

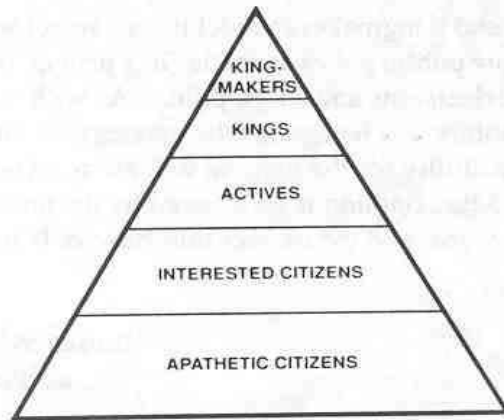
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Fact Sheet

Kings and Kingmakers (An Elite Model of Public Policymaking)

Barry L. Flinchbaugh, Extension Specialist at Kansas State University, developed the "Kings and Kingmakers" model of public policymaking in which he depicts that power and policy are organized in every community (or state, or the U.S.) in a pyramid, as illustrated in the schematic of the model.



Summary Description

The *Kingmakers* occupy the top level of the public policymaking hierarchy. They have the financial and intellectual resources to influence and even determine public policy. Their power is often "invisible" to the public. Nevertheless, from their position behind the scenes, they may determine who gets elected, which items appear on the public policy agenda, and which die a sudden death.

The *Kings*, or clearly visible policymakers, are next in the hierarchy. Kings are the elected and appointed leaders in government and organizations, and have a strong and direct interest in public policy. The Kings are elected or appointed, with the blessing of the Kingmakers, and work in close consultation with them.

The *Actives* are the "joiners," or civic-minded members of a community, state, or nation, who occupy the position in the hierarchy immediately below the Kings. These are the active members and leaders in service clubs, special-interest groups, and national organizations, like the League of Women Voters and the National Farmers Union.

Below the Actives are the *Interested Citizens*, who are fairly well informed on community, state, and national issues. But, unlike the Actives, the Interested Citizens are neither vocal nor frequent participants in the policymaking process.

The *Apathetic Citizens* are the largest group (at the bottom level of the hierarchy). According to Flinchbaugh (Selected Readings), this level represents the "don't-give-a-damn bunch." Only under unusual circumstances does a public issue arise that arouses their interest or provokes them to become more active and involved.

Focus of the Kings and Kingmakers Model

According to the Kings and Kingmakers model, the public policy agenda is set by the Kingmakers and determined by the Kings and Actives. Public policy education, Flinchbaugh argues, will be most successful when targeted toward the Kings, who will, in turn, impart the educational message to the Kingmakers (above) and the Active Citizens (below).

The focus of the Kings and Kingmakers model is on a select few in society to understand and explain how public policy is made. It is primarily concerned with *who has power* to make decisions and shape policy. As with other elite models, it does not show that all policy will be against the masses or contrary to public opinion, but that responsibility for the general welfare rests with a few influentials in the community. Mass opinion is influenced by the powerful elites; communication flows downward; and the masses thus have only an indirect influence on public policy.

—Prepared by Mary Ellen Wolf;
adapted from Flinchbaugh

Fact Sheet

Two Models of Public Policy Decisionmaking: Lindblom's "Muddling Through" versus the Rational-Comprehensive Model

Almost three decades ago, economist Charles E. Lindblom developed one of the most enduring models of public decisionmaking. Lindblom's incremental model was a reaction to the elaborate "rational-comprehensive" models in vogue at that time. Today, although times have changed, these two models are still accepted and used by policy analysts, public officials, and citizens alike. They have remained useful because they offer clear, although contrasting, conceptions of how public decisions actually are made. The characteristics of each are summarized.

Rational-Comprehensive Model

In the rational-comprehensive model, it is suggested that policy ought to be made, and even *is* made, as policymakers work systematically through the following:

- A consideration and clarification of values and objectives in a process that is distinct and separate from the analysis of alternative policies;
- Formulation of policies by isolating the ends, and then objectively seeking the means to achieve them;
- Determination of a "good" policy, by using the evidence gathered to demonstrate that it is the most appropriate means to achieve desired ends;
- Engaging in comprehensive policy analysis that takes every important and relevant factor into account; and
- Relying on theory, whenever possible.

In this model, it is further suggested that public policy starts from new fundamentals each time an issue arises. The implication is that decisionmaking can be accomplished fresh, from clean and "untouched" public policy "soil," each time a policy issue comes under consideration.

"Muddling Through" Model (Incrementalism)

In his challenge to the rational-comprehensive model, Lindblom describes a decisionmaking system of *successive limited comparisons*. In direct contrast to the "root" method of the rational-comprehensive perspective, in the incremental model, Lindblom says that decisions are made by the "branch" method, by continually building from the current policy and decisionmaking situation, step by step and in small degrees. According to Lindblom, in the complex world of public policy, decisionmaking is characterized by the following:

- Valued policy goals are selected in a process that proceeds along with the analysis of impacts and consequences; that is, values and objectives are *not* determined separately from analysis.

- The decisionmaker considers only some of all possible policy alternatives, and these differ only marginally from existing policy.
- For each policy alternative, only a limited number of important consequences are evaluated.
- The problems facing policymakers are continually changing and being redefined; therefore, policy analysis is always limited and often important outcomes, alternatives, and values are neglected.
- The test of a “good” policy is agreement—when policymakers find themselves agreeing on a policy, it becomes the most appropriate means to select.
- Incremental policymaking is essentially remedial and geared to treat immediate, concrete social needs rather than to promote future social goals.

Lindblom indicates in the model that many participants seek mutual consent as they go about solving public problems. But, because uncertainty characterizes the entire process, the participants seek modifications of existing programs, not the “all or nothing” changes suggested by the rational-comprehensive model. “Something that works” or decisionmaking by “muddling through” is, according to Lindblom, the most realistic picture of how public decisions are made in the United States. It is a model of limited, feasible policymaking.

Application and Use of These Models in Public Policy Education

It is difficult—if not impossible—to “fit” an issue into the rational-comprehensive or the incremental models. The models do not lend themselves to specific, applied, issue analysis. Instead, the particular value of these two rather abstract models is to help explain how public decisions have been or will be made, for a given public problem, at a given point in time. In short, rational-comprehensive and incremental models are best used as *frameworks for understanding a decision-making process or situation*.

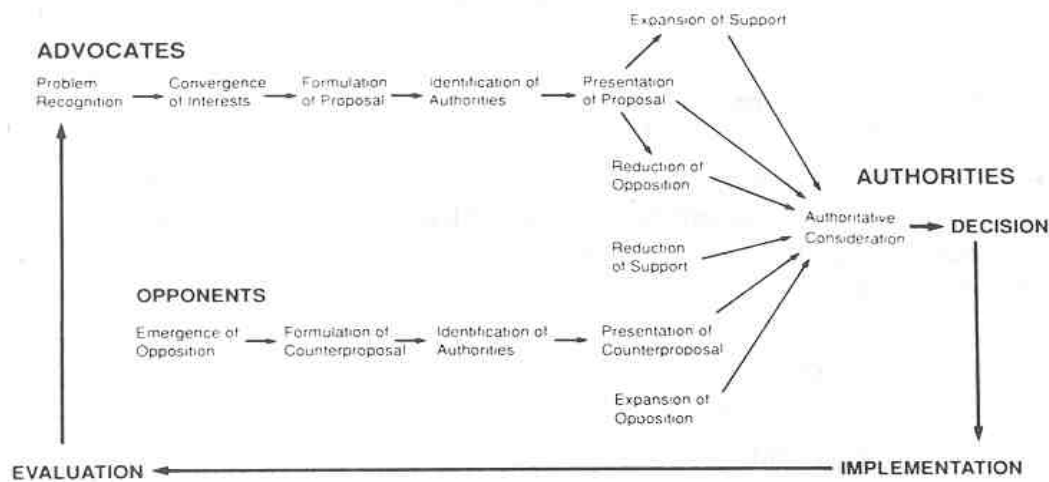
—Prepared by Mary Ellen Wolfe;
adapted from Lindblom (1959)

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Stages of the Decisionmaking Model

Newcomers to the political arena may find the social process model called “Stages of Decisionmaking” particularly useful. Alan Hahn developed this conceptual framework to describe a regularly occurring sequence of activities that involves citizen participation in the policymaking process.

This model recognizes that public problems involve conflict between policy *advocates* and *opponents*. To resolve such a conflict, the interested advocates and opponents engage in a series of steps or activities as a preface to petitioning key authorities to adopt their preferred policy alternative. This decisionmaking model differentiates between the activities of advocates and opponents and is presented schematically and described in more detail in the sections that follow.



Activities of the Advocates

Problem recognition. Advocates acknowledge a problem, new goal, or objective and initiate the decisionmaking process in an attempt to address it. The government official closest to the problem is often the first advocate to recognize it. Raising issues and moving from stage to stage through the process is more difficult for people with limited political experience and recognition.

Convergence of interests. The perception of a shared problem or goal brings together people who recognize that, by asserting their influence, they may obtain a desired resolution.

Formulation of a proposal. Interested individuals organize and plan action to address the problem or goal as they perceive it.

Development of a strategy. The advocates identify the decisionmaker with the authority to make the relevant decision. They then develop a plan of action to increase the likelihood that their proposal will be accepted.

Expansion of support. The advocates locate and solicit the support needed to persuade the key authorities to make the desired decision. (For example, they circulate petitions, advertise, hold mass meetings, and work out agreements with influential people.)

Reduction of opposition. Steps are undertaken to reduce the effectiveness of emerging opposition. These steps can take the form of anticipating the impact of opposition and attempting to defuse its impact in advance; face-to-face confrontation; or negotiation.

Presentation of proposal. The last activity the advocates engage in is to try to secure a place for their proposal on the policymaker's formal agenda. If the preceding sequence of activities has been accomplished, the groundwork for this final stage has been laid, and the chances of a successful outcome for the advocates will have been maximized.

Activities of the Opponents

The uniqueness of this model lies in its recognition of the important role that opposition forces play in making public policy. Arising at any stage of the policymaking process, opponents follow a series of steps that parallel those of the policy advocates:

- Emergence of opposition,
- Formulation of a counterproposal,
- Identification of authorities,
- Presentation of counterproposals,
- Expansion of the opposition, and
- Presentation of the proposal.

Final Stages in the Policymaking Process

The final stages in the policymaking process are (1) authoritative decision, (2) implementation, and (3) evaluation.

Authoritative Decision. Once a public issue (problem) reaches the formal agenda, the relevant government authorities deliberate and then make a final decision. Numerous outcomes are possible: the authorities can adopt the advocates' proposal, the opponents' counterproposal, or a compromise; or they can refuse to take action and thereby preserve the status quo.

Implementation. After the formal decision has been made, established (or newly created) government entities take action to implement the decision. A new routine

may result from the decision; the development of new regulations may be mandated; and enforcement procedures may be developed.

Evaluation. At some point after a new policy is implemented, advocates, opponents, or other “interested parties” begin to consider the effects and consequences of the decision and its implementation. At such point, the final stage of the policymaking process has begun. Either through formal means such as data analysis, or through informal means such as citizen reaction, evaluating a policy reveals its success, failure, or the need for modification. If a problem is observed in a particular policy, the “stages” begin again.

—Prepared by Mary Ellen Wolfe;
adapted from Hahn’s “Stages of Decisionmaking”

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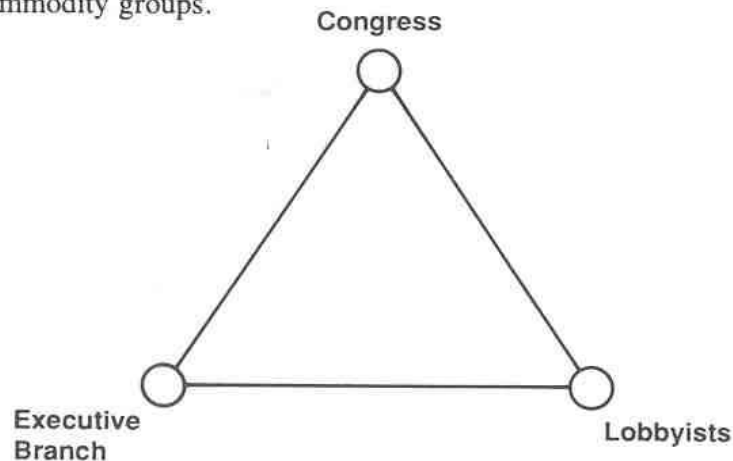
“Triangle and Clusters” Models of Public Policymaking

According to some observers, American public policy is the result of group interaction. Individuals have little impact on policymaking, it is argued, except as they take action through their membership groups. Furthermore, groups win success for their preferred policy alternative (and political power) on the basis of their size, political effectiveness, and wealth. Two “group” models of public policymaking are described here.

The Iron Triangle

Several decades ago, an observer of public policy developed the metaphor of the “Iron Triangle” to describe how agricultural policy was made. According to this model, the three points of power in the agricultural policy triangle are:

- The *Executive*—the Secretary of Agriculture, administrators of the USDA agencies, and the Director of the Budget;
- The *Congress*—the chairmen of the congressional Agriculture and Appropriations committees; and
- The *Farm Lobby*—the leaders of a few key farm organizations and relatively new commodity groups.



According to this perspective, within this triangle of power, the nation’s agricultural policy is debated; the legislative agenda is determined; administrative regulations are promulgated and implemented; and programs are administered. Over time, this model has proven relevant to other areas of public policymaking, such as housing, medicine, transportation, and the military.

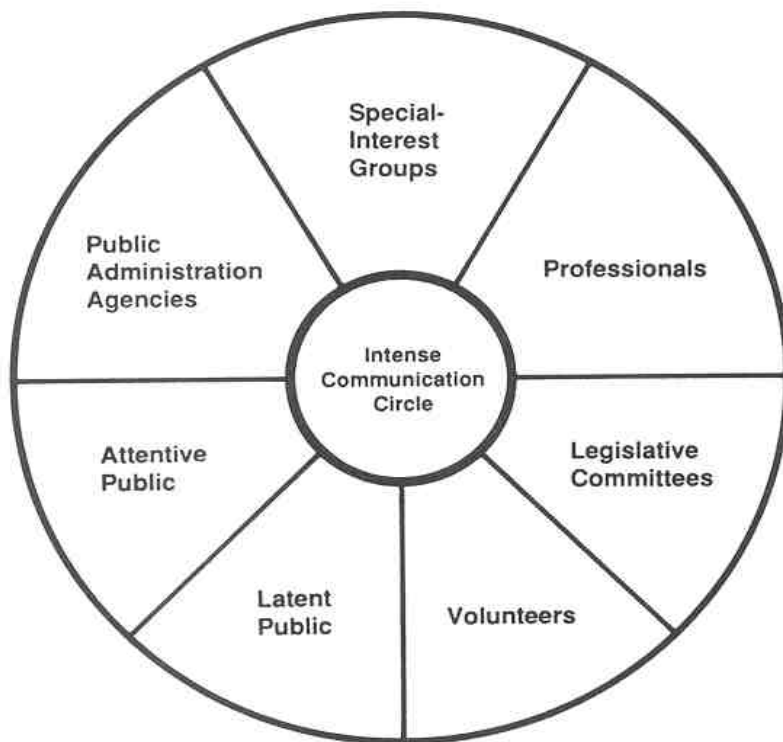
Power Clusters

More recently, Ogden (1971) used the term “web of power” to describe the increased number of actors playing significant roles in the public policy arena. Expanding on the idea of the “Iron Triangle,” Ogden formulated the *Clusters* model of policymaking to describe the multiple groups that affect policy from formulation through evaluation and revision.

Power clusters exist in every major area of public policy: agriculture, education, and defense are prominent examples. Power clusters come into being as related groups, acting independently, and joining together to influence public policy that affects their interests and concerns at the local, state, and national levels.

Elements of a Power Cluster. All power clusters contain the same elements:

- Administrative agencies,
- Legislative committees,
- Special-interest groups,
- Professionals,
- Attentive public, and
- Latent public.



Behavior of Power Clusters. Five patterns of behavior characterize the relationships within each power cluster and help shape the policymaking process.

- *Close personal and institutional ties*—key people communicate frequently.
- *Active communication among cluster elements*—intense communication characterizes the key actors in the cluster at varying points in time in the policymaking process.

- *Internal conflicts among competing interests*—although relationships within clusters are generally friendly, the various members may hold opposing views and frequently be in conflict with one another.
- *Internal cluster decisionmaking*—the majority of policy decisions are made within the various clusters.
- *Well-developed internal power structure*—within a cluster, key leaders are well-known and consulted on all major activities that affect their interests.

—Prepared by Mary Ellen Wolfe;
adapted from Ogden (1971)

Fact Sheet

Comparing Public Policymaking Models

Models of public policymaking are useful tools to help clarify our thinking about politics and public policy. These models also help us:

- Identify important aspects of policy problems;
- Focus on significant features of political life;
- Differentiate between important and unimportant events in the policymaking process; and
- Suggest explanations for public policy and predict its consequences.

The policy educator will find it useful to be familiar with the four models of policymaking herein, for each offers a different perspective on how public policy is made. Some educators are likely to prefer one model over another. But no one model says it all. In focusing on certain aspects of the policy process, of necessity, other aspects are omitted.

By comparing the characteristics of each model, the focus, use, and limitations of each become more apparent. The educator can use such comparisons prior to designing public policy programs to help accomplish the above, and to inform the participants about the public policy process itself.

—Prepared by Mary Ellen Wolfe

<u>Model</u>	<u>Focus</u>	<u>Use</u>	<u>Limitations</u>
Kings and kingmakers	Who has the power? (Elites)	Describes the role of leaders; reveals hidden power-brokers who influence public policy.	May overstate the role of elites; may understate the role of groups and the multi-dimensional nature of policymaking; can be hard to identify the elites over time.
Power Clusters	Who has the power? (Groups)	Describes the central role of groups; allows for incrementalism.	May overstate the group role and understate the role of public officials and institutions; may overlook environmental factors.
Rational-Comprehensive	How are decisions made? (Rationally, comprehensively)	Describes a rational "scientific" decision-making process.	May be unrealistic; exaggerate the time, resources, and information available to the decisionmaker; may not take group or elite power into account. (Highly abstract)
"Muddling Through"	How are decisions made? (Incrementally)	Highlights the manner in which officials make decisions.	May overlook the role of elites, systematic stages in the process, and possibility of innovative policy changes. (Highly abstract)
Stages in the Decisionmaking Process	What are the regularly occurring stages in the decisionmaking process?	Describes the process or system; multiple decision points, fragmentation of power.	May overlook changes in the social, political environment; content of the process may be overlooked. Does not identify the actors.

Key characteristics to consider in selecting a public policymaking model

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Evaluation: Unit II

Now that you have been introduced to a variety of models that describe how public policy is made, how well can you apply them to your issue?

1. Which model best describes how decisions and policy are made in your community or state? Why?

2. Do you prefer one model for describing the public policymaking process in your area? Why? What characteristics of this model attract you?

3. If you were teaching about how public policy or decisions were made in your community or state, would you use only one model? Justify your answer.

4. Describe how a policy or a decision was made in your state or community that illustrates one of the models you have just learned.

5. Which policymaking models would be most useful to you in describing and analyzing controversy (issue) in the topic you have chosen?

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