Understanding Public Policymaking

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## Actor Interaction and the Policy Process

David P. Adams, Ph.D.

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](WatershedCollaborationModel.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!