

Actor Interaction in the Policy Process

POSC 315: Lecture 5.2

Overview

- Concepts of interaction:
 - Policy domain
 - Policy community
 - Subgovernment & issue networks
 - Iron triangle
 - Policy regime

Policy Domain

Definition:

"A substantive area of public policy such as health care, education, or the environment." — Stone

- Can be a single policy or a cluster of related policies
- Area where actors compete and compromise

Policy Community

Definition:

The group of actors involved in a particular policy domain

- Includes officials, organizations, interest groups, and individuals

Subgovernment

Definition:

"A network of groups within the American political system that exercise a great deal of control over specific policy areas." — Stone

- Typically stable, closed, and long-lasting
- Includes congressional committees, bureaucratic agencies, and interest groups
- Often called "subgovernments" because of their influence over policy details

Issue Networks

Definition:

A more open and fluid set of relationships among actors interested in a policy area.

- Includes interest groups, think tanks, corporations, experts, media, and individuals
- Membership and influence can shift over time
- More dynamic and less predictable than subgovernments
- Reflects the complexity and diversity of modern policymaking

Iron Triangle

Definition:

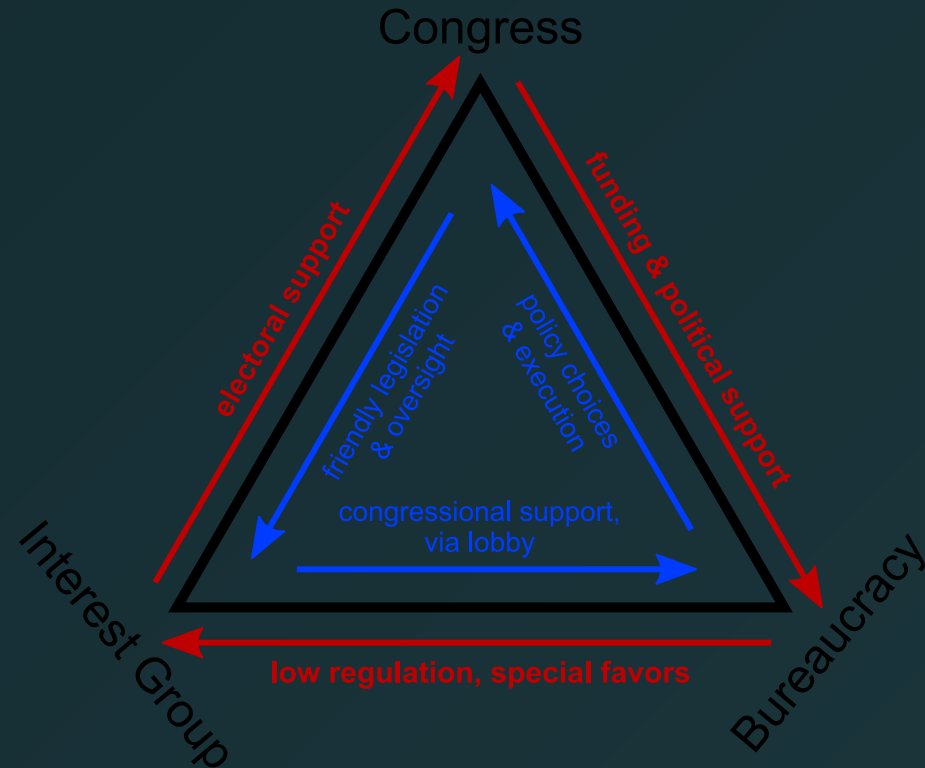
"A stable, mutually beneficial political relationship among a congressional committee (or subcommittee), an administrative agency, and organized interests concerned with a particular policy domain." — Stone

Example:

House Committee on Energy & Commerce, the EPA, and the American Petroleum Institute

- Iron triangles are more closed than issue networks

Iron Triangle Visual



Iron Triangle Components

- **Congressional Committees:** Write and oversee legislation
- **Administrative Agencies:** Implement and regulate policy
- **Interest Groups:** Advocate and provide resources
- Each group supports and reinforces the others
- Creates a stable, mutually beneficial relationship
- Often limits outside influence

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Policy Regime

Definition:

"A loosely formed governance structure formed by a policy community around a particularly broad policy domain." — Birkland

- Spans boundaries and includes many actors, coalitions, interests, and agencies
- Forms a "loose" governance structure around big, complex issues

Conclusion

- Policy domains are defined by their actors and their interactions
- Networks and coalitions shape who has influence
- Subgovernments, iron triangles, and policy regimes help explain how unofficial and official actors share power and shape outcomes

