

Agenda Setting and Multiple Streams

EVSS/PUBA 602 Public Policy

Fall 2015

- What is an agenda?
- What is agenda setting?
- A fierce competition
 - The agenda is not infinite
 - *Attention*
 - Why? E.E. Schattschneider: “the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power.”
 - Social construction of problems

Levels of the Agenda

- Distinguish between:
 - Agenda universe
 - Systemic agenda
 - Institutional agenda
 - Decision agenda

Getting on the Agenda

- *Why do some policy issues emerge on governmental agendas while other are relatively neglected?*
- Why is power important?
- Indicators and focus events
- Venue shopping
- “Expanding the scope of conflict”
- Conditions and problems

Assumptions and Logic

- Ambiguity
 - “A state of having many ways to think about the same circumstances or phenomena”
- Garbage Can Model: “Organized anarchy”
 - Fluid participation
 - Problematic preferences
 - Unclear technology: *the process of turning inputs into outputs*
 - *There is no clear process where aims are identified and the best ways to achieve those aims are considered and selected*

Assumptions and Logic

- Temporal order
 - *Who pays attention to what and when*
 - Time is a finite resource
- Assumptions
 - Individual attention is serial; systemic attention is parallel
 - Time constraints
 - The streams are independent

Social Construction of Problems

- Issue definitions / Political manipulation
 - Ambiguity and complexity create opportunities for multiple *frames*
- Problem Definition (Rochefort and Cobb 1994)
 - Problem Causation
 - Nature of the Problem
 - Characteristics of the Target Population
 - Nature of the Solution

Multiple Streams: Structural Features

- The Problem Stream
 - *The problem stream consists of various conditions that policy makers and the public want addressed*
 - Indicators
 - Focusing events
 - Feedback
 - Load

Multiple Streams: Structural Features

- The Policy Stream
 - *The policy stream includes a “soup” of ideas that compete to win acceptance*
- Generated in policy communities composed of experts/specialists
 - Visible and hidden actors
- Success contingent on:
 - Value acceptability
 - Technical feasibility
 - Integration of institutional configurations

Multiple Streams: Structural Features

- The Politics Stream
 - *The politics stream consists of three elements: the national mood, interest group campaigns, and administrative or legislative turnover*

Multiple Streams: Structural Features

- Policy Window
 - *Opportunities for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems*
 - Scarce due to agenda capacity
 - Arise from changes in the problem or politics stream
 - Predictable: budgets, reauthorization
 - Unpredictable

Multiple Streams: Structural Features

- Policy Entrepreneur
 - *Policy entrepreneurs are individuals or corporate actors who attempt to couple the three streams*

Multiple Streams: Processes

- Attention
 - Attention is scarce, therefore policy entrepreneurs attempt to frame issues in ways to attract the most attention
- Search
 - The search for solutions and their availability depend on the degree of integration in the policy community
- Selection
 - *Why do policymakers adopt some policies but not others?*
 - “During open policy windows persistent policy entrepreneurs, who constantly search for solutions to important problems, attempt to couple the the three streams. Success is more likely when all three streams are coupled, depending on the type of window that opens and the skills, resources, and strategies of entrepreneurs to focus attention and bias choice”