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Political Power and Policy Subsystems in American Politics

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American federal government policymaking takes place in a wide variety of settings ranging from fairly open and public systems involving a large number of actors to relatively closed systems with few participants. The location of decision making in government, the scope of an issue, the nature of a policy, and the number of participants involved in a decision all have an impact on the characteristics of a policymaking system.[1] The type of policy being considered affects the politics of the decision-making system handling it. Schattschneider put it succinctly: "New policies create new politics."[2]

Circumstances may develop that are beyond the immediate control of American decision makers. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo in 1973, the decline of communism and breakup of the former Soviet Union, droughts and floods in the United States, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant accident all changed the type of policymaking system that routinely handles these energy, foreign policy, water, and environmental policies.

Policymaking is responsive to the nature of the issues being considered. New problems create new policies, which in turn create new politics. Major problems that affect large numbers of people attract the attention of a wide range of policy makers. Minor issues affecting limited numbers of people involve few decision makers.

American public policy results primarily from the activities of thou-

sands of actors in hundreds of decision-making systems organized around discrete programs and issues. These decision-making systems operate within constitutional, electoral, and political party structures of the wider American political system and in effect make it work. Interested individuals, businesses, and groups cluster naturally around congressional committees and executive branch agencies whose decisions affect them either positively or negatively. An explanation of the organization and behavior of these decision makers is essential to an understanding of political power and public policymaking in the United States. The nature of American policymaking elicits several basic questions about policymaking systems and democracy: Are policymaking systems "irresponsible" elements in society? Do they have an "interest group" bias? Who is left out and who is in on the decisions? What kinds of issues never appear on the government agenda because of system bias? Can American democracy afford the luxury of our form of policymaking systems dominating and often clogging our legislative, regulatory, and judicial processes? Is our system of decision making inherently elitist or is it democratic?

A Typology of Policymaking Systems

In answering the questions posed above, it is a useful analytic tool to think of policymaking processes as falling into specific kinds of systems. One way to think of them is as a continuum ranging from *macro policy systems*, or "high politics" (general policy decisions with major political effects involving broad public interests, visibility, divisiveness, extensive media coverage, and many participants), to *policy subsystems* (dominant, competitive to disintegrated), to *micro policy systems* (narrowly focused decision making involving a very small, and often closed group of decision makers).[3] Policy issues may move up or down the decision-making continuum from micro politics to subsystems to macro policymaking systems. Policy subsystems

TABLE 4.1
A TYPOLOGY OF POLICYMAKING SYSTEMS

Policymaking system	*Visibility of decision*	*Scope of conflict*	*Level of conflict*	*Number of participants*
Macro policy systems	High	Wide	High	Many
Policy subsystems	Low	Narrow	Low	Few
Micro policy systems	"Invisible"	Very narrow	Low and personalized	Few

NOTE: These are the characteristics for the most common policy subsystems, that is, dominant subsystems.

tend to dominate the political landscape in American public policymaking. Policy subsystems are such a common organizational form of American public policymaking that they have been referred to by a variety of titles such as subgovernments, iron triangles, cozy little triangles, intermediary politics, policy whirlpools, power networks, power clusters, power triads, or policy coalitions. I use policy subsystems in place of these concepts as a term that captures the dynamic nature of these decision-making systems. Table 4.1 outlines a typology showing how policy subsystems fit between macro and micro politics.

Macro Policy Systems

Macro policy systems, or "high politics," make major decisions that may change policies or the power structure surrounding a major policy area. These systems often include presidents, congressional leaders, the mass media, the general public, the Supreme Court, or leaders of broad-based groups in society. The issues considered in macro policymaking systems may include major policies such as negotiations over final passage of the federal budget, macro economic policy, cutbacks in the defense budget, or cuts in the capital gains tax. Macro policy systems also include highly controversial, often emotion-packed issues that are narrowly focused with heavy media coverage and widespread public concern, such as the freedom of choice/anti-abortion issue, changes in social security benefits, or major tax increases. These issues have as common elements high visibility, extensive news coverage, "gangs" of high-level public officials, divisiveness, potential for extended controversy, and salience in the electoral arena. Macro policy systems often develop in response to crises resulting from an uncontrollable domestic or international social, economic, or political event such as the breakup of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe as a communist bloc. The reaction to external major social, economic, and political events often centralizes power, taking control away from policy subsystems. The subsystems are seen as obstacles to resolving conflict, but subsystem experts are relied on for policy options and expertise. Macro political decision making brings new and higher-level decision makers into the policy process and produces new policies unobtainable through subsystem decision making.

Often macro decision-making systems form because an issue cannot be resolved at lower levels of government. They evolve from competitive system to disintegrated subsystems to macro political decision making. Extended controversy, competition, and deadlock often push issues into the White House, onto national television news, and into the macro political realm. The annual battle over the budget starts from dominant subsystems considering programs, moves to competitive subsystems attempting to hold

on to their "fair share" of federal dollars, and then breaks down into disintegrated subsystem politics and into the view of the nation, macro political negotiations.

The transformation from policy subsystems to macro politics can be an annual process such as consideration of the budget or it can be dramatic or prolonged. An example of dramatic change is the energy crisis stemming from the cutoff of OPEC oil in 1973–74. Before this event, oil politics was controlled by producers of petroleum products. The OPEC cutoff pushed energy policy and its many well-organized and closed subsystems out of congressional subcommittees and administrative agencies and onto television, the front page of newspapers, and into national electoral politics. Charles O. Jones characterizes the dramatic expansion of the oil crisis into macro politics, or "sloppy large hexagons," as follows:

> Those cozy little triangles which had come to characterize the development of energy politics had become sloppy large hexagons. Demands by environmentalists and public interest groups to participate in decision making, involvement by leadership at the highest levels in response to crisis, and the international aspects of recent energy problems have all dramatically expanded the energy policy population . . . the expansion is up, out, and over —*up* in public and private institutional hierarchies (e.g., the involvement of presidents of companies and countries, rather than just low-level bureaucrats, and of congressional party leaders rather than just subcommittees); *out* to groups that declared an interest in energy policies . . . , and *over* to decision making processes in other nations or groups of nations.[4]

A prolonged and incremental transformation of routine politics to macro politics often results less from a single event than from cumulative incidents coupled with a growing public awareness of the gravity of an issue. One of the best examples is the increase in illegal drug use over the past three decades.

Micro Policy Systems

Micro policy systems, at the other end of the policymaking spectrum, involve attempts by a relatively hidden elite to influence government policy. The impact of the policy being influenced is often of limited interest to the general public. Micro policy decision making can be focused on areas of such technical complexity that it is removed from the daily living of most Americans and excluded from all but a few relevant subsystem actors. Micro policies seldom appear in election campaign rhetoric; most constituents are unaware or uninterested in them. Micro policy systems are characterized by limited participation, limited access, and limited communication

aside from those decision makers with the inside technical knowledge to understand the issues or political actors who want a favor and those in government who can grant it. Success is measured by micro political actors as their ability to control the process and, above all, by their ability to stay out of the news. Micro politics are often described in the popular media as corrupt, closed, elite decision-making systems linked to vested economic interests. Because of the secrecy, there is a potential for abuse but no certainty of it. The apparent intervention by five U.S. senators in the late 1980s in the regulation of the failing Lincoln First Savings and Loan Association and the involvement in Department of Defense weapons procurement contracts by members of Congress and their staffs are two examples of micro politics or, as some critics call it, micro management. The American news media often describe public policymaking using a micro political framework even when it is not applicable. Micro political conceptions of policymaking detract from a more complex and realistic description of routine federal government decision making: macro policy systems and the three kinds of policy subsystems. Micro policy systems obviously have an impact on public policy, but often it is not as lasting or significant an influence as policy subsystems or macro policy systems, which are more democratic and representative modes of decision making.

The Policy Subsystem Model

Two predominant images of the policy process are *iron triangles,* relatively closed policy arenas emphasizing stable relations among a limited number of participants, and *issue networks,* which are fragmented, open, and extraordinarily complex systems not well suited to resolving conflicts or reaching decisions quickly. The iron-triangle metaphor linking executive bureaus and agencies, congressional committees, and interest-group clienteles, sometimes referred to as *power triads* or *cozy triangles,* is used to describe a fixed, closed, and autonomous system for making policy. Hugh Heclo rejects the iron-triangle metaphor and replaces it with the idea of open issue networks that have disaggregated power and have many participants flowing in and out of decision making.[5] Both iron triangles and issue networks are useful but incomplete metaphors. They are only part of the picture. A more inclusive term is *policy subsystem.*

Several political scientists have used the idea of policy subsystems, but few have gone beyond a general conception. J. Leiper Freeman introduced the idea with his phrase "web of relationships in the subsystem."[6] Grant McConnell followed with a comparable term, "sub-government."[7] Theodore Lowi argued that policymaking had been coopted by status-quo interest groups; and he referred to a triad of decision making (for example, in the case of agriculture): "The politics within each system is built upon a triangular trading pattern including the central agency, a congressional committee or subcommittee and the local district farm committee . . . each side of the triangle complements and supports the other two."[8]

David Mayhew describes policy subsystems from the congressional viewpoint as "Congressmen protect[ing] clientele systems—alliances of agencies, hill committees, and clienteles—against the incursions of presidents and cabinet secretaries."[9]

Pluralist and interest-group theories of politics fit closely with the subsystem approach. Pluralists argue that groups make demands on government to foster their legitimate interests and that government has perceived its proper role as the promoter of these interests in society.[10] The public interest is defined by the aggregation of special interests with their sponsors in Congress and the bureaucracy. Pluralists further argue that new policies are enacted, new agencies created (or old ones expanded or reorganized), new congressional committees or subcommittees added (or jurisdictions expanded) to promote the interest of powerful competing groups in society, as interest groups in society gain sufficient power to "own" some "turf" in Congress and the executive branch.[11]

Interest groups often gain political power when their policy subsystem receives a structural "promotion." The elevation of the Veterans Administration to presidential cabinet status under President Ronald Reagan was a high-level promotion for veterans' groups and the congressional Veterans Affairs Committees. Similarly, President Jimmy Carter created the U.S. Department of Education in his first year in office after making a public commitment to the National Education Association and other educators during his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, something that the broad coalition of elementary, secondary, and higher education interests had sought for at least two decades.[12] Lineberry argues that the creation or expansion of jurisdiction is common to policy subsystems:

> When a group becomes strong enough, it gets a part of the government, its own piece of the action. The measure of an interest group's strength is how many "shares" of the government it controls. "Little" interests, such as the fisheries or tobacco growers, may have only an agency or two within a cabinet department and only a subcommittee of Congress. "Big" interests, such as business and labor, have whole cabinet departments upon whose support they can rely. But whatever the nature of the subgovernment, interest group liberalism is a pluralism without competition, a system of government where interest groups capture shares of the government and where the regulators are often drawn from the regulated.[13]

Specifying a General Model of Policy Subsystems

Policy subsystems can be characterized by networks of actors, the substantive policy domain with which they are concerned, and various modes of decision making. They are organized to make focused demands on policymakers and to influence specific programs, not to win elections or form governments. Most public problems considered by subsystems are addressed without being fully considered in the electoral arena, often with only a cursory nod from presidents, political parties, congressional leaders, or top executive branch administrators. Thousands of clientele-oriented subsystems, expressing many points of view, form the web of American public policy dominating the workload of congressional committees and subcommittees, interest groups, and executive branch agencies. Political power in each policy area is wielded by actors who often serve their own private interests. This has been called *multiple elitism* or *plural elitism,* but such terms do not acknowledge the democratic and open nature of subsystem politics.

Subsystems are decentralized power structures with predictable informal communication patterns among participants who come primarily from interest groups, members and staffs of congressional committees and subcommittees, bureau and agency personnel in the executive branch, and other policy specialists from universities, state and local governments, and specialized media (e.g. newsletters and professional journals). Washington lawyers, functioning as lobbyists, also play a key role in the structure of subsystem representation.[14] Presidential advisers from the Executive Office of the President, especially the Office of Management and Budget, can also become involved in subsystems. These participants have varying roles in moving issues onto the public agenda, developing and passing legislation, making rules and regulations, preparing and passing budgets, administering and implementing programs, and evaluating and changing them.

Subsystems and Functional Representation

Subsystems are dynamic and evolve because of a society's need to divide decision-making tasks and promote the development of knowledge to solve public problems. As this natural progression of dividing labor and developing expertise continues, the general electorate is frequently excluded from decision making, especially when it comes to highly technical and complex issues. Most people find government programs irrelevant unless they have an impact on their daily lives. Subsystem actors develop policy expertise and continuing relationships with one another in arenas of direct interest to themselves. Because they understand the issue, they have considerable independence in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policy under the subsystem's jurisdiction.

American politics is organized around thousands of subsystems, functionally oriented decision-making systems, sometimes in conflict, often in cooperation. Functions in society such as education, transportation, health-delivery systems, and environmental protection are represented primarily by specialists in those fields both within and outside of government. Subsystems are a form of *functional representation* (the representation of societal functions through governmental institutions) stemming from the division of labor and development of expertise and specialization in society. Functional specialists or persons with expertise and technical competence with regard to an issue or program dominate the subsystem. Functional specialists come from interest groups, academia, Congress, the executive agency, state and local governments, think tanks, and the other subsystem organizations that bring specialized knowledge to public-sector decision making.

Functional representation generally has a greater influence on routine policymaking than on highly controversial issues or "high politics." Policy embroiled in controversy attracts the attention and involvement of presidents, congressional leaders, political parties, the media and the general public, but the political system cannot handle very many highly controversial issues at one time. Most public policymaking is not electorally conflictual but routine. Consequently, the functional representation inherent in policy subsystems is more pervasive and influential than the formal and more commonly understood forms of representation based on geographic territory (U.S. Senate) and population (U.S. House of Representatives). Presidents discover quickly that it is difficult to establish a central core of authority over functional specialists and the policy subsystems. They cannot simply order that something be done and expect it to change. Passing a law in Congress does not automatically guarantee its implementation either. Power and authority in the bureaucracy is usually decentralized and housed in policy subsystems around the functions for which each agency has responsibility.

Any major public *policy arena* consists of a complex set of semiautonomous *subsystems* organized around *programs* or narrow issues such as titles within major legislative acts or specific regulations promulgated and administered by an administrative agency. Some programs are distributive, others regulatory, and others redistributive. Federal education policy, for example, generally perceived to be distributive, is divided into clusters such as higher education policy, primary education policy, secondary education policy, vocational education policy, and so forth. Within each of these education policy clusters are dozens of federal programs and thus dozens of policy subsystems.

Political Parties and Subsystems

The relationship of policy subsystems to political party organization within and outside government can be close or distant and can even supplant a party on a particular issue. When policy subsystems work through or become identified with political parties, the alliance is often both tentative and temporary because party members in this country share only some of the values of their fellow members from subsystem interest groups. More often, subsystems cut across party lines; they are nonpartisan. Subsystems in highly technical areas are most likely to be nonpartisan; for example, the allocation of funds for biomedical research to the National Institutes for Health is neither a Democratic nor a Republican issue. Such subsystems may help to democratize parties or even nation-states.

Subsystems as Open Communication Networks

Freedom of speech, assembly, and press allows for a free flow of information among subsystem actors. The open sharing of information among subsystem actors is the primary method of issue resolution for the subsystem.[15] Access to trustworthy and timely information about an issue or policy also helps determine the strength of subsystems. The better the quality and greater variety of information and the more diverse the sources of knowledge subsystem actors have, the more power they possess. Using specialized knowledge, they can anticipate and respond to policy events affecting their interests more effectively than can nonsubsystem actors.

Subsystem actors usually build coalitions, bargain, and compromise with one another in their quest to resolve an issue of public policy. The norm of reciprocity is widely practiced among subsystem actors. They share information, power, and influence over a program or public policy issue. Cooperation, friendly legislative oversight, and "cozy" program evaluation, often hidden from public view, are common to policy subsystems. Conflict is generally kept within well-defined boundaries, at a low to middle level within the executive branch and within subcommittees and their staffs in Congress. Surprises among subsystem actors are not appreciated, and the sharing of information and knowledge is rewarded.

Solutions to issues facing subsystem actors are seldom arrived at by the ideal of an abstract rational actor who systematically scans all alternatives and selects one that maximizes utility. The process of decision making is full of ambiguities at every stage in the policy process. Basic uncertainties occur in identification of a public problem, definition of goals and objectives the actors want to achieve, the strategy to be taken to solve the problem, and the criteria to be used to determine success. Despite these challenges, subsystem routines dispose actors toward a stock set of solutions that can be applied to a wide range of problems.[16]

Subsystem Conflict and Visibility

A small number of people participate in the subsystem, and dispute resolution tends to move toward equilibrium among the most powerful actors. The number of critical actors with jurisdiction over an issue often number fewer than 100 people. Professional careers are built around the issues and programs dominated by subsystems. People often move between interest groups, agencies, and Congress, building expertise and a reputation for knowledge about a subsystem and its programs.

A major characteristic of subsystem politics is its low level of visibility to the public and lack of involvement by the electorate. Policy subsystems evolve in such a way that important actors are hidden to the general public and nonsubsystem players. Since policy subsystems are organized around single issues or programs, they are rarely perceived to be important to a large constituency in the general public. Subsystems become naturally closed and out of the public eye because it is the most "efficient" way to make decisions about complicated and highly technical issues. Television and the general news media rarely focus on subsystem politics, and that is the way subsystem actors like it. Most highly visible political actors and institutions in American politics are not included in policy subsystems.

How many persons and what interests they represent in a subsystem depend primarily on the issues addressed, but in all cases, participants are drawn from a finite sphere of potential system members. There are approximately 1,300 federal government programs according to the Congressional Budget Office.[17] The exact number of policies within these programs and subprograms and thus the number of policy subsystems that exist is difficult to state authoritatively, but it easily exceeds 2,000. Nevertheless, the key players in the relationships among interest groups, congressional committees, agencies, and others amount to a few thousand out of potential millions of elected and appointed political actors. There are 2.9 million civilian employees in the federal government, but fewer than 3,000 managers with around 10,000 key subordinates who play a critical role in subsystem decision making.[18]

Approximately 75 percent of the bureau leaders (General Schedule levels 16–18 and the Senior Executive Service) are career federal executives.[19] In 1993 there were 284 committees and subcommittees in Congress with approximately 31,000 staff associated with Congress.[20] The staffs of House and Senate standing committees, key actors in subsystem politics, number slightly more than 3,000. Personal staffs to senators and house members number around 11,500. Finally, it is estimated that over 80,000 lobbyists and staff are connected with Washington-based interest groups and associations.[21]

"Mapping" the framework of a policy subsystem or determining who

the key decision makers are in any issue arena is critical to understanding public policymaking. The number of subsystem participants can range from a few dozen to hundreds, even thousands, depending on competition within a subsystem, visibility of the issue, complexity and scope of the policy being considered, and involvement of the news media, presidents, and the general public.

The Importance of "Political Turf"

Jurisdiction over an issue or program, or "political turf," defines who will be involved in the resolution of conflict and the nature of the policymaking process in that arena. Control of political turf is considered essential to the survival of policy subsystems. Powerful subsystems are usually successful in thwarting challenges to their authority and in keeping conflict within their own jurisdiction.

Administrative agencies and congressional committees and subcommittees all have jurisdictional claims. Knowledge of the policy preferences of the primary actors who have authority to deal with an issue is often enough to predict what the public policy will be for a public problem. Graham Allison argues: "Where you stand depends on where you sit."[22] Those actors with responsibility for a program, whether they are from interest groups, the Hill, or the executive branch, organize themselves so that they do not expose the subsystem to threats from outside adversaries. Generally, bureaucrats, committee and subcommittee chairs, and interest-group leaders rigorously defend their jurisdiction to make decisions about a program. Policymaking is often affected by jurisdictional battles. The importance of struggles over jurisdiction was expressed by a manager in the U.S. Department of Transportation when discussing the internecine battles between highway and urban transit advocates:

> You had to sit down people from the Highway Administration and the Urban Mass Transit Administration to negotiate the regulations. They wouldn't talk to each other for two months. They'd sit across the table from each other and scream at each other. The highway people didn't care one iota about UMTA's problems, the UMTA people didn't care one iota about the highway people's problems. It took eight months before they got out of the regulations.[23]

Sometimes several agencies or congressional committees exercise joint or sequential jurisdiction over a program, which can lead to increased conflict and competition. Often more than a single coalition of interest groups has a stake in the outcome of a specific issue. This increases the potential for conflict and, when taken to the extreme, can foster the disintegration of the policy subsystem. Jurisdictional disputes can also lead to stalemate, as occurred during the battles between the congressional energy and environmental committees over consideration of the opening of Arctic wilderness for oil exploration.

Subsystems and the Administrative Sector of Government

Policy subsystems have their locus of power at a low to middle level within the executive branch. Power often resides with experts in the bureau or agency handling a specific program, rather than at top management levels. Presidents and their appointees and members of Congress come and go, but the key functional specialists survive elections, reorganizations, cutbacks, and new policy directives. If political appointees do not learn how to work with policy subsystems, they find it difficult to achieve their objectives. In higher education policy, for example, the principal administrative actors include a complex matrix of middle-level managers of the Department of Education (DOE) programs (the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Student Financial Assistance, Higher Education Programs, Higher Education Program Services, and International Education) and independent agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and other agencies with programs that are of interest to postsecondary educational institutions.[24] This network of executive branch actors is linked to its counterparts in states, in Congress, and among dozens of interest groups.

Each program and issue in postsecondary education is handled by different bureaucrats and political appointees. If you want to know about student loans for postsecondary education, the Office of Student Financial Assistance "owns the turf" within the Office of Postsecondary Education. If you are interested in federal policy on foreign study, the Office of International Education has responsibility within DOE, but the U.S. Information Agency and the Department of State share this jurisdiction. These programs have networks of key administrators and small staffs that are the functional specialists in student financial aid and international education. Maybe twenty to thirty people are well known by the other actors in these subsystems. They play an essential role in generating new ideas and legislation, promulgating rules and regulations, and administering existing programs within their jurisdiction. These administrative actors have their administrative counterparts in state government and in colleges and universities. They know each other well and communicate regularly through national associations, newsletters, on the telephone, and, of course, in person in D.C. and in the states. They push their own agendas, bargain, compromise, keep one another informed, and generally try to help each other.

It is difficult for presidents, secretaries, undersecretaries, or even assistant secretaries for the Office of Postsecondary Education to keep up with all the issues and participants of higher education policy subsystems. Even when presidential appointees and top civil servants are experts in education, they often become "captured" by their agencies and the clients they serve. Thus the top political appointees, because of their unfamiliarity with the subject, have much less power than is suggested by their titles, or if they are already experts when appointed, they often exercise their power in agreement with the agency specialists.

Executive branch functional specialists can have substantial autonomy in the formation and implementation of public policy. They often initiate legislative proposals that help set the agenda for the authorization-appropriating process in Congress. They draft legislation and help congressional committees build support with members and interest groups. They forge relationships with interest groups and congressional committees to shape legislation and the flow of information essential to the policy process.

In addition to the federal government program managers, state and local administrative units with responsibility for a federal program are often part of the policy subsystem. State and local public officials are well represented through their respective national associations.[25] These officials communicate most effectively through special committees in "peak" associations such as the National Association of Counties, the National Governor's Conference, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of State Governments, the International City Management Association, the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the so-called seven pigs (public interest groups). Each peak association has developed expert committees and staff on a variety of topics that are a critical part of domestic policy subsystems.

Congress and Subsystems

The work of Congress is the work of committees and subcommittees. Power in Congress is decentralized and specialized in 295 committee and subcommittees, giving access to interest groups and administrators through members of Congress and staff assigned to committees and subcommittees. Congressional committees have their formal responsibilities defined by the rules of the House and Senate and by precedent. Members of Congress seek committee assignments that will help them get reelected and help them focus on programs and issues that are of direct interest to them and their constituents. Once a committee assignment is made, senators and representatives become deeply immersed in the policy subsystems within the jurisdiction of their assignment.

Congressmen and their staffs quickly become functional specialists (if

they were not before coming to Congress) in the several well-defined program areas under the jurisdiction of their committees and subcommittees. Most of the work of Congress is handled by specialists on subcommittees; thus it is easy for members to become specialists responsive to their counterparts from interest groups and agencies. The subsystem fosters a norm of "mutual noninterference" that reduces the number of battles over jurisdiction. The insulation of committees also insulates the subsystem.

Members supplement committee assignments by joining special congressional caucuses (e.g., the Steel Caucus, Travel Caucus, Mushroom Caucus, and Black Caucus) that are closely tied to interest groups outside Congress. Caucuses help shape the policymaking process in Congress and serve as contact points for liaison officers in the executive branch. Political action committees (PACs) raise funds for election campaigns and play a key role in "buying access" to members by interest groups. The total number of PACs has grown rapidly from 600 in 1974 to more than 4,000 in 1989 with most of their contributions going to incumbents regardless of political party. PACs reward members of Congress on committees and subcommittees and help reelect them to the subsystem most relevant to interest groups.

Senators and representatives practice a division of labor and allow "experts," their colleagues and staff members on the appropriate committees and subcommittees that have jurisdiction over an issue, to make the major decisions about a program. A common exception to the division of labor norm is when an issue is perceived to involve their state or district directly. Another exception is when an issue is a major electoral issue and is perceived to be of national importance. Members, whether or not they are on committees with jurisdiction over these macro issues, are actively involved in proposing solutions (e.g., solutions to the budget deficit, cuts in military spending, and cuts in income and social security taxes).

As a result of the reforms of the 1970s that decentralized congressional power (especially in the House), subcommittee chairmen and their immediate professional staff play an important role in policy subsystems. Committees and subcommittees are centers of subsystem policymaking by setting the agenda for initial consideration of new legislation, old programs and recurring issues; they have resources to oversee and evaluate the administration of programs; they have close contacts with interest groups, bureaus, and experts on an issue or program; and they have formal jurisdiction over an issue at the first, and often most important, stage of the legislative process. Legislators understand the connection between reelection and committee assignments. They are primarily motivated to get reelected, to satisfy their constituents, and to pass good legislation. Subsystem politics fits those incentives nicely. Congressmen realize that a strong relation-

ship between their subcommittee, relevant executive agencies, and interest groups can help them get reelected, serve constituents, and achieve good public policy.

Other important actors are the approximately 31,000 congressional staff: the personal staffs of senators and representatives, professional staffs of the subcommittees and committees (by far the most important congressional staff in the subsystem), and the program and policy specialists in other congressional work groups (e.g., the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, the General Accounting Office, and the Office of Technology Assessment). Each group has policy experts that assist the members, subcommittees, and committees in the development of new laws and the evaluation of old ones. They offer policy options, analyses and information for members. This bureaucracy of staffers has an independent power base in the policy process. Hill staffers build prominence through expertise and through the simple fact that they have more time to focus on the issues facing a policy subsystem than do Senate and House members. Committee staffs are especially important at hearings, markup, and report stages of subsystem policymaking. The committee agenda is largely set by the staffs. They draft legislation, arrange for hearings and witnesses, write amendments and floor speeches, and negotiate agreements among interested parties (interest groups, legislators, and executive branch officials) behind the scenes. Their expertise, access to powerful members, and concentration on subsystem politics make them very powerful in the policy process.

In conclusion, congressional committees dominate subsystem agendas in the House and Senate. Their decisions largely determine which policies will be considered in the House and Senate. They link subsystem actors during the legislative process and contribute to the fragmented, but representative nature of the subsystems.

Subsystems and the "Revolving Door"

Participants in policy subsystems have predictable career patterns. Congressmen and congressional staff often move to the executive branch or to interest groups to work in the same substantive areas they worked in during their tenure on the Hill. Executive branch officials often move to congressional staff assignments or to the private sector related to their bureau and agency work. Interest-group representatives and others from the private sector move in and out of governmental institutions, working on common substantive interests. This regularized movement of personnel around policy subsystems is so extensive that it has been called "incest groups." Each actor is in a series of exchange operations that depend on and receive benefits.

When new presidents take office, they often appoint experts from pressure groups or from the Hill to key positions in bureaus and agencies in the executive branch. Presidents Carter and Reagan campaigned against the bureaucracy and called for a new cadre of managers in Washington, D.C., during their election campaigns; but after appointing a few insiders from Georgia and California, respectively, they turned to the pool of functional specialists in Washington, D.C., to run their governments. It is not surprising that experienced Hill staffers are attractive appointees to a new administration. They have well-established linkages to their subsystems; and they bring with them knowledge and established communication networks.

A Typology of Subsystems

Although they are the predominant type of policymaking system in American politics, policy subsystems vary over time and according to the policy being considered. I suggest a simple typology to help delineate the dynamic nature of policymaking.

Subsystems are dynamic and can vary from *dominant* to *competitive* to *disintegrated*. Although the most common state of a policy subsystem is closed, static, and dominant over a particular program, competition and even policy disintegration occurs in any policy area from time to time.

Subsystems, like the policy process itself, are not static. They can range from dominant subsystems that are stable, with well-defined jurisdiction, low political visibility, narrow conflict, and few participants to competitive and disintegrated subsystems with instability, overlapping or fragmented jurisdictions with many players and extensive political conflict. The nature of subsystems is related to the type of policy, issue, and event facing the actors in the subsystem.

Dominant Policy Subsystems

Dominant policy subsystems are relatively stable communication and decision-making clusters with a small number of participants who significantly influence and often control government programs or issues. They are "relatively well-bounded," "differentiated from their environment," and "relatively complex."[26] Within a specific policy area, a few actors tend to be better organized and dominate the more passive interests. Dominant policy subsystems are usually structured around distributive policies such as tax deductions for home mortgages, Elementary and Secondary Education Act benefits, federal highway funds, water projects, veterans' benefits, and a variety of subsidies for business and industry. There is a flow of information and knowledge that follows well-worn and enduring channels among mu-

tually trusted actors sharing common interests and broadly shared policy preferences. The actors, including executive branch officials, legislators, businessmen, lobbyists, representatives of the specialized media, policy specialists in universities and think tanks communicate with one another, are relatively unseen and unknown to the general public. Decisions are made in dominant subsystems without regard to their overall impact on the political system. They are uncoordinated and decentralized.

Dominant subsystems exhibit relatively stable relations because the actors strive to reduce uncertainty, information costs, and opportunistic behaviors of the subsystem members by creating relatively stable channels of communication and well-established norms of the game. The norm of the dominant subsystem is cooperation, bargaining, and compromise. Subsystem actors develop an esprit de corps that flows across ideological and partisan lines. There is a high degree of mutually rewarding logrolling. There is a narrow scope of policy conflict usually at a middle or lower level within government institutions. Dominant subsystems are naturally resistant to pressure from outside powerful actors such as presidents, high-level executive branch officials, congressional committees that do not have formal jurisdiction over their subsystem issues, and interest groups that are not regular participants in the subsystem. Unless the general print and broadcast news media are considered useful to the cause of the subsystem, the key actors try to exclude reporters. Dominant subsystems work to thwart challenges to their authority over issues and programs within their jurisdiction, usually with great success.

Subsystem players try to limit conflict within the boundaries of their subsystems. Outside challenges to dominant policy subsystems usually do not pose a major threat. When new issues and policy problems are presented, the automatic response is to attempt to control the scope and level of competition, keeping it within the subsystem jurisdiction. Therefore, access to the decision process is often closed. An important norm of dominant policy subsystems is reciprocity. Dominant subsystems help private-sector producers through government action, whether this is new legislation, helpful regulations, or funding programs that the subsystem's clients want. Dominant subsystems are often organized in well-defined hierarchies with centrally located actors who mediate communication and decision making among more peripherally located actors. Alternatively, they may be structured in a wheel of relationships that is more diffuse. The structure of this type of dominant subsystem lacks hierarchy and centralized coordinating actors.

Competitive Policy Subsystems

A second type of policy subsystem, *competitive*, is distinguished by how the

decisions are made. Coalitions of actors are in a constant state of competition. Government actors may have an independent power to initiate new policies, but this may lead to challenges and conflict. Although the communication network is limited within each competing network of policy actors, the systems are more complex and open than in dominant subsystems. The political structure of the subsystem may shift dramatically from event to event and issue to issue. Peak associations and top governmental officials often must play a mediating role in the conflict between supporters and opponents of a particular policy preference. Government subsystem actors may initiate ways to reduce conflict, such as negotiated rulemaking, organizing short-term ad hoc groups of decision makers, or by using policy coordinating mechanisms such as the congressional budget committees.

Hugh Heclo's conception of "issue networks" fits the description of competitive policy subsystems. His description of many actors who move in and out of decision-making networks is a central tendency of competitive subsystems: "Issues networks . . . comprise a large number of participants with quite variable degrees of mutual commitment or of dependence on others in the environment. . . . Rather than groups united in dominance over a program, no one, as far as one can tell, is in control of the policies and issues."[27]

Relationships among the actors in competitive policy subsystems are often unstable for a short period, until the various factions are structured into competing clusters or there is general agreement among the key actors and the subsystem evolves into a dominant state. Competition may evolve through a redefinition of the scope and level of issue conflict among the actors inside an existing subsystem or by attacks from the outside by other actors. For example, in the view of Cigler and Loomis, "increased representation often leads to heightened levels of competition within a given policy subsystem, particularly as budget demands redefine more and more policies as redistributive."[28]

The policy being considered by a competitive subsystem is often defined as redistributive or regulatory. When redistributive policy conflict cannot be resolved within a single subsystem, other actors and subsystems often join the battle and resort to open conflict. Multiple referral of legislation is a sign of a competitive subsystem. For example, in 1992, the long-awaited major energy bill was referred to nine committees in the House of Representatives, causing delay and policy deadlock. The multiple referral of the energy bill and competition surrounding many of its provisions eventually caused further delay and deadlock in the conference committee with the Senate. Often, when new legislation is needed from competitive subsystems, approval from the larger political system is needed. This creates competition, conflict, and new policy players. Nevertheless, approval is usually

forthcoming, and the system generally defers to the experts with the policy jurisdiction, but the challenge and heightened visibility creates short-term conflict and permeability within and among subsystems.

Andrew S. McFarland designates regulatory negotiation as a "power triad," but the actors do not form a tight coalition; they conflict.[29] Regulatory negotiation with government actors mediating between two triadic participants is increasingly common but has much more bounded conflict than most competitive decision-making systems. For example, although labor, business, and the government have a continuing battle over the regulations to protect the health and safety of American workers, the decision-making system has not designated a static formal relationship between the three sectors. Occupational health and safety policy is competitive and complex; it includes not only the agency charged with regulating in that area but also government agencies or departments such as the Department of Health and Human Services, congressional committees and subcommittees, the courts, specialized media, public-interest groups, the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, and a variety of experts from the university and health communities. Competition and decision making is formally organized by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which has the responsibility to regulate the health and safety of the workplace for most American laborers. Labor unions, health and safety experts, medical researchers, and workers lobby for a safer workplace, and businesses and their associations conflict with OSHA and those pushing for a safer workplace. The OSHA relationships are far from a competitive power triad but are a complex, fluctuating subsystem.

Challenges to an existing dominant subsystem are rare and usually short lived, since it is to the advantage of most subsystem actors to minimize the costs of competition. Above all, the players try to keep final decisions out of the view of the public and the media. Competition is costly and unpredictable, and widespread publicity about a subsystem battle increases uncertainty. Most subsystem actors want to control the policy outcomes, even though they might not win all they desire. Generally, competitive subsystems are short lived, but competition can be institutionalized, such as the conflict between industry and environmentalists over clean air policy. A competitive subsystem tends to undermine dominant subsystems and micro politics, but tends to remain bounded. The supporters and opponents of a policy are well known to one another, such as those involved in the rewrite of the 1990 Clean Air Act. Competition often results from external events that have an impact on a subsystem or challenges to an existing subsystem power base. Competition generates new interaction patterns and eventually a new dominating coalition. There is often confrontation

over policy jurisdiction or the right to decide and always a contest over the substance of a program or policy. Competitive policy subsystems have more participants than dominant subsystems do, but numbers are still limited to knowledgeable insiders from two or more subsystems. The general public, congressional leadership, and high-level executive branch personnel can be involved but usually they are not.

THE CLEAN AIR ACT AND THE NATURE OF COMPETITIVE SUBSYSTEMS. An excellent example of an institutionalized competitive subsystem that experienced intense sustained conflict between industry and environmentalists occurred over the Clean Air Act from 1977 to 1990. The Clean Air Act of 1963 and amendments in 1977 gave the federal government a role in air-pollution abatement that acts almost like a national zoning law. The battle in 1990 pitted industrialists against environmentalists, which put powerful competing pressures on members of Congress.

The Clean Air Act probably has a greater impact on industry than any federal statute except the tax code. Nearly every congressional district has polluting industry targeted by the clean air legislation. Most districts also have well-organized environmentalists pushing for the elimination of toxic emissions. Industry predicted financial disaster and a loss of jobs if the most far-reaching proposals advocated by environmentalists were written into the new Clean Air Act. Environmentalists predicted dire health and environmental consequences for the continuation of acid rain, polluting motor fuels, and airborne toxic emissions. Most members of Congress try to protect the economic well-being of their districts by protecting jobs, and some members of Congress see it as their duty to protect petrochemical plants, automobile factories, local utilities, and coal jobs. Others represent districts with serious problems of air pollution and acid rain.

In the volatile and highly visible battle over clean air legislation, Republican President George Bush coalesced with such arch Democrats as Senator Robert S. Byrd, representing high-sulfur coal interests in West Virginia and chair of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, and Congressman John R. Dingell, chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee representing the automobile industry located primarily in Dingell's Michigan district. Congressman Henry Waxman from Los Angeles (an area with serious air pollution), and chair of the Subcommittee on Health and Environment of Dingell's Energy and Commerce Committee, and Senator George J. Mitchell from Maine (a state receiving regular doses of acid rain from the industrial Midwest), the Senate Democratic Majority Leader, were two key players representing the pro-environmental position. For years, Congress has been divided into warring camps, with northeasterners and environmentalists on one side and utility and high-sulfur coal interests on

the other. Issues of acid rain, alternative fuels (ethanol and methanol), acceptable levels of urban smog and carbon monoxide, tailpipe emission standards, requirements to build more clean-fuel automobiles, reduction in chlorofluorocarbons that deplete the stratospheric ozone, and cutbacks on cancer-causing air toxins are all related to the fight over jobs and clean air.

The inability to reconcile the clashing industrial and environmental interests in the rewrite of the Clean Air Act tied up Congress for over a decade. If most congressional behavior can be explained by the single, central fact that members want to be reelected, then it is understandable how this competitive subsystem caused delay and deadlock.[30]

Disintegrated Policy Subsystems

Although rare, disintegrated policy subsystems can develop in at least one of several ways. Intense, prolonged competition over a policy can push it into a disintegrated, and at times macro political, mode of decision making. The annual battle over the federal budget is an example of this. A congressional reorganization like the reorganization of the U.S. Senate committee system in 1976–77 can redefine jurisdiction and break up an old dominant subsystem. Changes in bureaucratic boundaries such as President Reagan's attack on the Economic Development Administration can disintegrate an old subsystem for some time. The scope of conflict in disintegrated policy subsystems is extensive, often leading to permanent jurisdictional change or a subsystem's demise. The level of conflict and visibility of policymaking is prominent within the executive branch and Congress, forcing issues to the attention of congressional leaders, departmental secretaries, and even presidents, and into the headlines of the mass media. Disintegrated policy subsystems have large numbers of participants at high levels of government and engage the interested public not usually focused on subsystem politics. There is no central core of authority over the issues under consideration in disintegrated subsystems; therefore it is difficult or impossible to come to quick, rational closure in the decision-making process. Totally disintegrated policy subsystems permit policy change by placing an issue at a higher level of decision making in government, by changing the jurisdiction over an issue, or by adding new actors to the subsystems through elections or reorganization.

The Dynamics of Subsystem Change

Policy subsystems behave like organisms, adapting to new conditions, evolving into new structures, languishing into extinction, and regenerating into new and viable political forces. Subsystems can be challenged by "outsiders" or by new actors trying to encroach on an established policy territory. Competition can also occur between two or more subsystems. Competition among subsystems and among new actors may lead temporarily to total disintegration of an existing subsystem, into a state of disintegration, or into macro politics. Some sort of disruptive event may expand the interest, conflict, and the number of participants in an area and cause a subsystem to change.

Subsystem Change and the Energy Crisis.

An example of the transformation of a dominant subsystem into a disintegrated one is the recent history regarding the pricing and distribution of refined petroleum products in the United States.

Conflict over oil policy in the United States came quickly in 1973 when the OPEC nations cut off oil exports to the United States. This caused shortages in heating oil, gasoline, and jet fuel, and an increase in price for all petroleum products. Before the cutoff of foreign oil, there was a classic closed, dominant policy subsystem over import quotas, oil depletion allowance, pricing and distribution, and other key petroleum public policies. The old politics of energy before the crisis was a classic example of subsystem politics dominated by the primary economic interests associated with the exploration, production, and distribution of oil, producer state interests, and their associations such as the American Petroleum Institute (an association consisting of almost all the petroleum companies in the United States); the Interior Committees of Congress and the tax committees (House Ways and Means and Senate Finance), and the Department of Interior's Division of Oil and Gas (DOG). A key player, the former president of the American Petroleum Institute (API), Frank N. Ikard, a former member of the House Ways and Means Committee, and his staff had extensive experience in the oil industry and in government. This was a well-established network of influential oil subsystem actors using their expertise and access to pursue narrow economic goals.

The oil subsystem of API, the Interior Committees, Finance, Ways and Means, and DOG was closed, autonomous, and rarely challenged. It was dominated by tax and oil experts freely moving information and their careers through a "revolving door" from private sector to public sector and back. Little public concern was expressed from nonenergy specialists until there was a dramatic change in the nature of the policy conflict caused by the 1973 energy crisis. The old dominant subsystem "controlling" oil policy changed dramatically when Americans quickly discovered the energy crisis in the long lines at gas stations and in increased prices for heating oil, airline tickets, and almost all consumer products. The general population entered the world of energy policy when they became concerned with the cost and shortages of oil. This led to direct challenges and ultimately to the disintegration of the old closed decision-making core of authority over oil

policy. And it spread to other energy decision-making systems. Consumer-oriented interest groups were invigorated and challenged the dominant position of the oil and gas producers and their friends in government. There was a proliferation of new congressional subcommittees and intense jurisdictional conflicts over the issue. Members and congressional committees wanted to be part of the energy policymaking action because their constituents expected their congressmen to have an answer to the energy crisis. A new Department of Energy was created; a dozen subcommittees claiming energy jurisdiction sprouted in the House and Senate; and as many new energy-consumer and producer-oriented interest groups were established shortly after 1973. OPEC's cutoff of oil fractured the hegemony of the dominant oil policy subsystem into dozens of policy positions. It was difficult to set energy policy priorities and legislate an end to the crisis. The old subsystem was faced with intense competition and ultimately disintegration, pushing the energy issue eventually into the macro political realm.

The increased political competition was all sound and fury. There was no long-term, rational energy policy in the United States. No one dominated the open, dynamic, and complex set of subsystems surrounding energy policy. There were no longer groupings of semi-autonomous, dominant subsystems in control of every aspect of energy policy. Charles O. Jones describes the expanded participation in energy policy as follows: "[energy policy participation] has expanded *up* institutional hierarchies, out to citizen groups, *over* the other nations, and *across* from one resource subsystem to others."[31]

The disintegrated energy policy systems of the mid-1970s slowly evolved into several dominant subsystems structured around oil, natural gas, nuclear power, hydroelectric power, and other sources of energy in the 1980s and 1990s. Under the Reagan and Bush administrations, as other issues pushed energy issues off the macro political agenda, the old energy dominant policy subsystem revived and reassembled itself without great fanfare, agreeing on the deregulation of oil pricing and tax expenditures for oil exploration. In conclusion, the post-1973 energy crisis between oil producers and consumers thrust the energy issue into turbulence, disintegration, and ultimately macro politics from 1973 to 1979. But energy policymaking quickly contracted into a world dominated by producer interest groups, subcommittees in Congress, and relevant executive agencies in the 1990s.

Changing the scope of conflict, increasing the level of conflict, changing key personnel, reorganizing jurisdiction over an issue, and using the regulatory process of administrative agencies and the courts are several important methods of changing the power of policy subsystems.

The *scope of conflict* and the *level of conflict*, as argued by E.E. Schattschneider, are two primary factors that influence the nature of politics and the power of the policy subsystems.[32] The successful resolution of a policy or issue conflict within a policy subsystem is essential to the survival of a subsystem. If the actors in a subsystem cannot quickly and successfully resolve conflict on their own turf, "outsiders" from other committees, agencies, bureaus, groups, and the media or the general public will take the issue away from them. These new actors in the decision-making system increase their influence and the probability of a policy change as the amount of internal subsystem conflict increases and becomes uncontrolled. Thus a primary motivation of the actors in policy subsystems is to control the *scope* and *level* of conflict associated with the programs and issues within the jurisdiction of the subsystem. Subsystems tend to be closed and naturally resistant to externally generated forces of change.

Although long-lasting competitive policy subsystems are rare, they often lead to significant policy changes. An example of challenge to a dominant subsystem and a major change in policy is the history of the passage of the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978. For years, airline regulation was made in a dominant subsystem made up of the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), the regulated airline industry, airline labor groups, specialized media covering the airlines, and the congressional aviation subcommittees. From 1938 to the mid-1970s, Congress generally followed the lead of the airline industry and the CAB for the regulation of routes and rates of air passenger and air freight carriers. In 1975 a direct challenge to the airline regulation policy subsystem was made by Senator Edward M. Kennedy. He held a round of oversight hearings on the CAB through his Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly. These hearings immediately expanded the focus on airline regulation by providing a valuable public forum for those outside the established subsystem. Many expressed displeasure over airline regulation and the CAB. Kennedy also challenged President Ford to reform much sooner and more vigorously than desired. After some prodding, Ford endorsed airline deregulation as a major part of his regulatory reform efforts. Ford also appointed a new reform-minded chairman of the CAB, John Robson, a new actor in the subsystem. The result of Kennedy's challenge as an outsider to the commercial aviation subsystem, and Ford's response was a redirection of CAB policy.

During the same period, a new chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Aviation, Senator Howard W. Cannon, was concerned about Senator Kennedy's challenge to his jurisdiction over airline regulation. The infusion of new players and the competition among Ford, Cannon, and Kennedy over airline deregulation shattered the "holy alliance" of the CAB, airline unions, airline companies, and congressional subcommittees. The issue of airline regulation was highly volatile and com-

petitive for a short period until the major actors compromised and endorsed the reform and a new coalition that favored deregulation was created.

Conclusion

In conclusion, how do we evaluate policy subsystems as a theory and as a way of making political decisions? The concept of policy subsystems is simple but joins a variety of theories of decision making and the American political process. Drawing from the literature on sociological network analysis, pluralism, corporatism, power triads, plural elitism, traditional legal-descriptive analysis, behavioralism, and rational choice, the theory of interest groups and policy subsystems can further our knowledge of how the policymaking process works in American politics.

Several concluding observations can be made about a theory of policy subsystems. Policy subsystems seem to describe routine policymaking accurately, but they are not static. They evolve and adapt to events and changing conditions. Dominant subsystems are the mode of distributive policymaking, but dedistributive (in times of scarcity), redistributive and regulatory policy may range from competitive to disintegrated to macro modes of decision making.

In summary, several basic propositions help specify a general model of policy subsystems in American politics:

1. American public policymaking is generally structured around specific programs and issues.
2. The relations among subsystem players are the basic determinants of public policy in each substantive program area.
3. Interest groups (public and private groups) organize to put pressure on policymakers in their arena of interest.
4. Countervailing groups organize to oppose the interests of interest groups.
5. Policy subsystem actors have significant influence over public policy within well-defined jurisdictions.
6. Subsystem actors lose power when an issue becomes highly visible and evolves into macro politics.
7. Subsystems provide stability for existing equilibria among interests.
8. Subsystems provide predictable access and opportunity for influence primarily to well-organized interests.
9. Subsystems provide some access and representation to interests that do not dominate a particular issue area.

10. Substantial changes in the balances among interests served by subsystems can be expected to occur only through macro-political intervention that modifies the rules and roles operating in the systems.
11. Subsystem actors generally adopt the norm of reciprocity; government actors subsidize interest-group actors, and interest-group actors assist government actors.
12. There is an interdependence among levels of government and between government and the private sector surrounding most policy subsystems.

The relationship between the scope and level of policy conflict and the influence of policy subsystems can be summarized in the following added hypotheses:

13. The wider the scope of conflict, the higher the level of conflict.
14. The wider the scope of policy conflict, the less the influence of policy subsystems over policy outcomes.
15. The higher the level of conflict, the less the influence of policy subsystems over policy outcomes.
16. Subsystems are unstable when resources are scarce and uncertainty surrounds the program.

Whether subsystems are good or bad is an issue that goes back to the roots of our democracy. The framers of the Constitution thought that by providing for elections and by delegating power to elected representatives they would prevent policymaking from falling into the hands of the "irresponsible" elements in society. James Madison warned of the dangers of faction, and contemporary critics of American democracy complain of interest-group liberalism, an upper-class bias in pluralism, exponential growth in political action committees, penetration of vested economic interest groups in the legislative and regulatory process, and the failure of the system to protect the "public interest." Do subsystems contribute to the "granting of preferences to a few favored interests" or check the power of large governmental and economic power bases? Policy subsystems allow for representation of a wide variety of interests, but there are no guarantees about fairness of outcome in our system; there are only guarantees of fairness of the rules of the decision-making game.

Acknowledgment

This chapter was written in honor of Charles H. Levine, distinguished

scholar-teacher, generous colleague, and reliable friend. From the first time I met Charlie and became his friend as a fellow graduate student at Indiana University in 1966 to his death at the age of forty-nine, he was a constant source of inspiration and candid reviewer of my scholarship. This chapter continues the dialogue that Charlie and I had about policy subsystems and the key role played by Congress in the policy process. We coauthored a chapter entitled "Reagan and the Intergovernmental Lobby: Iron Triangles, Cozy Subsystems, and Political Conflict," in *Interest Group Politics,* 2d ed., ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdette A. Loomis (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1986) that made public our ongoing discussion of policy subsystem theory. Following his last recommendation about my work on subsystems, I have described a more elaborate model that focuses on the dynamic nature of policymaking, something that I am sure Charlie would have appreciated. Part of this argument appears in the third edition of *Interest Group Politics* (1991).

Notes

1. See Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism,* 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1979).

2. E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).

3. Charles O. Jones describes three kinds of policymaking systems that predominate in American politics: cozy little connections or micro politics, cozy little triangles or intermediary politics, and sloppy large hexagons or macro politics. See Jones, *The United States Congress: People, Place, and Policy* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1982), 362. Also see Emmette S. Redford's useful typology of micro politics, subsystem, or intermediary politics, and macro politics in *Democracy in the Administrative State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 84. John W. Kingdon argues that a *visible cluster* made up of actors such as the president and prominent members of Congress has more effect on the policy agenda than the *hidden cluster* that includes specialists in the bureaucracy and professional communities. See Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

4. Jones, *United States Congress,* 353.

5. Hugh Heclo, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment," in *The New American Political System,* ed. A. King (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978). For an excellent critique of the concepts iron triangles, issue networks, and corporatism, see A. Grant Jordan, "Iron Triangles, Woolly Corporatism, and Elastic Nets: Images of the Policy Process," *Journal of Public Policy* 1, pt. 1 (February 1981): 95–123.

6. J. Leiper Freeman, *The Political Process* (New York: Random House, 1965).

7. Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1966). Also see Grant McConnell, "The Public Values of the Private Association," in *Voluntary Associations,* ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, 147–60 (New York: Atherton Press, 1969).

8. Theodore J. Lowi, "How Farmers Get What They Want," *Reporter,* 21 May 1964, 35. Also see Lowi, *End of Liberalism.*

9. David Mayhew, *The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 128. Also see Roger Davidson, "Breaking Up Those 'Cozy Triangles': An Impossible Dream?" in *Legislative Reform and Public Policy,* ed. S. Welch and J.G. Peters (New York: Praeger, 1977).

10. See the pluralist arguments of Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), and Nelson W. Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). Also see Robert A. Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

11. Lowi, *End of Liberalism,* 36–39. For a refutation of this point, see Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy.*

12. The close relationship of education groups to the Democratic Party during the Carter campaign proved helpful in the creation of the Department of Education; however, it also proved to be a hindrance during the Reagan presidency as Reagan attempted to dismantle the Department.

13. Robert Lineberry, *American Public Policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 38.

14. See John P. Heinz et al., "Inner Circles or Hollow Cores? Elite Networks in National Policy Systems," *Journal of Politics* 52 (May 1990): 356–90.

15. See Edward O. Laumann and David Knoke, "Policy Networks of the Organizational State: Collective Action in the National Energy and Health Domains," in *Networks of Power: Organizational Actors at the National, Corporate, and Community Levels,* ed. Robert Perrucci and Harry R. Potter (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1989).

16. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976).

17. Interview with staff from Office of the Director, Congressional Budget Office, November 1989.

18. Three million civilian employees include 811,000 U.S. Postal Service employees. See Congressional Budget Office, *Federal Civilian Employment* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987). Also see U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Civilian Employment of the Federal Government* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984). The number of civilian employees on 1 January 1963 was 2.5 million; on 1 January 1973, 2.8 million; and on 1 January 1990, 3 million.

19. Unpublished memo, Office of Personnel Management, Fall 1989.

20. Norman J. Ornstein et al., *Vital Statistics on Congress, 1989–1990 ed.* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1990). Also see *Federal Civilian Employment,* 27.

21. Burdette Loomis and Allan Cigler, eds., *Interest Group Politics,* 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1986), 6.

22. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 176.

23. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies.*

24. See Lawrence E. Gladieux and Thomas R. Wolanin, *Congress and the*

Colleges (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1976) for an analysis of higher education subsystems.

25. Charles H. Levine and James A. Thurber, "Reagan and the Intergovernmental Lobby: Iron Triangles, Cozy Subsystems, and Political Conflict," in Cigler and Loomis, *Interest Group Politics*, 202–20.

26. These definitional criteria come from Nelson W. Polsby, "The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives," *American Political Science Review* 62 (1968): 145.

27. Heclo, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment," 102.

28. Allan J. Cigler and Burdette A. Loomis, "Moving On: Interests, Power, and Politics in the 1980s," in Cigler and Loomis, *Interest Group Politics*, 306.

29. Andrew S. MacFarland, "Groups without Government: The Politics of Mediation," in Cigler and Loomis, *Interest Group Politics*, 289–301.

30. See David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

31. Charles O. Jones, "American Politics and the Organization of Energy Decision Making," *Annual Review of Energy* 4 (1979): 105.

32. Schattschneider, *Semi-Sovereign People*, chaps. 1 and 4.