

# **THE GEOGRAPHY OF STATE POLICIES**

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J. R. V. Prescott

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**J. R. V. PRESCOTT**

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## PREFACE

I would like to thank Professor W. G. East for his encouragement in writing this book. I am also grateful to Professor J. Andrews for stimulating discussions on various aspects of national policy; to my wife for preparing the index; to Mr P. Singleton of the Baillieu Library in the University of Melbourne for untiring assistance in the collection of references; and to Mr H. J. Collier for drawing the maps so well.

*1968*

J. R. V. PRESCOTT

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# I

## AIMS AND CONCEPTS

Hartshorne's definition of political geography as being 'the study of areal differences and similarities in political character as an interrelated part of the total complex of areal differences and similarities' (1954, p. 178),<sup>1</sup> has gained general acceptance. This measure of agreement stems from the recognition that political authority may be a more important influence on the way in which a person lives and works than the rest of the environment in which he lives. Since it is the government of any independent state which wields political authority, and makes the laws which are an important part of the total environment in which the majority of the world's population lives, it follows that the attention of the political geographer should be focussed, at least in part, on the governments of states. This is not new, but too often in studies of political geography authors refer to France or Britain without reference to the particular government in power in the particular country. Yet a British Conservative or Labour Government may have different geographical viewpoints, and may exert quite different influences on the political geography of the British Isles and overseas countries with which Britain has connections, or for which Britain has responsibility.

Although there has been a long awareness of this, it does not seem to have prompted the logical outcome of more attention on individual governments. Van Valkenburg (1939) included a chapter on the nature of government, because of its influence on relations with other states. Sprout (1962, chapter 6) examined the

<sup>1</sup> For a list of references see end of each chapter.

proposition that the form of a government affects its foreign policies and international capabilities, but came to no final conclusion on the best form. Moodie noted that the 'hallmark of the State is its sovereign power, with the corollary of allegiance by its inhabitants. In practice that sovereignty is exercised by a central government' (1947, p. 54). It is the government which carries out state functions and if there is no government there can be no state. It therefore follows that if any area lies outside the authority of the government it is not part of the state. This view may be legally incorrect but it reflects geographical realities. For example, during the period 1960–2 the Congolese Government in Leopoldville had no authority in Katanga, and since 1959 there have been some parts of South Vietnam which have been persistently beyond the control of authorities in Saigon. Clearly if we seek a more functional political geography our attention must be increasingly focussed on governments.

It is appropriate at this point to refer to an editorial by Cohen (1966), which was entitled 'a geography of policy', in which he suggests that a study of public and private policy provides common ground for economic and political geographers. There is no question of Cohen seeking to create a new branch of geography, he is merely recognising the fact that it is through policy decisions and their implementation that governments and private firms influence geography. Once again it is possible to find precedents for these views, although most earlier comments have been general rather than specific. For example, Pounds (1963, p. v) indicates that 'the geographical nature, the policy and the power of the state' are the three main themes running through his book. The book follows a systematic treatment and the geographical analysis of policy is the theme least satisfactorily explored. The discussion of national strategy by Jones (1954) is relevant for the political geographer interested in policy. He endorses Hilsman's plea for political scientists to become more policy oriented. For Jones national strategy or policy is the second ray of a country's power fix, the first is resources. There is little point in assessing national power unless the purpose of which the power is to be deployed is also known. This point has been stressed by Sprout:

... elaborate and encyclopaedic data about specific states—their size, shape, location, terrain, climatic resources, stage of development, government system, military forces, civic attitudes—acquires political

significance only with reference to some set of policy assumptions regarding the demands which they are likely to make on other states, and/or the demands which other states are likely to make on them. (1956, p. 49)

There seem to be three aspects of the study of government policy by political geographers. First there is the extent to which geographic factors are considered in making any policy decision. This is not only logically the first aspect, but it has also received most attention by political geographers. Second it is necessary to study the influence which geographical factors have on the operation of policy. This distinction was made clear by Sprout (1956, pp. 58–71, and 1957), who indicated that the policy-maker could evaluate only those geographical factors which were perceived. This leaves the possibility that certain factors which were not perceived could be significant when the policy was applied. This was certainly the case during the establishment of the British Groundnut Scheme in Tanganyika in 1948–9. The abrasive nature of Kongwa soil quickly destroyed ploughs and hoes, increasing costs, while its capacity to compact during the harvesting season impaired the efficiency of mechanical collection. Lastly the vagaries of the rainfall in the area had not been thoroughly established and sub-average years made the situation impossible. Third, political geographers must study the influence which the operations of policy have upon the cultural landscape.

If it is accepted that the study of policy should be developed along these lines the first question concerns the types of policies to be studied. It must be immediately agreed that political geographers have no right to pre-empt this field, which will be of increasing interest to economic geographers, as more and more governments assume greater powers in regulating the economic life of their countries. As Cohen suggests, however, economic geographers will probably be at least equally concerned to investigate the policies of private firms. This is a field which will generally lie outside political geography, the only exceptions will be the policies of very large companies with international operations, which may be significant in studying the political geography of specific countries. The significance of the policies of the major oil companies to the political geography of the Middle East is an obvious example of this point. But it seems likely that economic geographers will investigate the same aspects of policies as political geographers and both branches of the subject should

benefit from the common approach and similar methods. Political geographers will be mainly concerned with the dual primary policies of independent states: the preservation of territorial integrity and the maximum development of the state's resources for the benefit of the population. Pounds (1963, p. v) refers to these aims as 'self-preservation and welfare'. The policies of national governments which do not impinge on these two aims are likely to be marginal to political geography. It is immediately apparent that both these aims will be served by policies operating within the state or outside the state, by policies which are normally described as domestic and external. The country is made stronger by the reduction of serious regional political differences within the state as well as by the conclusion of military alliances, or the establishment of overseas bases. Minority movements are often a source of weakness to states, especially if they occur in border areas close to unfriendly states. Consider the problems which the Kenya Government faces as a consequence of the political attitudes of Somali in the Northern Frontier District. Development is likewise pursued by policies which operate within the country and outside it, and these are so well known that they require no examples.

If this identification of dual aims is followed we will be able to break away from the traditional division into internal and external policies, which has been evident in many post-war studies (Moodie, 1947; Hartshorne, 1950). Moodie noted the problem of distinguishing between the external and internal political geographies of countries and justified it only on practical grounds, which would still apply if the political geographer wished to focus attention on only one aspect of the state. Millar (1967) expressed the difficulties which political scientists face in trying to identify all that is apprehended by the term 'foreign policy'. One reason for not discarding this traditional division in political geography and political science was advanced by Spykman (1942b, pp. 16-17), who explained that the important difference between the internal and external sphere of operations of any government lay in the order and authority at the national level, and the absence of overriding authority and of an established code of laws at the international level. This was a theme which Spykman frequently stressed (1939, 1942a) and which Moodie noted concerning the autonomy of states in respect of internal economic development. More recently Professor Greenwood in the 1966 Roy Milne Memorial lecture noted that internal

policies were usually capable of open examination whereas foreign policies often had a shroud of secrecy imposed by the foreign governments concerned. But there is no suggestion that the order and authority of internal policies or their exposure to debate will necessarily result in a higher measure of predictability, or that the successful outcome of policy can be assured. There is a basic unity of national policy provided by the aim of creating the most favourable condition for the state. Any attempt to draw lines between domestic and foreign policies will face a number of difficulties. First, external geographical factors are often prime factors in determining domestic policies of development or defence. Second, domestic policies on questions such as tariffs or the treatment of minorities will influence the attitude of other countries. Third, some policies such as immigration will be difficult to classify as either domestic or foreign.

There is no conflict between these proposals and Hartshorne's suggestion that 'the fundamental purpose of any state . . . is to bring all the varied territorial parts into a single organised unit' (1950, p. 104). Hartshorne was concerned with the identification of the diverse regions of any state and this is still an important aspect of any analysis. But it is also important to follow this study with an examination of the policies adopted by the state to achieve unity, and to examine the effect of such policies on the continuing diversity of the regions and the cultural landscape. Hartshorne was obviously aware of these points, but he restricted his comments to 'the internal organisation of political authority . . . to permit different adaptations of government to different regional attitudes and interests' (1954, p. 199). There are other types of policies, including war and financial inducements, by which states will seek to overcome the political problems of regional diversity.

The second question concerns the way in which this material should be organised to simplify the co-ordination of research and to promote understanding. It is clear that there are three elements which may form a continuous chain: geographical factors, policies, and the geographical effects of policies. We can note that the new or altered geographical facts at the end of the chain may influence policy-makers in other countries, setting off a chain reaction, or provide the geographical factors to be taken into account by subsequent governments. An example of the chain reaction is provided by the maze of policy-decisions which followed the unilateral declaration of independence by Rhodesia.

Scholars concerned with the influence of geographical factors

on policy will dissect out the influence of individual factors, such as size, location, and quality of population. This is the type of organisation which can be found in most texts of political geography. Students dealing with the effects of the operation of policies on the cultural landscape will arrange the material according to the aspects of the landscape affected: communications, distribution of population, industrial development. But both groups of research workers will have to start with one or a number of policies. Policies occupy the strategic position in the chain from which the backward view towards geographical factors and the forward view to the geographical influences of policy can be taken. McClosky made a similar point as a political scientist:

decision-making . . . is usually a critical point in the process of international politics—a point of ‘input’ where the several influences that have gone into the decision can be detected and their relative effectiveness measured; and a point of ‘output’, where policies are unleashed and begin to register their effect on the course of international affairs. (Snyder, 1962, pp. 193–4)

It therefore seems essential to have some understanding of the nature of policy which will simplify the comparison of research results and the construction of a body of basic knowledge. This does not refer only to research within political geography, but would include research by economic geographers and political scientists. During the past decade many political scientists have focussed on decision-making as a central theme in their subject (see Snyder, 1962).

There are four qualities common to all policies—motive, method, subject and area of operation. From the point of the political geographer there seem to be three basic motives. Those of defence and development have already been mentioned; a third category includes policies of administration or organisation. They could theoretically be described as policies of development in the widest meaning of this term, but their distinctive nature makes their separation worth-while. This point was well made by Professor Spate in discussing a paper by Prescott (1967). Administrative policies will be concerned with the subdivision of the state into territorial units for purposes of local government, elections and the provision of basic services; it will also include policies connected with the choice of a capital, or an official language, or the division of powers between central and state governments in

a federation. If a policy cannot be fitted into one of these three groups it is likely to be marginal to political geography.

Reference to method in this case is not made in the sense used by Spykman, who identified techniques of coercion or negotiation. A more meaningful division for geographers is between unilateral decisions made by a single government, and multilateral decisions reached after consultation or involvement of more than one government. The significance lies in knowing whether it is necessary to construct one geographical view or more than one, for different governments will view the same geographical facts in different ways. The importance of this position was made clear in an exasperated letter written by Balfour to Lockhart in June 1918.

You constantly complain of indecision, as if all that was required was that H.M.G. should make up their minds. But there has been no particular indecision on the part of particular members of the Alliance. They have severally determined their policy as quickly as could reasonably be expected . . . Britain, France and Italy have thought the dangers of intervention less than its advantages; America has thought the advantages less than the dangers; Japan will do nothing on the grand scale until she receives an invitation from her co-belligerents.

(Quoted in Ullman, 1961, p. 192)

This division between unilateral and multilateral methods might seem to parallel the division into domestic and foreign policies. However, it is clear that governments may take unilateral action outside their own territory if they are sufficiently powerful, and conversely many governments have engaged in multilateral agreements relating to their internal development.

There is a very wide range of policy subjects, such as trade, conscription and investment control, and it is impossible to give an exhaustive list.

The area of operation of a policy includes both the geographical area and the section of the economy or population to which the policy applies. For example, policies regarding 'beef roads' in the Northern Territory of Australia apply to a clearly defined area of land, while restrictions on the production of margarine apply to a particular section of the country's manufacturing industry wherever it may be located, and conscription applies to a particular section of the community wherever they may live. In addition to the area of policy the geographer must also know its duration.

Four qualifying points must be made to this suggested view of

the qualities of policies. First, some policies will serve more than one motive. South Africa's search for oil has the defensive aim of strengthening the country's resistance to any economic sanctions, and the economic aim of improving the balance of payments by reducing the level of imports. Second, while the subjects of a number of policies in different countries may be the same they may serve different motives. If control over industrial location is examined, it is clear that in Britain this policy is designed to help the economic stability of some depressed areas and reduce the problems of planning in the Midlands and south-east England. In South Africa the establishment of border industries around the Bantustans is designed to reduce African concentrations around the main cities and reduce international criticism of apartheid policies. In Germany between the two world wars autobahns were built for defence and improved military efficiency, improvements in Irish roads are designed to make travel easier for tourists. Third, there will not necessarily be any correlation between motive and effect. For example, defence policies may have economic consequences. Britain has indicated that its timetable of defence cuts in Singapore took account of the economic significance of the base to the revenue of the island. Fourth, it is not necessary for geography to have been significant in the formulation of policies for their implementation to have geographic consequences. The doctrinaire nationalisation of industry will frequently produce geographical consequences, and any rise in the price of gold, that is based on political and financial reasons, would have a profound effect on the pattern of gold extraction. If it is accepted that Indonesia's policy of confrontation against Malaysia was compounded mainly of political and ideological elements, it is important to note that the effects of the policy included the cessation or hindrance of trade between the two countries, the construction of new roads and airfields in Sabah and Sarawak, and the evacuation of the Malaysian border zone accompanied by the regrouping of the Chinese population in supervised settlement areas.

The third question concerns the hypothesis to be used in establishing the relation between geographical factors and policy decisions. Sprout (1956) has made a detailed analysis of the man-milieu approaches available in respect of international politics which has value for political geography, because international politics includes the calculation of state power and the explanation and prediction of state actions. There is little doubt that examina-

tion of cognitive behaviour offers the best opportunity, providing the individual decision-makers can be identified, and providing there is sufficient material on which to reconstruct their appreciation of the significance of geographical factors. This will rarely be possible except in historical cases when material from archives is available, therefore it will usually be more fruitful to employ a concept of probabilism which utilises a general model and makes assumptions about motives, skills and knowledge. The difficulty of identifying the particular decision-maker in some cases may be gauged from the very complex diagram published in *The Times* (14 November 1966) to illustrate the economic corridors of power in Britain. Political scientists have often written on the problems associated with the meaningful analysis of policy decisions.

The matter becomes more complicated from here on, for many different variables have to be taken into account in assessing the influences on any particular decision. Psychological, social and economic factors may need to be investigated, in addition to the usual political ones. (McClosky, writing in Snyder, 1962, p. 194)

The difficulties of getting at the facts in foreign policy before the files are opened are obvious enough. Australia is one of the hardest of the democracies in this respect . . . There are no immutable or absolute factors in foreign policy. This is what makes writing about foreign policy so difficult. Perhaps nations ought to determine their policies in accordance with set principles—geographic, demographic, military, economic, ideological and so on. Prime Ministers ought to be rational, however that may be judged, but they are not always so. To find the basis for the foreign policy of a country, therefore, it is necessary to ascertain why relevant decisions were actually made. This means looking at the thinking of people who made the decisions, their image of the world and their own policy, of finding which facts were factors to them, and how they took them into account.

(Millar, 1967, pp. 73–5)

Some political scientists have used the technique of circulating manuscripts dealing with contemporary events, amongst politicians involved, inviting comment. Gross errors may be avoided in this way, although it is necessary to beware of politicians trying to present their policies in the best possible light.

It seems worth while to examine in more detail the nature and value of historical and contemporary studies. While it will be much harder to make correct assessments of the significance

of various factors in any contemporary policy decision, than in the case of decisions made so long ago that the archives may be consulted, the information about the details of the policy and many of its effects will be equally available in historical and contemporary studies. Sawyer (1967) has made the point that

there is no reason whatever to doubt that the ultimate expression of policy is reliable, and that the behaviour of many governments will be in accordance with the policy so expressed.

(p. 236)

In terms of the effects of policies, the only difference between historical and contemporary studies will be that in the former it will be possible to include long-range influences, and provide a fuller assessment of the extent to which the policy results were predictable.

In any case, political geographers have a duty to consider the contemporary scene, despite the attendant problems. This point was stressed by Moodie:

... the political geographer is concerned with the observation, recording and analysis of the changes in the world which have already taken place, as well as those which are proceeding at the present time.

(1947, p. 12)

It is recognised that contemporary explanations might be controverted by later scholars using primary sources, but such later scholars will be grateful for the impressions recorded by contemporary workers, and the descriptions of policy effects should be accurate. These contemporary studies will also assist in the examination of the relationships between policy and geography at different points in time within a single state. It would be interesting, for example, to test the views of the German statesman Kuhlman:

... the geographical position and historical development are so largely determining factors in foreign policy, that regardless of changes in the form of government, the foreign policy has a natural tendency to return again and again to the same general and fundamental alignment.

(Quoted in Sprout, 1945, p. 63)