CHAPTER 17 Policymaking

Parallel Lecture 17.1

## Policymaking

I. Government purposes and public policies

A. A **public policy** is a general plan of action adopted by government to solve a social problem, counter a threat, or pursue an objective.

B. All public policies are the means by which government pursues certain goals within specific situations.

C. Governmental approaches to solving problems can be divided into three broad types:

1. Distributive policies allocate resources to a segment of society so that a service or benefit is gained.

2. Redistributional policies take resources from one sector of society and transfer it to another.

3. Regulations guide the operation of government programs.

II. How the policy objectives are achieved causes various approaches to emerge:

A. An incentive will induce people to change their behavior for a favorable outcome.

B. Tax expenditures represent money saved by those taking advantage of the incentive but at a cost to government revenues.

C. Disincentives discourage certain behaviors.

D. Government provides a service or program.

E. Government establishes rules.

III. The policymaking process

A. The policymaking process can be separated into four stages. (See Figure 17.1)

1. **Agenda setting** is the part of the process during which problems get defined as political issues.

2. **Policy formulation** is that stage of the policymaking process when formal policy proposals are developed and a decision is made whether or not to adopt one of those proposals.

3. **Implementation** is the process by which policies are carried out.

4. **Policy evaluation** is the analysis of public policy to see how well it is working.

a) Alternative approaches may be considered in order to improve a program’s success.

b) Evaluation studies provide **feedback** to policymakers on program performance.

IV. A multiplicity of participants

A. Multiple forces pull government in different directions and make problem solving less coherent than it would be ideally.

1. **Fragmentation** of policymaking is fundamental because of the nature of government in America. It is the phenomenon of attacking a single problem in different and sometimes competing ways.

2. Authority is divided by both separation of powers and federalism.

3. Fragmentation results from conflict among branches or levels of government and from conflict within a single branch.

B. Although some degree of fragmentation is inevitable in a decentralized, federal system of government, mechanisms of coordination—like inter-agency task forces, reorganization, and Office of Management and Budget review—can bring some coherence to policymaking.

V. Issue networks

A. Within each policy area, representatives of a number of interest groups interact with one another and with government officials on a recurring basis. This interaction produces both conflict and cooperation.

B. Those who share expertise in a policy domain and who frequently interact constitute an issue network. **Issue networks** consist of groups of individuals of various interests involved in some particular aspect of public policy. The common denominator in a network is policy expertise.

C. Issue networks promote pluralist democracy.

1. They are open systems, with a wide range of interest groups.

2. Policies are formulated in a participatory way.

D. Those who prefer majoritarian democracy consider issue networks an obstacle to achieving their vision of how government should operation. Governmental dependence on technocrats helps interest groups who pursue policies that favor their constituents rather than the national interest.

E. Though networks promote pluralism, majoritarian influences on policymaking are still significant.

F. Issue networks, however, have facilitated pluralist politics in policy areas in which majoritarian influences are weak.

VI. Issue networks and democracy

A. An argument in favor of issue-network politics is that it works to bring more technical expertise into the policymaking process.

B. This dependence on technical expertise works to the advantage of interest groups.

C. Increasing the role of interest groups and issue networks in general promotes pluralism and works against majoritarianism.

D. There are still significant majoritarian influences on policymaking.

1. Public opinion can be a dominant force on highly visible issues (e.g., civil rights).

2. Elections also send messages to policymakers about widely discussed issues.

E. The principal disadvantage of issue networks is that they often allow the interests of well-organized constituents to prevail over the broad national interest.

VII. The Nonprofit Sector

A. Nonprofit organizations are neither governmental organizations nor private sector organizations.

1. Usually the term is used to refer to what the Internal Revenue Service considers “public charities”

2. Public charities perform some public good.

a) Most provide social services.

b) All provide something valuable, whether it is engaging people in their communities, providing them with a chance to appreciate art, creating opportunities for volunteering, or providing recreational opportunities.

B. Most nonprofits are supported by a mix of public and private funds.

1. Individuals who contribute money to nonprofits can deduct that money from their taxes (government subsidizes donations to charitable organizations).

2. Nonprofits also administer government social service programs.

a) This allows government to keep expenditures down.

b) Nonprofits can be innovative and extend their services in ways government would not be likely to do.

C. Nonprofits have a role to play both in administering and developing policy.