Section Two (of agenda setting)

Agenda setting continued:

**Agenda Denial**: some actors win by keeping things off the agenda

* Defining as “condition” or “private problem”
* Making it appear as too costly in some way

Will keep referring back to this concept – keep it in the back of your mind.

**Explanations of Agenda content:**

Why do certain things make it on the list and not others? We will take two ways of explaining it (characteristics and analysis).

1. Characteristics of problem
2. Analysis of who controls the agenda – theories of who controls agends

**Characteristics of problem:**

1. **Effects of issue**, and how use numbers to alter perceptions (stone)
2. **Analogous nature:** comparisons to other issues
3. **Spillover:** unintended consequences of action
4. **Symbolic importance**: manipulation of our subjective perception of issues (stone)
5. **Perceived tractability**: is the problem seen as solvable?
6. **Market failures**: when government action may make economic sense

All of these terms will be covered individually in slides

Terms just to know in class:

Policy entrepreneur – someone who takes ideas and is able to pull together to get the attention.

Problem broker – breaks the ice

1) **Effects** of the problem

- *indicators (aka statistics): factual evidence of social situation or its change*

Example of indicators if you want to say the economy is bad, you would use unemployment rates to back it up. Most of the indicators that we use are economic, but there are more like crime rates, and homelessness. Other examples are inflation and GDP.

Example two, how much rape is going on campus. Is something high priority on campus agenda.

More examples, how well higheways are paved, graduation rates, mental illness levels

* Extremity
  + If unemployment gets high people pay attention.
  + Important here are **perceptions**
* Range
  + If it’s across a broad area that causes attention because it can appear large.
* Concentration
  + If food poisoning was spread out would not be important but if they were in one small place than it could shut down the restaurant.
  + Or if there are lots of crosses when driving it creates caution, you drive slower because this means something.
* Visibility
  + Example, when you have a train accident its dramatic. The impact is higher than all the accidents that happen. Are accidents are diffused and train accidents are less common.
* Deborah Stone: “numbers”: number have various ways of being conceptualized
  + Example, unemployment rate should be at 3%
* Arbitrary lines: what is “dangerous”, “unacceptable” “success”, “imminent”
  + People might say any risk is dangerous.
  + Example, eating risk,
  + Driving risk
* Norms: the changing dynamics of acceptability
  + Example, one family should have two cars
  + Norms can evolve, example transportation time now takes longer, more traffic in Portland
* Two -edged swords: unemployment figures
  + Example, current level of 4.9% unemployment might look good but in comparison to 3% it does not.
* Hidden stories:
  + What is counted, counts: measuring low levels of toxics
    - The intensity of conflict measured by numbers injured or dead?
    - Once you start counting thins people will change the way they report.
  + Counting creates categories: the elderly, disabled
  + Funding: why the Census/count matters…
  + Concreteness implies a solution is possible – if you can count and now who they are, then you can fix it. For example you might know that 320 people children are homeless in Salem. Then you know who they are.

2) **Analogous nature**: similarity to other issues influences attention: if we prevent some sorts of pollution, should we not prevent others?

Passed OSHOA but not other dangerous things, so they created a general safety thing to protect all workers.

3) Spillover: action or attention in one policy area influences attention to others: if the government causes a problem, should it help fit it?

Also: if policy makes us see a problem, we can ignore one that seems related?

Example, attacked Iraq and they were defeated but now ISIS was created.

When you start acting in one area the logic of the problem makes you go into another thing and another thing.

Example, school lunches, provide lunch because it enables the kids to learn, but then breakfast was created.

Start picking on the most visible problem then realize that we should fix something else less obvious. Seeing one problem after another

4) Symbolic Importance: two aspects

a) event or image represents **core social values** or demonstration of larger issue: flags, polar bears, small businesses.

b) symbolic as part of how we structure our larger thoughts – Deborah Stone’s view

Deborah Stone: “symbols”: structure how we think of things

* Narrative stories: Ex, “ declines” or ‘rises”
  + Trump saying make America great again! Creates a narrative and he will be the one to take us out of it.
* Synecdoches: story presents specific value-leaden image of an idea, policy, or event: Ex, “welfare queen”
* Metaphores: “strangling business” “big brother”, “cut and run”
* Ambiguity: can appeal to both sides, or at least minimize antagonism: Ex, “educational reform”

5) **perceived tractability:**

- does it appear doable? Can the government actually fix this thing.

6) **Market failures: when economics might justify government intervention**

a**. public goods:** non-rival, non-excludable

- people can be free riders his example, of putting in street lights on a street but one neighbor does not pitch in anything but the others pay for it and he still benefits because they live on the same street.

- How do you get rid of free riders? taxes

- market will under-productive things people can get for free

b. **Externalities:** costs or benefits that the producer does not absorb

- negative, positive

- example, if you are deciding to build a factory, there is capital costs, labor, raw materials. Making widgets that cost $7 to produce but get $10 for each you will go forward with business. But he is ignoring the negative costs – the cost of the pollution, the angry water company that has to clean the water, and the angry farmer, because dead fish etc. but he is also producing a positive externality because he could be helping society by keeping kids out of trouble who are working.

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c. **information asymmetry**: when buyers or sellers are not equally informed of the benefits or costs of products or services.

- the market needs good signals and you don’t get them if they are not informed about it. But the government can try and overcome this by finding ways to inform, example, listing ingredients to inform customers about the cereal.

- example, truth and lending laws were getting people to get things that they were unaware of. Result, new credit card statements have lots of new information, guidance as to how to pay it off, interest rate scenarios etc.

**Effects of “crisis”:**

\* if you can get a person to believe that a problem is a crises you can get someone to act imminently. If they think it’s a crisis they will put it in front of other issues.

- **displacement**: move attention form one topic to a new one

- **expansion of problem**: attention to problem leads to attention to other issues

Example, Exon (Alaska) leak was a crisis that became the top topic.

- **rippling effect**: action at one level pushed action at others.

Example, Ferguson

**Who controls the Agenda**

* Pluralist perspective (many different groups competing to control agenda) example, all those people in health care system, all the groups represent pluralist
* Elitist perspective (one small group)
* State-centric or statist perspective

**Pluralist Models:** group competition for political power

* Not just lobbyist, a group working with an elected official

“normative” verse “descriptive” or empirical models

1. **Normative ideal**: modern democracy operates through group competition

* David Truman, Robert Dahl

**NORMATIVE PLURALISM: group competition is desirable because:**

* Specific voice – when you give money to a group you can go right for their group you want, compromises, versus voting you compromise
* Parties most affected are the most involved: subsystems beneficial (iron triangles)
* Assumes open group membership and easy group formation- one group is the voice for what you want to happen.
* Group competition for members and gov’t attention
* Responsive leaders (unions don’t do good when leaders do not pay attention to people)

1. **Descriptive pluralism:** study how groups compete and influence politics, not whether it is desirable or not

Schattschnieders call this the “pressure system”

(There is a reading on this)

**Elitist Models: recognize existence of groups, but see results consistently favors elite. (different ways of viewing this)**

**E.E. Schaatschneider**: middle and upper class dominate groups

**C. Wright Mills**: economic, political, military elites overlap and continually reinforce each other through socialization

**Ralph Miliband**: business enjoys great structural advantages in competition. Example a chip factory was going to build in Eugene but they said before we build we want this and that, and they got it because they were going to create jobs.

**Domhoff:** elite does not brainwash public through media as much as it **muddies the water of understanding.** Muddying makes things blurry and distracts

**Political contributions matter:** especially in primaries

Working of non-essential issues

**Statist perspective:** Control of agenda to serve interest of state and officials

* Elected officials
* Bureaucracy

**Subgovernment perspective:** who really benefits and drives policy subsystems?

**Statist Agenda Setting:**

“spin control”: interpretations of events serve specific political or policy goal

Diversion and wedge issues

Controlling access to government information

Creation of linkages in public mind

Negative externalities - society absorbs pollution costs.

Positive – externality – jobs are created

Economist concern: what is the net balance, dollars?

Potential political concern: who benefits?

Note: Positive externalities and public goods can be a big blur and overlap.