

# Historical and Structural Contexts

The Foundation of the Policy Process

POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy

Lecture 3.1

California State University, Fullerton

# Why Study Policy Structures?

Why does it take so long to make or change policy?

Why do some big problems stick around for decades? Today we look at the structures that shape—and often slow down—public policy in the U.S.

# Institutions: The Rules of the Game

Institutions are the **rules and organizations** that determine who gets to decide, what's allowed, and what's not.

They include laws, agencies, and even unwritten norms that shape our lives.

# Rules & Institutions: Examples

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- Constitution
- Laws
- Regulations
- Norms

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- Constitution
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## Institutions

- Supreme Court
- Congress
- Executive Branch
- Civil Society

# Types of Institutions

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- Government Agencies
- Courts
- Schools
- Police
- Corporations

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## Informal Institutions

- Family
- Religion
- Media
- Traditions
- Social Norms

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Think about it:

Why did the framers make it so flexible?

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- **Longevity:** still the foundation after 200+ years.

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*What happens when these checks break down? You get gridlock—or sometimes, runaway power.*



## Branch: Legislative

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- Makes laws
- Controls budget
- Declares war



## Branch: Executive

### Executive

- Enforces laws
- Commander-in-Chief
- Handles foreign policy

## Branch: Judicial

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## Judicial

- Interprets laws
- Reviews cases
- Checks constitutionality

# Where Policy Gets Made: Key Powers

Article I, Section 8

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- Taxation
- Commerce
- Defense
- Naturalization
- Intellectual Property

## Amendments

## Necessary & Proper Clause



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Necessary & Proper Clause

## Amendments

- 10th: Powers reserved to states
- 14th: Equal protection, due process

Who decides? Sometimes: the courts.

## Policy Restraint: Why the System is Slow

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- **Modifications:** Adjusting for new circumstances

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- Institutions structure what's possible and what's not.
- Most change is incremental, not sweeping.
- Crises can sometimes speed things up.

# Discussion



Where have you seen policy structures slow down or speed up change?

Can you think of a recent policy change that happened quickly?  
What made it possible?