Session 4 - Descriptive Models of Policy Making

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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 models 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:

- 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

• 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

- 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:

- 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:

- 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 the fed into the system.
• The feedback ignites a fresh round of policy making process.
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 political 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.