Current Events

Environmental Politics and Policy-Making (Continued)

3. The Separation of Powers & the Policy Process

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
       Trump has proposed deep cuts in the EPA budget

   iii. executive orders
       Obama extended environmental policy through executive action
       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

Environmental management is a massive job – and nearly all of it is dispersed across the U.S.

The problem of controlling bureaucratic discretion

Bureaus have to have discretion to implement policy – but discretion allows them to change or defy presidential priorities.

c. The Courts

• Federal judges are appointed for life and do not have to be reelected.
• 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 can do things differently

States matter because state policies affect the environment

States have a strong interest in managing natural resources within their borders to their advantage
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 wealth-building a top priority

   Example: Oklahoma promotes oil and gas

c) But some state (& local) governments usually pioneer environmental policies.

   Example: California and climate change

Public Opinion and Polarization

The Difficulties of explaining science

   Differences between the opinions of scientists and those of the public

Public Opinion

   • American support for the environment is a mile wide and an inch deep

      • Americans have higher priorities than the environment
The Issue-Attention Cycle

- Public attention to many issues, such as the environment, tends to increase rapidly and then recede.
- Anthony Downs: problems "suddenly leap into prominence, remain there for a short time, and then – though still largely unresolved – gradually fade from the center of public attention."
- Examples: - gun control after the Sandy Hook massacre
- The Deepwater Horizon oil spill
- The Fukushima nuclear power crisis

Political Polarization

is the increasing separation of Democrats and Republicans in political attitudes and behavior.

Political polarization has affected environmental policy more than any other policy area.

- In the 1970s, the two parties largely agreed on environmental policy (See Nixon’s record in Rosenbaum chapter 1)
- There were moderates, liberals and conservatives in both parties
- But Republicans persuaded Southerners to vote Republican - causing conservatives to abandon the Democrats – and making the Republican party more conservative
- Changes in the South has removed conservatives from the Democratic Party, making it more liberal - The Northeast and west coast have become strongly Democratic
- The Tea Party is a very conservative faction of the Republican party that strongly opposes most government regulations, including
environmental regulations

- The most active citizens are more partisan and ideological than average – and they play a large role in determining party nominees
- These divisions are now deeply emotional
- Attitudes about the environment have become especially polarized - Republicans stress the priority of wealth-building over environmental protection much more than Democrats

Interest Groups

Interest groups are critical for public policy

- Pluralism (Rosenbaum) - Policy is worked out by negotiation, bargaining, and compromise among various interest groups

- What do interest groups do?
  - Provide policy information and proposals
  - Endorse candidates
  - Build coalitions
  - Lobbying policymakers
  - Lobbying the public
  - Monitor policy implementation

- The Problem of Collective action for “Public interest groups”
  - Private interest groups can provide members with material benefits
  - But private groups have a very limited ability to provide material benefits, so they have to provide social connections and high-minded goals and purposes
• But if they need to provide “high-minded” goals and purposes, their members with resist compromise

• Therefore, Environmental groups face an internal struggle between

pragmatism versus purity