

Comparative (De)politicisations: Motivations, Rules and Contestations

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New Thinking For Energy



Summary

- Written with Matthew Lockwood, Exeter
- Faces and forms of depoliticisation
- Depoliticisation and repoliticisations
- Relation to ideas/rules/norms – which ones?
- Disaggregate: depoliticisations across sectors
 - Motivations, rules and politicisations
- Monetary policy
- Energy policy
- Climate policy
- Conclusions

Faces and Forms of Depoliticisation

- Governmental (Type 1 – Hay 2007; Wood 2013):
 - Delegation to technocratic experts – ‘arena shifting’
 - Assumes diminished parliamentary discretion is positive
- Societal (Type 2 - Hay 2007; Wood 2013)
 - Privatised and/or individualised responsibilities
 - Assumes private sector best/better placed to decide
- Preference Shaping (Type 3 and Flinders & Buller 2006):
 - Discursive constructs for multiple audiences, denial and using a form of ‘common sense’
 - Assumes that there are alternatives to be avoided/denied
- *Rules based* (inferred in above ‘faces/forms’):
 - Constraint of political agency around set rules and norms
 - Assumes democratic (or other) agreement on what is ‘right’
- Each contains certain assumptions, inc. functions for government, companies and individuals in political economies

Depoliticisations and Repoliticisations

- Conceptualisations of depoliticisation infer path dependencies – through isolation, rule-setting, blame avoidance, rule setting
- But also constant attempts to politicise any given **issue area**
- Distinguish between depoliticisations and politicisations - at points in time and related to issues – i.e. making less about dichotomies of political and apolitical (Flinders/Wood 2013)
- One clue is that in practice there are stark differences between understandings of depoliticisation as a policy tool that rest on different notions of politics as structure and agency:
 - Political actors make poor (economic) decisions – irrational agents; government overload; lack of capacity to govern economy
 - Politics as ebb and flow of what is salient and requiring of government action at different – ongoing de-/re-politicisation
 - Politics as contestation allowing for change and new rules
 - Politics as ongoing and informed collective agency and choice, underpinned by active deliberation and discretion

Differentiating: What Ideas and Norms?

- Different (de)politicisations as informed/aided by ideas:
 - Motivated in practice by neoliberal economic and rational choice ideas (Hay 2007); Depol as part of process of embedding rules and norms (Kuzemko 2013); Politicisation as contestation of that which is taken for granted (Wood 2011)
- Kettell 2008, in seeking to measure success, identifies material and perception aspects:
 - What were **aims** of depoliticising: to pursue certain objectives and rules (akin to policy paradigms – Hall)?; Are state managers no longer considered primarily responsible (one aim)?
- Conceptual and theoretical work often rests on (de)politicisations in single issue areas
- But do depoliticisations constrain differently?

Disaggregate: Case studies and contexts

- Historical Depoliticisations in the UK:
 - Monetary policy (Burnham 2001; Kettell 2008; Rogers 2009)
 - Energy: technical management of public companies to provide economically and socially vital services (Kuzemko 2013)
- Depoliticisation in and of Western Institutions as embedding market capitalism :
 - World Bank (Goldman 2001; Flinders and Wood 2013)
 - Global climate governance – scale, technocratic and market liberal norms (Newell and Bumpus 2012; Bernstein 2001)
 - More learning that previously supposed in IOs (Broome; Seabroke)
- Explore aims and outcomes across 3 issue areas:
 - What are the motivations for depol – are there similarities?
 - What rules/norms are being embedded via rules based depol?
 - What politicisations are taking place with what effect?

Where does Politics (not) Take Place?



Monetary Policy – UK (1980s +)

- Delegation of policymaking to independent Central Bank (1998) +
- Motivations (neo-classical economic and rational choice):
 - ‘Credible commitment’, electoral cycles and incentives to change policy esp. with regard to interest rates (risking ‘boom’ and inflation)
 - Seek governing competence in economic management (Burnham 2001: 127), given notion that MPs (and Treasury) not technically equipped
 - Strategy to avoid political responsibility (Burnham) rational given notion that state managers are ill equipped to manage the economy
- What aims/rules:
 - Independent Central Bank, protected from political pressures, to decide on monetary policy and interest rates
 - Economic stability, fiscal efficiency, inflation targets and growth - objectives
- Politicisations (relate to rules and motivations):
 - There is no evidence that countries with independent banks are less subject to political business cycles (Berger et al 2001, Posen 1995)
 - Financial crisis and contestations of neoliberal economic governance
 - CB independence supported by key constituents (City and state managers)

Energy - UK

- Liberalisation and privatisation; independent regulator, Ofgem
- Motivations:
 - Broader dominance of neoliberal economic ideas/business support
 - Public energy: economically inefficient; high cost; not transparent
- What aims/rules:
 - Aim: privatised companies; competition; liquid wholesale markets
 - Aim: secure and balanced (electricity) system (regulations)
 - ‘Take politics out of energy’ – expert economic management
- Politicisations:
 - Need to mitigate for climate change; energy supply (in)security
 - New institutions: DECC and CCC – new objectives
 - Ofgem remains ‘independent’ but mandates change
 - Market interventions due to market failure(s) – but not creating new market structures

Climate Change: 2000s

- Creation of independent Climate Change Committee (CCC)
- Why: New scientific knowledge about anthropogenic climate change and growing political support (UN; EU; UK)
- What aims/rules
 - Act to mitigate climate change: emissions reductions, renewable (nuclear) energy and energy efficiency
 - Independent CCC: knowledge creation and hold govt. to account
 - Carbon dioxide emissions reduction targets legally binding
 - Climate change understood as market failure hence intervene
- Politicisations
 - Energy security/growth = tax breaks and support for fossil fuels, some successful opposition to setting new targets and to CCC
 - Anti-tax, anti-Europe/EU and losing competitiveness
 - Far more radical change is needed – profound change in how we live challenges ‘economistic’ turn and growth capitalism

Conclusions

- How do (de)politicisations in different issue areas relate?
- Similarities
 - Institutional depoliticisations across all 3 areas (motivations)
 - Attempts across all 3 to embed certain rules, but rules different
 - Movement from neoliberal to neoclassical economics in climate and energy – but market capitalism embedded across all
 - Politicisations (discursively) relate to motivations and rules
- Differences:
 - Climate change starts with ‘market failure’ and suggests some quite different potential politicisations
 - Societal (marketised) depoliticisation greater/persists in energy
 - Greater institutional depoliticisation still in Monetary Policy; climate change contestations; energy policy some change
 - Like for like?
- Motivations similar (arm’s length) but rules and contestations differ

Can we differentiate between –ed and –ing? Preference shaping' always as depoliticising?

