

Public Policy Management:

W8. Law Making and its Actors

Geetha Rani Prakasam,
ICCR Chair Professor,
DBS, UNITECH, Lae, PNG.

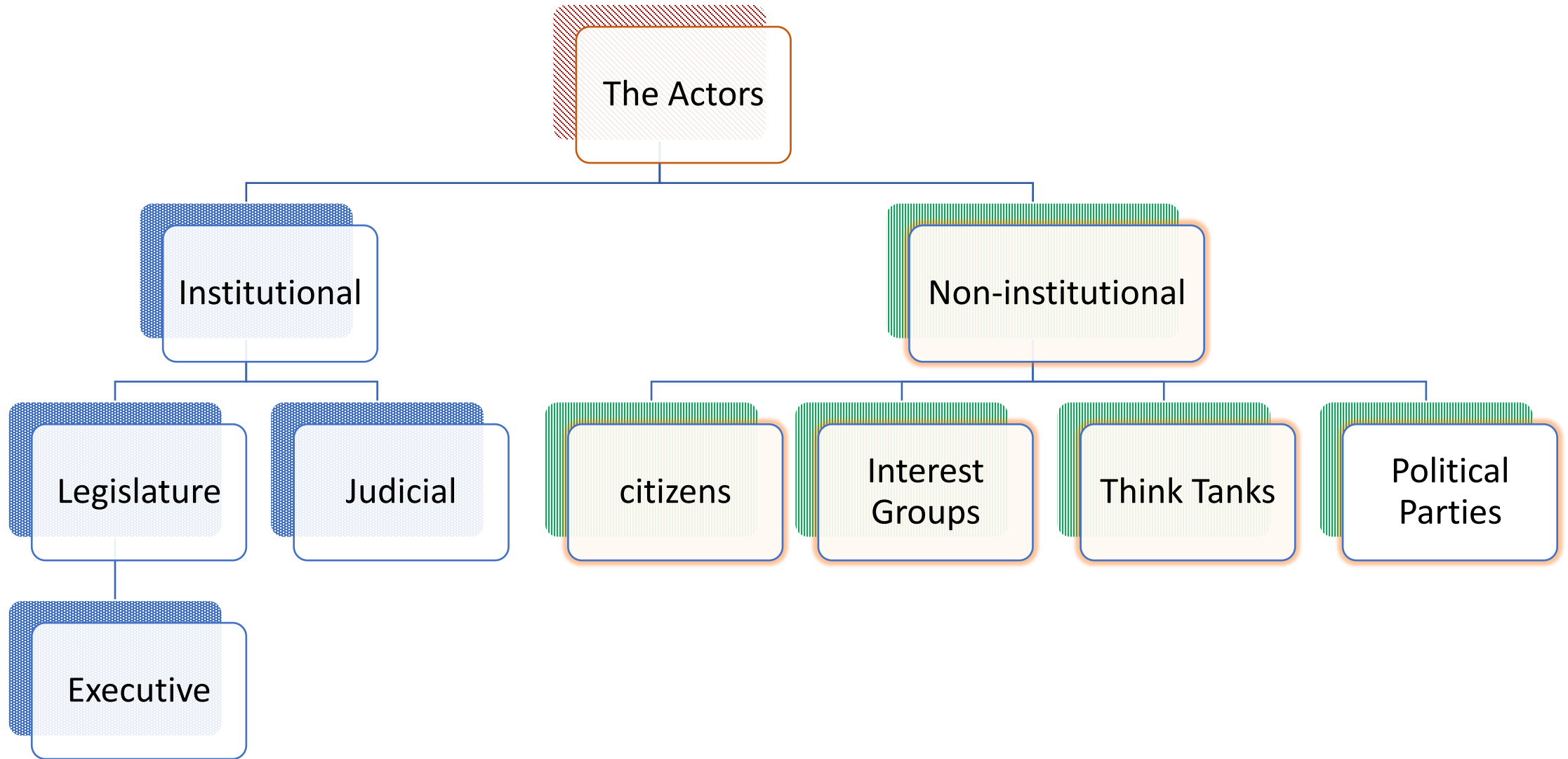
week	Main Topics	Key words
8	Law Making and its Actors	Democracy, Parliament, Assembly, Congress
9	Budget as a Part of Policy Cycle	Govt. Revenue and govt. expenditure, fiscal health
10	How Policy Makes Politics	nexus of policy and politics
11	Evidence-Based Policymaking	Evidence, research
12	Policy implementation	bureaucracy, Government officials
13	Evaluation of public policy	Goals, attainment
14	Public Policy Analysis	policy content analysis

Recap of the Week7 & outline of Week8

- W7:-Institutional Foundations of Public Policy
- **W8:** review the changing nature of the policy process in post-industrial society,
- examine how citizens can get involved in state and local government policy processes,
- discuss the role of political parties and elections in state and local politics and policymaking,
- discuss the types of interest groups present and the strategies these groups typically use in state and local policy processes,
- review the role of the mass media in policy processes,
- examine how industry and business can often exert significant influence in state and local politics.

Outline of Week8 Lecture

- discuss the role of social movements in shaping state and local politics and policy processes,
- compare how policymaking processes differ between various systems including the separation of powers political system found in the U.S. and the integration of powers (parliamentary) political systems found elsewhere,
- offer suggestions for how policy processes and actors can enhance community sustainability.



Who are public policy actors?

- Actors in public policy making are the people who create, implement, and enforce laws and regulations. They can be **government officials**, interest groups, or members of the public.
- In addition to legislative, court, and bureaucratic agencies, all levels of government produce **public policies**, such as legislatures, courts, bureaucrats, and executive offices at the national, local, and state levels.
- In this lecture, we describe state and local government policy processes and the various actors and interests that typically seek to influence those processes. Public policy and the policy process have been defined in the following way by most social scientists that study these phenomena:

Key Actors and the Policy Process in State and Local Governments

- Policy is what the government says and does about perceived problems. Policymaking is how the government decides what will be done about perceived problems. Policymaking is a process of interaction among governmental and non-governmental actors; policy is the outcome of that interaction.
- From this definition of key terms, it is clear that a diverse set of actors can become involved in the making of state and local public policy.
- Beginning with the perception of a problem, making it an issue for government action, getting it on the government's agenda for consideration, and finally securing relevant government action all entail the involvement of many parties sharing a stake in the form of government action taken.

Key Actors and the Policy Process

- For many state and local governments the process can become rather complex, featuring a multitude of actors engaged in one or more aspects of policymaking.
- Broadly speaking, one can place the actors in the state and local government policymaking process into one of two broad categories: **institutional actors** and **non-institutional actors**.
- The institutional actors involved in the public policy process are governments and governmental agencies that deal with public affairs — namely, the subjects of many other lectures in this course, including legislative bodies, executive departments, and the judicial branch.
- Depending on the policy issue in question, there are often state and local, as well as national-level institutions involved in policy issues arising in our federal system of government.
- United States has a very large number of such agencies and governments due to the federal (as opposed to unitary) nature of the U.S. political system.

Key Actors and the Policy Process

- The separation of powers provided for in both our federal and state constitutions keep our governmental system decentralized; in countries such as Japan, Great Britain or France, where governmental power is more centralized, far fewer such institutional actors become involved in regional and local policymaking.
- The non-institutional actors involved in the policy process, are diverse and can include political parties (e.g., Republicans and Democrats), interest groups (e.g., the National Rifle Association, the National Organization for Women), social movements (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g., the League of Women Voters), and the mass media (e.g., newspapers, radio, television, the Internet), and individual citizens.
- These potential actors are fiercely independent of the government and have different types of resources at their disposal, and employ varying strategies in their efforts to influence state and local public policy.
- We will discuss each of these sets of actors and describe how they may exercise influence over state and local policy processes.

Political Participation in Post-industrial America

- More specifically, this lecture will accomplish the following goals important for a sound understanding of state and local government and politics:
- Contemporary studies of public participation in post industrial societies suggest that a new style of politics has emerged over the course of the last several decades.
- This new style of politics is characterized in major part by an expansion of what has been considered *appropriate* political action. This arises out of some specific socio-political changes that occurred in the post-war period.
- Due to historically unprecedented economic growth, a prolonged period of prosperity, and relative political stability have created an increasingly better-educated public that places demands on government to address ever-changing problems arising in the management of post industrial societies — including the challenge of sustainability.
- The contemporary grassroots citizen organizations and associated social movements that arise in this context are considerably more likely to engage in **protest politics** or **elite challenging political activities** — such as demonstrations and boycotts — than were previous generations of activists.

Political Participation in Post-industrial Era

- Political conflicts arising over increasingly complex issues — such as sustainable development, same-sex marriage, immigration reform and No Child Left Behind educational reform — have generated a multitude of new interest groups, many of which draw citizens into the political process via single-issue concerns as opposed to a broad philosophical orientation to proper governance.
- One such policy arena with this type of political conflict is found in the domain of environmental policy.
- Traditionally, in the US, environmental management was a process largely insulated from public scrutiny.
- By the 1970s, however, quite widespread concern became evident concerning the proper management of the natural environment.
- Environmental organizations grew in size and proliferated in many economically advanced countries, and these organizations succeeded in mobilizing citizens, in challenging traditional environmental management practices, and in presenting new environmental issues for public debate.

Political Participation in Post-industrial Era

- Given the difficulty ordinary citizens have in dealing with the scientific complexities of environmental issues, the process by which democratic societies confront complex scientific and technical issues involving the broader public interest is important to understand.
- The formation of NGOs and interest groups is *critical* in this respect. The emergence of community-based interest groups and **social movements** has been characterized as an “eruption from below,” with demands for increased citizen input in the decision-making process lying at their base.
- Interest groups and community-based advocacy groups have pushed for increased democratization as a fundamental component of public policy. In doing so, the activities of interest groups illustrate the inherent tensions existing between a politicized, issue-driven segment of the electorate and “expert” decision-makers operating in the realm of natural resource policy

Political Participation in Post-industrial Era

- The prominent political scientist Ronald Inglehart argues that there are two distinct forms of political participation that should be recognized.
- The “elite-directed” mode of political action is represented by socio-political institutions, such as political parties, bureaucratic agencies, labor unions, and industry associations that are hierarchical in nature and mobilize citizens into action in a coordinated, “top-down” fashion.
- In contrast to this familiar pattern of citizen mobilization is the elite-challenging mode of political action, a pattern of political activity that is generally more issue-specific operates outside traditional political channels, and tends to make use of unconventional and sometimes disruptive tactics in an attempt to influence public policy.

Political Participation in Post-industrial Era

- Elite-challenging activism is a form of political action that usually addresses specific policy goals such as a community opposition to the location of a prison in a town or city.
- Nonviolent resistance is often an important part of environmental action: lying across the road to block the onslaught of bulldozers, chaining oneself to the floor of a valley as the dammed waters start to rise. These can be powerful forms of protest.
- The press will take notice, and the public will follow, so the world will learn of your cause. If you are willing to lay your life on the line, they think, you must be quite convinced of the correctness of your position.
- According to the highly regarded political scientist David Truman, industry groups that perceive threats to existing values often are put on the defensive by such tactics.

Political Participation in Post-industrial Era

- One example of this is the tobacco industry after the demonstration of a link between smoking and cardiac and pulmonary disease.
- In response to the elite-challenging behavior of consumer, environmental, and social equity advocacy groups (e.g., National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Sierra Club), industry groups are motivated to establish communication networks and create a common front against new policies that might negatively affect their ability to conduct business as usual.
- Instead of competing against one another as a market-based economy model would predict, industry-wide groups (e.g., Cattle Ranchers, Wheat Growers, Automobile Manufacturers and Retailers, Real Estate interests) often focus on their lowest common denominator of common interest and work in concert to take advantage of political opportunities to oppose these new groups.

Political Participation in Post-industrial Era

- Such “coalitions of convenience” have indeed become quite commonplace in many conflicts coming before U.S. state and local governments.
- The emergence of new “elite challenging” forces in American society has led to the creation of a broad array of interest groups, citizen groups, political party factions, and government agencies becoming active in the state and local government policymaking process.

Interest Groups

- All post industrial nations, including the United States, are experiencing explosive growth in the number, scope of concerns, and size of interest groups seeking to influence public policy.
- Community-based interest groups and other grassroots organizations concerned with a variety of public policy issues are variously labeled as **public interest groups**, **citizen groups**, or **social movements**.
- These particular terms are used to distinguish between citizen and community-based groups, which as a whole differ in their goals from groups representing either business or professional interests. According to the noted economist Mancur Olson's seminal work *The Logic of Collective Action*, such not-for-profit groups typically experience considerable difficulty organizing and mobilizing action.
- Groups of this type usually seek collective benefits that are often non-material, such as preserving endangered species or promoting civil rights and are inclusive rather than exclusive in nature (that is, the benefit sought will accrue to everyone regardless of their contribution to securing it).

Interest Groups

- Despite these rather formidable obstacles, however, public interest groups have grown dramatically in number and in size in virtually all U.S. states and in urban and rural areas alike in recent decades, and they have become important players in the American state and local government public policymaking process.
- Interest groups are highly diverse in terms of their size, the resources at their command, the scope of interest and activities in which they engage, their policy preferences, and their organizational form.
- They can be involved in a host of state and local government policy issues, including the areas of environmental protection, poverty reduction, public safety, child health and welfare, gender equity, and transportation system reform.
- Such groups can be of the large-scale membership type organized nation-wide, or they can be community-based and focused on local conditions.

Interest Groups

- International organizations (commonly referred to as ‘international nongovernmental organizations, or INGOs), issue-focused think tanks (e.g., The Heritage Foundation), and activist organizations (e.g., Habitat for Humanity, Doctors without Borders) also often engage in policymaking in U.S. state and local governments on a selective basis.
- Many community-based and grass-roots public interest groups have been effective advocates of public policies that are intended to promote sustainability---the environment, peace, human rights, consumer rights and women’s movements provide convincing examples of the power of voluntary action to change society.
- This seeming paradox can be explained by the fact that the power of voluntary action arises not from the size and resources of individual voluntary organizations, but rather from the ability of the voluntary sector to coalesce the actions of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of citizens through vast and constantly evolving networks that commonly lack identifiable structures, embrace many chaotic and conflicting tendencies, and yet act as if in concert to create new political and institutional realities.

Interest Groups

- Although interest groups differ quite widely in their human, financial, and organizational resources. These networks are able to encircle, infiltrate, and even co-opt the resources of opposing bureaucracies. They reach across sectors to intellectuals, press, and community organizations.
- Once organized, they can, through electronic communications, rapidly mobilize significant political forces on a global scale.
- Generally, it can be said that community-based and grassroots groups tend to be understaffed and poorly financed in comparison with organizations that represent private sector interests such as the petrochemical industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the telecommunications industry, the insurance industry, agricultural commodity groups, etc.
- Most community and grassroots non-profit groups are managed by either an unpaid or poorly compensated staff and claim very few official members, although some have developed large memberships and/or long lists of generous financial contributors and have hired skilled researchers, lawyers, and organizational managers.

Interest Groups

- Moreover, interest groups can have two fundamentally different types of memberships — one composed exclusively of individual citizens, and another consisting of representatives of large institutions, business firms, or state and local governments.
- Some observers of interest groups also note that there is an increasing use of professional agents such as lobbyists and political consultants, professionals (often former elected public officials) who are adept at influencing policy processes and mobilizing support or posing opposition to public policy initiatives.
- According to the research conducted by political scientist Andrew McFarland, it is as much the skill of such agents that determines the groups' success as it is their size of membership or financial resources.

Coalitions of Interests

- Another source of influence and success in the policy process is the formation of *coalitions of interests*.
- Such alliances feature numerous smaller groups or businesses as members rather than individual citizens.
- These coalition-type groups can become a formidable political force due to their pooled financial resources and their freedom from dependence upon highly variable individual membership dues.
- Another source of group strength identified by political scientist Jack Walker is the role of powerful *patrons* who are located outside of the group but who provide critical financial and social networking resources.
- The support of the many private foundations (e.g., the Nature Conservancy, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation), of wealthy individuals (e.g., Bill Gates, etc.), and of government agencies (e.g., Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Energy) allows some environmental and public health groups to reduce their reliance on individual memberships dues.

Coalitions of Interests

- A variety of strategies developed to influence the policy process have been identified by social scientists who study the policymaking process in state and local government.
- Central among these strategies are the various forms of lobbying of elected officials and governmental agencies, the organizing of grassroots activists to mobilize public opinion, the building of coalitions with other like-minded groups, and the making of strategic financial contributions to supportive politicians.
- The specific strategy (or combination of strategies) used by a particular organization is influenced by various factors, including the types and amounts of resources available to it, the perceived effectiveness of the strategies available, and the governmental structure in place.
- Large memberships give interest groups an advantage in letter writing, in the staging of public demonstrations, and in the training of volunteers to carry out grassroots activities.

Coalitions of Interests

- In contrast, those organizations possessing few members but commanding large budgets generally wish to focus on influencing the election of key decision-makers or lobbying such decision-makers after the holding of elections.
- The latter has been the preferred strategy for industry and commercial interests, and as a result, many industrial interests have benefited significantly from governmental programs and from government subsidies.
- Regardless of the size of their budgets and memberships, however, Berry observes the following about interest groups: “ (they) have strong reasons to convince people at the grassroots of the righteousness of their arguments, believing that changed public opinion will eventually lead to changed elite opinion.”
- This long-term perspective is especially the case in the advocacy of sustainability, in light of the fact that issues of sustainability are becoming popular among citizens in post-industrial countries.

Coalitions of Interests

- The survey in question asked these public interest groups about the types of strategies they used and about the activities in which they engaged, including their interactions with government, the public, other groups, and the mass media.
- The strategies range from traditional forms of influence such as lobbying government officials to elite-challenging activities such as organizing and staging political demonstrations and engaging in protests.
- While many of these groups are active at various levels of government, most groups have more influence in state and local government rather than the national government.
- This observation substantiates former U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Thomas “Tip” O’Neill’s often-quoted remark, “all politics are local.”

Coalitions of Interests

- Another finding supportive of the discussion above is that public interest groups promoting a civil society spend a great deal of time trying to educate the public and working in concert with other groups to promote their agenda.
- Of course, the strategies of such public interest groups and industry-based groups are partially dependent on the structure of government and its potential points of access, as we will note later in this lecture.
- Yet another interesting finding derived from this study is the degree of self-perceived success of these groups.
- The second-highest level of self-assessed success noted is that of working with local governments, followed by working with state government and working with political parties. Working with the national government elicited the lowest level of self-assessed perceived success.

Social Movements

- As discussed previously, political scientists have identified two distinct forms of political participation intended to influence public policy — i.e., the “elite-directed” and “elite challenging” modes of political action.
- Contemporary studies of the policy process in post-industrial societies indicate that the elite challenging mode of politics has been very effective in bringing about policy change when it is associated with the development of a *social movement*.
- Social movements are broad-based efforts to change societal institutions and practices that emphasize a collective identity reflective of an identifiable set of shared values. Social movements encapsulate a broad range of concerns and engage a large number of organizations and individual citizens who become united for a particular cause.

Social Movements

- Such movements have included the causes of the Prohibition of the Manufacture and Sale of Alcohol, Workers' Rights, Civil Rights, Environmental Protection, and Women's Rights. All of these movements affected state and local politics and public policymaking in state and local government.
- Currently, the Gay and Lesbian Rights movement is also very active at state and local levels of government. Efforts to promote the recognition of benefits associated with civil unions and the legal recognition of gay marriage are public policy changes being sought by this contemporary social movement.

Characteristics of Social Movements

- Sociologists and political scientists who have studied social movements have identified some characteristics associated with social movements that have been successful in the past; these characteristics include the following:
- **1. *Sufficient financial resources to recruit and educate new members and to promote the desired policy outcomes in the general public:***
 - Having sufficient financial support is particularly important in areas where the proposed changes are strongly opposed by groups with substantial resources.
- **2. *Involving people and organizations with prior grassroots experience:***
 - Having staff and leadership skilled and experienced in grassroots politics expedites successful organizational efforts.

Characteristics of Social Movements

- 2. This is likely the case because experienced people are more likely to know which strategies work and which do not work under given circumstances.
- Experienced people are also more likely to be connected to affected communities and know the political landscape within which the recruitment of movement participants can be accomplished.
- **3. *Identifying emotional issues to motivate people to participate:***
This process is known as “dramatic spotlighting,” and it occurs in cases wherein events that lead to public outrage are carefully highlighted for the media and potential participants.
- There are many examples of injecting emotion into a natural resource and environmental policy issues — such as the filming of the clubbing of baby seals in annual hunts in Canada by Greenpeace and a 1970’s EPA television commercial using a stately Native American elder with tears coming from his eyes after coming upon a polluted river; while these are particularly noteworthy examples, many others could be given.

Characteristics of Social Movements

- **4. Using a “micro-mobilization” approach:** Organizing small informal and formal groups at the local level, all connected to a much larger network or coalition, has been found to be an important component of successful social movements in the past.
- Having people interact at the local level creates social bonds among otherwise isolated persons, and these bonds increase issue interest and participation in social movement activities.
- At the same time as local bonds are being built there must be an ongoing connection to a larger movement; locally bonded people scattered across a myriad of communities are more likely to take part in movement activities if they believe large numbers of others are also participating in other localities facing the same problems they are dealing with in their own community.
- Examples of relatively successful movements would be the women’s suffrage movement (i.e., “first wave” feminism), the civil rights movement, and the early environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

Characteristics of Social Movements

- **5. *The absence of crosscutting cleavages:*** Crosscutting cleavages —such as liberal versus conservative, rural versus urban, etc. within a social movement — often lead to political conflict and undercut efforts at building a large, cohesive and effective movement.
- Successful social movements in the past have grown more inclusive over time, but start with a core set of fairly uniform actors who maintain a steadfast focus on their shared cause.
- **6. *Having a diverse and “co-optable” communications network:*** Successful social movements tend to develop communication networks that connect large and diverse numbers of people to the cause — the greater the number and diversity of people actively participating in the network, the more likely the movement will be successful.
- The communication network needs to connect individual and group participants in the movement to one another, it needs to connect participants with the mass media, and it needs to connect the movement with potential new participants.

Characteristics of Social Movements

- **7. *Having capable and competent leadership:*** Articulate and charismatic leaders and organizers are much more likely to inspire emotion and participation than passive followers and inarticulate leaders.
- If leaders are identified as being too partisan or allied too closely with a particularly divisive interest group, then their ability to lead a broad-based movement is diminished.
- **8. *Having an optimistic expectation:*** This characteristic of successful social movements is related to sense of efficacy. People have to feel they are joining ranks with large numbers of like-minded people, and that their own participation will contribute to the success of the movement.
- While this is a very difficult characteristic to engender in contemporary America, with only 60 percent of the eligible population participating in the electoral process it is nonetheless very important for successful social movements.

Characteristics of Social Movements

- **9. *Encouraging solidarity instead of free riding:*** With many state and local issues in the political sphere, there are many free riders — people willing to sit back and watch others take action and then benefit from those actions without themselves having contributed their fair share.
- Successful movements are able to move people to take private actions that contribute to collective political action (writing letters, attending public meetings, voting for supportive candidates, joining groups, donating money, etc.) despite the temptation to free-ride on the sacrifices of others.

Citizens

- As discussed previously, there are a variety of ways that citizens can influence state and local policy processes as discussed above — traditional and elite-challenging methods. Traditional methods would include:
- voting in elections; working on political campaigns for candidates or political parties, which could include convincing others how to vote, attending rallies or meetings, and fund-raising activities; and communal activities such as working with groups to solve community problems or contacting governmental officials.
- In contrast, elite challenging or “unconventional” political participation could include:
- signing petitions; participating in lawful demonstrations; participating in boycotts; participating in unofficial strikes; and taking part in “sit-ins” and the occupation of buildings or facilities in order to dramatize a claimed injustice.

Citizens

- While citizens can take a number of steps to participate in politics, overall participation in the United States compared to many other democracies is noticeably lower, particularly in recent years. In addition, not all segments in American society participate in elections at equal rates.
- Because a high level of citizen engagement in governance is an important component of civil society and sustainable communities alike, some state and local governments pursuing sustainability have tried to address some of these reasons for not participating with specific public policies. Increasing citizen participation is important to state and local governments because:
 - **1.** voting and attentiveness to public affairs lie at the heart of the democratic principles upon which the United States was built.
 - **2.** citizen participation provides legitimacy to state and local policy decisions to the extent that people recognize that their concerns were incorporated into the laws under which we all must live.

Citizens

- **3.** citizen engagement can increase the citizens' sense of attachment to the community and engender the "co-production" of public goods – that is, citizens promote the public welfare by voluntary actions motivated by a sense of civic duty (e.g., recycle to reduce solid waste, maintain safe lighting on private property, make donations to the Red Cross, United Way, Community Food Banks and the like to provide for those in need).
- **4.** it helps to maintain and reinforce community networks and social connections, thus increasing the ability of communities and states to respond to natural and economic disasters.
- **5.** heightened public participation also can lead to enhanced momentum to implement new policies and energize community-based initiatives needed to promote sustainability.

Use of E-government Techniques: Citizen Participation

- Some examples of state and local efforts to increase citizen participation — not only in elections, but also for service on citizen review boards, planning commissions and other venues, include the use of e-government techniques (i.e., providing useful policy-relevant information on the Internet and allowing on-line voter registration), allowing voting before election day, allowing more flexible voter registration opportunities at numerous venues such as on election day, at schools, in hospitals, and in vote-by-mail systems present in Oregon (for all elections) and other states for many state and local elections.
- Concerning this latter approach of making voting easier, many states that have traditional polling station elections are also allowing a very flexible system for absentee voting by mail.

Initiative and Referenda

- One way that citizens can affect public policy and even amend state constitutions or county and city charters directly is through the initiative process. In over a third of the states and in many local governments the **initiative** provides citizens a process to vote on proposed constitutional amendments, **statutes** or **ordinances**.
- The initiative process originates from a certain number of registered voters (the number depends on the state and the nature of the proposal) signing a petition to place an issue on the ballot. With a sufficient number of validated voter signatures either an indirect or direct initiative process ensues.
- Under the indirect form, an issue is first referred to state legislature for consideration, and then if the legislature does not enact the measure, that same measure is placed before the electorate to decide. In the direct form of the initiative, a measure is directly forwarded to voters for their consideration without passing through the state legislature.

Initiative and Referenda

- In many states, the legislatures can also refer a specific measure to the voters for approval or disapproval. This process is called a **referendum** and differs from the initiative process because the measure originates with the legislature.
- All of these types of votes collectively are referred to as “ballot measures,” “propositions,” or simply “initiatives,” depending on the state.
- The initiative and referendum process is thought to have originated in the Greek city-states studied by Aristotle, and both methods of direct legislation by the people have been used at various times throughout the centuries in countries such as Switzerland, France, Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- In the United States, the initiative and referendum processes were used by many states to both adopt and later revise their original constitutions. South Dakota was the first state to adopt the initiative process in 1898, followed by Utah in 1900, and then Oregon in 1902.

Media

- The mass media play an important role in state and local government policy processes. In the U.S. “children spend more time in front of television sets than in school,” and more than two-thirds of the people in the country “report they receive all or most of their news from television” – given these facts and given the growth of the electronic mass media it is clear that the media are enormously important as a factor in state and local politics.
- With the advent of worldwide television coverage due to the extensive proliferation of satellite transmitters and receivers, as well as the rapid expansion of the world wide web and the Internet, the transmission of information globally is virtually instantaneous and the potential impact of this information has been enhanced greatly over what it was in the past.
- The strategic use of visual images and the near-real-time dissemination of graphic scenes is a powerful means to create and maintain concern for a specific issue. For example, a picture of a dying bird mired in oil is a great deal more moving than is a short oral “talking head” report that a tanker is leaking crude oil off a coastline somewhere.

Media

- This type of strategic media messaging by interest groups and political parties is especially important in an era of globalization where a wider audience has access to new sources of public affairs-relevant information and this audience is being exposed to more diverse messages concerning state and local governance issues than ever in the past.
- In addition to noting these aspects of the new potency of the mass media, it needs to be stated that the mass media traditionally perform certain important functions that are essential to state and local government and politics, including the following.
- Formation of public opinion: the mass media provide information and the reporting of diverse viewpoints that help citizens form their own views of public policy issues.

Media

- The mass media help to prioritize public policy issues that come to the attention of state and local government. In one sense, the mass media can serve as a “marketplace” of ideas; in another sense, they help determine what issues come to the attention of policymakers based on their independent assessment of the “newsworthiness” of particular stories and issues.
- The news media, particularly the print media, serve as an important “watchdog” over state and local governments and officials, providing a check on corruption, inadequate attention to matters of public concern, unethical conduct, and bureaucratic malfeasance.
- The media collectively provide an essential link between citizens and their government in a democracy by helping communicate public policy-relevant information, policy preferences, and societal values back and forth between citizens and their governmental leaders and civil servants.

Corporations and Economic Interests

- Businesses and multinational corporations are another set of actors that are extremely important in the political life of state and local government.
- The noted scholar Charles Lindblom argued convincingly that business enjoys a “privileged position” in American politics generally, and in state and local government in particular.
- In capitalist or market-based economies such as ours, it is private corporations rather than government that run crucial sectors of the society.
- In many democratic countries significant portions of what are private sector businesses in the U.S., such as energy production, airlines, medical care, and health insurance, are “nationalized” and are operated by the government.
- This fact means that private interests in the U.S. command far more wealth, power and influence vis-à-vis governmental authorities than is the case in virtually any other contemporary democratic nation.

Corporations and Economic Interests

- Some critics of American society argue that the power possessed by private corporations has increased markedly in recent decades as a direct consequence of the globalization of local economies and the explosive growth of multi-national corporations.
- They argue strongly that the combination of these two factors has led to the exercise of undue corporate influence on state and local governments that are required to regulate and or levy taxes on some of the activities of these powerful interests.
- The implications of this increasing role for global corporations in local communities replacing locally owned, locally financed and locally operated small businesses are rather ominous for state and local government in the U.S.
- This is the case in part because interests far removed from the community will decide the ultimate fate of that community rather than the community itself, and also because— generally speaking — business interests oppose public policies “that they believe would impose significant new costs on them or otherwise reduce expected profits” regardless of their potential benefit to the broader community

Corporations and Economic Interests

- While virtually all political scientists agree that business interests command a great deal of influence in state and local government, there is disagreement among social scientists on just how much influence business interests actually exercise in the policy process.
- As the discussion of public policy models found at the end of this lecture illustrates, some scholars make the argument that corporations dominate the policy process, both nationally and internationally, while others argue that business is just one of the many powerful interests involved in the policy process.
- The highly regarded American political scientist Robert Dahl persuasively argues, however, that those who own and control corporate and personal wealth pose special problems for democratic systems and public policy:

Corporations and Economic Interests

- ...ownership and control contribute to the creation of great differences among citizens in wealth, income, status, skills, information, control over information and propaganda, access to political leaders... [and] differences like these help in turn to generate significant inequalities among citizens in their capacities and opportunities for participating as political equals in governing the state.
- This observation suggests that in the United States and other market-based economies, business interests represent not merely one of many contending interests in state and local governments, but represent among of the most important actors involved in public policymaking in those governments.

Political Parties and Elections

- Political parties are important actors in state and local public policy processes throughout the country. Typically, political parties “reflect a political culture with distinct world views” that are organized to “seek power in government.”
- While the Founding Fathers tried very hard to insulate the new nation from the development of factions and parties through the constitutional arrangements of federalism, separation of powers and checks and balances, they obviously were not entirely successful in that effort.
- By 1800 the United States was one of the first countries in the world to have nationally organized political parties.
- With continental expansion and population growth through mass immigration and the resulting expansion of the electorate — in addition to historical reforms enfranchising African Americans and women — political parties provided the principal means to mobilize voters through what we have called “elite-directed” politics in our preceding discussion.

Political Parties and Elections

- Political parties provide a means for the organization and direction of competition for political power. They prioritize issues to be addressed by government and recruit candidates to stand in elections at the national, state and local levels of government.
- After elections are held, the winning party takes control of the government and the minority party calls into question the majority party's actions in areas where they believe it is subject to criticism that will resonate with citizens in the next election.
- This constant give and take, action and reaction between the political parties serves to keep the public informed about the actions of their government and aware of alternates possible to existing policies and practices.
- Political parties can also facilitate the work of state government if the same party controls both the legislature and governor's office, thus minimizing the often-divisive effect of separation of powers and checks and balances.

Political Parties and Elections

- Divided control of state government by different parties makes governance more difficult, requiring skillful negotiation to bring differing policy preferences into some degree of accord to permit effective action to address the problems requiring government attention.
- Typically, the presence of divided government at the state level acts to restrain the scope of government initiatives to address public problems and leads the respective parties to request a “mandate to govern” in the next election.
- The principal function of political parties in democratic countries is “...the development of a solid and durable linkage between the party’s electorate and the policymakers...parties are expected to represent the social composition of those who mandate them and to respond politically to the demands of their electorate.” Some additional functions carried out by political parties in the U.S. include:

Political Parties and Elections

- They represent *groups of interests* in U.S. states and communities. Once elected, however, elected officials not only represent their own party supporters but they also must govern in the interest of all of the constituents in their respective jurisdictions.
- They help to *simplify choices* for voters by organizing and articulating alternative positions on the issues facing the state and local governments wherein they operate. Parties also help to recruit and educate candidates for public office so that citizens can make judgments as to whom to trust with the grant of public authority in pending elections.
- They can help to stimulate interest in public affairs, in elections, and in democratic governance in general. By explaining their positions on the issues, political parties can help to inform and shape public opinion.

Political Parties and Elections

- There are different types of political parties in democratic countries, with **missionary parties** and **broker parties** being two of the major subdivisions.
- Missionary parties tend to be rather ideological in orientation, in a sense of proclaiming a “mission” to fulfill if elected to office in terms of specific public policies and programs.
- Missionary parties often enter elections with a “manifesto” or “platform” of specific and detailed policy actions to be undertaken if successful in the election.
- These parties are able to maintain a focused agenda because they tend to exercise a high degree of control over membership and carefully monitor who is allowed to make use of the party label as a candidate.
- The political party leadership itself selects who will be the candidates standing in local elections and who will serve as leaders of the party. Missionary parties are most often found in parliamentary-style governments and are seldom seen in state and local politics in the U.S.

Political Parties and Elections

- The political parties are far less ideologically oriented and seek to “broker” a multitude of interests in order to appeal to the widest segment of the electorate. Broker parties have weak control over their membership since it is typically self-selected, and those interested in elective office generally nominate themselves in American politics.
- Candidates for office are selected through the use of **primary elections** and **caucuses** — two candidate recruitment processes that allow interested voters within each party to make the selection of their party’s candidates instead of the party leadership.
- The use of primaries to select candidates is a unique feature of American politics when compared to other post-industrial democracies.
- This practice ensures that political parties in the U.S. are less ideologically cohesive than their counterparts in other countries, and the decentralized power structures of the political parties reflecting American federalism ensures, as well, that regional and sectional differences will permeate the national Democratic and Republican parties alike.

Political Parties and Elections

- American political parties can be generally characterized as centrist concerning policy preferences when compared to parties in other post-industrial nations. Republicans and Democrats draw support from almost every major socioeconomic group, with a few noteworthy exceptions. For example, African American people vote overwhelmingly Democratic (82 percent voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election).
- This “playing toward the middle” approach is re-enforced by the fact that many voters characterize themselves as neither Republican nor Democratic in basic leaning, but rather see themselves as independents that can vote for either party’s candidates depending on whose message is more appealing.
- These fundamental conditions motivate each major political party to tolerate a diversity of opinions and accommodate a wide range of policy preferences within their ranks. The American broker style of political parties has allowed both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party to absorb third parties and even broad social movements over the years.

Political Parties and Elections

- Another important feature of the U.S. political party scene at both national and state levels is the existence of the **two-party system**. Since the 1860s the same two political parties have dominated the American political system — Democrats and Republicans.
- Most Americans today consider themselves to be either Republicans or Democrats, and while an increasing number of Americans are identifying themselves as independents, they still vote for the two main parties at the ballot box.
- Third parties have had a tough time establishing themselves in the U.S. because of our **single-member district** (SMD) form of electoral representation wherein the candidate with the plurality of the vote (not necessarily the majority) wins the election.
- Many other post-industrial democracies have **proportional representation** systems with **multimember districts** (MMDs); such a form of electoral representation tends to encourage multi-party systems because multiple seats are proportionally distributed based on what proportion of the vote a particular party wins.

Political Parties and Elections

- Two other relatively unique features found in some state and local government elections are the **open primary** and **nonpartisan offices**. Open primaries are primary elections where voters do not need to be members of a specific political party in order to vote for that party's candidates.
- Voters still have to be registered to vote, but can decide to vote for their favourite candidate regardless of which party registration they hold. Most states have **closed primary** systems, which are preferred by the parties, wherein only persons who are registered members of a political party can vote using the ballot of that political party.
- In nonpartisan elections, candidates run for office without listing a political affiliation. Typically, the winning candidate is chosen in a runoff election from the top two vote recipients in the primary election. The candidates in nonpartisan elections are most likely aligned with one of the political parties, but they do not identify themselves as party members.

Political Parties and Elections

- Nonpartisan elections are generally held for local government offices in some counties, in many cities, and especially in the case of school district and other local special districts and boards and commissions. Nonpartisan judicial elections are also very common at the state and local levels.
- Many members of the public, journalists, and even elected officials themselves decry “partisan politics.” The common argument heard is that partisan politics too often leads to stalemate in government and the election of non-responsive public officials.
- Because of this supposed tendency, some argue for open primaries in state and local elections to remove the influence of parties.
- On the other hand, many political scientists and political parties believe that partisanship is generally a good thing in electoral processes because it offers voters cues about the choices facing them. In a sense, you know something about where candidates (or current elected officials) stand on the issues if they identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats.

Conclusion: Policy Processes, Actors and Sustainability

- We shed light on the various actors involved in state and local government governance and the public policy decision-making processes in which they tend to operate.
- Citizens, interest groups, the mass media, political parties, and social movements were all discussed in this regard.
- As a general backdrop to that discussion, we have described the changing nature of politics in post-industrial societies and what that historical transition to a period of sustained peace and prosperity has meant for the political processes of advanced democracies, including the United States.
- The changing nature of state and local politics from decidedly elite-directed to elite-challenging modes of political participation has increased the complexity of policy processes leading to multiple and competing perspectives on who has power and influence and how public policy decisions are actually made in state and local government.

Conclusion: Policy Processes, Actors and Sustainability

- The challenge of moving toward more sustainable forms of economic activity, land use patterns, energy use and production processes, transportation services, public health, and social services, and food production and transport will face virtually all state and local governments in the U.S. in the coming decade.
- Global climate change may well displace globalization of the marketplace as a principal concern of state and local government officials and the citizens living in communities throughout the country.
- Community-based citizen groups, the mass media, private corporations, philanthropic foundations, industry-wide associations, public interest groups, and political parties are all going to have to figure out how to work in concert — state-by-state and local community-by-local community — to achieve the level of adaptation to change that sustainability will require.

Conclusion: Policy Processes, Actors and Sustainability

- We must hope that the promise of pluralism held out by its defenders, as it relates to state and local governments in the U.S., is more a reality than a myth.
- If entrenched interests and concentrated wealth based on the status quo prevent or delay sustainability-promoting adaptations, we may all be dooming our children to a future less inviting than the one we inherited from our own parents.
- These perspectives point up the importance of specialized institutions for conflict resolution; and make it a priority of international assistance to help establish agreed rules for resolving conflicts—and the subsequent enforcement of agreements— before conflict turns violent.
- Until such institutions take root, this helps explain how international enforcement of agreements has been effective.

References

- Chapter 4: Key Actors and the Policy Process in State and Local Governments, available at <https://open.oregonstate.edu/government/chapter/chapter-4/>
- Jungblut Jens & Deanna Rexe, (2017), Higher education policy in Canada and Germany: Assessing multi-level and multi-actor coordination bodies for policy-making in federal systems, *Policy and Society*, 36:1, 49-66, DOI: 10.1080/14494035.2017.1278864

What Next?

- Budget as a Part of Policy Cycle