Understanding Public Policymaking

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Actor Interaction and the Policy Process

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POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy

Week 3 - Lecture 3.1

Theories of the Group

Theories of the Group: Introduction

- Public policy results from interactions among groups with different interests and resources
- Understanding group interaction is key to understanding policymaking
- Two main theories: elite theory and pluralist theory
- These offer different perspectives on power distribution and policy formation

Elite Theory

- A small group with the most resources makes the most important decisions
- These individuals are often wealthy, well-educated, and well-connected
- Associated with C. Wright Mills' concept of the *"power elite"*
- Different elites often dominate different policy areas

Pluralist (Group) Theory

- Power is distributed among various groups in society
- Groups compete for influence over public policy
- Associated with Robert Dahl's concept of *"polyarchy"*
- More optimistic view of power distribution
- Acknowledges some groups are underrepresented in the political process

Actor Interaction for Policy Change

Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)

- Focuses on interaction of actors in the policy process
- Actors form coalitions based on shared beliefs and interests
- Coalitions compete to influence policy outcomes
- Useful for understanding how policy change occurs

Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework

- Focuses on how institutions shape actor behavior
- Institutions determine incentives and constraints for actors
- Key to understanding policy change through institutional lens
- Valuable for analyzing institutions' impact on policy process

IAD Example from My Research

"Does Collaboration Matter?"   View PDF

Rational Choice Theory

- Focuses on behavior of individual actors
- Assumes actors are rational and self-interested
- Actors seek to maximize their utility
- Useful for predicting behavior and policy outcomes

Lindblom's Incrementalism

- Proposed by Charles Lindblom
- Policy changes occur gradually and incrementally
- Emphasizes small, successive adjustments over radical change
- Valuable for analyzing policy evolution over time

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET)

- Policy change occurs in short, intense bursts
- Long periods of stability between bursts
- Changes often triggered by external events or crises
- Useful for understanding dynamics of policy change over time

Policy Process Models

Systems Model

- Views policy process as interconnected parts that interact

- Includes inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback loops
- Helps understand the policy process holistically
- Valuable for grasping complexity and interactions within the process

Stages Model

- Sees policy process as a progression of stages
- Stages include agenda setting, formulation, implementation, evaluation
- Aids in comprehending policy development and implementation
- Useful for dissecting the step-by-step process of policy-making

Garbage Can Model

- Perceives policy process as chaotic and non-linear
- Problems, solutions, participants, and opportunities mix haphazardly
- Decisions emerge when elements coincide within the "garbage can"
- Helps grasp the randomness and intricacy of policy-making

Conclusion

Key Takeaways

- Understanding group dynamics is crucial for understanding policy-making
- Elite and pluralist theories offer different perspectives on power distribution
- ACF, IAD, rational choice, incrementalism, PET, and policy process models provide valuable frameworks for analyzing policy-making
- Policy-making is a complex, dynamic process influenced by various actors and institutions

Questions?

Any questions or comments?

Due on Saturday

Don't forget to submit your Term Paper Proposal assignment by Saturday!