

Policy Process Theory

EVSS/PUBA 602 Public Policy

Fall 2015

Policy Theory

- Is there a unified theory of public policy?
- *It seems like a lot of fuss to me – what does it really matter?*

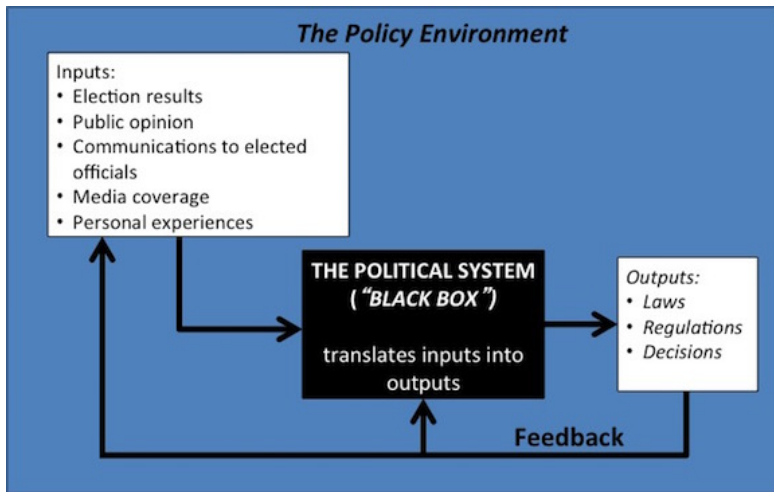
Knowledge *in* and knowledge *of*

- Multiple “Fields of Policy Study”
 - Knowledge *of*
 - Policy and politics
 - Policy process
 - Policy design
 - Policymaking institutions
 - Policy implementation
 - Knowledge *in*
 - Policy analysis
 - Policy evaluation

Policy Theory and Models

- What are models?
- How are they used?
- Models of the *policymaking system* and models of the *individual*

Policymaking System



Institutional Model

- Institutions: *Public policy is authoritatively determined, implemented, and enforced by government institutions*
 - Congress, the presidency, courts, bureaucracies
 - Government institutions give public policy three distinctive characteristics:
 - Legitimacy: legal obligations; democratic; the Constitution
 - Universality: extends to all citizens
 - Coercion: imprison violators
- *Government institutions provide structure to the process of policymaking*

Rational Model

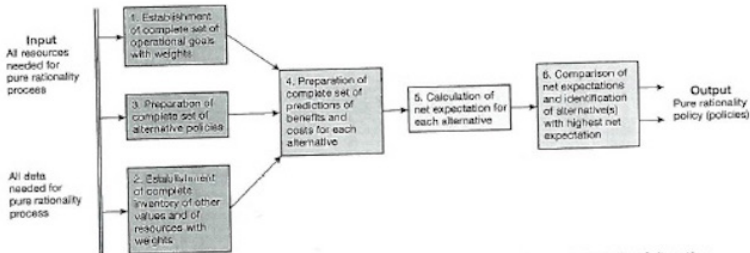


FIGURE 2-2 A Rational Model of a Decision System The rational model assumes complete agreement on goals, knowledge of alternative policies, and the ability to calculate and select the policies with the greatest benefits and least costs.

Capacity for Decision-Making

- Comprehensive rationality: *homo economicus*
 - Individuals have preferences
 - Preferences are ranked
 - Preferences are consistent
 - All aspects of a choice situation are known
 - Careful weighing of costs and benefits
 - Choice based on efficiency and “maximizing utility”

Rationality and Public Policy

- **Rationalist:** Comprehensive rationality in the policy process
 - Policymakers can separate values from facts
 - Policymakers have consistent policy preferences, and rank them to help maximize societal gain
 - Policy is made in a linear fashion (e.g., policy stages)
 - Comprehensive decision-making, all factors and possibilities considered and explored
- Is this realistic?

Bounded Rationality

- What is bounded rationality?
 - *Humans intended to be rational but are prevented from behaving in a fully rational manner by cognitive limitations* (Smith and Larmier, pg 49)
- Individuals “satisfice” not maximize
- Use heuristics or short-cuts in the absence of complete information

Bounded Rationality in the Policy Process

Incrementalism

- What is incrementalism?
 - Bounded rationality applied to the policy process
 - *Path-dependent*: Policy is made through small changes to existing policy
 - “root” vs. “branch”
 - Application to agency budgetary decisions

Group Theory

- Individuals with common interests band together formally or informally to press their demands on government
- *Pluralism*
- Role of political system:
 - Establish rules
 - Arrange compromises and balance interests
 - Enacting compromise (policy)
 - Enforce compromise

Elite Theory



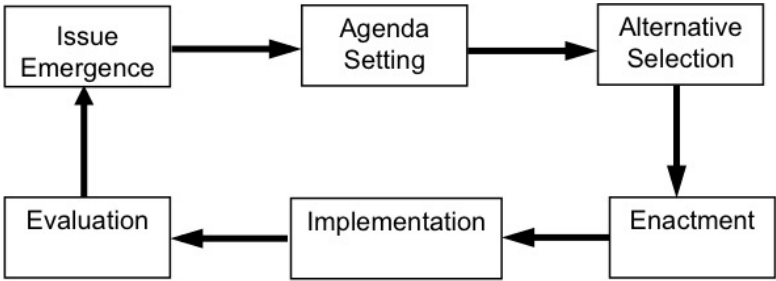
Public Choice Theory

- Economic study of nonmarket decision making
- *All political actors seek to maximize their personal benefits in politics as well as the market place*
- Collective decision making leads to mutual benefit
- *Social contract*
- Market failures
 - Public goods
 - Externalities
- Becker-Posner Blog

Game Theory

- Study of decisions in situations in which two or more rational participants have choices and the outcome depends on the choices by each
- Examples:
 - Chicken
 - Prisoner's dilemma
 - *Deterrence*

Policy Stages



Policy Stages

- Criticisms
 - Not a causal theory; no causal drivers, therefore no basis for hypotheses testing
 - Descriptive inaccuracy; stages are not distinct
 - Top-down focus
 - Neglects intergovernmental relations

Policy Stages

- According to *deLeon* what does the policy stages approach offer?
 - **Practical utility:** allows scholars to focus on specific areas of the policy process
 - **Parsimony:** it reduces complexity and is analytically useful; serves as a common vocabulary for scholars to utilize
 - Useful for teaching purposes

Scientific Method

- *A method or procedure that has characterized natural science since the 17th century, consisting in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses.*

Criteria of a Scientific Theory

Sabatier 2007

- Data acquisition and analysis methods are public and can be replicated
- Concepts and propositions should be clearly defined, logically consistent, and lead to empirically falsifiable hypotheses
- Propositions should be general
 - Proposition: (i.e., logic statement) declarative statement that is either true or false
- Methods and concepts subjected to criticism and evaluation

Theories and Models

- **Theories:** place values on variables, posit *casual* relationships among variables, and make predictions
- **Models:** make precise assumptions about a limited set of parameters and variables

- Deterministic models:



$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta X_i$$

- Probabilistic models:



$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \epsilon_i$$

Theories and Models

Thomas Dye

- Order and simplify reality
- Identify what is significant
- Be congruent with reality
- Provide meaningful communication
- Direct inquiry and research
- Suggest explanations