

KAY 203

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY

WEEK 2:

THE CONTEXT FOR POLICY-MAKING

Central Institutions & Actors

Knill & Tosun, pp. 40-68.

Central Institutions and Actors

- Who are the central institutions and actors in policy making to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Central Institutions and Actors

- Public policy is determined by many factors. Among the most crucial are a country's **polity** and its **politics**.
- Policy choices are affected by both
 - The polity (i.e. the institutional arrangements characterizing a political system) and
 - The politics (i.e. The policy-making process).

Central Institutions and Actors

- Role of **institutions**
 - Established sets of formal **rules** that determine the extent to which actors' preferences may be transposed into public policies.
 - Rules of the political game
 - The **most central institution** of any political system is **represented by the constitution** and the **constitutional court** protecting the fundamental principles of government it defines.
 - Electoral and party systems

Central Institutions and Actors

- **Actors**

- Individuals, corporations or other collective entities, who possess policy preferences and the desire to realize them through their participation in the policy-making process.
- Some actors are in reality **collections of actors** (e.g. the executive)
- Some are at the same time **formal organizations**, as they are constituted through institutional rules

Relationship Between Institutions & Actors

- **Institutions** (**Rules** of the political game) determine the extent to which actors can transform their preferences into public policy.
 - Example: If a policymaker wishes to enact a policy that gives younger workers preference over older workers, most constitutions would effectively prevent such a proposal from becoming law.

Key Policy-making Actors

- The executive
- The legislature
- The judiciary
- Bureaucracies
- Political parties
- Interest groups
- Experts
- Private Firms

Characteristics of Actors

- For understanding how actors might determine policy outputs there are three characteristics to which we must pay attention:
 - Their capabilities
 - Perceptions
 - Preferences

Public vs. Private Actors

- Public
 - Executive
 - Legislatures/Parliaments
 - Provide legitimacy, oversight & legislation/laws
 - Judiciary
 - Policy-modifying power of the judiciary/courts such as declaring a certain piece of legislation to be unconstitutional
 - Authority to interpret and
 - Apply the constitution and other laws
 - The bureaucracy
 - For implementing public policy, the executive relies on the bureaucracy, the layers of hierarchically appointed officials
 - Political Parties

Public vs. Private Actors

- Private Actors: Neither elected nor appointed
 - Interest groups
 - Lobby groups, interest associations, pressure groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
 - Experts/Political Advisers
 - Individuals or groups of individuals that can have an impact on policy-making on grounds of the information they supply to policymakers

National Institutions

- Constitutions and constitutional courts
 - What if a country does not have a written constitution?
 - What if a country does not have a constitutional court?
- Constitutional characteristics
 - Flexible (Easier to change) vs. rigid constitutions
 - Unitary vs. federal government structures
 - More or less state intervention

Power Distribution Among Actors

- Horizontal division of power
 - Between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary
- Vertical division of power
 - Whether a state is unitary or federal

Legislature (Parliament)

- Legislatures with one house only
- Legislatures with two houses
 - A lower and an upper house

Judiciary

- Judiciary is independent of the other branches of government.
 - Judges should only be influenced by the law and the facts of a case.
- As the judiciary can affect policy-making through its court decisions, in many countries the selection of judges to supreme or constitutional courts is a political process.

Federal Governments

- Certain powers are exercised by the federal or general government (**shared rule**)
- Other powers by the regional governments of the constituent states (**self-rule**)
- Decisions at the federal level require the consent of the subnational units- **Negotiation**
- Policies that turned out to be successful in one subnational unit are often emulated by other units – **Policy transfer**

Unitary States

- Unitary states tend to change policies to a greater extent and more **rapidly**.
 - There are less **veto points** or **veto players**
- Unitary states can also use decentralization, a transfer of decision-making powers from the federal government to subnational units.
 - Example: In 1998, the United Kingdom launched devolution reforms to transfer Powers in areas like education and health to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Electoral institutions

- Electoral institutions
 - Who can be elected (e.g. age, residency requirements)
 - Specifications of election types (e.g. general elections, regional elections, presidential elections)
 - Time that may elapse between elections
 - Issues of suffrage
 - Compulsory voting
- Majoritarian vs. proportional representation
 - High level of proportionality may favour extremist parties.

Party Systems

- Types of party systems (Caramani, 2011)
 - Dominant-party system
 - Two-party system
 - Multiparty system
 - Bipolar system
 - Parties form relatively stable electoral alliances

Party Systems

- Policy-making can be expected to vary across different party systems.
 - Dominant-party systems should be able to **respond immediately** to emerging policy problems
 - Policy-making process can be expected to **take longer** in multiparty systems due to the need to receive the **consent** of the other parties for a policy proposal

Central Institutions and Actors

- In addition to national institutions, supranational and intergovernmental institutions are increasingly influential on domestic policy-making.
 - United Nations (UN)
 - World Trade Organization (WTO)

Supranational & Intergovernmental Institutions

- A supranational organization has powers that its member states do not have because they have delegated a limited amount of their sovereignty to it.
 - They can adopt public policies that are binding for their member states, such as the EU.
- An intergovernmental organization also consists of member states, but they **remain independent** and engage in **voluntary** cooperation & coordination.
 - Member states do not surrender any sovereignty to it, such as the NATO, UN and OECD.

The United Nations System

- UN may affect many public policy areas
 - Conflict prevention, peace missions & humanitarian assistance
- UN works on many different issues
 - Disaster relief
 - Refugee protection
 - Sustainable development
 - Promotion of democracy
 - Gender equality
 - Advancement of women, etc.