


Policy Formulation: Agenda Setting



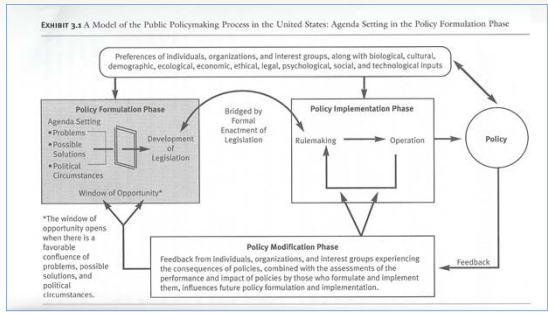
PHC 6102
Principles of Health Policy and Management

Objectives

- Describe the agenda setting of the policy formulation phase of the policymaking process
- Describe how decisions are made about possible solutions in agenda setting Describe the nature of problems that drive health policy agenda setting
- Describe interest group involvement in agenda setting

Overview of the Policy Formulation Phase

EXHIBIT 3.1 A Model of the Public Policymaking Process in the United States: Agenda Setting in the Policy Formulation Phase

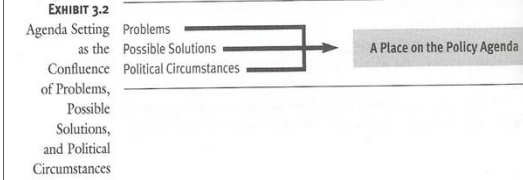


*The window of opportunity opens when there is a favorable confluence of problems, possible solutions, and political circumstances.

Agenda Setting

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EXHIBIT 3.2 Agenda Setting as the Confluence of Problems, Possible Solutions, and Political Circumstances



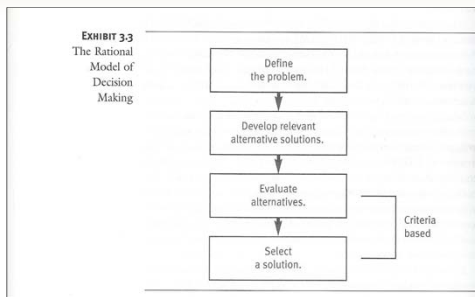
Problems that Drive Policy Formulation

- **Those policymakers broadly identify as important and urgent**
 - Depends on its public salience & the degree of group conflict surrounding it (salience must be high & conflict low)
- **Trends in certain variables reach unacceptable levels**
 - E.g., growth in number of uninsured & cost escalation in the Medicare program
- **Those spotlighted by widespread applicability or impact on a small group but powerful**
 - High cost of prescription medications
- **Those linked to other problems that already occupy secure place on agenda**
 - Cost escalation in Medicare & growth of the federal deficit

Possible Solutions in the Policy Formulation

- **Existence of possible solutions to problems help determines agenda setting**
 - Well-conducted health services provides policymakers with facts that might affect their decisions
 - Research plays an important documentation role through the gathering, cataloging, and correlating of facts related to health problems and issues
 - Research informs, and thus influences, the health policy agenda through analyses to determine which solutions may work

Making Decisions About Alternative Possible Solutions



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Political Circumstances that Drive Agenda Setting

- Political circumstances surrounding any problems/potential solutions include
 - Relevant public attitude, concerns, and opinions
 - The preferences and relative ability to influence political decisions of various groups interested in the problem
 - The positions of involved key policymakers in the executive and legislative branches of government

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Interest Group Involvement in Agenda Setting

- **Lobbying**
 - Communicating with policymakers to influence their decisions to be more favorable to, or at least consistent with the preferences of the lobbyist
- **Electioneering**
 - Using resources at their disposal to aid candidate for political office
- **Litigation**
 - Challenge existing policies, seek to stimulate new policies, or try to alter aspects of the policy implementation in courts
- **Shaping Public Opinion**
 - Creating television, radio, and print advertising that seek to protect and preserve their views or preferences

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Influential Role of Chief Executives in Agenda Setting

- Ability to present a unified position on issues
- Ability to emphasize problems and preferred solutions in a number of ways including press conferences, speeches and addresses
- Ability to appoint special commissions or tasks to address the issue
- They are well-positioned to focus the legislative branch on the development of legislation and to prod legislators to continue their work on a favored issue

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Summary

- The policy formulation phase involves agenda setting and development of legislation
- Agenda setting is the function of the confluence of three streams of activity: problems, possible solutions to those problems, and political circumstances
 - When all three flow together in favorable alignment, a **window of opportunity** opens, allowing a problem/potential solution combination, which might be developed into a new public law, or amendment to an existing law
- Interest groups influence agenda setting by lobbying, electioneering, litigation, and by shaping public opinion
- The chief executive (the president, governor, or mayor) also influence policy agenda by the institutional resources inherent in the executive office

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Questions

- Discuss the formulation phase of policy making in general terms.
- Identify and discuss the three stream of activities in agenda setting
- Describe the nature of problems that drive policy formulation
- Describe the ways that interest groups influence agenda setting
- Describe the role of chief executives in agenda setting at the federal level

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Sources

- Longest, B. B. (2010). Health Policymaking in the United States, Health Administration Press.