Policy Process Models

Understanding How Policies Are Made
POSC 315: Introduction to Public Policy
Lecture 2 (Part 1 of 2)

Summer 2025

California State University, Fullerton

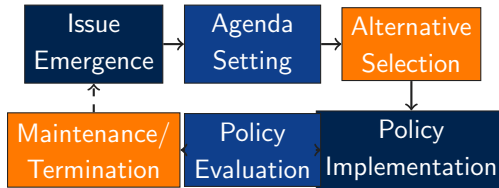### Today's Focus:

1. The Stages Model
   - Structure and process
   - Strengths and limitations
2. Systems Thinking
   - Systems model approach
   - Inputs, throughputs, and outputs
   - Strengths and limitations

Overview

Today's Focus:

1. The Stages Model
   - Structure and process
   - Strengths and limitations
2. Systems Thinking
   - Systems model approach
   - Inputs, throughputs, and outputs
   - Strengths and limitations

These models help us understand the complex process of policy
development

The Stages Model

First Stages

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- **Issue Emergence**: A problem is identified and brought to the attention of government
- **Agenda Setting**: The problem is placed on the government agenda
- **Alternative Selection**: Various policy options are considered

Later Stages

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- **Policy Implementation**: The policy is put into action
- **Policy Evaluation**: Effectiveness is assessed
- **Maintenance, Succession, or Termination**: Policy is continued, modified, or ended

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The process is cyclical, as new issues often emerge from existing policies

Stages Model Strengths

✔ **Intuitive**

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Easy to understand and explain

✔ Descriptive

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✔ Flexible
Adaptable to different
policy areas and
government levels

Stages Model Weaknesses

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Ignores much of the complexity in policymaking

✖ Separate

Treats stages as distinct when they actually overlap

Reflection Point

Think of a recent policy issue (e.g., COVID response, student debt):

- Can you identify the different stages it went through?
- Did it follow a linear path or move back and forth between stages?
- Were some stages more visible or important than others?

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A perspective that emphasizes the relationships among parts of a system and how they interact with each other and the system as a whole.

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Rather than seeing policy as a linear sequence, systems thinking views it as a dynamic, interconnected process

- Public policy is viewed as the **response of the political system** to forces brought to bear on it from the outside environment.
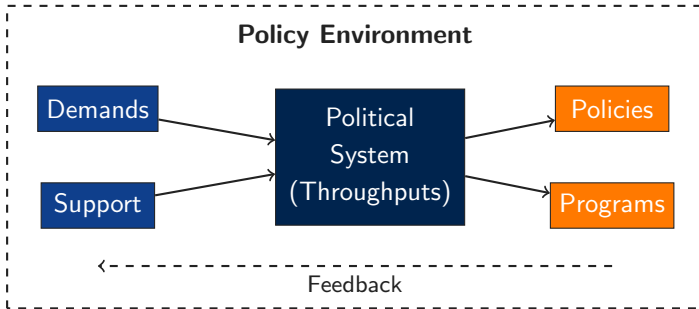
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- A policy environment surrounds the political system
  - Forces enter the political system from the environment either as demands or as support
- The political system processes these inputs and produces policy outputs

Note: This diagram illustrates the continuous feedback loops in the policy system

Environment & Inputs

The Systems Model Components

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- **Policy Environment**: Political, economic, social context
- **Inputs**: Demands and support from public, interest groups, officials

Processing & Results

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- **Outputs**: Laws, regulations, decisions created
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Feedback

Response to policy outputs that loops back into the system, potentially creating new demands or support

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The "black box" of processing remains somewhat unclear

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Best Use	Instructional, basic analysis	Complex policy analysis

Key Takeaways

- **Stages Model**: Provides a useful framework but oversimplifies reality
- **Systems Model**: Emphasizes relationships, feedback loops, and environmental context
- **Complementary Views**: Both models provide valuable insights while having distinct limitations
- **Practical Application**: Understanding these models helps analyze real-world policy development

"Models are to be used, not believed."

— Henri Theil

Coming Up Next

We'll Cover:

- Structural Environment
- Social Environment
- Economic Environment
- Political Environment
- International Environment

Questions to Consider:

- How do environments constrain policy choices?
- Which environmental factors are most influential?
- How do these environments interact?