

POLI 359

Public Policy Making

Session 4-Descriptive Models of Policy Making

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Descriptive Models of Policy Making

Models under the Descriptive category include:

- Elite Model
- Group Model
- Systems Model
- Institutional Model

The Elite Model

- Elite Model may be viewed as the preferences and values of the governing elite.
- The model suggests that people are apathetic
- It assumes that people are ill-informed about public policy.
- It assumes that the elite shapes mass opinion on policy questions.
- It assumes that the masses do not shape elite opinion on policy questions.
- It assumes that public officials merely carry out the policies decided upon by the elite.

The Elite Model ;Đont'd☐:

- It is claimed that policies flow downward from elite to masses.
- It is also believed that polices do not arise from mass demands.
- It is assumed that active elite are subject to relatively little direct influence from apathetic masses.
- It also assumes that elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

Characteristics of the Elite Model

- Society is divided into the few who have power and the many who do not.
- Only a small number of people allocate values for society
- The masses do not decide public policy.
- The few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed.
- Elites are drawn from the upper socio-economic strata of society.
- The movement of non-elites to elite positions must be slow to maintain stability avoid a revolution.

Characteristics of the Elite Model

• Don't do:

- Only non-elites who have accepted the elite consensus can be admitted into governing circles.
- Elites share consensus on the basic values of the social system and its preservation.
- Public policy does not reflect the demands of the masses
- Public policy rather reflect the preferences of the elite.
- Change in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary.
- Active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from apathetic masses.

Characteristics of the Elite Model

• Don't do:

- Incremental changes permit responses to events that threaten the social system.
- The responses cause minimum alterations to the system.
- Elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.
- A small group is responsible for the formulation of public policy.
- Popular elections and party competition do not allow the masses to govern.
- Policy questions are seldom decided through elections.

Advantages of the Elite Model

- It identifies the contributions of specific groups involved in policy formulation and implementation.
- It determines who is responsible for what and what is made applicable to whom.
- It makes up identify the power blocs in society.
- It shows us those who determine who gets what, when and how.

Weakness of the Elite Model

- It is undemocratic since ordinary people have no say in policy formulation.
- It has potential for policy alienation since it s top down in approach.
- It creates a false impression that elites have consensus.
- It is not true that the masses are apathetic since they protest some policies perceived as obnoxious
- It is also not true that public officials only implement policies.

The Group Model

- The model proposes that interaction among groups is the central fact of politics.
- Individuals with common interests band together to press their demands on government.
- Interest groups are shared attitude groups that make claims on other groups in society. The TUC in Ghana can make claims on the Employers Association of Ghana.
- A group becomes political if and when it makes a claim on or through a government institution.

The Group Model ;Đont'd☐:

- Individuals become important in politics only when they act on behalf or part of group interest.
- The group then becomes the essential bridge between the individual and his government.
- Politics is really a struggle among groups to influence public policy.
- The political system manages group conflict.
- It does this by establishing the rules of the game in the group struggle.
- It arranges compromises and bargains and enforces them.

The Group Model ;Don't'd?:

- Public policy at any given point is the equilibrium reached in the group struggle. The equilibrium is determined by the relative influence of the interest groups.
- Changes in the reflective influence of any interest group results in changes in public policy.
- Policy then will move in the direction of the group gaining interest.
- Policy also moves away from the group losing influence.

Characteristics of the Group Model

- The model does not explain policy decision making per se.
- Rather it attempts to analyze the relationships among actors.
- The activities of groups determine the outcomes of policies.
- It formulates a complete synthesis of the interactions between groups in a policy environment.
- Groups have special, often conflicting interests.
- The influence of groups is determined by their numbers.
- Competition for influence creates countervailing power.

Advantages of the Group Model

- It accepts that interest groups have power to influence policy.
- It is democratic because it allows room for competing and diverse ideas in policy making.
- Groups can offer resistance to policies they do not favour.

Weakness of the Group Model

- The model has minimal value in communist and developing countries where associational life is circumscribed.
- It belittles the role played by public officials in policy making.
- Unbridled group struggle can disrupt policy making and subsequently result in conflict.
- Policies may reflect sectional interest to the neglect of the public interest.
- It is too idealistic in stating that power is widely shared.

The Systems Model

- The model emphasizes the approach rather than the structure of the policy machinery.
- Policy making according to the model is conceptualized in terms of inputs (demands and claims).
- These demands are converted into policy choices.
- The choices translate into outputs (policy outcomes).
- Feedback (on policy outcomes) is fed into the system.
- The feedback ignites a fresh round of policy making process.

Characteristics of the Systems Model

- The political system is composed of the identifiable and interrelated institutions and their activities.
- Inputs into the political system from the environment consist of demands and supports.
- The environment consists of all those conditions and events external to the political system.
- Support is rendered when groups and individual abide by election results and pay taxes.
- Citizens accept the decisions of the authoritative political system in response to the demands.

Characteristics of the Systems Model

- The concept of feedback indicates that public policies may subsequently alter the environment and may also alter the demands from the environment.
- The character of the political system may produce new demands.
- The demands lead to further policy outputs in a continuous never ending flow of public policy.
- The systems theory sees public policy in a cyclical manner.

Advantages of the Systems Model

- It is an ingenious and innovative simplification of a rather complex relationship.
- It is an innovative simplification of a highly political process.
- It recognizes the interrelationship between the political system and other systems.
- The feedback loop creates a cycle which serves as a learning process.
- It furnishes a panoramic view of how policies are made in democracies.

Weakness of the Systems Model

- It is too simple and has oversimplified a highly complex political process.
- It gives a pseudo impression of rationality and objectivity which is erroneous.
- The conversion process in the model is highly ambiguous and vague.
- The conversion process does not indicate whether the feedback is actually taken into account.
- Political systems are not closely interrelated as the model suggests.