THE PREDICTION OF POLITICAL FEASIBILITY

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PREDICTION OF POLITICAL FEASIBILITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR BETTER POLICYMAKING. A MAIN METHOD FOR PREDICTING POLITICAL FEASIBILITY IS DELPHI STUDIES OF POLITICIANS AND OTHER POLITICAL "EXPERTS."

Policymaking being directed at influencing reality, the probability that any policy-alternative will be implemented does constitute a main criterion in identifying a preferable policy. While there may be a number of policies which should be adopted for other reasons (e.g., educational impact, expression of national ideologies, and symbolic significance), in the main a "reasonable" (on the level of subjective satisficing) probability of implementation within a defined time period should constitute a threshold which must be passed by every policy-alternative before it becomes a subject for serious consideration. Similarly, when a number of policy-alternatives have different political feasibilities, the political risks and costs associated with each one constitute an important criterion for identifying the preferable policy.

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While recognizing the importance of political feasibility, care must be taken to avoid a mistake widespread in practice and sometimes supported by theory,* that "feasibility" becomes a dominant criterion of a preferable alternative, in the sense of "the more feasible, the better." Predictions of political feasibility should play an important role in policy analysis, in limiting the range of seriously considered alternatives. But this limitation should be made explicit and based on an objective statement of the to-be-used political feasibility criterion -- to avoid the danger both of underrating or of overrating this element of the relevant policy analysis network. Bearing in mind this caveat, it seems true that it is the neglect of political feasibility which makes so many prediction studies quite irrelevant for real life policymaking and policy practitioners, and thus hinders significant contributions of predictions to actual policymaking.

In view of the importance of political feasibility for policymaking, it is quite surprising that it is neglected and even ignored in the policy sciences literature, including most prediction studies. Main reasons for this neglect seem to include the general tendency in much of normative policy sciences, including prediction studies, to exclude political phenomena as either too difficult and/or too "mundane;" and the economic or physical sciences and quantitative background of most developers of decision sciences and systems analysis (who are the pioneers of applied prediction studies, rather than the more humanistic and politically oriented broad "futurists," to the exclusion of political science. More important are the great objective difficulties of dealing with politics within predictions in a way which is more useful than misleading.

In this Paper an effort is made to deal with the objective difficulty by proposing some methods for more systematic exploration of political feasibility in a way operationally useful as part of policy analysis. To do so, we must first clarify the main relevant meaning of the concept "political feasibility." Then, investigate the variables shaping political feasibility.
And finally -- based on the conceptual examination and variable search -- propose a method for operationalizing political feasibility as a part of prediction sets.*

The Concept of "Political Feasibility"**

Political feasibility -- in relation to policy-oriented predictions -- can be defined in three, closely interdependent, ways as (1) relating to an actor; (2) relating to a policy-alternative; and (3) relating to a policy-area.

*I am not dealing in this Paper with the related, but distinct, question if and how to institutionalize more systematic political feasibility predictions in the policymaking system. This is a complex problem because of dangers of intruding on the role of the politician and the risks of conservative bias and repression of innovative alternatives -- which in the beginning often look quite infeasible. Encouragement rather than repression of adventurous thinking and social invention is certainly a main need of contemporary policymaking. Therefore, arrangements are required for preventing their repression by political feasibility predictions and analytical methods in general, for instance through establishing socio-organizational distance and barriers between the more invention-oriented and the more analytical-oriented functions.

(1) From the point of view of any actor (individual, group, organization, nation, etc.), political feasibility refers to the space of effective political action within which the actor is able, with a certain probability, to affect reality -- including, among other activities, to influence policies and their implementation. In this sense, political feasibility is closely affiliated with the concepts of "influence" and "power." I will use the term "political leverage" to refer to this ability of an actor to influence (among other phenomena) policies and their implementation (including, sometime, to make and implement policies on his own). A derived term is "politician leverage domain," which refers to the action-space within which an actor has political leverage.

(2) Political feasibility as regards a defined policy-alternative deals with the probability (or range of probabilities) that within a given time that policy-alternative will receive sufficient political push and support to be approved and implemented.

(3) In relation to a policy-issue or a policy-area, political feasibility refers to the range within which alternatives are politically feasible. I will use the term "political feasibility domain" to refer to this range of alternatives.
There are close logical and empirical relationships between these three definitions. Thus, logically, in order for a policy alternative to be politically feasible (in the 2nd sense, above), it must be within the political feasibility domain (in the 3rd sense, above) of the relevant policy area (or areas). Also, empirically, the shape and dynamics of a political feasibility domain are in part determined by the political leverages of the actors active in respect to the involved policy area.

Focusing our attention on political feasibility prediction in respect to policy-alternatives, let me point out that it is a probabilistic (predictive) concept, and should be expressed as a probability distribution in respect to each policy alternative. Similarly, a political feasibility domain is constructed in layers, according to different probabilities of the policies falling into those layers receiving sufficient political push and support to be approved and implemented. Also, political feasibility is highly time-sensitive, i.e., the probability that a given policy will receive sufficient political push and support to be approved and implemented varies over the time range during which that push and support are to be achieved.
The relationship between time and political feasibility is not only non-linear, but not fixed in directions nor continuous. Sometimes feasibility will increase (possibly in jumps) for a larger time span; sometimes it will decrease (possibly in jumps), such as when political opportunities are lost. Therefore, the political feasibility of a policy-alternative is a probability-distribution-trajectory, moving in different directions and often non-continuous. Similarly, political feasibility domains change, possibly non-continuously, when various time spans are considered.

Additional complexities are the absence of reliable theory and the dependence of political feasibility on a large number of dynamic variables in respect to many of which reliable predictions are impossible. Hence, empirical data to estimate with reasonable confidence political feasibility domains beyond a short-time horizon have to be rich and often will be unavailable. Furthermore, even if theory-grounded and empirically supportable approximations can be made, they may be too complex to be of much use other than better to sensitize the policymakers to the problems and facets of political feasibility.
Nevertheless, progress is possible in the direction of better predicting political feasibility, even short-range predictions, and the sensitizing of senior policymaking being radical improvements in comparison with the usual states of present policy analysis and policymaking. But some understanding of the main feasibility-changing variables is required for that purpose.

VARIABLES SHAPING POLITICAL FEASIBILITY

Not enough is known about political feasibility to permit its modeling, even qualitatively. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some of the variables which influence political feasibility and the directions of their impact, at least in Western political culture.

I propose that political feasibility be viewed in terms of the following variables:

(1) The main actors, their capacities, and their intentions. This will include, among others, the relevant government agencies, producers, employees, and other organized interests. The capacities of these actors (their political leverage) I regard for purposes of the present analysis as given. But actors' intentions interact with policy alternatives: the more a policy alternative is regarded by an actor as promising utilities
and/or as belonging to its sphere of legitimate activity
and/or as meeting its emotional tastes, habits and pre-
dispositions -- the more the actor will tend to develop
intense intentions and convert its capacities into action.
The image of potential utilities depends in part on the
goals of each actor and his prediction of the results
of the various alternatives. But, as a rational model
does not adequately represent organizational behavior,
an actor's behavior will be strongly influenced by
historic attitudes, personal relations, internal processes,
and other socio-psychological factors. The image of an
issue belonging to an actor's legitimate sphere of
activity depends mainly on the structure of the field
(constitutional laws, conventions, rules of the game)
and on historic attitudes and patterns of behavior.

(2) Inputs into the policy-area, both actual and
potential. These include public opinions, availability
of resources, political climate, pressures, technological
innovation, and other political-system exogenous variables.
Some assumptions concerning the impact of these variables
on political feasibility are supportable: for instance,
in an expanding economy with no expensive war, more money
has a higher probability of becoming available and thus
increases the political feasibility of expensive alternatives. Or, the more large groups and strong actors get intensely dissatisfied with the present situations, the more support may be available for more-than-incremental innovative alternatives. Or, the more a radically new alternative becomes technologically feasible and glamorous, the higher its probabilities of becoming politically feasible. Concerning other developments -- such as changes in taste and culture -- prediction of impacts on political feasibility are quite unreliable.

(3) The actor-interactions and aggregated political leverages. Here, one basic notion is "required coalition."* Political feasibility requires actor-cooperation sufficient to achieve the political leverage to provide the desired probability, within the stipulated time span, of approving and implementing an alternative. In part, actor-interaction will depend on the same variables as (1) above; in part, it depends on

*The concept of "minimum winning coalition" is developed in Theodore Riker, The Theory of Political Coalitions (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962). Care must be taken to avoid neglect of the political in order to use elegant economic or theory-of-games models. For instance, in many political situations, much broader coalitions than needed to "win" are required -- to demonstrate support, strengthen cohesion and build up power for the future. Therefore, I prefer the broader term "required coalition."
interaction-history and interaction-shaping phenomena involving the same actors in other areas. Also, every policy-area has its formal laws and informal "rules of the game," which channelize many of the actor-interactions.

(4) The "critical leverage mass" needed for political feasibility depends in turn on the rules of the field, such as the required majority to approve a party decision, the required push to get a bill through Parliament, etc. The critical leverage mass itself may change, depending, for instance, on the mood of Parliament and its timetable.

To sum up, we specified the following illustrative list of political feasibility variables:

(1) The main actors: capacities and intentions. Capacities shaped by many variables external to our analysis. Intentions depend on image of potential utilities and disutilities, which depend on actor's goals and actor's prediction of policy-alternative-results, and on image of sphere of legitimate action. Intentions also depend on various actors' propensities and habits.

(2) Inputs into policy area: public opinion, resources, pressures, political climate, etc.

(3) Actor-interaction: as in (1), plus interaction-history, rules of the game, spill-over effects from other areas.
(4) **Critical leverage mass.** Rules of the field, subjected to change by variables external to our analysis.

This list serves as a basis for one of the two main approaches to political feasibility estimation, to be discussed soon.

**Prediction of Political Feasibility**

The method I propose for predicting political feasibility is a trip-facet Delphi,* in which persons with tacit knowledge in political feasibility ("experts") fill in three different types of prediction schemes, so as to increase reliability through convergence and consistency testing.

The prediction panels are to be composed of persons knowledgeable in political feasibility, that is: politicians, senior executives and politics-observing persons. While politicians are the ideal panel members for political feasibility prediction studies, this itself may be politically and personally nonfeasible, especially if such studies become widespread. Therefore, main

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*The Delphi method, as developed at RAND, is described by its main inventor Olaf Helmer in *Social Technology* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1966).*
reliance may have to be put on politics-observing persons, such as personal aides, political correspondents, political science scholars, senior civil servants, etc. In this case, the few feasible studies in which politicians can be involved should be utilized to identify those groups of politics-observing persons whose responses best correspond with those of the politicians and who can, therefore, serve as their best surrogates for the study of political feasibility.

The prediction schemes deal: (1) with direct political feasibility estimation, where the predictors express their straightforward opinion on the political feasibility of different alternatives, broken down by explicit time dimensions (see Scheme One); (2) with condition predictions, where the predictors identify various conditions which will make a given policy alternative politically feasible (see Scheme Two); and (3) with variable predictions, where predictors deal separately with the different variables of political feasibility, permitting derivation of political feasibility through processing of the variable predictions (see Scheme Three).

In filling in the schemes, the following rules, among others, should be followed:
(1) Detailed questionnaires (which can also be filled in through structured interviews) should try to elicit as elaborated estimates -- in terms of probabilities, time dimension and assumptions -- as the sophistication of the panel members permits, but without forcing them to "invent" in order to fill in the questionnaires.

(2) The questionnaires are to be processed through Delphi Method, with one or two iterations.

(3) Different panels -- selected by randomization of the stratified total panel-membership -- should fill in the three schemes, so as to permit comparison and convergence testing. At a second and third stage, each group should fill in the other schemes, to permit consistency testing.
SCHEME ONE: DIRECT POLITICAL FEASIBILITY ESTIMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Alternatives</th>
<th>Next x Years</th>
<th>Next y Years</th>
<th>. . .</th>
<th>Next n Years</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative One</td>
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<td>Alternative Two</td>
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<td>Alternative N</td>
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Each cell to be filled in with a probability, or a probability distribution, or alternative probabilities with explicit assumptions -- depending on the capacities of the predictor.
### SCHEME TWO: POLITICAL FEASIBILITY CONDITIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Alternatives</th>
<th>Is politically feasible during next x years</th>
<th>If not -- what changes in conditions are required to make it politically feasible.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative One</td>
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<td>Alternative Two</td>
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<td>Alternative N</td>
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Depending on interest and on capacities of the predictor, the scheme can deal with various time spans, different feasibility probabilities and probability-changes, and various combinations of conditions and assumptions.
### Scheme Three: Variable Political Feasibility Estimation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Relevant Actors</th>
<th>Leverage</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Input Image</th>
<th>Probable Action</th>
<th>Actor Combinations</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Alternative image, in terms of actors' goals</td>
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<td>and sphere of legitimate activity</td>
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<td>Central Government Units</td>
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<td>Relevant propensities, tastes and historic habits</td>
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<td>Local Government Units</td>
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<td>Interest Groups</td>
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This matrix to be prepared in respect to each policy alternative.
Each cell to include a concise statement of the relevant images and variables -- in quantitative and qualitative terms, with alternative predictions, probabilities, time dimension, and explicit assumptions -- depending on the capacities of the predictors.
The results provide (a) a political feasibility estimate in respect to each policy alternative; and (b) by putting together all political feasibility estimate -- a part of the political feasibility domain (but there may be many additional highly politically feasible alternatives waiting to be discovered).

The results should be regarded as of limited validity and as depending inter alia on the absence of unexpected occurrences (which often are probable). Nevertheless, the results should be of help to the main policy-makers in better making their own estimates of political feasibility. Another important benefit is the education of prediction experts, and policy analysts in general, in politics and the explicit treatment of politics in predictions -- as important steps in developing capacities better to deal with more complex issues.

SOME CAVEATS

Having proposed a method for predicting political feasibility, I would like to conclude with a word of warning. This warning does not relate to the obvious unreliabilities of the proposed methods or the uncertainty of all predictions based on them. What really worries me
is a much more fundamental danger, namely, the danger that
every political feasibility prediction tends to ignore
the capacities of human devotion and human efforts to
overcome apparently insurmountable barriers and to achieve
not only the improbable but the apparently impossible.
A good policy may be worth fighting for, even if its
political feasibility seems to be nill, as devotion and
skillful efforts may well overcome political barriers and
snatch victory out of the mouth of political infeasibility.

Any political feasibility estimate, however care-
fully derived and however correct at its time, must,
therefore, be regarded as provisional, sometimes to be
taken up as a challenge rather than accepted as an abso-
lute constraint. In this respect, political feasibility
well fits into the basic orientation of policy sciences,
to serve as an aid in high-level heuristic policymaking,
but not as a decision-determining algorithm or a set of
self-fulfilling predictions.