Probing the Politics of Poverty

Tom Oliver
Department of Population Health Sciences
Director, Master of Public Health Program
University of Wisconsin—Madison

Prepared for IRP Poverty 101 Workshop, 5 June 2013
Overview of the Session

- The value of political analysis of social issues
- The many politics of poverty
- Tools for analyzing the politics of policy development
What Is the Value of Political Analysis?

- Seeing conflict and power as intrinsic elements of policy making and as determinants of governmental action and inaction
- Understanding the origins and goals of policies and programs
- Anticipating and diagnosing problems in policy implementation and performance
- Considering how programs should be evaluated and refined over time
Politics of Economic Inequality

- Taxation
- Monetary and fiscal policy
- Employment (incl. gender equity)
- Foreign policy (guns vs. butter)
- Immigration
- Trade
- Regulation
Politics of Economic Inequality (cont.)

What is the contemporary structure of “class warfare”?

- Rich vs. poor?
- Middle class vs. rich?
- Middle class vs. poor?
Politics of Social Policy

- Political participation, electoral coalitions
- Redistricting: polarization, marginalization
- Cycles of public opinion
- Ideological rationale for policies:
  - Universalism (Social Security, EITC, student loans)
  - Equality of opportunity (Head Start, school financing)
  - Safety net (SNAP, SSDI, Medicaid)
  - Poor (or even poor kids) as public goods?
Politics of Social Policy (cont.)

- Intertwined politics of poverty, race, and ethnicity
- Anti-poverty programs as social regulation
Studying the Policy Process

- Whose interests and viewpoints are represented
- How responsive or accountable government is
- Why particular policies are selected over alternative possibilities
- How policies reshape politics
Levels of Consensus and their Functions in the Policy Making Process

Societal Consensus (Problem Definition)

Political Consensus (Problem Selection)

Policy Consensus (Problem Solution)

Societal Level: What conditions warrant attention?

Political Level: What problems warrant attention?

Policy Level: What proposed solutions warrant attention?
The Translation of Social Conditions into Policy Issues

- Risk assessment
- Locus of responsibility
- Social construction of target populations

Source: Oliver (2006)
Social Construction of Target Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Advantaged</th>
<th>Contenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dependents</td>
<td>Deviants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Construction

Source: Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (1993)
Who is Deserving of Subsidies for Income Support?

- Age?
- Parent of dependent children?
- Married?
- Full or part-time employment? Length of employment?
- Immigration status?
Unmarriage Penalty in Wisconsin’s Policy on “Birth Cost Recovery”

- Single mother is enrolled in Medicaid for pre-natal care, delivery, and ongoing post-natal care and receives any income support she and the child are eligible for.

- Unmarried father, if successfully identified, is pursued for both repayment of hospital delivery costs and subsequent child support regardless of his income.

- Common outcome: father is absent and does not contribute financial, emotional, or child-rearing support to mother.
Models of the Policy Process: The Cycle of Policy Making
Sources of Incrementalism in Policy Making

- Multiple participants
- Disagreement on root values
- Bounded rationality
- Political institutions
- Fiscal constraints
- Concentrated interests
Projecting Political Feasibility

□ Policy must survive “political test”

• Little chance of adoption if not supported by officials, voters, or key stakeholders
• Who are the individuals or groups usually concerned about this type of problem?
• Who might be expected to become involved in the current problem?
• Need to assess motives, resources, and strategic position of stakeholders
Projecting Political Feasibility

- Concepts to consider for costs and benefits
  - Tangible vs. intangible
  - Direct vs. indirect
  - Opportunity cost

- Costs and benefits to whom?
  - Society
  - Jurisdiction, group, institution
  - Individual
**Framework for Analysis of Policy Design and Political Feasibility**

**Costs**

- Diffuse Costs
- Concentrated Costs

**Benefits**

- Concentrated Effects
  - large in magnitude
  - occur immediately
  - direct, traceable impact
  - identifiable group or geographic jurisdiction

- Diffuse Effects
  - small in magnitude
  - occur over time
  - indirect, less traceable impact
  - broad, less identifiable target population

---

Sources of Innovation in Policy Making

- Critical junctures in policy development
- Political opportunities and leadership
- Policy entrepreneurs and investors
- Linkage of multiple venues in reform

Source: Oliver (2006)
Multiple Streams Model of Agenda Setting and Policy Change (John Kingdon)
Suggested Readings

Suggested Readings


Suggested Readings


Suggested Readings