Unofficial Actors in the Policy Process

Actor Interaction

POSC 315: Week 4-2

Overview

- Unofficial Actors
  - News Media
  - Political Parties
  - Interest Groups
  - Think Tanks
  - Corporations
  - Individuals
- Concepts of Interaction

The News Media

"Politicians and the news media create a world of political fictions by developing causal stories that determine to whom and to where or to what blame is affixed." - Deborah Stone

Media Framing

Key Concepts

- Frame definition: "The process by which a communication source defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy"
- Impact on public perception
- Example: "Immigrant Caravan" vs. "Refugee Caravan"

Media Gatekeeping

- Control over story selection
  - Editorial decisions
  - Story placement
  - Coverage duration
- Impact on policy windows
  - Creating opportunities
  - Sustaining attention
  - Influencing timing

Modern Media Dynamics

- Evolution of Media Landscape
  - Traditional vs. Digital platforms
  - Social media impact
  - 24-hour news cycle
- Challenges
  - Decreasing attention spans
  - Information overload
  - Echo chambers

Pack Journalism

"The tendency of journalists to cover the same stories in the same way because they are competing with each other for audience attention."

- Creates story momentum
- Reinforces narrative frames
- Can lead to groupthink

Political Parties

Unique characteristics:

- Not mentioned in Constitution
- Created by politicians
- Essential for ballot access

Party Functions

- Coordination Functions
    - Coordinate actions
    - Communicate with voters
    - Raise money
    - Recruit candidates
    - Mobilize voters
    - Organize government

Modern Party Dynamics

- Polarization Effects
    - Increased ideological sorting
    - Gridlock challenges
    - Partisan policy formation
- Institutional Changes
    - Primary system evolution
    - Campaign finance role
    - Party discipline

Party Realignment

Historical Examples

- The New Deal Coalition
- Southern Strategy
- Reagan Revolution

Interest Groups

Core Definitions

- "An organization that tries to influence public policy decisions." - Stone
- "A collection of individuals who share a common interest or attitude and seek to influence government for specific ends." - Lowi

Interest Group Types

- Institutional Groups
    - National Governors Association
    - National League of Cities
    - National Association of Counties
- Economic Groups

- National Association of Manufacturers
- American Petroleum Institute
- American Medical Association
- Public Interest Groups (PIGs)
  - Sierra Club
  - National Rifle Association
  - Consumer advocacy organizations

Modern Interest Group Strategies

Digital Age Tactics

- Social Media Campaigns
  - Viral advocacy
  - Online mobilization
  - Digital grassroots
- Data-Driven Approaches
  - Targeted messaging
  - Analytics-based advocacy
  - Digital engagement metrics

Interest Group Activities

- Direct Activities
  - Lobbying
  - Campaign contributions
  - Litigation
  - Venue shopping
- Indirect Activities
  - Public relations
  - Grassroots mobilization
  - Coalition building
  - Research and education

AstroTurfing

Modern Examples

- Definition: Creating artificial grassroots movements
- Current Examples:
  - Industry-funded citizen groups
  - Corporate-sponsored local movements
  - Social media manipulation campaigns
- Impact on Policy Process
  - Public perception manipulation
  - Policy agenda influence
  - Legislative pressure

Think Tanks

Research and advocacy organizations focusing on:

- Policy research
- Analysis
- Recommendations
- Public education

Think Tank Categories

- Academic Think Tanks
  - Brookings Institution
  - RAND Corporation
- Advocacy Think Tanks
  - Heritage Foundation
  - Center for American Progress
- Contract Research Organizations
  - Urban Institute
  - Research Triangle Institute

Think Tank Influence

- Policy Research
  - Data analysis
  - Policy evaluation
  - Impact assessment
- Knowledge Translation
  - Policy briefs
  - Media engagement
  - Decision-maker outreach

Think Tank Funding

Funding Sources

- Private Donors
- Foundations
- Corporations
- Government Contracts
- Endowments

Impact on Research Focus and Credibility

Corporations and Business

Policy Process Role

- Direct policy influence
- Economic stakeholders
- Implementation partners
- Resource providers

Corporate Policy Tools

- Direct Influence
  - Lobbying
  - Campaign contributions
  - Policy research funding
- Indirect Influence
  - Industry associations
  - Public-private partnerships
  - Economic leverage

image of an iron triangle subgovernment relationship

Figure 1: image of an iron triangle subgovernment relationship

Corporate Policy Impact

Key Areas of Influence

- Regulatory Policy
    - Industry standards
    - Compliance frameworks
    - Environmental regulations
- Economic Policy
    - Tax policy
    - Trade agreements
    - Labor regulations

Interaction of Actors

- **Policy Domain**
    - "A substantive area of public policy such as health care, education, or the environment." - Stone
        * A policy domain can be a single policy or a group of related policies
        * an area where actors compete and compromise

Interaction of Actors

- **Policy Community**
    - The group of actors who are involved in a particular policy domain.

Interaction of Actors

- **Subgovernment**
    - "A network of groups within the American political system that exercise a great deal of control over specific policy areas." - Stone
    - An *issue network* is a more open version of a subgovernment.
    - Open to numerous actors, interest groups, think tanks, corporations, individuals, etc.
    - Often consists of a few key actors or advocacy coalitions.

Interaction of Actors

- **Iron Triangle**
    - "A stable, mutually beneficial political relationship among a congressional committee (or subcommittee), an administrative agency, and organized interests concerned with a particular policy domain." - Stone
        * Example: The House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the EPA, and the American Petroleum Institute
    - An iron triangle is more closed than an issue network.

Iron Triangle

Interaction of Actors

- **Policy Regime**
    - "A loosely formed governance structure formed by a policy community around a particularly broad policy domain." - Birkland

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  - When a policy domain is broad and spans boundaries of various types, the actors, coalitions, interests, and agencies form a policy regime—a loose governance structure.

Conclusion

- Unofficial actors play critical roles in the policy process
- Understanding their interactions is essential for policy analysis
- Media, parties, interest groups, think tanks, corporations, and individuals shape policy outcomes
- Complex dynamics and power structures influence policy decisions

Next Time

- Individuals in the Policy Process
- King's *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*