

## Current Events

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# Environmental Politics and Policy-Making

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## 1. Institutions and Government

**Institutions** are groups of long-lasting structures, rules, and standard operating procedures - for example, UMSL is long-lasting - it includes structures (colleges, departments, and services), rules (for getting a degree) and standard operating procedures (registering for class, for class times and places).

**Institutions** create order and predictability.

**Government** is a set of institutions with the legitimate right to use coercion within a given territory – and government rules include laws.

Governments rule parts of the earth's landscape and water

Governments are run by humans for humans

- they govern the environment for humans
- they manage natural resources for humans

Governments govern the environment through public policies and institutions

- Government institutions and laws are hard to change, especially in the U.S.
- Therefore if you can get a law made and enforced, it will be hard for your opponents to change it. But if you want to change a law or institution (and especially a Constitution), it is very difficult.

## 2. The U.S. Constitution

**James Madison's dilemma: making a *lasting national republican* government**

**– rule by “the people” that would do *more good than harm***

The solution: create a really complicated government that is chosen by the people but is really, really hard to use.

Give different powers to among institutions with different standpoints:

Separation of Powers in the federal government:

Congress, the president & executive branch, & the courts

Separation of Powers between the federal and the state governments (federalism)

**The Constitution encouraged fragmentation, pluralism, incrementalism and state & local initiatives in environmental policy (see Rosenbaum)**

## 3. The Separation of Powers & the Policy Process

### a. Congress - a fragmented law-making body

**Mostly, a collection of parochial standpoints.**

The House of Representatives

The Senate (you need 60 of 100 votes to get most policies through the Senate)

Small states have disproportionate influence in the Senate:

California's 2 Senators represent about twelve percent of the U.S. population

Wyoming's 2 Senators represent two-tenths of one percent

This tends to help resource-rich states with small populations (Wyoming and Alaska),

but there are small states whose Senators are strong environmental supporters(VT)

## **b. The President and executive branch**

### **What can a president influence?**

- i. The national agenda through legislative priorities and appointments  
Trump EPA Director: Scott Pruitt
- ii. budget priorities
- iii. executive orders  
Trump has reversed Obama on environmental actions
- iv. agency priorities
- v. international agreements  
Obama endorsed and pushed for the Paris climate agreement  
Trump announced the US is withdrawing from the Paris agreement

## **The Bureaucracy**

The problem of controlling bureaucratic discretion

## **c. The Courts**

- an independent view of environmental issues
- Interpretations of laws and the Constitution may differ from other branches
- Court decisions can have far-reaching consequences
- Example: Massachusetts v. EPA 2007

## **4. Federalism**

Federalism: Political authority divided between a national government and subnational (or regional) governments

States matter because state policies affect the environment

States have a strong interest in natural resources within their borders managed

**So...State standpoints**

- a) State resource management has provided prosperity, jobs and tax revenues for states - and all these things are politically popular.
- b) State and local governments usually make market-driven economic growth a top priority
- c) But some state (& local) governments are usually the first to put an issue on the public agenda