietwat door het postmodernisme aangeraakte historisme niet, hij heeft er integendeel respect voor, maar acht het kennelijk voor het soort boek dat hij wilde schrijven minder geschikt. Toch laat hij wel degelijk zien door welke eigentijdse intellectuele vooronderstellingen zijn grote denkers werden gedreven en tegelijk beperkt. Zij vernieuwden thema's die zij erfden door ze te herformuleren en in een zorgvuldiger gesystematiseerd kader op een frisse manier te doordenken. Hij toont hen, om het zo te zeggen, in actie.

Soms heeft de lezer het idee dat hij, wijsgeer meer dan biograaf, daar niet geheel in slaagt. Slechts zelden heeft men bij het bestuderen van dit boek de indruk dat men begrijpt waarom de grote denkers zich hun leven lang met zo'n verbazingwekkend vasthoudendheid hebben ingespannen een verward, soms snel veranderend, schijnbaar van het toeval afhankelijk en hoogst explosief verschijnsel als de politiek te doorzien en het richting te geven. Zij riskeerden daarbij veel, ook persoonlijk. Het serene proza van Hampsher-Monk en zijn voorkeur voor het strikt logische exposé verhullen de dramatiek van de politieke theorie en de passie van de politieke denkers.

Hampsher-Monk is een zeer belezen man, die zijn boek voorzag van een uiterst nuttige bibliografie. Hij beperkt zich tot publikaties in het Engels. Zelfs de titels van de werken van Rousseau, Hegel en Marx vindt men hier uitsluitend in Engelse vertaling.

Dit werk is niet innovatief, maar het laat zien wat een prachtige resultaten ook samenvattende studies kunnen opleveren wanneer ze op het hier bereikte niveau van gedachte en stijl worden gecomponeerd.

E.H. Kossmann

Michael Laver en W. Ben Hunt, **Policy and party competition**. New York en London, Routledge, 1992.

Policy and party competition is a remarkable book for a number of reasons: it reports on an ambitious project of data-collection about party-systems that purports to develop a comparative data-base that allows for the investigation of existing theories of party systems (mainly based on Rational Choice assumptions) in parliamentary democracies. At the same time, it attempts to introduce some new insights with respect to the testing of the more sophisticated theories of party-competition and to develop the data-base in order to facilitate the testing of the hypotheses that can be derived from these theories. In my opinion, this project is very important and very much needed too. For, as the authors repeatedly state: there exists a gap between the level of theories and the range of data available to test these theories comparatively. At the same time, it may be asked to what extent their endeavour has been successful, both theoretically and methodologically. In this review, I shall first present an outline of the theoretical arguments in the book. Secondly, I shall discuss the way in which the authors collect their data, and the methodological choices they make. Thirdly, I shall discuss the empirical results based on these data with respect to the divisions in, and functioning of, party systems. Finally, I shall comment on the question to what extent the authors' approach to comparative political research on policy and politics is indeed a fruitful one, that other are well-advised to adopt.

Laver and Hunt's point of departure is that the relation between the policy priorities of parties and the preferences of voters is a central feature of party competition. Hence, it is assumed that parties by and large are responsive to the wishes of voters (and, of course, vice versa: that voters do indeed react to what parties promise in terms of policy). Party competition is then about parties developing priorities for the electorate at large. This well-known theory (based on Downs's seminal work) is here specified in terms of 'policy' (and not in terms of ideology, or of short term issue saliency, etc.). Policy is defined as a party's plan for action for the near future, and is, quite rightly, restricted to 'public' policy (legislative action directed at rewarding by means of policy outputs the whole electorate or segments thereof, rather than responding to the individual preferences of voters).

In view of this, Laver and Hunt argue that a one-dimensional representation of the relationship between the policy-priorities of parties and the 'wants' of voters is an admissible point of departure, but that it is not good enough for the more sophisticated theories of party competition (particularly those concerned with government formation and/or related policy-making). Firstly, because many theories suggest that party competition is about multi-dimensional policy-spaces; secondly, that parties *within* a party-system differ in the extent to which they attach weight to various policy-priorities. However, data-sets to investigate these assumptions are either scarce or not suited to examine this type of theory-development empirically. The ambitious aim of the authors is to examine this gap *and* to collect the data to bridge it. A tall order indeed, particularly because

their project concerns a *cross-national* enterprise.

In chapter 1 existing research designs focusing on spatial models are discussed. Laver and Hunt contend that hitherto: 'not only the operationalization of this approach is a more complex task (...) but that it also points to fundamental theoretical ambiguities that have thus far been swept under the carpet.' (p. 28) Therefore a data-set ought to be developed, which is not only methodologically valid and reliable, but that also enables us to examine the various models and the assumptions underlying them. The best way to go about this problem is, according to the authors, to conduct an expert survey.

Chapter 2 is devoted to examination of the pro's and con's of other types of data-gathering that have been developed to investigate the division and working of party systems (i.e.: Content Analysis of Policy Documents; analyses of Mass Survey Data; analyses of Government Expenditure Flows). The authors come to the conclusion that an 'expert survey' is a better research strategy than the other ones, because this research strategy enables a more comprehensive way of collecting the indicators to match the theoretical questions asked. In addition it enables a researcher to collect information on the relation between *policy-making* actors (i.e. parties) and *policy-taking* ones (voters). Moreover, it allows for a theory-guided survey of essential characteristics of the phenomena under review.

The survey was conducted among 1228 political scientists in 24 democracies, 355 of which (= 29%) responded (Ireland is at the top of the table and Switzerland holds the 'wooden spoon'). The results of the survey have been checked in terms of face validity by comparing them with existing scales and by controlling for potential bias by regressing the respondents' selfplacement with their overall placement of parties in terms of relative distances. These tests proved to be satisfactory. It is interesting to note, by the way, that from this analysis it appears that the Dutch respondents show a comparatively large amount of bias! (p. 130-131)

The results of the expert survey are fully reported in Appendix B to the book. They provide information on: 1) various party scales based on typical policy types (e.g. social and economic policy, environmental policy, etc.) and on so-called structural issues (urban vs. rural, centralization, religion, language, etc.); and 2) party system parameters, i.e. the way and the extent to which parties in parliament and government can and do effectively operate with respect to policy-making. In addition a number spatial representations are supplied to typify the division and working of party system in the countries under review. This presentation of the data is very interesting and makes in my view quite fascinating reading.

In chapter 3, 4 and 5 the data are extensively discussed in relation to existing theories of the patterned cross-national variation of party systems, the key parameters of party competition, and the influence of party-related policy priorities on the process of government formation.

On the basis of the data Laver and Hunt demonstrate that uni-dimensional interpretations of party systems across parliamentary democracies are too crude and too simplistic. Parties differ according to the saliency of issues as well as to

the policy domains involved (however, as they report on p. 48-49 and in Tables 3.3 and 3.4, the most common conflict dimension is the one on social and economic policy-making, which is considered by many as 'the' typical dimension representing Left vs. Right!). In addition they present evidence from which it appears that in many party systems there is a third cluster of parties that deviate from this basic dimension of the party system. For instance, in the Netherlands the VVD and D66 are in a different position, and should not be placed on the dominant dimension of the Dutch party system, where the PvdA and CDA are at the opposite poles (p. 53-55). Subsequently, a typology of party systems is developed that can be labelled as a policy-directed typology. It is concluded that a policy-based approach not only renders more precise information on the division of party systems, but also casts doubt on certain assumptions such as uni-dimensionality of a party-system and the uni-modal distribution of the electorate. Conversely, the type of party system rather defines the various modes of party competition.

In chapter 4 and 5 the working of party systems in relation to party competition and government formation is investigated. Matters such as the trade-off between office and policy, the time horizons of the actors involved, and the party-specific weights of policy domains are examined. The results reported in chapter 4 and in appendix B. are inductively developed and are of an exploratory nature. There appears to be regional variation regarding the extent to which parties are more or less policy-oriented. In Scandinavia and in the Low Countries there exists a stronger tendency to favour policy over office, and this is particularly the case with respect to the smaller left-wing parties, and to a lesser degree regarding the social democratic ones, whereas other parties (e.g. liberal and Christian democratic ones) tend to favour office over policy. The time horizon of politicians appears to be longer than is often thought. Parties, especially those with a policy-based strategy, tend to develop strategies of a medium-term range nature, rather than to live by the day.

Finally, Laver and Hunt claim that the much contested assumption about parties being unitary actors can indeed be upheld. Party leaders in particular appear to exert considerable influence over their parties and this has consequences for the ways in which parties operate with respect to the composition of the government.

Government formation is the subject of the last chapter, and two traditions of coalition-theory are examined: firstly the game-theoretical approach, and, secondly, the policy-driven models. As could be expected on the basis of already published work in this area, the latter approach appears to be more promising in terms of empirical validation. Both the models based on the distribution of portfolios (explaining government formation by office seeking as a means to control policy-making) and those based on the relative importance of policy dimensions (explaining cooperation between parties by means of shared policy priorities) work quite well in comparison to the more mathematical approaches to government formation. However, the main gain of their research is, according to Laver and Hunt, not so much the ability to assess which of these

approaches is best, but that shows that the data set based on expert survey is indeed an appropriate instrument to control for many of the underlying assumptions of the contested models of government formation, and that it allows for a more comprehensive and robust test of many of these approaches. The crucial question with respect to this type of data-collection is then whether or not the data-set, together with the theoretically guided research strategy constitute indeed the proper method to conduct comparative research of party systems in parliamentary democracies.

At various places Laver and Hunt warn the reader to be prudent with the data they have collected and presented. For, on the one hand, their validity is difficult to corroborate, and, on the other, the data they provide to meet theoretical demands are still rather unsophisticated. Apart from the fact that such warnings are honest and needed, it remains to be seen whether the authors' claim to have found a way to bridge the gap between sophisticated theorizing and poor and incomplete data is warranted. Hence, we should ask ourselves whether or not the means, i.e. expert survey, serves the end, i.e. the testing of sophisticated theories by means of an adequate data-set. According to the authors expert surveys are a better instrument than, for instance, data based on contents analysis or on expenditure flows. However, one wonders whether this is true or not. For, first of all, expert surveys are based on *personal* views and are ultimately nothing more (or less) than 'hear-say evidence'. Secondly, they suffer from the fact that they are collected at *one point in time*, hence under historically specific circumstances (e.g.: would Italian experts fill out their questionnaires today in exactly the same way as they did around 1987?). Of course, this is the eternal problem of Scylla and Charybdis, and I agree with Laver and Hunt that to possess some well-documented and structured data is better than relying purely on (more or less) calculated guesses or on conventional wisdom.

Nevertheless, I take issue with their claim that it is the best way to go. Data based on policy-documents and expenditure flows both have strong points in their favour. They allow for a data-set over various points in time and they can be reconstructed to examine the party positions of *all* parties, if one wishes to do so. For instance, policy programmes of opposition parties can be recalculated in terms of relative importance of policy domains in terms of counterfactual public expenditure flows. Alternatively, issues not yet taken into account in the Manifesto Research project at the present time can be investigated (provided the money and manpower is available). Furthermore, there is less room for bias because of the relative 'objective' status of these data. When all is said and done, it seems a better way to attempt to *combine* the different strategies to collect the appropriate data, than to adopt only one of these. In addition, this would allow for more extensive checks on (face) validity and reliability of the data at hand.

A second point of concern is the *comparability* of the data gathered. Although the authors make clear that we ought to be prudent with drawing conclusions as if these were genuinely comparative, they attempt at the same time to reach such conclusions. Actually, I do not blame them for trying to do so, but I wish to emphasize that the data are based on *country*-surveys (which has a methodolo-

gical advantage, in that the experts probably have not aired contaminated views based on comparative knowledge). This means that the transformation of the data into weighted means and relative measures of distances remain nationally based ones. It would need further steps of data-transformation to turn them into truly comparative variables (but, as Laver and Hunt urge the readers, we should roll up our sleeves and start doing this ourselves, as they report most of the raw data in full). However, there are limits to this solution: the data are by and large *actor-oriented* (parties, leaders, governments, electorates). In order to analyse in more detail a number of the more sophisticated theories, such as the ones on parties as rational actors, on parties in government or in forming one, we need to elaborate the *institutional* room for manoeuvre both in a specific system under review as well as in comparative perspective. It remains to be seen to what extent this is possible by means of these data.

All in all, it can be concluded that, notwithstanding the above criticisms, Laver and Hunt have done a tremendous job in: 1) pointing out the weakness of the relation between (comparative) political theory and (cross-national) data available; 2) convincing their readership that the development of more imaginative research designs is necessary; and 3) presenting in a very lucid and extensive fashion the relevant theories and the research strategies used in relation to the data gathered. All comparativists interested in democratic politics, especially those interested in studying the working of party systems, should study this book, and, whether they agree with its contents or not, their research is bound to profit from it.

J.E. Keman

M.F.J. van Tilburg, **Lokaal of Nationaal? Het lokale karakter van de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen in Nederlandse gemeenten (1974-1990)**. VNG Uitgeverij, 's-Gravenhage, 1993.

Verkiezingen voor de Tweede Kamer worden met enige regelmaat aangeduid als verkiezingen van de eerste orde, terwijl verkiezingen voor de Gemeenteraad, Provinciale Staten, en het Europese Parlement bekend staan als verkiezingen van de tweede orde. Een belangrijke vraag die een groeiend aantal politicologen bezighoudt, is die naar het specifieke gemeentelijke, provinciale, of Europese karakter van deze tweede-ordeverkiezingen. Volgens velen zou de Nederlandse kiezer, voor zover deze het sowieso nog de moeite waard vindt om de gang naar de stembus te maken, zich overwegend laten leiden door nationale overwegingen. Dit alles zou een verzwakking inhouden van het specifieke gemeentelijke, provinciale, of Europese karakter van tweede-ordeverkiezingen. Op zijn beurt zou dit een aantasting vormen van het mandaat van de voor de betreffende raden gekozen politici, en daarmee van het functioneren van de gemeentelijke, provinciale en Europese democratie.

Tegen deze achtergrond is Van Tilburgs dissertatie met de ambitieuze titel