Current Events

Exam 1 – next Tuesday

Public Opinion and Polarization

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 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

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**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
  • Lobby policymakers
  • Lobby 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**