

12

Politics and Public Policy

I. Reviewing the Chapter

Chapter Focus

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the American constitutional system reaches policy decisions at the national level. These decisions are mainly the result of the Constitution, not political leaders, and are the outcome of adversarial politics. This policy process takes different forms depending on the issue under political discussion. Coalition formations vary by policy type. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, you should be able to do each of the following:

1. Explain how public policy is mainly the result of the constitutional system, citing the impact of four constitutional provisions.
2. Discuss why the policy process is adversarial and assess the consequences of this type of politics on public policy.
3. Identify and compare the four kinds of policy coalitions that form around issues.

Study Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. Citizen grievances over politics and policies
 - B. Citizens believe the two connected: bad politics causes bad policies
 - C. Current system mainly the result of the Constitution, not political leaders
 - D. Constitution written to make governing hard, unlike constitutions of European democracies
- II. How the American System Affects Policy Making
 - A. Consider effect of four constitutional provisions on policy
 1. Separation of powers: makes president and Congress rivals as well as forcing members of Congress to represent local constituents
 2. Federalism: makes it difficult to have a national policy
 3. Judicial review: makes acts of Congress and president subject to court examination as well determining if agencies abide by the law
 4. Freedom of speech and assembly: makes lobbying constitutionally protected
 - B. These features make the system of government adversarial
 - C. Adversarial politics has consequences
 1. Puts a premium on the ability to dramatize issues
 2. Leads to attacks on political opponents
 3. Downplays negotiations and acceptance of compromise

4. Gives politicians incentive to promote government action
 5. Gives incentive to dig up dirt and blow whistle on rivals
 - D. Things get done despite adversarial politics
- III. How Things Get Done
- A. Participatory system leads to multiple ways of making policy
 - B. Policy produced by bureaucracy in Japan and by prime minister in Britain
 - C. In United States, everybody involved in policy making
- IV. Four Kinds of Political Coalition
- A. Client politics: concentrated benefits, distributed costs
 1. Definition: small group that would benefit from a policy rounds up votes
 2. Examples: dairy farmers and milk subsidies; labor unions and federal projects
 3. Beneficiary of policy is client
 4. Sometimes called special-interest or pork-barrel politics
 5. Client wins because no one stands to lose by policy
 6. Opposition hard to organize or not worth the trouble
 7. Congress supports since somebody gains and hardly no opposition
 8. Political parties usually not involved
 - B. Entrepreneurial politics
 1. Coalition represents large number of beneficiaries on behalf of policy that will impose heavy cost on small group
 2. Leader of a few activists will come to be regarded as spokesperson
 3. Can defeat client politics by repealing policy enjoyed by group or imposing new tax, regulation, or restriction on it
 4. Policy entrepreneur is leader, like Nader or Jarvis
 5. Need to dramatize issue to be successful
 6. Must rely on symbols that appeal, but these change over time
 - C. Interest-group politics
 1. Assumes policies result of competition between rival groups
 2. Sometimes called “pluralist theory” in which winning coalition consists of whichever side amasses the most votes
 3. Winner depends on size, strength, and energy of rival groups
 4. Occurs when group stands to gain from a proposal and some other group has much to lose
 5. Stakes not necessarily monetary, but anything people feel strongly about
 6. Members of Congress do not like this form of politics since they are forced to take sides
 7. Political parties play small role since split on issue, although some issues follow party lines (e.g., abortion)
 8. After issue decided, losing group can challenge in court or before administrative agency
 - D. Majoritarian politics
 1. Policy where majority of people stand to benefit, but also pay the cost
 2. Question is whether benefits exceed costs
 3. Examples: Social Security and Medicare
 4. Public opinion key factor in outcome
 5. Interest groups rarely decisive
 6. Political parties do not play role except when policy is new

V. Cautionary Remarks

- A. Not every issue fits into four policy categories
- B. Perceptions on effects of a policy can change and this changes political coalitions
- C. Policy categories do not label policies as good or bad
- D. Confusion and deadlocks of American politics only corrected by changing constitutional system
- E. Current system has advantages, like safeguarding personal liberties

Key Terms Match

Match the following terms and descriptions.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|---|
| a. client politics | 1. ____ | Policies that gain benefits for some relatively small but identifiable group and impose cost on another small but equally identifiable group. Issues of this kind tend to be fought out by organized interest groups. |
| b. entrepreneurial politics | 2. ____ | A person who works on behalf of the unorganized or indifferent majority against client groups. |
| c. interest-group politics | 3. ____ | Policies that aim to benefit large numbers of people at a cost large numbers of people will have to bear. |
| d. majoritarian politics | 4. ____ | Policies from which some identifiable, though often small, group will benefit, but for which a large part of society will pay the cost. |
| e. pluralist theory | 5. ____ | Another name for interest-group politics used by political scientists. In this view, the winning coalition consists of whichever side has amassed the most votes. |
| f. policy entrepreneurs | 6. ____ | Policies that benefit society as a whole, or some large part of it, but that impose substantial costs on a small segment of society. |

Did You Think That...?

A number of misconceptions are listed below. You should be able to refute each statement in the space provided, referring to information or argumentation contained in this chapter. Sample answers appear at the end of the *Study Guide*.

1. “The political system in the United States makes it difficult for the average citizen to have much influence on government.”

2. “Policy making always operates the same way. If you know how institutions work, you know how policies are shaped.”

3. “Majoritarian politics, in which the majority of people stand to benefit in some significant way, always leads to good outcomes.”

II. Practicing for Exams

True/False. Read each statement carefully. Mark true statements *T*. If any part of the statement is false, mark it *F*, and write in the space provided a concise explanation of why the statement is false.

- _____ 1. With its numerous checks and balances, the U.S. Constitution was designed to make governing difficult.

- _____ 2. The separation of powers guarantees that the president and Congress will compete for power over government policies.

- _____ 3. Federalism tends to counter effects of the separation of powers and to facilitate policy making.

- _____ 4. The best way to describe our political system is cooperative.

- _____ 5. The decentralization of power in Congress is one more factor that impedes policy making.

- _____ 6. Adversarial politics tends to breed interest groups.

- _____ 7. Political corruption in the United States is both more widespread and more difficult to expose than in Europe.
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- _____ 8. In Japan, most policies are proposed by the prime minister.
-
- _____ 9. The “client” in client politics is usually a special-interest group that tends to benefit if a policy is adopted.
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- _____ 10. Successful client politics depends on a well-organized and motivated majority.
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- _____ 11. Policy entrepreneurs generally work on behalf of special-interest groups.
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- _____ 12. The key to successful policy entrepreneurship is dramatizing the issue.
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- _____ 13. The use of symbols and slogans that appeal to the public is most closely associated with majoritarian politics.
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- _____ 14. In the pluralist view of politics, the winning coalition in a policy battle is the side that gets more than 50 percent of the vote.
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- _____ 15. Unlike client politics, interest-group politics often involves big winners and big losers.
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- _____ 16. Both politicians and political parties thrive on interest-group politics and the intense battles that often ensue.
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- _____ 17. Public opinion is the key factor in determining the outcome of majoritarian politics.
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- _____ 18. Policy making in the United States is best explained by interest-group politics.
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_____ 19. Foreign policy is especially easy to assign to one type of politics—majoritarian politics.

_____ 20. Client politics is inherently bad; majoritarian politics is inherently good.

Multiple Choice. Circle the letter of the response that best answers the question or completes the statement.

1. The principal reason the American political system is difficult to govern is that it:
 - a. denies special-interest groups access to the policy-making process.
 - b. discourages popular participation and encourages corruption.
 - c. places too much power in the hands of too few people.
 - d. is shaped by a constitution that makes governing difficult.
2. The American system of separation of powers not only makes members of Congress focus on the demands of their local constituents but also:
 - a. makes the president focus on the need to get re-elected.
 - b. makes the Supreme Court concerned with protecting pork-barrel politics in its exercise of judicial review.
 - c. makes the president and Congress rivals.
 - d. reduces the impact of federalism.
3. An example of pork-barrel politics is when Congress:
 - a. chooses committee chairmanships on the basis of seniority.
 - b. enacts election laws that favor incumbents.
 - c. passed laws that distribute benefits and costs to the great majority of the people.
 - d. enacts a program that benefits a single member's district.
4. The power of judicial review can be used against federal agencies by declaring that an agency has not done all that a law requires or has:
 - a. exceeded its legal authority.
 - b. engaged in pork-barrel politics.
 - c. favored one branch of government over another.
 - d. acted in opposition to public opinion.
5. Why should freedom of speech and assembly make governing more difficult? Because it:
 - a. encourages the abuse of presidential power.
 - b. weakens the ability of government to prosecute extremist groups.
 - c. gives the federal government power over the states in matters of civil rights.
 - d. makes it difficult to place meaningful restrictions on the activities of lobbyists.
6. The adversarial nature of the American political system can be explained by all of the following factors *except*:
 - a. judicial review.
 - b. popular elections.
 - c. federalism.
 - d. separation of powers.

7. An example of client politics is:
 - a. social welfare.
 - b. labor legislation.
 - c. licensing of barbers.
 - d. antitrust legislation.
8. Client politics can be distinguished from interest-group politics by the absence of:
 - a. an organized, opposing interest group.
 - b. narrowly concentrated benefits.
 - c. government involvement.
 - d. ideological and cost considerations.
9. A proposed agricultural support program will benefit the lumber industry but increase the cost of paper nationwide. What type of politics is *most* likely to be involved?
 - a. entrepreneurial politics
 - b. client politics
 - c. interest-group politics
 - d. majoritarian politics
10. A proposed bill that would abolish tariffs on imported cheese, thereby hurting the dairy industry while benefiting America's cheese eaters, would *most* likely involve:
 - a. entrepreneurial politics.
 - b. client-centered politics.
 - c. interest-group politics.
 - d. majoritarian politics.
11. A key figure in the adoption of policies that benefit a large number of people a small amount, but that place the cost of these policies on a single small group, is the:
 - a. politician with new ideas.
 - b. academic economist.
 - c. policy entrepreneur.
 - d. corporate executive.
12. Which of the following statements about entrepreneurial politics is correct?
 - a. It is of greatest use to liberals attacking conservative special interests.
 - b. It can be used by either liberals or conservatives.
 - c. It is of greatest use to conservatives attacking liberal special interests.
 - d. It is most effective when the public is kept unaware of the issue.
13. Which of the following is *most* likely to make the job of the policy entrepreneur easier?
 - a. a president who enjoys majority support in Congress
 - b. the aid of a powerful special-interest interest group
 - c. some crisis or scandal that focuses attention on the issue
 - d. a client with deep pockets and access to the media

14. An example cited by the text of how entrepreneurial politics can fail without a compelling symbol is the issue of:
 - a. gun control.
 - b. Medicaid.
 - c. tax reform.
 - d. killing baby seals.
15. The pluralist theory is *most* applicable to what type of politics?
 - a. interest-group politics, because it is the result of competition among rival interests
 - b. client politics, because of the incentive for affected groups to organize.
 - c. majoritarian politics, because of the opportunity of interest groups to play a central role
 - d. federalist politics because it gives a full accounting of the role of the judiciary
16. What sort of issue is *most* likely to involve interest-group politics?
 - a. one in which cost and ideology are the prevailing concerns
 - b. one in which costs are widespread and benefits are narrowly concentrated
 - c. one in which certain small groups benefit while others pay
 - d. one in which benefits are widespread and costs are narrowly concentrated
17. As an example of one of the few interest-group issues that breaks down along party lines, the text cites:
 - a. labor-management relations.
 - b. the environment.
 - c. trade protectionism.
 - d. abortion.
18. Ideological debate prior to adoption of a policy measure, followed by bipartisan support thereafter, is *most* likely to characterize:
 - a. client politics.
 - b. entrepreneurial politics.
 - c. interest-group politics.
 - d. majoritarian politics.
19. A proposed environmental protection program offers benefits and costs that will be shared by a large number of people. The type of politics that will likely be involved is:
 - a. entrepreneurial politics.
 - b. client-centered politics.
 - c. interest-group politics.
 - d. majoritarian politics.
20. The tobacco industry long resisted efforts to change the system under which it received federal subsidies for unsold tobacco. What finally brought about change?
 - a. concern about the health effects of smoking
 - b. President Carter's program of deregulation
 - c. President Reagan's Task Force on Regulatory Relief
 - d. citizen anger at paying for unsold goods

Essay. Practice writing extended answers to the following questions. These test your ability to integrate and express the ideas that you have been studying in this chapter.

1. What factors explain the adversarial, participatory nature of the American political system? What are some of the consequences of this type of system in terms of (a) how policies are adopted, (b) who benefits, and (c) how politicians behave?
2. Why does your text assert that “politicians have no incentive to say that government shouldn’t tackle a problem.” What would be required to reduce the scope of government action?
3. What types of policies do you think are most likely to be beneficial for the nation? How might client politics be good for the nation? How might majoritarian policy be detrimental to the nation? (Consider, for example, the difficulty in modifying Social Security benefits in the interest of the larger economy.)

IV. Research and Resources

Suggested Readings

Derthick, Martha, and Paul J. Quirk. *The Politics of Deregulation*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985. A brilliant analysis of how three industries—airlines, trucking, and telecommunications—were deregulated despite industry opposition.

Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1984. Insightful account of how issues, especially those involving health and transportation, get on (or drop off) the federal political agendas.

Polsby, Nelson W. *Political Innovation in America*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984. Explains how the federal government adopted eight policy innovations.

Wilson, James Q., ed. *The Politics of Regulation*. New York: Basic Books, 1980. Analyzes regulatory policies in nine agencies using the four types of politics described in the chapter.

Resources on the World Wide Web

Overview of think tanks that analyze policy:

www.policy.com

www.epn.org

Some specific think tanks that analyze policy:

American Enterprise Institute: www.aei.org

Brookings Institution: www.brookings.edu

Cato Institute: www.cato.org

Center on Budget & Policy Priorities: www.cbpp.org

Center for Strategic and International Studies: www.csis.org

Council on Foreign Relations: www.foreignrelations.org

Heritage Foundation: www.heritage.org

Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies: www.jointctr.org

Progressive Policy Institute: www.dlcppi.org

RAND: www.rand.org

Urban Institute: www.urban.org