

Understanding Policy Change

Introduction to Policy Process Theories

POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy

Lecture 2-2

David P. Adams, Ph.D.

Why Study Policy Process Theories?

Theories help us:

- Understand how policies change over time
- Identify key factors in policy development
- Predict when change might occur
- Analyze past policy successes and failures

Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF)

Policy windows open when three independent streams converge:

- **Problem Stream:** Issues gaining attention (e.g., opioid crisis)
- **Policy Stream:** Available solutions (e.g., harm reduction policies)
- **Politics Stream:** Political conditions (e.g., bipartisan support for intervention)

Example: The Clean Air Act amendments of 1990, where environmental crises, policy solutions, and political leadership converged.

Key Components of the Three Streams Model

Key Components:

- **Policy Entrepreneurs:** Individuals or groups who promote policy solutions
- **Policy Windows:** Opportunities for policy change when the streams align
- **Coupling:** The process of linking the streams together

Advocacy Coalition Framework

Policy change through competing belief systems

- Groups form around shared beliefs
- Compete to influence policy
- Learn and adapt over time

Example: The long-term debate between environmentalists and the fossil fuel industry over climate policies.

Technical Details: Advocacy Coalition Framework

The ACF involves:

- **Coalitions:** Groups of actors who share beliefs and coordinate actions
- **Policy Subsystems:** The focus of coalitions' activities, such as specific policy areas
- **Policy Brokers:** Individuals who mediate between coalitions

Example: Coalitions of environmental groups and industry representatives in the energy policy subsystem.

Key Components of the ACF

Key Components:

- **Belief Systems:** Deep core beliefs, policy core beliefs, and secondary aspects
- **Policy Learning:** Changes in beliefs or strategies based on new information
- **External Events:** Factors outside the subsystem that can influence policy change

Example: The impact of economic crises or natural disasters on policy learning and coalition strategies.

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

Policy changes through:

- Long periods of stability
- Sudden, dramatic shifts
- New policy "equilibrium"

Example: Major civil rights legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which marked a sudden shift after years of incremental change.

Key Components of PET

Key Components:

- **Policy Images:** How issues are perceived and understood
- **Venue Shopping:** Efforts to move issues to favorable decision-making arenas
- **Policy Entrepreneurs:** Actors who promote significant changes

Example: The shift in gun control policy debates following high-profile mass shootings.

Summary

Key Takeaways:

- Policy process theories help us understand and predict policy changes
- *Kingdon's MSF* highlights the convergence of problem, policy, and politics streams
- The *Advocacy Coalition Framework* focuses on belief systems and coalition dynamics
- *Punctuated Equilibrium Theory* explains long periods of stability interrupted by sudden changes

Use these frameworks to analyze and interpret policy developments in your term paper.

Looking Ahead: Term Paper

You'll apply these theories to analyze a policy of your choice

- Choose a policy issue that interests you
- Select one or more theories to analyze it
- Build your analysis step by step

First step: Topic selection due Week 4