

Giving Structure to Structure

Ken Shepsle's Impact on the Present & Future of Political Science

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November 12, 2016

The Quest for a "General Equilibrium Theory of Politics"

- Preferences alone don't give us much predictive power (positively or normatively)
- Adding on institutions, or "structure," can.
- Three questions follow from this addition:
 - a. What effects does structure have?
 - b. Where does structure come from?
 - c. Did structure arise because of the effects we identify, or for other reasons?
- The present of political science---at least "institutionalism" within political science---is largely focused on continuing the project of (a), above. Ken's work here is huge. From "Structure Induced Equilibrium" to his work with Barry Weingast to his work with Mik Laver,¹ Ken laid the foundation for over 30 years of scholarship (and counting).
- *The future of political science*: part of Ken's latest work focuses on what I call "softening the structure." Rule-breaking, innovation: changing the rules of the game. This work is particularly exciting not because of its subject, per se. Rather, we are witnessing a scholar who wisely and profitably brought "the rules of the game" into the theoretical study of politics bravely (and presumably wisely) say, "but what if we look at/for the middle ground?"

I remember multiple times when people told me (and/or others with me clearly standing in the circled group of conference attendees) that the following were dead topics:

- Social choice theory,
- Information aggregation,
- Delegation, and
- Formal political theory, writ large.

I hesitate to gloat, but the evidence here and in the journals suggests those people were wrong. I am thankful they were wrong. And I thank Ken for both helping to provoke those claims

¹ Not to mention other work, including his textbook "Analyzing Politics" and his work with Rohde on the Supreme Court, among many others.

and---through both his research and mentorship over the past decades---helping us prove them wrong.