

Official Actors in the Policy Process

Theories of Interaction

POSC 315: Week 3-2

Theoretical Approaches

Three main frameworks for understanding policy actors:

1. Institutionalism
2. Behavioralism
3. Neo-Institutionalism

Institutionalism

- Studies politics and policy through formal institutional interactions
- Focuses on formal rules and procedures
- Emphasizes relationships between institutions

Behavioralism

- Focuses on individual political motivation and behavior
- Analyzes incentives and disincentives
- Examines relationships between individuals and groups

Neo-Institutionalism

- Synthesizes institutional and behavioral approaches
- Examines sociological aspects of institutions
- Studies how institutions shape behavior
- Applies rational choice theory to institutional analysis

Key Concepts

Law of Inertia

Objects in motion tend to stay in motion

Institutional Inertia

The tendency of formal institutions to resist change

Institutional Concepts

- **Path Dependency:** Historical decisions shape current options
- **Incrementalism:** Change occurs in small steps
- **Punctuated Equilibrium:** Long periods of stability interrupted by rapid change

Types of Policy Actors

Official Actors

Formally recognized participants in the policy process

- Legislators
- Executive
- Bureaucrats
- Judges

Legislators

Core Functions and Responsibilities

- Primary lawmaking body in democratic systems
- Constitutional authority to create, amend, and repeal laws
- Oversight of executive branch activities
- Budget and appropriations authority

Legislative Dynamics

Key Motivations

- Re-election goals drive many decisions
- Constituent service and representation
- Policy achievement in priority areas
- Institutional power and influence

Legislative Constraints

- Procedural Requirements:
 - Committee system
 - Parliamentary rules
 - Voting procedures
 - Bicameral negotiations

Political Constraints

- Party leadership directives
- Coalition management
- Interest group pressure
- Electoral consequences

Legislative Activities

- Bill Introduction and Sponsorship:
 - Research and drafting
 - Coalition building

- Stakeholder engagement

Committee Work

- Hearings and investigations
- Expert testimony
- Mark-up sessions

Constituent Services

- Casework management
- District outreach
- Community engagement

Executive Branch

Core Functions and Powers

- Law Execution and Administration
- Policy Leadership:

Function
Agenda setting
Policy proposals
Crisis management
International relations

Executive Policy Tools

Direct Policy Instruments

- Executive Orders
- Executive Memoranda
- Proclamations
- Signing Statements
- Veto Power

Executive Influence

- Agenda Setting Power:
 - Public attention direction
 - Media relations
 - Crisis framing
- Bureaucratic Oversight:
 - Agency direction
 - Personnel appointments
 - Budget proposals

Bureaucracy

Implementation Role

- Policy Implementation
- Regulation Development
- Program Administration
- Service Delivery

Bureaucratic Structure

- Hierarchical Organization:
 - Clear chain of command
 - Specialized divisions
 - Standard operating procedures
- Personnel Systems:
 - Merit-based hiring
 - Civil service protections
 - Professional development

Street-Level Bureaucrats

Key Characteristics

- Direct public interaction
- Discretionary authority
- Resource constraints
- Complex decision-making

Bureaucratic Power

- Technical Expertise:
 - Specialized knowledge
 - Program experience
 - Policy implementation insights
- Administrative Authority:
 - Rulemaking power
 - Enforcement discretion
 - Program management

Judiciary

Constitutional Role

- Constitutional Interpretation
- Legal Dispute Resolution
- Rights Protection
- Government Oversight

Judicial Powers

Key Authorities

- Judicial Review:
 - Constitutional analysis
 - Statutory interpretation
 - Administrative review
- Jurisdictional Authority:
 - Original jurisdiction
 - Appellate jurisdiction

Policy Impact

- Direct Policy Effects:
 - Constitutional rulings
 - Statutory interpretation
 - Administrative oversight
- Indirect Influence:
 - Agenda setting
 - Policy framing
 - Behavioral incentives

Judicial Constraints

- Institutional Limitations:
 - Case or controversy requirement
 - Standing doctrine
 - Precedent considerations
- External Constraints:
 - Implementation dependence
 - Political context
 - Public legitimacy

Policy Process Integration

Actor Interactions

- Checks and balances system
- Institutional interdependence
- Policy feedback loops
- Conflict resolution mechanisms

Looking Ahead

Next Session: Unofficial Actors in the Policy Process

- Interest Groups

- Media
- Think Tanks
- Advocacy Organizations