



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Boekbespreking van: Collective Choice Processes: A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Foreign Policy

Mokken, R.J.

Citation

Mokken, R. J. (1999). Boekbespreking van: Collective Choice Processes: A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Foreign Policy. *Acta Politica*, 34: 1999(4), 388-393. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450669>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450669>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

appropriate, in the Netherlands the courts might well prove to be more responsive to religious minorities than the political institutions. Thus, although Monsma and Soper are right in claiming that in the past "judicial interpretations have not been a dominant influence on the development of free exercise rights, as they have in the United States" (p. 63), the shift from the pluralist model to strict separation is likely to be yet another factor contributing to the judicialization of politics in the Netherlands.

Hans-Martien ten Napel

Irmtraud N. Gallhofer and Willem E. Saris, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Political Argumentation*, Praeger, Westport 1996, ISBN 0-275-95433-1, \$ 65.00;

Irmtraud N. Gallhofer and Willem E. Saris, *Collective Choice Processes: A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, Praeger, Westport 1997, ISBN 0-275-96029-3, \$ 59.95.

These two volumes cover two decades of research into foreign policy decision-making. The objective is twofold: in the first book ('Argumentation' below), it is to study the structure of individual argumentation in political discourse, and in the second book ('Choice' below), it is to determine collective argument as a sequential process whereby individual contributions lead to a collective decision. Principal data sources are documentary data in the form of available minutes of cabinet meetings, and associated documents such as memoirs of participating politicians.

The first volume consists of two parts. Part 1 presents in seven chapters and a summary a qualitative analysis of individual argumentation. Part 2, consisting of six chapters and a summary, presents a quantitative study of the arguments used by individuals.

After a general introduction to argumentation theories in chapter 1, the authors unfold their own framework and methodology in chapters 2 and 3. The concept of a decision tree and its decision table is used: from the root (the event or problem to be decided) the set of decision alternatives (strategies) branches out to the respective outcomes each with its (subjective) probability of effectuation and associated utility. With respect to its application the authors follow a rather pragmatic approach, based on the likely level of detail (with intensity/without intensity) to be observed for the probabilities and utilities as mentioned in political discourse. 'With intensity' denotes the verbal expression of graded indications such as 'certain', 'very likely', etc.; the 'without intensity' category denotes dichotomized expressions such as certain *vs.* impossible, and good *vs.* bad.

A combination of these categories for both probabilities and utilities leads to four classes of information precision: Class I (probabilities and utilities both with intensities), Class II (graded probabilities, ungraded utilities), Class III (ungraded

probabilities, graded utilities) and Class IV (both probabilities and utilities without intensities). In practice, Class I, with its rather sophisticated level of detail, proved to be rare in political discourse.

For each class, appropriate decision rules should lead to the choice of a strategy by the individual decision-maker. For Class I these rules involve computational activities (expected utility) which are not likely to be observed in explicit form in discourse. Class II is seen to be determined by risk-avoidance rules: positive for select strategy with highest probability of positive outcome; or negative for select strategy with lowest probability of negative outcome. For Class III a complicating factor is the relevance of outcomes with multiple attributes and corresponding multiple attribute utilities (MAUT). For a simple case a minimax (or maximin) rule can suffice, but for MAUT several rules are conceivable, such as lexicographic, utility sum and dominance rules. The dominance rule (choose the strategy that is better on at least one dimension and not worse on others) is expected to be most likely here. Class IV, finally, is characterized by what the authors refer to as Simon rules. 'Simon's rule' chooses the strategy with only positive outcomes; 'reversed Simon rule' excludes all strategies leading only to negative outcomes, if an alternative with at least one positive outcome is available.

The result is a template with which an argument can be represented as a decision tree or table, corresponding to one of the classes, together with its inferred decision rule, some information concerning relevant conditions, and the preferred outcome as its conclusion. Thus a uniform framework is given for the type of argumentation used by individual political actors to formulate and legitimate their own preferences in political debate or discourse. Chapter 3 develops coding procedures with good reliability for the application to individual political argumentation in texts.

This type of argumentation analysis is demonstrated in the chapters 4 to 7, covering four critical situations in recent history. First, the argumentation of members of the Austro-Hungarian Common Council of Ministers in July 1914, leading to the declaration of war on Serbia and World War I; second, a sequence of three decisions made by Hitler between November 1937 and August 1939, initiating World War II; third, the arguments of President Kennedy and his advisers during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962; and last, the deliberations in the Dutch cabinet, which in December 1948 led to the second military operation of the Dutch against the Indonesian republic. The qualitative analyses of Part 1 conclude with a description of the various types of argument and rules found for 31 individual arguments studied in that way.

In Part 2 of 'Argumentation', six chapters report several quantitative studies concerning the general validity and applicability of the basics of the decision template in individual argumentation. The qualitative study demonstrated that the decision rules, by which individual decision-makers came to their conclusion, did not appear in their argumentation. Apparently these were obvious to others. In chapter 8 these findings are tested in two studies. The first study involves a random sample from a population of 136 Dutch cabinet decision situations in the first half of the twentieth century – 42 in the period 1914-1945 and 94 in the period 1945-1955 (the Indonesian

war of independence and post-war recovery in The Netherlands) – involving 404 individual arguments of cabinet members and advisers. A sample of 231 arguments resulted in 53 individual arguments for the first period and 178 for the post-war period. The quantitative analysis confirmed that the decision template in text analysis was quite capable of detecting the decision rules, leading to the choice of the decision-maker.

Seven argumentation rules were together almost able to predict perfectly the 231 choices of politicians, and six of those seven rules covered 219 choices, due to a considerable reduction of information and simplification as part of the argument, enabling the application of the dominance principle.

The obviousness of such latent decision rules to others was tested in a second study by means of a small survey of the Dutch population. Thirteen decision problems, exemplifying the different decision rules, were selected from the foreign policy dataset, and presented to a random sample of 59 members of households, using the tele-interview method. Analysis of the resulting 767 protocols showed that almost all subjects (99%) chose the same strategy as the politicians. There was less agreement (86%) as to the decision rule applied, the differences depended on education only. The conclusion was that this approach is a valid way to detect implicit individual decision rules in political argumentation.

Chapter 9 concerns the quality of the arguments in terms of the Dominance Principle. An analysis of 219 proposed decisions showed that 163 of them were correct according to that criterion, implying that through simplification and problem restriction political argumentation leads to the presentation of a dominance structure.

The last three chapters investigate the effect of external and internal characteristics. Differences in individual argumentation are explained using situational, organizational, external actor, social context and personal characteristics, as explained in chapter 10.

Chapter 11 studies factors for the specification of the strategies in individual argument. Four conditions emerge as important: whether an ally or non-ally is concerned; is the decision-maker the initiator or is a reaction to another nation involved; is he facing external conflictive/cooperative behaviour, and finally, the degree of satisfaction with the status quo. In Chapter 12 factors concerning the specification of outcomes in individual political arguments are traced. The initial expectation is confirmed that the conditions crisis, issue area and departmental affiliation all played a role. In particular, in crisis situations a short-term time frame was imposed to reduce the problem to the preferred outcomes.

Finally, in Chapter 13 factors concerning the uses of decision rules are studied, as related to the four classes of individual argumentation the authors distinguish. Depending on the situation and other participating decision-makers, actors can and do freely use the range of argumentation rules. This is illustrated by an analysis of the argumentation used by the last Dutch governor general Van Mook in the summer of 1947, in which eight arguments, with six different rules, were used sequentially, in

support of the single proposed conclusion to occupy the seat of the Indonesian government in Jogjakarta.

The volume 'Argumentation' gives an interesting, new perspective on the text analysis of documentary individual political argumentation. Conventional methods of quantitative content analysis usually rely on discrete categorical systems, to code fragments of text for further statistical data analysis. Here the decision tree serves in qualitative case studies as a frame for sets of text fragments, to be connected into arguments of seven or six basic argumentation styles with corresponding rules. At the same time the basic elements of the template can be used in quantitative analyses to relate characteristics of argumentation to external aspects.

'Argumentation' describes how individual decision-makers present their argumentation in the decision-making bodies in which they participate. It does not tell us how their proposed decisions result in a final decision of those bodies. That is the purpose of the second volume on collective choice. 'Choice' also consists of a qualitative part (eight chapters and a summary), followed by a quantitative part (three chapters and a summary).

The decision theoretic approach of 'Argumentation' might lead the reader to expect similar inspiration from the literature on collective choice for the volume on 'Choice'. That is not the case. In Chapter 1 a rather cursory overview of possible theoretical frameworks is given. Collective choice and decision theoretic approaches ('objective' rationality) are then dispelled from further consideration.

The actual theoretical framework and methodology of Chapters 2 and 3 show a different perspective, mainly based on communications research. A process model, inspired by Poole et al., is used to code recorded meetings in terms of three basic, sequentially related steps: problem-oriented interactions (step 1), solution-oriented interactions (step 2), aggregation of individual preferences in case of disagreement (conflict-oriented: step 3). Each of these consists of several interaction subcategories. Next to these, interaction categories are used for the later stages of collective decision-making: implementation-oriented, the result of the meeting (decision taken, decision postponed), as well as the type of aggregation rule, as inferred from the texts.

Thus a meeting is represented by a time-sequential meeting profile, where each act is plotted according to its sequence number against the various interaction (sub)-categories, running from the initial stages of problem orientation, through solution formulation and critique, disagreement and conflict-orientation, to implementation-oriented acts, ending with decision postponement or decision taken. A number of attributes were registered for the decision-maker, such as department and party affiliation, and position in the cabinet (key minister, minister, adviser), and the crisis/non-crisis nature of the decision situation.

Chapter 2 contains a set of twelve propositions concerning the expected nature of the decision processes. Their basic conditions concern the type of decision-making group and the crisis/non-crisis nature of the decision problem. Four types of groups are distinguished, following Hermann et al.: groups with a predominant leader

(insensitive to advice /sensitive to advice, respectively); homogeneous or single groups; and heterogeneous or multiple autonomous groups. Four propositions, mainly relating to the first three group types, are illustrated in Part I, the other eight are tested in the quantitative analysis of Part II. Chapters 4 to 8 look again at the four case studies used in 'Argumentation', just in a different order, according to the group type they illustrate. Chapter 4 briefly describes the process profiles for the two meetings on August 22 1939, when Hitler informed his supreme commanders of his decision to invade Poland. This exemplifies quite simply the situation of a group with a predominant leader, insensitive to advice, trivially confirming the relevant propositions. This case of just a single contributing actor also illustrates the totally different and complementary perspectives of the two books. In 'Argumentation', for each of the arguments of any actor concerned (i.e., Hitler), the decision tree template gives the corresponding argument style. In 'Choice' these arguments of the individual actors are absent, elements of them eventually playing a role in the determination of sequential acts, to represent the collective argument as a process profile. Here the collective argument profile is virtually determined by the acts of a single actor (Hitler).

The situation of a predominant leader, who is susceptible to advice, is illustrated in detail in chapter 5, where the Kennedy government meetings concerning the Cuban missile crisis, from October 16 to October 28 1962, are again spelled out, this time in process profiles for five relevant meetings. They show how President Kennedy, initially inclined to a speedy decision, and showing a hawkish stance, finally decided on the more cautious option of a naval blockade of Cuba, after various rounds of discussions, where the interactions recycled from problem analysis to implementation and back again, involving various military and diplomatic options. The propositions for this case were thus fulfilled: no aggregation rule, as the President took the final decision after exhaustive consultation of his officials and advisers, no conflict management, as the latter were approached for their expertise and advice only.

The third type, a homogeneous or single group, is illustrated by the deliberations of the Austro-Hungarian Common Council of Ministers in July 1914, leading to World War I. Although only small (five members), this decision unit showed some internal disagreement, as the Hungarian prime minister disagreed with the initial position of a pre-emptive ultimatum to Serbia, warranting a declaration of war. This shows the different course of a decision process when there is internal disagreement, according to a quality distinction which the authors use throughout the book. In decision units with concordance among its participants, the processes follow an *analytic mode* of collective discourse. As a result of problem analysis, solution seeking and critique, a range of options is brought forward and their outcomes evaluated, frequently in recursive cycles. This was shown by the Cuban missile crisis of the previous chapter. With internal disagreement, a different approach is needed. It is called the *cybernetic mode*, after Maoz, and is an algorithmic process where, under the pressure to reach consensus, a compromise is sought by means of a Lindblom-like incremental search of the nearest attainable solution, without further consideration of outcomes and their consequences.

The final decision of the Austro-Hungarian cabinet, a slightly amended version of the original pre-emptive ultimatum proposal, is a case in point.

The fourth and last kind of group, heterogeneous or multiple autonomous, is illustrated by a return to the handling of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict in the Dutch extra-parliamentary cabinet (Drees-Van Schaik) in the last quarter of 1948. This is discussed in two chapters. In chapter 7 the first part of that process covers the period from the end of October to mid-December. It is seen as consensual decision-making in a heterogeneous group. Across three decision phases and nine sessions, with seven process profiles, we see how an internally divided, but consensually operating, cabinet managed to come to the decision at its meeting of 13 December 1948, to initiate military action in Indonesia at short notice. In chapter 8 this decision is questioned again, due to a possibly positive personal telegram from the republican vice-president (Hatta). The ensuing decision track from December 14 up to December 18 is shown to cover two decision phases, the first involving eight meetings (five of which were on December 15), the second involving two cabinet meetings. Ten process profiles reflect the sequence. They show a deeply divided cabinet, beyond hopes of consensus, resorting to repeated votes, and finally offering its resignation, which was not accepted by the newly appointed (4 September 1948) Queen Juliana in view of the external crisis. In the end the cabinet reached a procedural consensus leading to an authorization to start military action.

This example demonstrates how heterogeneous, internally divided groups, in crisis situations, forego a consensus, and have to resort to the cybernetic mode where, irrespective of outcomes and consequences, a solution is reached by incremental adaptations, which can be based at least on a majority.

Part 2 continues with a quantitative study of collective decision processes in a heterogeneous decision unit, the most interesting case, testing the remaining propositions. Three of those refer to the decision process, another four to aggregation rules, the last one concerning the decision-mode (analytic/cybernetic). Chapter 9 describes the design of the study. The same 136 foreign policy decision situations of Dutch cabinets are used as in 'Argumentation', for the periods 1900-1945 and 1945-1955; a smaller sample (49 minutes of meetings) was used for analysis. Following Poole et al., the processes are analysed in Chapter 10 as sequential clusters of interaction (sub)categories, which made it possible to assess the effects of crisis or internal conflict. The proposition that in non-crisis situations more time can be spent on problem-oriented acts proved to be tenable. For the case of internal disagreement, contrary to expectation, conflict-oriented acts tended to multiply in later stages, needing more conflict management.

Chapter 11 focuses on the preference rules used by Dutch cabinets to reach final decisions. A basic premise is that decision groups strive for consensus as the most preferred form of aggregation rule. According to specific group norms, different options can be chosen when no initial consensus is apparent, such as postponement, shifts of the argumentation toward a more acceptable compromise, shift to another