
5. The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory in Latin America

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) developed by Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones offers insights into the dynamics of public policy and political change within democratic systems. At its core, PET suggests that policy evolution is characterized by extended periods of stability interspersed with sudden bursts of rapid change. During times of stability, policies remain largely unchanged, with occasional minor adjustments (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Jones, Baumgartner & True, 1995). However, significant policy shifts occur sporadically, often triggered by factors like public opinion shifts, election results, crises, or alterations in political power dynamics.

Baumgartner and Jones elucidate how policy agendas are determined, how issues gain or lose traction in the political arena, and why certain policies remain static while others undergo substantial alterations. The theory sheds light on the complexities of policy change within democratic societies, providing a framework for understanding the non-linear nature of the policymaking process. A central tenet of PET is its explanation of policy monopolies—rigid structures composed of institutional and ideological arrangements that impede new entrants and ideas. These monopolies foster stability and incremental adjustments but can occasionally be disrupted, leading to punctuations—dramatic policy shifts.

Initially introduced in *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (1993), PET has undergone refinement and expansion over the years. In “The Politics of Attention—How Government Prioritizes Problems” (2005), Jones and Baumgartner emphasized the role of attention in shaping policies. Subsequently, in *The Politics of Information: Problem Definition and the Course of Public Policy in America* (2015), they explored the influence of information in policy formulation. While PET’s early focus was on the US government, it has since been applied to diverse political systems worldwide (Walgrave & Green-Pedersen, 2014; Baumgartner et al., 2019a). Moreover, PET’s empirical contributions have been significant, with the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) playing a key role. The CAP, initiated by Jones and Baumgartner, aims to track attention dynamics across countries and time using quantitative methods, facilitating cross-national comparisons.

This chapter discusses the evolution of PET, highlighting its theoretical and empirical advancements, including its application in Latin America. It also examines the establishment and methodology of the CAP before concluding with a summary of contributions and avenues for future research. Through PET and the CAP, scholars gain valuable insights into the intricate mechanisms driving policy change, thereby enriching our understanding of political dynamics in democratic societies.

2. THE PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM THEORY: ORIGINS AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to PET, policy processes often adapt to social, economic, and political transformations following incremental changes. Policies follow long periods of stability, during which policy community members gradually adapt regulations to changing conditions. However, periods of policy stability are interrupted by abrupt increases in issue attention, which generate what Baumgartner and Jones labeled “punctuations” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). Punctuations occur because policymakers cannot process information proportionally according to the severity of problems (Simon, 1957). During periods of stability, issues are not the object of political debate outside the policy subsystem, and most policy actors tend to ignore any information regarding the issue. Policy stability is governed by a few public and private actors that interact on a regular basis, adapting policy gradually according to their preferences and ways of thinking about issues. Institutionalizing these “policy monopolies” contributes to maintaining the status quo and preventing significant policy change. However, occasionally, policy actors shift their attention to an issue they have ignored, which produces rapid and sudden changes in the political agenda.

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) Jones and Baumgartner (2005) expand upon Simon’s theory of bounded rationality to elucidate the phenomenon of abrupt interruptions in long periods of policy stability.¹ Simon (1957) posits that bounded rationality dictates humans’ inability to address multiple problems simultaneously, leading them to employ suboptimal decision-making strategies. This constraint, according to Jones and Baumgartner (2005), results from what they term cognitive friction—an accumulation of cognitive costs incurred by policy actors during decision-making processes. Given these cognitive constraints, individuals often settle for satisfactory rather than optimal decisions. Additionally, time constraints exacerbate this phenomenon, as the human capacity to attend to an unlimited number of issues concurrently is inherently limited. Consequently, while individuals’ choices remain rational within the bounds of available information, their cognitive limitations inevitably circumscribe the scope of their decision-making processes.

Like humans, political institutions also face limitations in considering all problems simultaneously. Jones and Baumgartner (2005) defined institutional friction as the institutional costs imposed by formal and informal rules governing the political system. For example, to enact policies through the legislative process, it is necessary to build a majority in Congress. For this reason, Brazil’s executive branch often relies on presidential decrees (“*medidas provisórias*”, in Portuguese) to enact policies. The approval process of presidential decrees introduces less friction in policymaking when compared to bills. Political institutions create friction in the decision-making process, which makes any response to social problems time-consuming. Thus, all information processing is necessarily disproportionate.

Issue attention results from a competitive process in which many problems try to get policymakers’ attention, but only a few succeed. Following Schattschneider’s (1960) mobilization of bias conceptual framework, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and Jones and Baumgartner (2005) argue that on most occasions, policymakers pay disproportionate attention to those issues that respond to the preferences of economic and social elites, leaving aside those issues that affect disadvantaged and minority groups. Policymakers tend to ignore the problems and alternative issue frames that threaten the interests of the elites, especially those that question existing values and principles in a society (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). As a

result, some preferences are ignored in the political debate. The absence of political discussion does not mean there is no conflict about an issue but that a privileged set of policy actors has been able to limit the scope of political debate outside the policy subsystem. Political elites institutionalize this privileged position by creating what Baumgartner and Jones call policy monopolies.

To break the status quo and reach policymakers' attention, those who do not conform to the status quo—the losers of the political battle—must mobilize and devote their time and resources to raise visibility about an issue, explain why it is problematic, and why it is necessary to respond collectively to solve it. The process of issue competition always involves a political conflict between those who mobilize to break the status quo and those who work to prevent such a change. A policy actor's capacity to win the political battle depends on many factors, mainly the ability to overcome collective action dilemmas, mobilize strategically, develop data and information resources, and find allies in and out of governmental structures. It also depends on policy actors' ability to frame issues and propose alternatives that fit existing values, are technically and economically feasible, and do not generate significant societal opposition (Schattschneider, 1960; Cobb & Elder, 1971; Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

PET presents an alternative lens through which to examine policy change, offering a departure from traditional incrementalist perspectives. Incrementalism, rooted in the notion of governments as organized anarchies, suggests that policymakers grapple with uncertainties, limited resources, and imperfect information when addressing social issues (Simon, 1957; Lindblom, 1959). The pursuit of alternative solutions entails significant information gathering, which involves high transaction costs. Consequently, existing policies form the basis for subsequent ones, with decision-makers often opting for incremental adjustments due to bounded rationality (Simon, 1957)—the cognitive constraints individuals face—as well as the interests vested in maintaining the status quo. This process fosters a bias toward policy options that align closely with existing frameworks, with change occurring incrementally.

Baumgartner and Jones argue that incrementalism offers only a partial understanding of policymaking dynamics. Incrementalism involves decision-makers making limited, reversible changes due to their inability to predict outcomes accurately. This approach maintains dynamic equilibrium within the political system, suggesting that dramatic changes from the status quo are improbable. PET, therefore, seeks to reconcile these incremental patterns with a broader dynamic of stability and change. It posits that change is not solely characterized by policies remaining relatively static over extended periods but also by sudden shifts in agenda-setting and policymaking processes. PET integrates these moments as manifestations of an underlying attention allocation process, wherein stability and punctuated, abrupt, large-scale changes are viewed as integral components within the same theoretical framework. Subsequent sections introduce various concepts that elucidate the foundational elements of PET's theoretical model.

3. DYNAMICS OF POLICY MONOPOLIES AND VENUE SHOPPING IN POLICYMAKING PROCESSES

PET offers a nuanced perspective on policymaking dynamics, particularly during extended periods of stability. Within this model, the policy process primarily unfolds at the level of

policy subsystems. These subsystems consist of a diverse array of stakeholders, ranging from government officials and parliamentarians to bureaucrats, lobbyists, and interest groups. These actors collectively form what scholars like Kingdon (1984) and Rhodes (2008) have termed “policy communities”, characterized by their selective access and participation. These communities are typically composed of small groups deeply invested in specific policy issues, sharing a common understanding of the problems at hand and potential solutions. Baumgartner and Jones further elaborate on the notion of “policy monopolies” within these communities. Policy monopolies arise when a single interest or a shared understanding of a particular issue dominates the policymaking arena. Essentially, policy monopolies emerge when all actors within a subsystem hold the same policy image—a cohesive comprehension of the problem and its potential remedies. This shared understanding creates a cohesive force within the policymaking process, often leading to prolonged periods of policy stability and incremental change.

Policy monopolies play a crucial role in maintaining stability within policy subsystems, primarily by fostering conformity among a select group of experts. These monopolies, characterized by their dominance in policymaking, are reinforced by institutional arrangements that limit decision-making power to a privileged few, effectively excluding others from the process. In Brazil, for instance, such institutional arrangements are enshrined in legislation like the Federal Constitution, which imposes constraints on immediate modifications to the legal framework. Additionally, entrenched clauses further solidify these monopolies by preventing their amendment, thereby upholding stability in public policy formulation and hindering the inclusion of new issues on the government agenda.

Central to the concept of policy monopolies is the notion of a “policy image”, which represents a shared understanding of a particular issue among members of the monopoly (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, pp. 25–26). This image, as defined by Baumgartner and Jones, encompasses both a causal comprehension of the problem and an evaluative framework that shapes perceptions and responses. Drawing on the work of Deborah Stone, the construction of policy images involves a blend of facts, empirical analysis, and emotive appeals, resulting in what can be described as “causal stories” (Stone, 1989, p. 282). These narratives highlight the damage caused by the problem, identify its root causes and responsible actors, and advocate for governmental intervention to address it. Policy actors within monopolies actively work to construct and reinforce these policy images, employing various persuasive techniques and data-driven arguments to challenge existing beliefs and promote their preferred solutions. This process involves a strategic combination of persuasion, argumentation, and empirical evidence aimed at shaping public discourse and influencing policymaking decisions. Through this concerted effort, policy actors seek to maintain the dominance of their preferred narratives within the policymaking arena, thereby perpetuating stability and resisting changes that challenge their established norms and interests.

In Brazil, the education sector serves as a prime example of a public policy subsystem characterized by a cohesive policy monopoly centered on a shared vision. At the heart of this subsystem lies the Basic Education Maintenance and Development Fund (FUNDEB), which operates across different levels of government and is widely acknowledged as a crucial mechanism for ensuring mandatory financing for basic education. FUNDEB represents a consensus-driven response to the pressing need to enhance the quality of education nationwide. Within this policy subsystem, various stakeholders converge to support FUNDEB’s objectives and initiatives. These include bureaucrats from the Ministry of Education, members of

Congress, influential interest groups such as the “Movimento Todos Pela Educação” (a civil society initiative dedicated to education), advocates for the right to education, and academic scholars. Together, they form a cohesive network committed to the sustained development and improvement of educational standards in Brazil. FUNDEB’s origins trace back to the establishment of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Elementary Education (FUNDEF) in 1998. Since its inception, FUNDEB has undergone a series of incremental changes aimed at expanding its reach and impact. These modifications have gradually broadened FUNDEB’s scope to encompass all levels of primary education, culminating in its transformation into a permanent fund with the passage of legislation in 2020. Despite the evolution of FUNDEB over time, no viable alternatives for education financing have emerged to challenge its dominance within the policy subsystem. This steadfast support for FUNDEB underscores the entrenched nature of the policy monopoly surrounding education policy in Brazil, reflecting a shared commitment to its continued success and effectiveness in addressing the nation’s educational needs.

Policy monopolies play a pivotal role in shaping the policy process by restricting access to actors who diverge from the prevailing ideas and narratives within the subsystem. This exclusivity effectively confines policy debates and decision-making to a select group of stakeholders who adhere to the dominant policy image. Consequently, issues advocated by dissenting voices struggle to gain visibility outside the confines of the policy subsystem. The institutionalization of policy monopolies serves as a key mechanism contributing to what Baumgartner and Jones term negative feedback—a phenomenon crucial for maintaining policy stability. Within these monopolies, conflicts among participating actors are typically resolved internally, circumventing broader political debates in parliamentary settings and the media. This insular approach ensures that policy changes unfold gradually, characterized by incremental adjustments rather than abrupt shifts in the prevailing understanding of problems and their solutions. As a result, the entrenched nature of policy monopolies reinforces the status quo, impeding significant deviations from established norms and frameworks.

Occasionally, issues transcend the confines of policy subsystems and capture attention in broader political arenas, such as parliaments, the media, and social media platforms. This transition from the micro-level of policy subsystems to the macro-level of the political system engenders a wider sphere of participation. As Jones et al. (1995) emphasize, issues cannot remain indefinitely within the confines of specialized policy communities; occasionally, macro-political forces intervene, propelling them into the spotlight of public discourse. In the expanded realm of the macrosystem, issues undergo heightened scrutiny from the media and increased engagement from the public. This shift alters the dynamics of information processing, as a diverse array of actors with varying perspectives and interests weigh in on the matter. Importantly, the actors in the macrosystem may not share the same policy image as those within the original policy subsystem.

As issues gain exposure to a larger and less regulated audience, positive feedback mechanisms come into play, driving change and innovation. This can lead to the emergence of a new policy image or narrative surrounding the issue. This transformation is often catalyzed by the involvement of new participants who bring fresh perspectives and ideas to the table. Positive feedback manifests through various channels. Structural changes or significant events, such as presidential elections, may catalyze shifts in political agendas. Additionally, focusing events—sudden and impactful occurrences that capture public and policymaker attention—can redirect the discourse toward emerging issues. Moreover, changes in issue attention

can result from the mobilization of policy actors who challenge dominant narratives within the policy subsystem. Ultimately, policy change may arise when dissenting voices—often characterized as the “losers of the political battle”—successfully challenge the status quo and introduce novel ways of framing issues. This ongoing interplay between policy subsystems and the broader political landscape underscores the dynamic nature of policy evolution in democratic societies.

Also, policy change is more likely due to shifting the focus of political debate across policy venues. These are defined as political institutions, including different branches—legislative, executive—and levels of government—supranational, national, and sub-national—with the authority to make decisions concerning different issues (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). In some cases, issue jurisdiction is highly concentrated in a single venue, like defense or diplomacy, while in others, jurisdiction is fragmented across many venues, like environmental issues. Proponents of policy change may consider the fragmentation of issue jurisdiction across venues as an opportunity to raise visibility about new issues and policy frames (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993)—this process is defined as venue shopping.

When they fail to change the image of politics by entering its subsystem, policy actors can change the institutional arena that built that image (this process is known as venue shopping; see Pralle, 2003). For example, they can take issues to different institutional spheres, such as Congress at the federal level or state legislative bodies, to attract attention and change policy conception. This change of location may cause actors who do not share the existing policy image to become involved in the issue. An example of venue shopping in the Brazilian context is the recent judicialization of issues related to human rights, such as the rights of the LGBT population and abortion. Various social groups take these issues to the Federal Supreme Court to prevent elected politicians in the executive and legislative branches from bearing the political costs of getting involved with them.

In both cases, rapid change is explained by the fluidity and displacement between the subsystem and the macrosystem. The dynamics described above can increase access to decision-making for different groups and potentially disrupt existing policy monopolies. The attention of government leaders and the public can introduce new ideas and actors into the policy arena. In these situations, processing social problems in the macrosystem, where brakes and access restriction mechanisms are less prominent, generates a burst of attention and immediate demands, prompting swift responses from government officials. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) identify the quick access of an issue to the macrosystem as the pivotal moment when significant policy changes tend to occur. New ideas and institutions have the potential to endure over time, creating a new state of equilibrium within the political system, which may eventually revert to stability after a certain period.

4. A QUANTITATIVE AND COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO POLICY CHANGE

PET is also an innovative methodological approach to the study of policy change. Contrary to other theoretical frameworks (see Sabatier, 1998; Weible et al., 2020), PET explains how policy changes occur from a quantitative and comparative perspective beyond case studies. The empirical strategy relies on developing datasets containing information about the evolution of issue attention across time, policy venues, and levels of government. In their 1993 book,

Baumgartner and Jones developed datasets to study the agenda dynamics of some issues—nuclear power, pesticides, or tobacco—from the mid-1940s to the 1980s, using keyword searches in existing datasets available in the US Congress or the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature and New York Times. The development of these datasets constituted a significant transformation from existing research at the time, as it allowed for comparing issue attention in Congress, media, and public opinion across time and levels of government.

As the Policy Agendas Project focused only on the US, Baumgartner and Jones led the development of the CAP, which involves researchers across America, Asia, and Europe (<https://www.comparativeagendas.net/>). The CAP aims to explain how policy change occurs across policy areas comprehensively. This requires developing data that allow us to compare attention to issues across time—e.g., how important attention is to the economy compared to all issues in the legislative agenda, and how much attention the president pays to health issues in their annual speech compared to other issues. To achieve this goal, the CAP developed datasets about different political activities—annual speeches (like the Queen's speech or the State of the Union speech), party manifestos, legislative activities (bills, laws, legislative decrees), oversight activities (oral and written questions, hearings), stories on the front pages of newspapers, posts on social media, etc. (see Baumgartner et al., 2019b). Each bill, law, oral question, mention in the annual speech or party manifesto, social media post, and media story is classified according to a predefined coding scheme (see Bevan, 2019).

The CAP employs content analysis to measure attention. It allows the systematic comparison of various issues and the exploration of several questions that have not before been subject to systematic quantitative analysis. The coding scheme includes 21 topics and more than 200 subtopics, as shown in Box 5.1. The first coding scheme was developed in the late 1990s to classify policy issues in the US and was later adapted to different political contexts. Today, the CAP datasets include many political activities in the US and European countries—Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the European Union, the United Kingdom—Israel, and Canada, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and a number of Latin American countries as explained in the next section.

BOX 5.1 CLASSIFICATION OF ISSUES ACCORDING TO THE CAP

- Macroeconomics
- Social policy
- Rights
- Housing
- Health
- Commerce and banking
- Agriculture
- Defense
- Labor
- R&D
- Education
- Foreign commerce
- Environment
- International affairs

- Energy
- Government
- Immigration and refugees
- Public lands
- Transportation
- Culture
- Crime and justice

Source: CAP: www.comparativeagendas.net.

All the databases have been coded twice by human coders, following the project's codebook. Occasionally, data has also been coded using automatic coding (see <https://cap.tk.hu/en>). In all cases, country teams have adapted the codebook to the peculiarities of their countries. For example, Colombia created a new code to account for Domestic Conflict and Peace Processes, which has been a crucial problem in Colombian politics for the last few decades (see Vieira-Silva and del Cid, 2020).

Political activity datasets vary across countries depending on each research team's goals and theoretical questions. Many studies aim to test PET, that is, whether policy dynamics exhibit periods of stasis and dramatic change (Baumgartner et al., 2020, p. 45). Jones and Baumgartner (2005) test the punctuated equilibrium theory by analyzing the distribution of percentage changes in the US budget across policy areas between 1948 and 2003. They conclude that while some budget programs experienced moderate growth or cuts, others received substantial increases, doubling, or tripling their size (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 112). Later, Jones et al. (2019) reached similar conclusions using budget data across seven advanced democracies. More recent research has extended the testing of the general hypothesis to non-democratic regimes. Baumgartner et al. (2017) analyzed budget data during authoritarian and democratic periods in Brazil, Turkey, Russia, and Malta, showing that policy dynamics follow the punctuated equilibrium model in all four countries. They find that democratic regimes are more efficient in processing information than authoritarian systems, and this is a similar pattern that has also been observed in China (Chan & Zhao, 2016) and Hong Kong (Lam & Chan, 2015).

Some CAP members have developed research projects to study agenda-setting and political representation (Chaqués et al., 2015; Baumgartner et al., 2019a). Their goal is to test under which conditions policymakers are more likely to follow citizens' priorities, whether governmental actors follow their mandates as defined during political campaigns, and whether policy responsiveness varies across time, countries, and levels of government. Other CAP members study the interaction between media and political agendas to explain under which conditions policymakers are more likely to lead or follow the media agenda (see Vliegenthart et al., 2016). Also, several CAP projects study party competition and legislative activities (Walgrave & Green-Pedersen, 2014). Recent studies focus on agenda dynamics on social media (Russell, 2021).

According to John (2006), the project holds significant potential due to its extensive large temporal-scale datasets. The systematic organization of this data, coupled with the project's impressive evolution, has led to a substantial volume of case studies examining policy dynamics in various sectors. Over the past decades, the CAP has demonstrated how policies change

in relation to various variables, such as framing, the influence of pressure groups and policy entrepreneurs, and shifts in government or institutional environments. Methodologically, the project's integration of quantitative and qualitative dimensions has made a noteworthy theoretical and methodological contribution to the study and analysis of changes in governmental agendas and policy dynamics over time.

5. PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM THEORY IN LATIN AMERICA

The CAP has expanded in several Latin American countries—Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico (Baumgartner et al., 2020; Bevan & Palau, 2020). Datasets include information about governmental and legislative activities covering one or more decades. Most studies focus on studying the governmental agenda and have developed datasets that include information about the president's annual (Ecuador and Mexico) and/or investiture speeches (Brazil) to study variations in the governmental agenda. The annual speeches in Ecuador and Mexico are like the US State of the Union annual speeches. It is one of the most relevant political activities of the year in which the president of the nation informs about the most critical issues, the main achievements and decisions taken during the year, and the main challenges for the future. It is an essential political moment because it captures the media and citizens' attention.

In Brazil, researchers use the “Message to the National Congress”, a document in which the president reports his priorities to Congress and the nation. The inauguration speech (in which the candidate informs representatives about the political program they want to fulfill) is also one of the crucial political events during the president's term, but it contrasts with annual speeches, which only occur once a year, at the beginning of their term. Studies so far explain how members of the government prioritize issues across time. This is a point of departure to go further in the analysis and explain questions regarding political representation: Under which conditions do members of government respond to their mandates as defined during the electoral campaign, and which factors (economic recession, international institutions' intervention, or a pandemic like COVID-19) explain deviations from initial compromises, and how changing party systems and institutions affect the president's national ability to fulfill policy promises along the term.

In Brazil, research employing PET has flourished across four key areas of analysis. The first area focuses on presidential attention, tracking and comparing presidential speeches over time, particularly during moments of heightened media scrutiny and public interest. Studies by Brasil and Capella (2019), Brasil et al., (2020), Capella (2020) and Brasil & Bichir (2021) and others have utilized methods like diversity and capacity indicators to uncover shifts in government priorities. For instance, Teruel (2024) examines changes in President Lula's agenda across three elections, highlighting links between political context and agenda formation. Similarly, dos Santos (2024) conducts a comparative analysis of presidential speeches in Brazil and the US, while Brasil et al. (2022) compare presidential agendas across Latin American countries. The second area focuses on legislative attention, analyzing longitudinal trends and comparing legislative agendas with other policy domains. Research by Brasil et al. (2023) tracks transformations in Brazil's Constitution through the analysis of Constitutional Amendments. The third area, led by Freitas and Brasil (2024), examines data from the Brazilian Supreme Court, focusing on concentrated constitutionality control actions. These

actions, aimed at challenging laws and regulations via the Supreme Court, reveal dynamics in judicial oversight and its impact on policy contestation. Lastly, the fourth area employs the Brazilian public budget as an indicator of government attention and distribution across policy sectors. Brasil et al. (2023) analyze budget distribution among policy sectors, identifying patterns of incrementalism and punctuations. Peres et al. (2023) delve deeper into budgetary changes, exploring political and economic factors influencing distribution. Meanwhile, studies by Machado et al. (2023; 2024) examine federal intergovernmental transfers and municipal budget priorities, shedding light on the trajectory of fiscal decentralization and local policy priorities. Overall, these diverse research endeavors underscore the multifaceted applications of PET in understanding policy dynamics and governmental attention allocation in Brazil.

In the case of Colombia, Vieira-Silva & del Cid Castro (2020) explores the role of Colombian presidents in shaping public policy through the lens of legislative agendas and their outcomes in Congress. Breaking new ground in Colombian scholarship, Vieira investigates how different types of presidential agendas influence legislative success. By constructing a typology of agendas based on size, diversity, and ambition, the study reveals that smaller, more focused, and ambitious agendas correlate with higher rates of legislative success across six administrations. This empirical analysis draws on original databases developed for Colombia using CAP methodology. The findings suggest that presidential agendas play a central role in shaping Colombia's policy landscape, highlighting the importance of agenda configuration in legislative outcomes. Despite facing constraints and navigating complex executive-legislative relations, presidents remain primary agents of change. The dissertation proposes further research to explore the nuanced relationship between agenda types and presidential success, offering a theoretical framework for understanding presidential influence in the Colombian policy process. In addition to advancing theoretical insights, the Colombian team has contributed to scholarship through the creation of new databases on presidential legislative agendas, providing a comprehensive overview spanning 24 years of Colombian governance.

Aranda-Jan et al. (2019) examine the priorities of heads of state as indicators of government attention, focusing on presidential agendas in Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico. Drawing on the CAP methodology, the research analyzes presidential speeches and official documents to identify key policy areas and changes over time. Key questions include whether there is a unified "Latin American presidential agenda" and how presidential priorities differ across countries. They conclude that countries experiencing presidential re-election tend to demonstrate increased agenda capacity and diversity. Additionally, the study suggests the existence of a Latin American presidential agenda, characterized by persistent themes such as macro-economics, international relations, government affairs, social policies, and justice across the analyzed countries. Despite these commonalities, each country exhibits its own unique priorities influenced by internal contexts and global positioning. The study emphasizes the need for further research to explore the impact of re-election on agenda expansion and to solidify the existence of a Latin American agenda by extending the analysis to more countries and considering various regional factors.

Other researchers, such as del Cid (2019), use PET to conduct comparative case studies. Cid's research focuses on understanding the dynamics of agenda-building processes for the decriminalization of abortion in Central America. The study aims to identify both political and policy strategies involved in these processes, highlighting institutional and non-institutional biases applied by governmental actors toward demands for abortion decriminalization. Additionally, the research investigates whether the gender regime plays

a role in shaping strategies for and against decriminalization, serving as an explanatory factor for the persistence of prohibitive regulations in the region. Cid's analysis reveals that Central America exhibits significant legislative lag in terms of abortion legalization, with existing regulations being prohibitive or restrictive. For instance, El Salvador and Nicaragua implemented reforms criminalizing abortion without exceptions in 1997 and 2006, respectively. Guatemala, on the other hand, maintains only one exception for therapeutic abortion, which faces considerable implementation challenges. Despite the unfavorable political environment for decriminalization, proponents of legalization employ strategies involving coalitions with governmental actors to advocate for decriminalizing certain abortion causes. In El Salvador, initiatives were introduced to decriminalize four abortion causes, while Guatemala saw a bill aimed at providing comprehensive protection for girls victimized by sexual violence, including decriminalizing abortion for girls under 15 impregnated through rape. In Nicaragua, efforts were made to promote the decriminalization of abortion for reasons related to women's mental and physical health. However, alliances opposing decriminalization have exerted significant influence in the state arena, often rooted in the historical relationship between the state and religious institutions.

Finally, the research teams in Ecuador have analyzed the interaction between media and political agendas (Aguirre, 2020). To do that, they developed a dataset containing information about a sample of stories on the front pages of two newspapers—*El Comercio*, a private newspaper, and *El Telegrafo*, a public newspaper. They also gathered information about the symbolic agenda (annual speeches) and legislative agenda. Additionally, in recent years, the University of Barcelona team has developed datasets about MPs' attention on social media (Twitter accounts) in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela from 2020 to 2023. They also developed a dataset about daily announcements of the head of the executive in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter delves into PET, a framework introduced by Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones to explain patterns of the policy process. Unlike other theories that focus either on gradual changes or periods of stability, PET integrates both perspectives, proposing that extended periods of stability and incremental adjustments coexist with sudden, dramatic shifts in policy priorities.

The chapter also discusses the application of PET in a comparative context, emphasizing initiatives like the CAP. This project addresses the challenge of obtaining comparable longitudinal and cross-sectional data across different countries, particularly in Latin America.

The exploration of PET in the context of Latin America presents an exciting opportunity for researchers to deepen their understanding of policymaking dynamics in different types of democracies. While PET has been extensively applied in other regions, its adaptation and utilization in Latin America remain relatively unexplored. By applying PET to the diverse areas of public policy in this region, researchers can evaluate its effectiveness and relevance in capturing the complexities of policymaking processes in dynamic political environments. A key aspect that PET studies in Latin America have yet to fully address is the role of informal institutions, which play a significant role in shaping political outcomes in the region. Unlike formal institutions, such as legislative bodies or government agencies, informal institutions

operate outside of official channels and often influence policymaking through networks, traditions, and social norms. However, existing PET studies have largely overlooked these factors, leaving important questions unanswered. For instance, do informal institutions contribute to friction or negative feedback in the policymaking process? Under what circumstances do they exert the most influence? Addressing these questions requires a nuanced understanding of informal institutions and their impact on policy outcomes.

One of the main challenges in studying informal institutions is the difficulty in identifying and measuring their influence. Unlike formal institutions, which are codified and documented, informal institutions are often intangible and difficult to quantify. However, advancements in comparative politics research, particularly in areas like legislative studies, offer promising methodological approaches for addressing this challenge. By adapting and applying these methodologies to the study of informal institutions within the framework of PET, researchers can gain valuable insights into their role in shaping policymaking dynamics. To effectively expand the scope of PET research to the comparative realm, researchers affiliated with initiatives like the CAP must engage with the broader comparative politics literature. This interdisciplinary dialogue will enable PET researchers to explore the nuances of policymaking in non-consolidated democracies, incorporating insights from comparative politics scholarship. By integrating perspectives from diverse disciplines, PET research in Latin America can enrich its theoretical framework and empirical analyses, offering a more comprehensive understanding of policymaking processes in dynamic political contexts.

NOTE

1. The concept of bounded rationality was also highlighted in the works of Kingdon (1984) and Wildavsky (1964). Both authors considered that political actors are cognitively limited in their theoretical models.

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