(Note: As far as one of the following criteria is not applicable, please indicate why and supply alternative relevant information.)

1. Details of applicant
Name, title(s): Vis, Barbara, MA, MSc
(PhD thesis approved by manuscript committee September 2007; defense scheduled for 13 March 2008)
Affiliation (incl. fte): Department of Political Science (1.0 fte)
Telephone: 020-5986821
E-mail: b.vis@fsw.vu.nl
Website: http://home.fsw.vu.nl/b.vis

Duration: Application for an additional 0.2 fte research time during one year

Discipline: Political Science
Keywords: Welfare state reform; Prospect theory; Fuzzy-set analysis; Political actors; Behavioural theory

2. Title of the application
Why Do They Do It? Governments and Welfare State Reform in Advanced Capitalist Democracies

3. Research proposal (3a + 3b = max 800 words)

3a. Problem statement and theoretical background
What induces some governments to pursue welfare state reforms that may lose them votes? And why do some governments pursue reforms that offer no avenues for reaping electoral gains? Given that all industrial democracies face socio-economic challenges like ageing populations, sluggish economic growth and long-term unemployment, how to explain the variation across governments in reforms to tackle such problems? Why, for example, did the German Social Democratic/Green coalition eschew unpopular measures in its first term in office, but implemented a radical reform agenda in its second term? And why did the first Blair government pursue labour market activation policies, whereas the second did not? Current approaches in welfare state research cannot satisfactorily answer these ‘why do they do it?’ questions (for literature reviews, see Van Kersbergen 2002; Starke 2006). The proposed research endeavours to identify the conditions under and the extent to which governments – as the main political actors in welfare state reform politics – pursue unpopular and not-unpopular reforms. Unpopular reforms are defined as those policy changes that negatively affect the median voter, i.e., the voter who holds the median policy position. Not-unpopular reforms are defined as those policy changes that affect the median voter neither positively nor negatively. The latter reforms are not politically risky, but provide hardly avenues for
reaping electoral gains. How to explain governments’ behaviour with respect to both types of welfare state reform?

Based on insights from prospect theory – a psychological theory of choice under risk (Kahneman & Tversky 1979; 2000, for reviews of the use of prospect theory in political science, see Levy 2003; Mercer 2005) – this study’s central argument is that governments’ attitude towards risk, and therewith their willingness to pursue (not-) unpopular reform, is shaped by the context or – in prospect-theoretical jargon – domain (cf. Vis & Van Kersbergen 2007). Two hypotheses guide the analysis. First, governments pursue unpopular reforms only when confronted with losses (e.g., a deteriorating socio-economic situation). Second, governments’ pursue not-unpopular reforms only when confronted with gains (e.g., an improving political position).

3b. Method / Approach

To empirically assess the prospect-theoretical hypotheses presented above, the proposed project consists of two parts. The first part involves updating and extending the applicant’s unique dataset of welfare state reforms pursued by British, Danish, Dutch, and German governments from 1979 onwards. These countries’ governments are selected for a number of reasons. First, the countries vary with respect to a number of characteristics that might influence governments’ pursuit of (not-) unpopular reform, such as the type of welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990), the type of party competition (Kitschelt 2001), and the electoral system (Lijphart 1999). Including governments from countries that differ on such characteristics helps reveal the robustness of the findings by controlling for the influence of contextual factors. Second, all countries had rightist governments as well as leftist ones that pursued (not-) unpopular reform in one cabinet period and abstained from it in another (Vis 2008: chapters 6 and 7). This feature allows me to control for the influence of partisanship. Third, the four countries vary as regards the extent of welfare state reform that has taken place (e.g., Visser & Hemerijck 1997; Cox 2001; Green-Pedersen 2002; Kuipers 2006).

The current dataset contains qualitative as well as quantitative data and is based on a large number of sources (e.g., Scruggs 2004; Armingeon et al. 2006; ISSA 2006). Some (relatively) recent governments, such as Balkenende II, are not included in the dataset yet and will be added. Moreover, the extended dataset will include more qualitative data on welfare states reforms for all governments under consideration. This updated dataset will allow for mapping better the type of welfare state reform (unpopular or not-unpopular) and the extent of reform. The updated dataset will be made publicly available through the applicant’s website.

The second part of project entails an empirical test of the prospect-theoretical hypotheses using an innovative technique: fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA, see Ragin 1987; 2000). This set-theoretical approach is particularly apt for testing these hypotheses in that it allows for the identification of necessary and/or sufficient conditions. Additionally, fs/QCA can deal with multiple and conjectural causation, which are the situations in which the same condition (i.e., independent variable) leads to a different outcome depending on the context or when an outcome results from the combination of two or more conditions (Mahoney & Goertz 2006; Vis 2008). These situations are likely to arise in welfare state research because of, among other things, the different types of welfare states (liberal, conservative, and social democratic, cf. Esping-Andersen 1990). The empirical analysis focuses on the reform activities of 26 Danish, German, Dutch, and British governments between 1979 and 2007. Data on these reforms are part of the updated dataset.

The project’s fresh theoretical angle and innovative methodological approach will allow for a better understanding of the politics of welfare state reform.
4. Key publications relevant to the present proposal (3 - 5)


5. Time Plan (max ½ A4 or 100 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Research activity</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept.–Nov.</td>
<td>Updating and extending applicant’s dataset of welfare state reforms (Part I of project, see 3b)</td>
<td>Extended dataset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec.–Febr.</td>
<td>Drafting paper based on preliminary findings, to be presented at a (international) conference (Part II of project)</td>
<td>Conference paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March–Aug.</td>
<td>Finalising dataset (Part I of project)</td>
<td>Finalised dataset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revising the paper based on preliminary findings, to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal (Part II of project)</td>
<td>Journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing paper based on finalised data, to be presented at a (international) conference (Part II of project)</td>
<td>Conference paper (which will become a journal article)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Relevance (scientific, societal; max 300 words)

The proposed research is scientifically relevant because it is empirically, theoretically, and methodologically innovative. Empirically, the study brings the decision-making of political actors – especially governments – back to the center of attention. Studying governments’ behaviour is an issue that has receded into the distance under the influence of (particularly) institutionalism, although many of the theoretical claims and hypotheses have continued to refer to what governments do. This project bridges this empirical gap. Theoretically, the study is innovative in bringing together the scholarship on the welfare state and prospect theory. Psychological theories are still hardly used in political science despite their possible utility. Insights from prospect theory complement, for example, the existing welfare state literature by offering a behaviourally correct micro-foundation, which is something most theories lack (see Vis 2008). Methodologically, the study’s approach is innovative in that it applies a relatively new technique: fuzzy-
set Qualitative Comparative Analysis. Set-theoretical approaches like fs/QCA do not yet belong to the standard toolkit of comparative researchers. Yet, set-theoretical approaches offer a series of advantages over more traditional approaches such as statistical techniques and case studies, which makes applying them useful. In doing so, the proposed research contributes to the debate about methodology in the social sciences in general and comparative politics in particular.

The societal relevance of the project is that it improves our understanding of what governments actually do with respect to welfare state reform. In the current socio-economic climate in which the population is ageing and growth rates are slowing down, welfare state retrenchment is on the agenda everywhere. Still, we have only limited understanding of what induces some governments to pursue perhaps necessary but electorally risky reforms, whereas other governments – that are confronted with the same background conditions (e.g., ageing population) – do not.

7. Expected output and contributions (7a - 7d = max 500 words)

7a. Expected output

- Publicly available dataset of welfare state reforms. This will be a unique dataset in that it combines a large amount of qualitative and quantitative data on welfare state reforms.
- Two conference papers. Both papers will be revised for submission to peer-reviewed journals, one of which during the project; the other in the year following the project.
- Two journal articles (see above).

7b. Contribution to the research program of the Department

By examining what governments do, the findings of the proposed research will contribute to one of the core themes of the research program of the Department of Political Science: parties and government (Cluster B3, see Research Assessment Social Sciences 2001-2006, pp.205-206). Additionally, and related, the proposed study will help answer the third research question of the departmental research program as it studies the effects of multi-layered governance in terms of public policy-making (see Research Assessment, p.204). The proposed research is novel in that it examines the actual decision-making behaviour of political actors (especially governments) and in that it pursues a new methodological approach.

7c. Contribution to the research mission of the CCSS

The proposed research contributes to the research mission of the CCSS by conducting a comparative analysis to examine the conditions under and the extent to which governments pursue (not-) unpopular reform in a theoretically and methodologically innovative way. Moreover, the project has an interdisciplinary character as it complements a political science approach with insights from psychology and methodology.

7d. Additional value

- What is the additional value of the proposal? Why is it not possible / would it be possible to conduct the proposed project within regular work time?
- Has the content of the proposal (similar subject matter) been submitted elsewhere? If yes, where?

The additional value of the proposal is that it updates and extends a dataset that will be publicly available, that it helps solve the puzzling cross-government variation in (not-) unpopular reform, and that is draws on as well as develops an innovative methodological approach.

The proposed research cannot be conducted in the regular working time because, especially, updating and extending the dataset on welfare state reforms has time demands beyond what is currently possible under the terms of my contract.

The content of the proposal has not been submitted elsewhere.

8. Replacement of applicant’s teaching obligations
Replacement of the applicant’s teaching obligations is stated in the attached letter by the Head of the Dept. of Political Science in Appendix A.

9. CV of applicant
(including publication record)

Please ad CV in Appendix B.

10. I hereby declare that I have completed this form truthfully:

Name: Barbara Vis
Amsterdam, Date: 9 November 2007

11. Literature references (max 1 A4)


Appendix B

Curriculum Vitae
Barbara Vis

Office: Home:
Department of Political Science Bankastraat 27
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 2103 XE Heemstede
De Boelelaan 1081 Tel: 023 529 7125
1081 HV Amsterdam Mob.: 06 1941 6149
Tel: 020 598 6821 Email: b.vis@fsw.vu.nl
Fax: 020 598 6821 Web: http://home.fsw.vu.nl/b.vis/

Date and place of birth: 10 June 1979, Heemstede

Present Position

2007– Assistant Professor in Comparative Politics, Department of Political
Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam/
Senior Member Netherlands Institute of Government (NIG)

Previous Positions

2005-2006 Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
2004-2007 Doctoral Researcher, Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Education

2008 Ph.D. in Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (manuscript
approved by reading committee September 2007; defense sched-
uled for 13 March 2008)
Dissertation title: Biting the Bullet or Steering Clear? Politics of
(Not-) Unpopular Welfare State Reform in Advanced Capitalist Dem-
ocracies
Supervisors: Kees van Kersbergen & Hans Keman
Reading committee: Klaus Armingeon, Christoffer Green-Pedersen,
Gary Marks, Paul Pennings & Kurt Weyland

2003 M.Sc. in Political Science, Universiteit van Amsterdam
Field: International Relations

2002 M.A. in Economics, Universiteit van Amsterdam
Field: General Economics
Plus a 60 ECTS Minor in Labour Studies

Teaching Experience

2007 Instructor, Comparative Politics (fall/winter),
2nd year B.Sc. Political Science (with Adriaan Hoogendoorn)
Instructor, Academic Skills Workshop (fall), PMC Political Science


Teaching assistant, Bachelor Political Science (spring), 1st year B.Sc. Political Science

2005 Instructor, Political Economy (fall), 3rd year B.Sc. Political Science

2004-2007 Several invited lectures in the M.Sc. Political Science

RESEARCH

Journal articles (international refereed)

forthcoming 'Governments and Unpopular Social Policy Reform: Biting the Bullet or Steering Clear?', *European Journal of Political Research* (accepted for publication).


Monographs


Book chapters


Professional publications


Conference papers


--- also presented at the NIG Work Conference 2007, Panel 4 ”The Dynamics of Political Attention”, Tilburg, The Netherlands, November 8.


--- Paper also Presented at the Research Seminar of the Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 14 March.


Submitted and under review


Workshop organisation


2005  Dutch/Flemish Politicologenetmaal, “Methods & Techniques: Innovations and Applications in Political Science”, May 19-20, Antwerp, Belgium (with Catherine de Vries, Rens Vliegenthart & David Hollanders).

Invited presentations


GRADUATE COURSEWORK

2004-2006  Graduate Program of the Netherlands Institute of Government (NIG), Rotterdam, The Netherlands (program completed).

Courses taken: Skills (getting it published; presentation; writing reviews; network analysis; formulating a research problem; operationalisation; case study research; simulations); Philosophy of Science; Core Themes in Public Administration and Political Science; State of the Art in Political Science.

2005  Pooled Time Series Cross-section Analysis: Panel Data in the Social Sciences, Essex Summer School in Social Science, University of Essex, UK.

2005  Introduction to Bayesian Statistics, Interuniversity Graduate School of Psychometrics and Sociometrics (IOPS), Universiteit van Utrecht, The Netherlands.

2004  Comparative Methodology – The Logic of Case Oriented Research, Oslo Summer School in Comparative Social Science Studies, University of Oslo, Norway.

2004  Varieties of Capitalism, Oslo Summer School in Comparative Social Science Studies, University of Oslo, Norway.

Other courses

2006  Introduction to Blackboard for Teachers, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
2005  Teaching in English, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
2004  Succesvol Promoveren & Persoonlijke Effectiviteit, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

OTHER PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

2007-  Reviewer for the Journal of European Social Policy
2007-  Co-organiser of Departmental Staff Seminars, Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
2006-  Correspondent for Kennislink
2006-2007  Organiser of Ph.D. “peer teaching” sessions, Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
2005-2007  Member of the Ph.D. Council of the Netherlands Institute of Government (NIG)

MEMBERSHIPS

Netherlands Institute of Government (NIG)
Dutch Political Science Association (NKWP)
The Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE)
COMParative methods for the Advancement of Systematic Cross-case analysis and Small-n Studies (Compasss)