

Unofficial Actors in the Policy Process

POSC 315: Lecture 5.1

Overview

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

The News Media

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

Media Gatekeeping

- Control over which stories get covered
 - Editorial decisions
 - Story placement and duration
- Impact on policy windows
 - Creating and sustaining attention
 - Influencing timing of policy action

Modern Media Dynamics

- **Media Landscape Evolution**
 - Traditional vs. Digital platforms
 - Social media impact
 - 24-hour news cycle
- **Challenges**
 - Short 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

Political Parties

Unique characteristics:

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

Party Functions

- Coordinate actions of government
- Communicate with voters
- Raise money and recruit candidates
- Mobilize voters
- Organize government

Modern Party Dynamics

Polarization Effects:

- Increased ideological sorting
- Policy gridlock
- More partisan policy formation

Institutional Changes:

- Primaries have changed party power
- Campaign finance is more complex
- Party discipline is challenged

Party Realignment

Historical Examples:

- The New Deal Coalition
- Southern Strategy
- Reagan Revolution

Interest Groups

Interest Groups

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

Modern Interest Group Strategies

Digital Age Tactics

- Social Media Campaigns (viral advocacy, online mobilization, digital grassroots)
- Data-Driven Approaches (targeted messaging, analytics-based advocacy, engagement metrics)

Interest Group Activities

Direct Activities

- Lobbying
- Campaign contributions
- Litigation
- Venue shopping

Indirect Activities

- Public relations
- Grassroots mobilization
- Coalition building

AstroTurfing

Definition: Artificial grassroots movements

Examples:

- Industry-funded “citizen” groups
- Corporate-sponsored local movements
- Social media manipulation campaigns

Impact:

- Manipulates public perception
- Shapes policy agendas
- Exerts legislative pressure

Think Tanks

Think Tanks

- Research and advocacy organizations
 - 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
 - Outreach to decision-makers

Think Tank Funding

Funding Sources:

- Private donors
- Foundations
- Corporations
- Government contracts
- Endowments

Impact: Shapes research focus and credibility

Corporations & Business

Corporations and Business

Policy Process Role:

- Direct influence on policy
- Major economic stakeholders
- Policy implementation partners
- Resource providers

Corporate Policy Tools

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

Corporate Policy Impact

Key Areas:

- **Regulatory Policy:**
 - Industry standards
 - Compliance frameworks
 - Environmental regulation
- **Economic Policy:**
 - Tax policy
 - Trade agreements
 - Labor regulation

Individuals

How Do Individuals Shape Policy?

- **Citizens as Policy Actors:** Influence policy through voting, advocacy, and civic participation.
- **Public Opinion Shapers:** Shift the policy agenda via conversations, social media, and community engagement.
- **Voter Mobilizers & Advocates:** Organize others, champion causes, petition officials, and testify at hearings.

Grassroots & Everyday Influence

- **Grassroots Organizers:** Build local movements that can spark national change.
- **Policy Implementers:** Help put policies into practice as volunteers, jurors, or board members.
- **Evaluators & Innovators:** Assess policy impacts, provide feedback, and develop new solutions.
- **Everyday Actions:** Writing letters, attending meetings, and sharing information can ripple through the policy process.

Example: March for Our Lives

Case Study:

After the tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, students organized the "March for Our Lives" movement. Their activism brought national attention to gun policy and demonstrated the power of individual and grassroots action in shaping public debate.

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 decisions