The Policy Implementation Process

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ABSTRACT

There is an implicit assumption in most policy studies that once a policy has been formulated the policy will be implemented. This assumption is invalid for policies formulated in many Third World nations and for types of policies in Western societies. Third World governments tend to formulate broad, sweeping policies, and governmental bureaucracies often lack the capacity for implementation. Interest groups, opposition parties, and affected individuals and groups often attempt to influence the implementation of policy rather than the formulation of policy.

A model of the policy implementation process is presented. Policy implementation is seen as a tension generating force in society. Tensions are generated between and within four components of the implementing process: idealized policy, implementing organization, target group, and environmental factors. The tensions result in transaction patterns which may or may not match the expectations of outcome of the policy formulators. The transaction patterns may become crystallized into institutions. Both the transaction patterns and the institutions may generate tensions which, by feedback to the policymakers and implementors, may support or reject further implementation of the policy.

By application of the model, policymakers can attempt to minimize disruptive tensions which can result in the failure of policy outcomes to match policy expectations.

A general assumption is often made by scholars who analyze policies and build models of the policy processes that once a policy has been made the policy will be implemented. This assumption, in large part, accounts for the neglect of the policy implementation process in the models constructed to explain policymaking or to instruct policymakers in methods of better policy making.

In this paper the implications of this assumption will be evaluated—especially in terms of policy processes in Third World nations. I will also construct a model of the policy implementation process which may be useful in the analysis of policymaking and in the formulation of policies.

Policymaking and Policy Implementation

There are a number of reasons for the neglect of the implementation of policy in the current models. As mentioned before, there is an implicit assumption in most models
that once a policy has been "made" by a government, the policy will be implemented and the desired results of the policy will be near those expected by the policymakers.\footnote{Citizens also make this assumption. According to Dye, "We assume that when Congress adopts a policy and appropriates money for it, and when the executive branch organizes a program, hires people, spends money, and carries out activities designed to implement the policy, the effects of the policy will be felt by society and the effects will be those intended by the policy." Thomas R. Dye, \textit{Understanding Public Policy} (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 291.} This assumption rests upon certain political and organizational conditions. However, these conditions may not be found in all societies. Indeed, the societies of the Third World often are devoid of all or some of these conditions.

Recent interpretations of politics in Asian and African nations have indicated that, unlike in many Western nations, the governmental policies seldom are the result of demands and pressures by interested parties. As James C. Scott has written, "The open clash of organized interests is often conspicuously absent during the formation of legislation in these nations."\footnote{James C. Scott, "Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change," \textit{American Political Science Review} 63 (December 1969), p. 1142.} Indeed, the channels for such influence (political parties and interest groups) may be undeveloped or suppressed by official governmental action. Governments will initiate policies often without consultation with the interested or affected individuals or groups. According to Scott,

To conclude from this, however, that the public has little or no effect on the eventual "output" of government would be completely unwarranted. Between the passage of legislation and its actual implementation lies an entirely different political arena that . . . has a great effect on the execution of policy.\footnote{Ibid., p. 1142.}

The real role of interest groups and other interested groups, including political parties, comes when the policies are implemented by the government. It is at the implementation stage of the policy process when the policy may be abandoned by the government, implemented or modified to meet the demands of the interested parties. This process represents a radical departure from that found in many Western nations. Interests and opposition in Western societies focus upon the policymakers. If a policy is made (or not made) the various interests know that this decision will be implemented. And often there is little they can do about it at that stage. Research and theory building also has focused on the "inputs" or upon the processes by which policies are made. However, in Third World nations the emphasis by interested parties is upon the policy itself or upon the bureaucrats who must implement the policy.\footnote{Scott writes, "Influence at the enforcement stage often takes the form of 'corruption' and has seldom been treated as the alternative means of interest articulation which in fact it is." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 1142. For three cases of interest concentration upon policy implementation in India, see Robert W. Stern, \textit{The Process of Opposition in India} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).}

Even if a government of a Third World nation is committed to the implementation of a particular policy, the bureaucracy that must implement the policy often is lacking in the capacity to implement.\footnote{On administrative capacity in Third World nations, see Ralph Briabanti, ed., \textit{Political and Administrative Development} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1969); Fred W. Riggs, \textit{Administration in Developing Countries} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964); and Edward W. Weidner, ed., \textit{Development Administration in Asia} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970).} This situation usually is not found in Western societies.