Understanding Health Changes in Eastern and Southern Europe

-A Qualitative Comparative Analysis on the Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Expanding and Restricting Access to Health Care-

Key words: Health Systems, Health Access, QCA, Political Economy, Eastern Europe, Southern Europe

Abstract

Health reforms are the product of complex systems, where political, institutional and structural factors interact to produce changes. These complexities make it difficult to accurately explain the drivers of reforms. A different approach is suggested, based on patients’ access to health care. The paper utilizes a new index of access to health services, in order to analyze changes in the 17 EU member states in Southern and Eastern Europe, across 67 governments in the last 25 years.

Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis is used in order to untangle necessary and sufficient conditions which lead to retrenching and expanding access. Five causal conditions and their interactions are tested, which cover political, institutional and structural dimensions, namely: government ideology, veto points, fiscal deficit size, linkages between parties and voters, and the current level of access in the health system.

Results indicate that lack of fiscal pressure is necessary for expanding access to health care, while an existing low level of access to health is necessary for retrenchment. Left-wing cabinets are associated with expanding access to health, in combination with low fiscal pressure, existing high levels of access and programmatic linkages between parties and voters. Right-wing cabinets are associated with retrenching access to health care in combination with non-programmatic linkages and existing low levels of access.