

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

- – 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*