Political Science 17.20
Introduction to American Politics

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Politics and Policy
Lecture 19 (April 23, 2013)
Politics and Policy as a System

Negative Feedback

Positive Feedback
Outline

1. Politics and Policy as a System
2. Negative Feedback
3. Positive Feedback
Not only does politics make policy, but policy makes politics, influencing the preferences, ideas, opportunities, and resources of political actors.

Different kinds of policy lead to different kinds of politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Concentrated Benefits</th>
<th>Diffuse Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated Costs</td>
<td>redistributive (interest group)</td>
<td>entrepreneurial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffuse Costs</td>
<td>distributive (logrolling)</td>
<td>majoritarian</td>
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Politics and Policy as a System

[Diagram showing a cycle between Mass Public, Representation, Public Policy, and Policy Feedback]

Outline

1 Politics and Policy as a System

2 Negative Feedback

3 Positive Feedback
The Public as Thermostat

- Simple choice for complex policies: “more” or “less”
- Two factors affect public’s (median voter’s) preferences:
  1. Most-preferred policy (ideal point)
  2. Location of status quo
- (Note similarity with pivotal politics model.)
- **Thermostat**: As policy moves to the left (e.g., when Democrats control the government), the median voter’s demand for “more” liberal policies should decrease.
- **Example**: Defense spending in Reagan years
Half-measures may satisfy public enough to demobilize
→ Medicare Part D
Policies may also stigmatize and demobilize their target populations
→ Means-tested welfare programs
→ Penal system
Outline

1. Politics and Policy as a System
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Public policies can create and empower new constituencies, giving them resources to defend the benefits they obtain from government.

Examples:
- Financial firms
- Physicians
- Social Security
Public policies lead citizens to invest in the status quo in a way that is costly to switch from (path dependence)

- Mortgage interest tax deduction (tax expenditure)

Policies can also influence citizens’ subjective understandings on themselves as citizens

- GI Bill:
  - engaged, public-spirited citizens
  - “affirmative action for whites”
Dynamic Representation

Changes in public preferences
↓
Defeat of out-of-step incumbents + anticipation of defeat
↓
Changes in public policy
↓
Changes in public preferences

- Presumes a largely thermostatic view of policy feedback
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Spring 2013

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