

Beyond Subsystems: Policy Regimes and Governance

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To be presented at the *5TAD Fifth Transatlantic Dialogue Conference*
June 11-13, 2009, Washington, D.C.

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Acknowledgements

Valuable comments on drafts of this contribution have been provided by Joshua Sapotichne, John Griswold, and Barry Pump of the Center for American Politics and Public Policy. We also thank Samuel Workman and Bryan D. Jones for their participation in the broader research project. Financial support for this research was provided by National Science Foundation grant number SES-0623900. Neither the NSF nor those who have offered insights are responsible for the content of this contribution.

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Abstract

Many policy problems do not fit within traditional subsystem boundaries for organizing policy responses. Policy process scholars have paid limited attention to these boundary-spanning problems and to the challenges that their solutions entail in governing across subsystems. We suggest attention to *policy regimes* provides a promising direction for future scholarship. Our review of the literature about subsystems and regimes provides a basis for distinguishing the two concepts and for further development of notions about policy regimes. They are usefully characterized as governance arrangements that put pressure on players in different subsystems to act more or less in accord in pursuing similar ends. These pressures emanate from an issue of widespread concern, a shared sense of purpose, supportive interests, and facilitative institutional arrangements. We consider the role of these forces in the emergence, strength, and durability of policy regimes for six illustrative cases. Our research synthesis challenges the extant focus of policy process scholars on subsystems as the basic unit of analysis and broadens the traditional focus on policymaking to consideration of the dynamics of governing.

Beyond Subsystems: Policy Regimes and Governance

The difficulties of addressing complex policy problems have been especially evident in recent years as illustrated by the challenges posed by deteriorating infrastructure, lapses in food safety, global climate change, homeland security, and the depletion of oceans. These problems and their requisite solutions are inherently complex because they necessitate actions across multiple policy sectors, within and across different levels of government, and among the private and public sectors. The important point from a policy process perspective is that the solutions for complex problems like these are messy because they do not fit within traditional subsystem boundaries for organizing policy responses. Donald Kettl aptly described this conundrum in commenting that “the new challenges of 21st century life—from terrorism to pandemics and international trade to climate change—have undermined the ability of boundaries—any boundaries, drawn anywhere—to deal with truly important and inescapable issues” (2006, pp. 12-13).

The quest for cohesion and coordination in addressing complex problems like these remains a central challenge. The myopic nature of policymaking among policy subsystems is especially problematic for addressing boundary-spanning problems. Each of the relevant subsystems provides a separate lens through which to view problems. Each also has different ways of addressing problems given that they have separate policymaking histories and serve different interests. Because of these differences, achieving the desired unification among elements of diverse policy subsystems for any given boundary-spanning issue is the Achilles’ heel of governing. Our discussion of *policy regimes* is fundamentally concerned with governance arrangements that foster unified actions across subsystems.

Those who study policy processes have been remarkably inattentive to boundary-spanning problems and solutions. The predominant foci of the policy process literature are the dynamics of policymaking within subsystems that comprise fairly regularized bases for addressing particular policy issues. Subsystems define the boundaries of policymaking activity,

set the rules of the game, and engage key stakeholders in debate for any given area of policy. By focusing on the policy subsystem as the basic unit of analysis, policy process scholars largely ignore the possibilities for and challenges posed by cross-subsystem policy dynamics. These dynamics are central to addressing the governance of complex policy problems that span multiple policy areas. The ability of policy process scholars to address such problems requires rethinking the basic unit of analysis for policymaking and moving beyond the extant focus on individual subsystems.

Policy process scholars have also paid less attention to the challenges of governing, preferring instead to emphasize different aspects of policymaking. In contrast, governance scholars have long wrestled with various approaches to coordinated action. That quest has entailed consideration of policy czars and governmental reorganizations (see March & Olsen, 1983; Wilson, 1989, pp. 268-274), whole-of-government approaches involving “joined-up” government (see Christensen and Laegreid 2007; Ling, 2002; Perri 6, 2004), the Open Method of Coordination as developed in the European Union (see Radelli, 2008), and integrative policy strategies as applied to forestry and coastal management (see Shipman & Stojanovic, 2007; Howlett & Rayner, 2006). Despite this diversity of approaches, the quest for coordinated action remains an elusive challenge that Guy Peters labels as “one of the central concerns in the contemporary study of interorganizational politics” (1998, p. 308). Policy process scholars can and should contribute insights about these thorny governance issues by expanding their traditional concerns about policymaking to addressing broader issues of governing.

We suggest attention to policy regimes provides a fruitful means for joining the contributions of scholars who study policy processes with those who are concerned about governance in addressing the challenges posed by complex policy areas. Consideration of policy regimes highlights the prospects for and limitations of governing across the boundaries of subsystems. As we elaborate below, policy regimes are usefully characterized as governance arrangements that put pressure on players in different subsystems to act more or less in accord in

pursuing similar ends. Like the joined-up government and integrative strategies, policy regimes foster parallel actions across different policy areas and among different levels of government. Like the Open Method of Coordination approach, policy regimes are animated by commitments of key actors within different policy areas to achieve a common goal. Unlike either of these, policymakers do not explicitly set out to construct policy regimes. Instead, policymakers shape the forces that allow regimes to evolve and propel unified action.

In what follows we synthesize various literatures in developing the notion of a policy regime and in arguing that this concept is important for the study of policy processes. The synthesis has four parts. First, we consider existing theorizing about policy subsystems and why we need to move beyond them. We argue policy regimes are useful for considering policymaking across subsystems. Second, we conceptualize policy regimes by relating the concept to literature concerning regimes for a diverse set of fields in political science including international relations, comparative politics, American political development, and urban politics. This includes consideration of previous efforts to incorporate notions of regimes in the policy literature. In the third section, we more fully consider the forces behind policy regimes and their role in the emergence, strength, and durability of a given regime. We illustrate these dynamics with examples of policy regimes including community empowerment in the 1960s, pollution abatement in the 1970s, drug criminalization in the 1980s, welfare responsibility in the 1990s, and most recently, homeland security. In the fourth and final section, we consider issues for further development and examination of the concept of a policy regime.

In Search of a Unit of Analysis

The concept of a policy subsystem is one of the oldest concepts in the study of policy processes. The concept can be traced to Ernest Griffith's discussion of policy whirlpools in his 1939 book *Impasse of Democracy* in which he writes: "One cannot live in Washington for long without being conscious that it has whirlpools or centers of activity focusing on particular problems" (quoted from Redford 1969, p. 96). Though there has been much debate about the

nature of these relationships, the concept of a subsystem is well ingrained in the study of American politics. Subsystems are typically characterized by a stable coalition of interests (see Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 16), a dominant idea or ‘image’ that fosters coherent approaches to a policy problem (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, pp. 4-6), and a dominant institution that structures power arrangements (see Redford 1969, p. 96) and the flow of information (see Jones & Baumgartner 2005, pp. 70-74). Various terms have been used to describe these subsystems (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, pp. 6-9), policy domains (see Bursetin, 1991; Laumann & Knoke, 1987, pp. 9-10), and subgovernments (see Berry, 1989; McCool, 1990), subsystems have defined the basic unit of analysis of research on the policy processes.

The concept of a policy subsystem loses traction when considering problems and solutions that span multiple subsystems. Herein lies the rub. As we note in the introduction, many contemporary problems cross-cut multiple areas of policy and their attendant subsystems. Rittel and Webber (1973) first highlighted the complexity of social problems in coining the phrase “wicked problems” to refer to their inherent messiness. But, only in recent years have boundary-spanning aspects been highlighted as the key component of problem complexity as illustrated by Duit and Galaz’s (2008) discussion of a range of complex biophysical and human problems. Indeed, some of the most noteworthy examples of policy initiatives of the last century fell *beyond*, not within, the boundaries of individual subsystems. Crises surrounding drugs, crime, terrorism, and poverty have each led to efforts to construct governance arrangements that span multiple policy subsystems. A central issue for the development of unified governmental efforts for addressing such complex problems is overcoming the inertia that is embedded in different policy subsystems. This creates pulls in different directions as different subsystems shape problem definitions and policy responses to fit their distinctive ways of doing business.

What does the policy process literature tell us about relationships among subsystems and the ability to overcome these cross-currents? Very little it seems. To the extent that policy process scholars discuss interdependencies across subsystems, the emphasis is upon spillovers in

policymaking activities and disruptions that affect more than one subsystem. These have been characterized in the policy literature as chaotic and disruptive to normal politics (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1994). As illustrated by Charles Jones' and Randall Strahan's (1985, p. 153) discussion of the congressional response to the Arab oil embargo as an "Oklahoma land rush," spillovers can engage actors from a wide array of subsystems. Russell Williams (2009, p. 32) goes so far as to suggest that policy spillovers can produce "an entirely new '*uber*' subsystem in which there are new institutions and a new mix of actors" (2009, p. 32, emphasis in the original). But as shown by May, Sapotichne, and Workman (2009a) in discussing widespread policy disruptions, the engagement of policymakers in affected subsystems can be very uneven.

Though scholars have recognized the overlap of policy communities from different subsystems for policymaking (see Grant & MacNamara, 1995; Lauman & Knoke 1987, pp. 374-397; Zafonte & Sabatier, 1998), only recently has attention been paid to how subsystem interdependencies affect policy dynamics for multiple subsystems. Michael Jones and Hank Jenkins-Smith (2009) consider the potential for "trans-subsystem" change among "linked subsystems" comprised of overlapping issues and interests that are joined by circumstances (e.g., the force of a 9/11 event) or cross-subsystem learning (e.g., global climate change). The emphasis of their theorizing is relationships among subsystems and how these affect the potential for macro-level policy change much as May, Sapotichne, and Workman (2009a) study the impacts of widespread disruption from terrorism for multiple, related subsystems governing homeland security. These lines of research are noteworthy in showing the limits of analysis of policy dynamics when confined to individual subsystems. As yet, theorizing about policy dynamics among multiple subsystems is insufficiently developed to provide notable insights about governing across subsystems.

The topic of governing beyond the boundaries of subsystems, which is central to the type of unified policy action that we consider, has been even less emphasized in the policy process literature. As we note in the introduction, the subsystem concept is limited when addressing

problems and solutions that span multiple policy areas. The focus on policymaking within a given subsystem precludes consideration of activities in related subsystems. In at least implicitly recognizing this constraint, policy scholars have sought to redefine the contours of a given subsystem or to suggest the emergence of new subsystems for problems and solutions that do not fit within the confines of existing arrangements. An example of subsystem redefinition is William's (2009) discussion of how the financial services crisis in Canada led to expanded policymaking activities for this subsystem. Claims about the emergence of a new subsystem is revealed in Orr's (2006, p. 162) discussion of the emergence of a climate change policy subsystem comprised of "a community of organized interests made up of experts in the field." This is far different than the depiction of climate change by Michael Jones and Hank Jenkins-Smith (2009) as a prototypical trans-subsystem issue.

These machinations no doubt reflect some of the squishiness of the subsystem concept. But no matter how they are redefined or stretched, we argue individual subsystems cannot encompass the type of complex problems and unified policy actions across elements of subsystems that we consider. Consideration of the problems associated with governing beyond the boundaries of subsystems requires a new unit of analysis and a new conceptual basis. We introduce the concept of a *policy regime* to depict governance arrangements that extend beyond the boundaries of subsystems.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the analytic properties of subsystems and policy regimes. Whereas subsystems are conceptualized as institutionalized areas of *policymaking*, policy regimes are *governance arrangements* that span multiple subsystems. The utility of considering subsystems as a unit of analysis declines as one moves into the realm of complex policy areas. Whereas policy subsystems are constructed around relatively stable institutions, policy regimes are constructed *across* these same institutional boundaries.

Table 1. Subsystems and Policy Regimes

	Subsystems	Policy Regimes
Conceptualization	Institutionalized areas of policymaking	Governance arrangements across multiple subsystems
Relevance	Different issue areas that have institutionalized patterns of policymaking	Complex problems that span different subsystems and levels of government
Dynamics	Provides stability in policymaking and generally reinforces the status quo absent major disruptions	Unification of elements of subsystems to work in accord in seeking similar goals
Limits	Issue areas without well formed publics or institutionalized patterns of policymaking	Anemic regimes that fail to overcome the inertia of relevant policy subsystems.
Related concepts	Advocacy coalitions, iron triangles, policy communities, policy domains, policy monopolies, policy networks, sub-governments	International regimes, implementation regimes, political regimes, regulatory regimes, urban regimes

Both subsystems and policy regimes bring stability and cohesion to the issues they consider. Subsystems structure political conflict by limiting entrants (see Redford, 1969, pp. 96) and debate (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, p. 238) under normal circumstances. They are characterized by regularized patterns of policymaking that are occasionally punctuated by major disruptions (see Baumgartner & Jones 1994; Worsham 1997; Wilkerson et al., 2002; Feeley 2002; MacLeod 2002). As discussed by Worsham (2006, p. 438), these functions of subsystems bring “stability to the otherwise volatile process” of policymaking. Policy regimes unify elements of relevant subsystems to bring cohesion to governing arrangements. Rather than relying on well-established patterns of policymaking as with subsystems, policy regimes bring about cohesion through governance arrangements that foster a set of organic forces that we discuss below. These act as centripetal forces in propelling elements of relevant subsystems to act more or less in accord in seeking the same ends.

Both subsystems and policy regimes begin to break down when the undergirding elements are weak. As suggested by May, Sapotichne, and Workman (2005), subsystems tend to be underdeveloped when the relevant issues and interests are highly fragmented or nascent. Under these circumstances, patterns of policymaking are irregular as policymakers within a given policy area shift their attention to different issues and coalitions are characterized by fluid participation. The prospects for policy regimes are limited by failures to overcome the inertia of the subsystems they necessarily span—what we label as anemic regimes. Anemic regimes are unable to overcome the inertia built into existing ways of doing business, limiting the potential for bringing cohesion to messy policy areas.

One of the challenges for policy process scholars in grappling with notions about subsystems and policy regimes is overcoming the multiple lexicons that comprise these concepts. As suggested by the entries in the last row of Table 1, the terminology surrounding each of these concepts is confusing. Policy scholars have sought to draw distinctions in the array of related terms concerning subsystems and have introduced various distinctions in different types of subsystems (see Howlett & Ramash, 1998; McCool, 1998; Weible, 2008; Worsham 1998). As we discuss in the next section, the terminology surrounding regime concepts is also confusing given the variety of different applications of the concept in political science and public administration.

Perhaps the most daunting aspect of either of these concepts is the difficulty of identifying “a subsystem” or “a regime” as is apparent to anyone who attempts to research these or to any student of policy processes who first encounters these terms. Given that these are constructs that are not directly observable, it is not surprising that opinions differ about the contours of a given subsystem or regime. Suffice it to note that regimes are no better or worse in this regard than are subsystems in that both are malleable concepts.

Regimes in Context

Notions of regimes have a prominent place in scholarship concerning international relations, comparative politics, American political development, and urban politics. More recent contributions by policy scholars develop notions of regimes of relevance to specific policy reforms. Each of these traditions has considered variants of the regime concept while proceeding relatively independently. Taken together, they highlight the roles of four key attributes—issues, ideas, interests, and institutions—in regime formation and change. Each of these traditions views regimes as addressing in some fashion particular issues of concern. International relations scholars emphasize the ideational and institutional components of regimes. Scholarship in the fields of urban politics, comparative politics, and American political development more fully consider power arrangements and coalitional dynamics among relevant interests. Finally, theorizing about policy-specific regimes brings together ideas, interests, and institutions within the boundaries of a single subsystem in addressing different policy reforms. We briefly outline these traditions as a foundation for our conceptualization of a policy regime.

Perhaps the most developed notions of regime come from international relations scholars who have utilized the concept to understand patterns of activity in and around internationalized policy areas. Stephen Krasner (1983, p. 2) describes an international regime as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations.” International regimes are fundamentally about crafting institutions in the international sphere for governing responses to particular policy problems such as hazardous waste and food, or to promote particular ends such as trade (see Kratochwil & Ruggie 1986). In this way, policy problems that demand coordination within the international sphere create conditions that are ripe for the development of international regimes.

The discussion of regimes by these and other scholars of international relations makes clear that institutional arrangements alone do not constitute a regime. Institutions are only

meaningful insofar as they embody and reinforce shared understandings and beliefs regarding the problem at hand (see Kratochwil & Ruggie 1986). For example, treaties governing climate change by regulating carbon emissions do not signify the existence of a climate change regime; a regime requires the coupling of an ideational component, signified by shared principles, beliefs, and goals with an institutional component. As discussed by Martin and Simmons (1998, pp. 752-753), regimes foster the desired convergence among actors in diverse settings only when the international institutions that are created advance agreement about shared principles, beliefs, and goals.

Scholars working with the regime concept in other traditions have more explicitly highlighted the centrality of power and interest groups in regime formation and change. Foremost among these is the work of Clarence Stone (1989) and his colleagues, who apply the regime concept to the study of governing arrangements in urban politics. According to Stone (2005, p. 309), the challenges of urban governance are “coalition building, resource mobilization, and devising schemes of cooperation.” This research suggests that interest groups lend strength to governance arrangements but, unlike international regimes, cooperation does not signal shared values or beliefs but instead the selective provision of benefits (also see Mossberger & G. Stoker, 2001).

A similar progression of ideas developed in comparative politics and American political development where scholars brought attention to structural power relationships between the state and society. Kitschelt (1992, p. 1028) defines political regimes “as the rules and basic political resource allocation according to which actors exercise authority.” In this tradition, Esping-Anderson (1993) considers the role of labor in shaping different welfare state regimes. From this perspective, coalitions of political actors shape the direction and capacity of the regime to act as buttressed by the power of ideas and the formation of supporting institutions. Those writing within the traditions of historical institutionalism with the American political development literature adopt a similar stance in arguing that new regimes are made possible by the

embracement of organizing ideas by new coalitions of political actors. As characterized by Orren and Skowronek (1998, p. 694): “As [political] regimes transform new ideas about the purposes of government into governing routines, they carry on the reformer’s central contention as the political common sense of a new era, a set of base assumptions shared (or at least accepted) by all the major actors in the period.” These literatures suggest that while ideas and institutions are important components for developing governing regimes, the alignment of political power is central to their strength and durability.

Scholars working in the policy process tradition have employed regime concepts in examining particular policy reforms or classes of reforms. Particular reforms involving new policy-specific regimes have been characterized by Carter Wilson (2000) as containing an idea or ‘policy paradigm,’ an institutional basis that structures policymaking and implementation, and a set of interests that provide political support. A variety of examples of this use of regime terminology can be found in the recent policy process literature. McGuinn (2006) discusses regime change in federal education policy that shifted focus from equity to accountability, transformed K-12 institutions, and involved new coalitions of actors around the accountability regime. Rogers, Beamer, and Payne (2008) discuss differences among American states in their welfare and income support regimes following reforms at the national level. Wilson (2009) discusses the creation of a new financial services regime in Canada in response to the credit crisis.

A subset of the policy-specific regime literature concerns implementation regimes as the arrangements for carrying out policies. Robert Stoker (1991) introduced this terminology when considering the challenges of intergovernmental implementation. He defines an implementation regime as “an arrangement among implementation participants that identifies the values to be served during the implementation process and provides an organizational framework to promote those values” (1991, p. 55). More generally, one can think of implementation regimes as

comprised of a set of arrangements, inducements, and signals that both structure and facilitate implementation.

Regime terminology has also been employed by policy scholars in talking about classes of reforms. Emphasizing the relevance of paradigm change, scholars studying regulatory reforms have used regime terminology to describe the adoption of new regulatory approaches. For example, in discussing regulatory regimes Marc Eisner suggests “[o]ne can recognize the emergence of a new regime when regulatory policy initiatives and institutional innovations introduced across a number of areas reveal similar goals, patterns of state-economy relations, and administrative models” (1994, p. 159; also see Harris & Milkis, 1989). Others, like Shipan (2004), have considered aspects of regulatory regimes in studying the dynamics of regulatory arrangements. This research blends notions of policy and implementation regimes.

This brief review of regimes in context reveals the variety of uses of regime terminology in political science and public administration along with the diversity of traditions in the use of the label. Regardless of the specifics, the interplay of issues, ideas, interests, and institutions play a prominent role throughout various discussions of the concept. While notions about policy regimes are more recent, it is clear that our discussion of the concept is not something that we have devised anew. Yet, we do think that the extant literatures addressing policy-specific regimes and different classes of regimes have been rather general in the use of the regime label. One problem with this use of policy regime terminology is that it is hard to distinguish a policy-specific regime, like that discussed by McGuinn (2006) for K-12 education, from a policy subsystem. Similarly, it is hard to distinguish the discussion of changes in regulatory regimes from that of policy reform more generally.

Governing Beyond Subsystems

We draw from the literatures reviewed here in suggesting that a policy regime is best thought of as a governance arrangement that spans multiple subsystems and fosters unified action. From this perspective, regimes go beyond individual subsystems and concern much more than

policy implementation. They unify elements of subsystems so that those elements that are relevant to a given, complex problem work more or less in accord toward similar ends. In their quest to seek policy cohesion and coordination, policymakers shape the forces that allow regimes to evolve.

A distinctive aspect of our conceptualization of a policy regime is that it spans elements of multiple subsystems and their attendant policymaking activities. This distinction has three important implications. It eliminates conflation of the concept of a policy regime with the notion of a policy subsystem. It distinguishes our perspective from that of those who study policy regime formation for particular policy areas that comprise single subsystems of policymaking—what we label above as “policy-specific regimes.” And, it draws attention to the cross-subsystem dynamics of regimes in overcoming the inertia that is built into the individual policy subsystems that are addressed by a given regime.

The distinctions between subsystems and policy regimes are evidenced by the differences in the ways that different elements of policymaking and governing come into play.¹ Four different elements have been important aspects in the depiction of policy subsystems—issues, ideas, interests, and institutions. These together serve as key indicators of the existence of a subsystem as well as help to define the contours of it. Drawing from the literature summarized in the preceding section, we suggest that these same considerations give rise to and sustain policy regimes. The relevance of each of these to policy subsystems and to policy regimes is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Different Features of Subsystems and Policy Regimes

Feature	Subsystems	Policy Regimes
Issues	Define the foci of a given subsystem	Stimuli for garnering attention across subsystems
Ideas	Help to delineate dominant images for subsystem concerns	Bind elements of relevant subsystems to achieve a common purpose
Interests	Establish the degree of conflict within a subsystem, comprising “wavering equilibriums”	Provide political power and legitimacy to a given regime
Institutions	Regularize patterns of participation, information flows, and authority.	Structure cohesion by channeling attention, authority, and information flows

Issues are a defining element of policy subsystems as reflected in Griffith’s discussion of policy whirlpools and the long tradition since then in the policy process literature of analyzing distinctive areas of policymaking and dominant problem definitions. Individual subsystems address multiple, related issues. For policy regimes, a widespread issue of concern acts as both an attention-focusing mechanism and a unifying force for regime formation. Widespread crises, problems, or other disruptions by definition garner attention of relevant actors in multiple policy subsystems and create demands for cross-subsystem responses. But as shown by May, Sapotichne and Workman (2009a), the timing and duration of shifts in attention to new dimensions of a problem differs according to the degree that affected subsystems were previously attending to aspects of the relevant problems. In addition, the problem may be defined differently among relevant subsystems. The definition of “the problem” for any given issue that spans multiple areas of policy making is inevitably interpreted through the lenses of particular subsystems. For example, the threat of terrorism looks different to those who are concerned with public health than those who are concerned with domestic security.

A key notion advanced in scholarship about policymaking is that ideas matter for fashioning a common understanding of policy purpose (see Blyth, 2003; Lieberman, 2002;

Menahem, 2008). Policymakers embrace particular ideas about differing problems and objectives to construct what Deborah Stone (1989, p. 282) labels as a causal story in “attributing cause, blame, and responsibility.” In this way, ideas provide linkages between problems and policymaking solutions. Baumgartner and Jones (1993, p. 7) suggest that such policy images, based on a “powerful idea,” provides one basis for the monopolization of a given policy subsystem.

Ideas are also central ingredients of policy regimes in that coalescence of actors in different subsystems around an idea serves as a central motivating purpose or goal. This provides the foundation for parallel engagement of elements subsystems, regardless of the degree of agreement about the dimensions of a given problem. We suggest ideas serve as the organizing principle for integrating actions across subsystems—the glue of the regime. Ideas can be powerful in this regard as was the case for the common goal of “pollution abatement” as a rallying point for various federal and state environmental protection efforts in the 1970s and 1980s. But, the motivating ideas can also be weak. Daniel Moynihan’s study of the War on Poverty (1969) shows the central motivating concept of community action was not well understood even among those who crafted the idea.

The involvement of different interests is a central consideration for the depiction of consensus or conflict within policy subsystems (see Weible, 2008). McCool (1990) argues the political viability of a subsystem is dependent on the degree of engagement of supportive interests. Worsham (1998) refers to the fragility of interest support within subsystems as “wavering equilibriums” that can take on a variety of forms depending on the nature of interest group conflict.

Interests also play a powerful role in the formation and strength of policy regimes. Regimes need at least tacit approval of the governed, what Margaret Levi labels “contingent consent,” in order to achieve legitimacy (1997, pp. 17-21). Scholars who study urban regimes argue that such support is central to establishing the governing capacity of a regime. For

example, Gerry Stoker's "iron law" of urban regimes (1995, p. 61) holds the viability of a regime is dependent upon a mobilization of interests that is commensurate with the regime's main policy agenda (also see C. Stone, 1989, p. 21). For policy regimes, the bases of support are in principle derived from the affected interests. But, relevant stakeholders may or may not have the same sense of urgency and the same degree of "buy in" to the shared purpose of a policy regime. We generalize from this in highlighting the potential for and necessity of interest realignments across subsystems in support of emergent policy regimes. In short, the interests that undergird the elements of the policy subsystems that comprise a given policy regime have the potential to either reinforce or pull apart the emerging cohesion.

We do not explicitly include beliefs as a feature of subsystems or of policy regimes, although they are relevant to each. In developing the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993, pp. 29-34) argue that the differing beliefs of coalitions of actors within subsystems establish the degree of polarization of a subsystem and the potential for change. However, beliefs are not posited under the ACF as a defining feature of subsystems.² We suggest that beliefs, as defined under the ACF, help establish the degree to which various coalitions of interests endorse the goals or central purpose of a given regime. The central purpose, as reflected in the central idea behind the regime, is a defining feature of a regime. The extent of support for that idea is based in part on the degree to which the idea resonates with the core and policy beliefs of various actors within the regime.

Institutions, usually defined in terms of dominant congressional committees and associated governmental bureaus, are central conduits for the flow of information and policymaking activity within a subsystem. Baumgartner and Jones (1993, p. 7) label this as a "definable institutional structure" that regularizes policymaking and provides the basis for a "structure-induced" equilibrium in policymaking. These institutional features are typically considered to be the defining elements of a subsystem. Given this, policy process scholars focus on the policymaking activities of congressional committees when studying subsystem dynamics.

Perhaps the least understood aspect of regime formation is the role of institutions. Our perspective is straight forward in suggesting that institutionally-imposed cohesion serves as a potential unifying force across policy subsystems just as structure-induced equilibriums add stability to policy subsystems. The institutional cohesion for governing beyond subsystems is provided by institutional designs that structure authority, attention, information flows, and relationships in support of a policy regime.³ There is no single institutional design that accomplishes these purposes as much depends on the nature of the prior interest relationships and power of the coalescing idea. As suggested by Lieberman (2002), institutions—rules, norms, and organizations—interact with ideas and interests in order to achieve change; they do not operate independently of them (also see Blythe, 2003).

A variety of institutional forms may be relevant for structuring cohesion. The analytic issue is the degree to which a given form fits the particular circumstances of a particular policy regime. The creation of policy czars for the War on Poverty, drug wars, and energy crises is an effort to unify policy responses across multiple subsystems. However, the limits of coordinating mechanisms and policy czars are well documented (see J. Wilson, 1989, pp. 268-274). In some instances, a dominant congressional committee could provide the necessary institutional force. As discussed by William Browne (1995), the cohesion of agriculture policy around the principle of farm development has been driven by the dominance of the House and Senate agriculture committees. Given the fragmentation of committee jurisdiction across policy subsystems, a dominant agency is more likely to be the relevant institutional force. For example, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency acted as an integrative force in getting players in different subsystems to attend to pollution abatement. The agency became the key player in the environmental subsystem as well as had varied degrees of influence within subsystems addressing agriculture, energy, environmental health, and occupational safety and health.

Policy Regimes in Practice

To develop insights regarding regime formation and change, we consider six policy regimes. These provide instructive experiences in efforts to fashion cohesive approaches to a variety of complex problems in the United States. We selected these cases with several considerations in mind. First, only issues of a boundary-spanning nature were included. This ensures consideration of cases that exemplify the cross-subsystem policy dynamics that characterize policy regimes. Second, evidence of some level of cohesion across subsystems was necessary for arguing these constitute policy regimes rather than haphazard attempts to address messy problems. Finally, cases were selected to ensure sufficient variability over the past 40-plus years. This provides some useful historical context and a basis for considering the durability of policy regimes. Our evidence about the regimes is necessarily limited as it is based on secondary accounts. Nonetheless, the illustrations are useful in showing different aspects of the emergence, strength, and durability of policy regimes.

The different policy regimes we consider are summarized in Table 3. These cover a gamut of complex issues for which we highlight particular regimes rather than the issue as a whole. The designation of relevant time periods denotes the fact that regimes can and do go out of existence. As shown in the table entries, each of the forces that we consider—issues, ideas, interests, and institutions—can be identified from secondary accounts for the illustrative regimes. In what follows, we characterize the trajectory of different policy regimes by the degree to which each of these forces either serves to reinforce or undermine cohesion in commenting about the emergence, strength, and durability of policy regimes. These cases illustrate the potential for governing across subsystems but also the inherent limitations such approaches entail.

Table 3. Illustrative Policy Regimes

Regime Era & Issue	Ideas Key Embodiments	Interests Primary Supporters	Institutions Integrative Forces	Affected Subsystems Primary and Secondary
Community Empowerment 1966 – 1974 Urban unrest	Urban renewal through decentralized planning Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966	Big city mayors, planning and public works professionals; intergovernmental lobbyists; and anti-poverty advocates	Department of Housing and Urban Development Inter-Agency Review Teams	Economic Development, Housing Education, Employment, Social Welfare, Transportation
Pollution Abatement 1969 – 1977 Environmental pollution	“End of pipe” pollution control National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act	Environmental groups and the environmental movement	WH Council on Environmental Quality Environment Protection Agency	Environment Agriculture, Health, Education, Energy, Trade
Drug Criminalization 1984 – 1994 Illegal drug use	“Zero tolerance” for illegal drug use Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986	Law enforcement agencies; state and local officials	WH Office of National Drug Control Policy Drug Enforcement Agency	Criminal Justice Defense, Education, Foreign Policy, Public Health, Social Welfare, Trade
Disability Rights 1990 – Present Discrimination of the disabled	Ensuring socio-economic independence of disabled individuals Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990	Advocacy groups for disabled children and families; conservative disability rights advocates	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Department of Justice Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Labor, US Commission on Civil Rights	Education, Employment, Housing, Public Health, Social Welfare, Transportation
Welfare Responsibility 1996 - Present Failures of income support policies	Reduced dependence through personal responsibility and work incentives Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996	Business interests; conservative think tanks; some governors and state welfare administrators	Department of Health and Human Services Department of Agriculture, Department of Housing and Urban Development	Social Welfare, Employment, Housing Agriculture, Immigration, Public Health, Social Security, Tax Policy
Homeland Security 2001 - Present Threat of terrorism	Protecting the homeland Homeland Security Act, Bioterrorism Act, USA Patriot Act, and various presidential directives	State and local first responders, health officials, and elected officials	WH Office of Homeland Security Department of Homeland Security Numerous other federal agencies	Domestic Security, Disaster Preparedness, Transportation Safety Border Protection, Food Safety, Information Security, Public Health, Technological Hazards

Notes: Regimes are arrayed in chronological order with respect to the eras that we consider.

Sources: Compiled by authors based on the following accounts concerning disability policy (Jeon & Haider-Markel, 2001); environmental pollution (Bosso, 1987; Harris & Milkis, 1989; Andrews, 1999); illegal drug use (Meier & Smith, 1994; Whitford & Yates, 2003); income support (Rogers, Beamer, & Payne, 2008, Schram and Soss 2001); threat of terrorism (May, Jochim & Sapotichne, 2009); and urban blight and unrest (Aleshire 1972, James, 1972).

Regime Emergence

What leads to the creation of policy regimes? We suggest the pressures to create policy regimes are no different than those that have been discussed in the literature for fostering agenda change, policy change, or reforms more generally. Though various policy process scholars have suggested a variety of triggers for these changes, the evolving consensus seems to point towards pathways involving crisis-driven and coalition-driven dynamics (see Cashore & Howlett, 2007; M. Jones & Jenkins-Smith, 2009). The perception of a crisis is perhaps the most powerful trigger for regime emergence. Yet, it is not a necessary condition as regimes do emerge from more endogenous forces involving coalition dynamics.

Four of our cases illustrate crisis-driven regime emergence. As discussed by James (1972), the community empowerment regime can be traced to the widely recognized failures of earlier urban renewal programs under the War on Poverty and efforts that preceded it. In the case of the pollution abatement regime of the 1970s, the growing awareness of an environmental crisis led to major policy initiatives and an emphasis on pollution abatement (as opposed to pollution prevention) that spanned subsystems addressing the environment, agriculture, health, energy, and trade policy (see Andrews, 1999, pp. 203-210). This type of evolutionary process is also evident in the emergence of the drug criminalization regime for illegal drug use in the 1980s—no single event shifted the attention of policymakers but growing salience coupled with politics that favored an emphasis on criminalization led to a broad initiative under Reagan’s “War on Drugs” (see Whitford & Yates, 2003). Though the emergence of attention to the “crisis” at hand for each these cases was slower than would be the case of a more dramatic focusing event, the perception and labeling of a crisis creates a sense of urgency for triggering desires to change existing ways of doing business. More dramatic crises trigger widespread disruptions that span multiple subsystems and in so doing, garner calls for policy action across multiple policy areas to address the problem at hand. The preminent example of this type of disruption is the terrorist attacks of

9/11 and the subsequent heightened attention to the threat of terrorism (see May, Sapotichne & Workman, 2009a).

Sometimes new approaches to problems that span multiple subsystems emerge from the less visible and more gradual dynamics involving the interplay of different advocacy coalitions. As illustrated by the emergence of disability rights and welfare responsibility regimes, broad-based coalitions effectively gained the attention of political leaders at the top levels of government and advanced their preferred policy solutions. The “hidden army” of disability rights advocates effectively broadened their coalition to include other civil rights organizations (see Griffin, 1991) and exploited support among mass publics to gain agenda access (see Sharp, 1994). Welfare reform advocates pursued a similar model of issue expansion, as conservative think tanks and Republican leaders of Congress strategically tapped escalating public outrage over welfare dependency and the lack of “personal responsibility” among welfare clients (see Hacker, 2004; Schram & Soss, 2001). This type of dynamic is suggestive of a process of coalitional conflict that spills across subsystems and as a consequence has the potential to foster cross-subsystem engagement with a broad-based issue of concern. Of the six policy regimes we consider, just two are characterized by a coalition-driven policy dynamics. This suggests that the threshold for garnering agenda access in multiple subsystems by interest groups is higher than that provided in times of crises.

Another way to think about conditions for the emergence of policy regimes is to consider examples of solutions to subsystem boundary-spanning problems that have not overcome the inertia of existing ways of doing business. Deficiencies in infrastructure, failures in food safety, the obesity epidemic, the depletion of oceans, and the persistence of poverty each constitute complex policy problems that demand solutions among elements of multiple policy subsystems. At various point in time, each has fostered perceptions of a crisis. As such, the conditions for these are ripe for the emergence of policy regimes. But, we don’t think this has occurred for these cases given that it is hard to point to a confluence of issues, ideas, interests, and institutions

that constitute meaningful policy regimes. Each has a more or less identifiable set of issues, but to varied degrees they lack a combination of core motivating ideas, sustaining interests, or facilitative institutional designs.

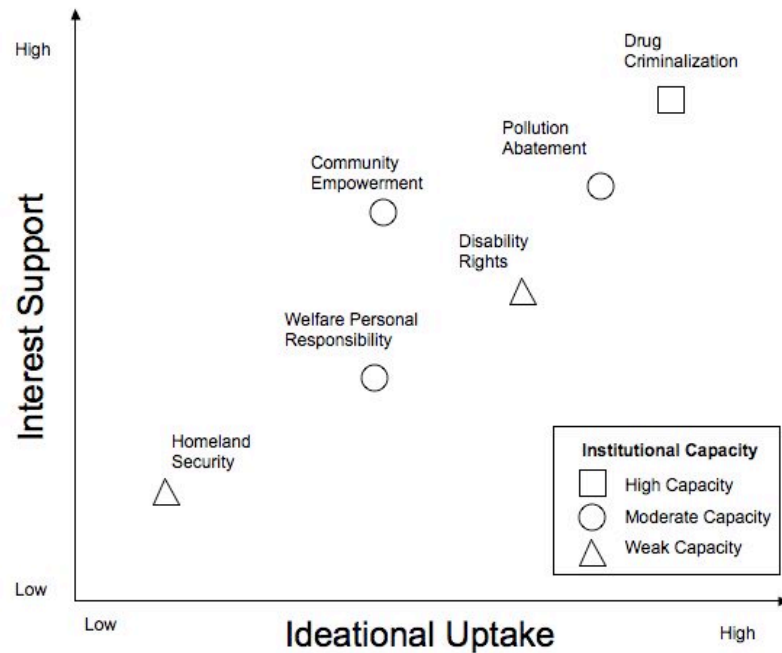
This discussion suggests we can point to the factors that establish conditions for regime formation but our knowledge of the combinations that are either necessary or sufficient for the emergence of viable regimes are yet to be articulated. The possibilities for regimes are perhaps strongest when interest groups and policy entrepreneurs are able to effectively link the perception of a crisis with their cause. But even when the barriers to regime formation are low, it takes the sustained involvement of policymakers and affected interests to ensure the regime not just emerges but is sustained.

Regime Strength

Because policy regimes span across subsystem boundaries, the barriers to emergence are high. The preceding discussion suggests a threshold for the creation of a minimally viable policy regime. We further suggest that the threshold is not fixed as it may be lowered in times of crisis or more flexible if the boundaries of relevant subsystems are permeable. Regardless of these circumstances, the inertial forces that limit the viability of a regime also limit the strength of a regime. We conceptualize strength broadly as the ability of a given regime to bring about the desired unification of action across subsystems. Note, however, that strong regimes are not necessarily desirable regimes in the sense that they constitute better policy. Nor do strong regimes necessarily constitute durable regimes in the sense that they have longer lives.

We posit that the strength of a regime is a function of the interaction of the ideas, interests, and institutions that undergird a given regime. Issues are relevant in providing an impetus for action, but it is these other features that provide the glue that binds the elements of a regime. Like any glue, the cohesion it provides can be weak or strong and its strength can vary over time as the regime is subjected to various challenges. The degree of “ideational uptake” reflects the extent to which both those actors within the regime and others embrace the core idea

that serves as a motivating purpose. The purpose is hollow if it is not understood or embraced. Interest support provides the energy behind a regime and the ability to overcome the criticisms of detractors. Energy is provided by the mobilization of interests while conflict undermines it. Institutional designs address the governing capacity of regime in focusing attention and resources to the purposes of the regime.



Source: Constructed by authors on the basis of secondary accounts.

Figure 1. Strength of Policy Regimes

Figure 1 portrays our sense of the strength of the six policy regimes we consider based on our evaluation of the degree of ideational uptake, interest support, and governing capacity of each regime. For those regimes that are no longer in existence, we gauge their strength at the time that the regime was in place. The placement of each is necessarily impressionistic as informed by our reading of secondary sources. The strongest regimes we consider are drug criminalization, community empowerment, and pollution abatement. Each is characterized by a high degree of interest support, engagement with key ideas, and moderate to high institutional capacity. The

regimes for disability rights and welfare responsibility are somewhat weaker with the homeland security regime being the weakest.

A central motivating idea provides the foundation for parallel engagement of subsystems. This foundation can be strong, as in the case of the drug criminalization regime of the 1980s, or it can be weak, as illustrated by the homeland security regime of present. In the former case, ideas around “zero tolerance” and criminalization were seductively simple and powerfully attractive to a core constituency. Presidential pronouncements about the “zero tolerance” message helped reinforce shared engagement across the affected subsystems. As Whitford and Yates (2003, p. 997) write in their analysis of the drug war, “political leaders, in setting common goals, provide direction for political appointees struggling to identify their agency’s critical tasks.” In contrast, the homeland security regime is characterized by the vague idea of “protecting the homeland” that, as shown by May, Jochim, and Sapotichne (2009), has been subject to shifting definitions by political leaders and not been widely embraced by players within the regime.

Most of the regimes we consider fall between these two extremes in their degree of ideational uptake. The legal recognition of disability rights provided a milestone for disabled groups, but the ideational uptake of these rights has been limited by their peripheral status in many of affected subsystems that have placed greater emphasis on rehabilitation and income support (see Jeon & Haider-Markel, 2001). The notions of decentralized planning that were at the core of the community empowerment regime of the 1960s were welcomed by urban mayors. But as discussed by Aleshire (1972), the enthusiasm waned as mayors reacted to federal restrictions and encountered delays in implementing urban programs. Conflict over guiding principles can also be a source of weak engagement with core ideas, as illustrated by the welfare responsibility regime. Here, noteworthy numbers of welfare workers and state and local policymakers have rejected the basic premise of “personal responsibility” as antithetical to the needs of welfare clients (see Meyers, Glaser & MacDonald, 1998). This fractured engagement has weakened the degree of consensus about the linchpin of the welfare responsibility regime. In

each of these cases, the sense of shared purpose and the cohesion it provides in setting a common direction were undermined.

Political support offered by affected interests provides the energy behind a regime and ties across subsystems that are fostered by a wider community of interest than is found within individual subsystems. The drug criminalization, pollution abatement, and community empowerment regimes each were successful in mobilizing supportive constituencies that cross-cut multiple subsystems among law enforcement officials, urban mayors, and environmental groups respectively. Though each of these regimes had detractors, the powerful forces behind each and their ties to political power provided a basis for warding off opposition at least initially (see Andrews, 1999, pp. 238-239 for pollution abatement; James, 1972 for community empowerment; Meier & Smith, 1994; and Miller, 2006 for drug criminalization). Sometimes interest support is driven less by organized groups and instead by more partisan political coalitions. Though these forces can be powerful, as in the case of the welfare responsibility regime, they are necessarily more transitory in nature given that issues fade off the macropolitical agenda (more generally see Patashnik, 2008, pp. 168-169).

The homeland security regime illustrates the weakness of the lack of a strong constituency for a regime in showing how the differing interests that are associated with the component subsystems undermine cohesion. May, Sapotichne, and Workman (2009b) demonstrate a substantial mobilization of a variety of interests after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. But, none of these constitute a galvanizing constituency for the resultant homeland security regime. This suggests that policy regimes comprised of weak or insufficiently developed publics suffer once the limelight of the crisis that fostered a regime fades (more generally, see May, 1991).

The capacity of coordinative institutions to structure authority, attention, and information flows in support of a regime also contributes to the strength of a regime. Weak, highly fragmented institutional designs are less likely to provide the coordinative structure necessary to

govern. For example, the institutions that are involved in the disability rights regime are fragmented across multiple bureaucratic agencies and congressional committees. This fractured institutional framework has been less effective at coordinating various aspects of discrimination that span employment, education, housing, and transportation. Similarly, the highly decentralized approach to administering the welfare regime has dissipated the energy behind the reform as different subnational actors put their stamp on the regime (see Howard, 1999). At the same time, highly centralized institutions are not necessarily more effective at building regime strength. In the case of homeland security, the Department of Homeland Security has proven to be institutionally weak and buffeted by competition from powerful bureaucratic counterweights.

The lesson from these examples is that the appropriate institutional design should neither be so fractured as to render coordination impossible nor so centralized that mission and purpose become muddled. The institutional capacity created with the Environmental Protection Agency in the pollution abatement regime avoided these pitfalls in that it became the “gorilla in the closet,” to use Andrew’s (1999, pp. 229-231) characterization, in influencing the actions of other players in subsystems addressing agriculture, health, and energy. That capacity, however, was undermined by the noteworthy challenges of bringing about coordinated actions among state and regional implementers. Decentralized institutional structures need not undermine capacity so long as the institutional design fits with other aspects of the regime. For example, the drug criminalization regime was characterized by a decentralized institutional structure but this design was shored up by powerful local and state law enforcement agencies. The arrangement of interests in support of an institutional design in this case made for a strong regime. It gained cohesion through energetic supporters and an institutional design that reinforced that energy.

In sum, the strength of a regime is based on the alignment of ideas, interests, and institutions in reinforcing the regime’s governing arrangements. Stronger regimes are effective in bringing coordination and cohesion by reinforcing a shared purpose, mobilizing efforts of key players and supporters, and focusing attention and authority among multiple subsystems in

support of a common goal. Consider an analogy where each of these elements is a leg of a three-legged policy stool with the issue of concern constituting the seat at the table. The strength of the regime is compromised by one or more weak legs.

Regime Durability

Wobbly stools are not necessarily any less durable than their reinforced counterparts, as either can go out of fashion or otherwise be tossed aside. It is interesting to note that among the examples we consider, the three strongest regimes—drug criminalization, pollution abatement, and community empowerment—are no longer in existence. Each has its descendents based on remnants of the original core ideas and supportive constituencies, but what followed are arguably less viable and visible regimes. The other, more recent examples of regimes that we consider still exist. This basic observation about the durability of the regimes we consider underscores both the fragility of regimes and the fact that longer-term durability is not necessarily related to the strength of a regime.

The durability of policy regimes is as much dependent on the broader political context as it is on the forces that shape the emergence and strength of a regime. As new political alignments take shape, the existence of some regimes may be threatened. Much depends on the ideological predispositions of political actors and the issues that dominate policy agendas. As discussed by Orren and Skowronek (1998), regimes remain vulnerable to broader shifts in the public mood and electoral replacement. These shifts in the larger political environment have real consequences for the composition of interests who have privileged access to American political institutions and, as a result, shape the coalitions that support specific policy regimes. For example, the emergence of the “pro-growth” coalition under the Reagan administration shifted the balance of power towards business and ultimately chipped away at the pollution abatement regime (Andrews, 1999, pp. 256-261).

Sometimes the seeds of destruction are sown within the regime itself. Coalitions that support regimes may fracture. In the case of the community empowerment regime of the 1960s,

the loss of support from big city mayors led to the collapse of the coalition that supported the regime (see Kettl, 1979). These dynamics parallel those discussed by policy scholars in theorizing on the durability of policy reforms and highlight the importance of interest group feedback mechanisms which build supportive constituencies for reforms or regimes (see Patashnik, 2008, pp. 168-169).

Political actors that don't buy in to the guiding principles of a given regime may push alternative policy ideas when they see an opening marked by a change in governing coalitions. This type of dynamic is illustrated in the drug criminalization regime, which became weakened when new ideas emphasizing rehabilitation and treatment diminished support for the extant focus on "zero tolerance." This also occurred for the community empowerment regime with the 1972 election of Richard Nixon and his administration's emphasis on a different paradigm (new federalism and block grants) for delivering funds and services to state and local governments (see Kettl, 1979).

The rise and fall of issues on the agenda also plays a central role in understanding the durability of policy regimes. Once the urgency of crises fades from memory, new problems compete for limited political resources. Policy issues may become displaced as new problems rise on the agenda, either due to new crises or strategic actions on the part of organized groups (see Jones & Baumgartner, 2004). For example, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, key components of the homeland security regime were drawn away from the extant focus on terrorism. The forces that propel attention to an issue may fade as aspects of the problem are solved. In the absence of attention to the issue underlying a policy regime, the arrangements cease to have relevance for policymaking. For these same reasons, some regimes remain highly durable despite the apparent weaknesses in the governing arrangements. Homeland security encapsulates a highly salient issue that has been resistant to displacement. Because of the continued concern over the threat of terrorism, partisan coalitions in Congress who benefit from fermenting these concerns have provided patrician support for homeland security efforts despite

weaknesses in the regime. While the homeland security regime remains anemic, its continuing existence has not been widely questioned as evidenced by how little attention it garnered in the 2008 presidential election.

New Directions

With this contribution we have made the case for moving beyond subsystems as a primary focus for policy scholars and for the utility of thinking about policy regimes as modes for governing among subsystems. We do not expect policy scholars to jettison decades of study of the dynamics of subsystems in order to jump on a regime bandwagon. But, we hope that this synthesis has shown that the concepts and theorizing about policy subsystems and regimes are complementary. As such, development of theorizing and empirical work about policy regimes can and should contribute to broader scholarship about policy processes. We are content in exploring this niche ourselves, but welcome others to pursue the many avenues that are yet unexplored in thinking about policy regimes. In this final section, we point towards some possible directions for future theorizing and empirical work on policy regimes and the forces that underlie them.

Our discussion of policy regimes challenges theorizing on policy processes in two ways. First, we have suggested that the extant focus on policy subsystems unnecessarily limits our understanding of policymaking. The concept of a policy regime provides an alternative unit of analysis more adept at examining cross-subsystem policy dynamics. Second, policy regimes highlight the importance of considering what happens *after* major initiatives are enacted. We have revealed that the emergence of a policy regime in no way guarantees its strength or durability. Policy process scholars have largely restricted their analyses to what happens up to major shifts in policymaking, a focus that provides a skewed perspective on the dynamics of governing (see Patashnik, 2008, for a notable exception).

A host of issues arise in thinking about and attempting to examine the dynamics surrounding policy regimes. We have focused here on the broader conceptual issues and

illustrations of some of the more obvious dynamics. Practical issues arise in identifying regimes, just as they do in identifying subsystems. Both are as much constructs of policy scholars as they are building blocks of policymaking and governing. Yet, studying them requires the ability to identify their contours. As such, research about the contours of regimes is a subject that bears further attention.

We have suggested that emergence of policy regimes is driven by dynamics not unfamiliar to policy process scholars. Crises may facilitate attention to an issue by disrupting the normally stable parameters of policymaking and triggering spillovers across subsystems. The strategic actions by advocacy coalitions can also propel attention to an issue of concern regardless of the perceptions of a crisis. Garnering widespread attention to an issue is a necessary condition to regime emergence. But, what are the forces that cause issues to “diffuse” through subsystems and to what extent do these spillovers translate into viable policy regimes once the urgency of crises fade and coalitions concerned about them fracture? Whether the policy dynamics engendered by reforms originating from Congress and the president differ, as Charles Jones and Randall Strahan (1985) have suggested, has yet to be empirically examined in any detail. Existing theorizing gives us only kernels of guidance.

Clearly, not every crisis or strategic push by an advocacy coalition leads to the emergence of a policy regime. What factors interact with these considerations in influencing the emergence new governing arrangements? The permeability of subsystems provides one potential explanation for the lessening of the inertia of individual subsystems and the ability of cross-subsystem regimes to emergence and gain strength. Established institutional structures and entrenched interests provide formidable barriers to major shifts in policymaking but, as we illustrated above, these barriers are not insurmountable. An overlap of institutions and interest groups among relevant subsystems provides a starting point for fostering cohesive regimes that can be built upon by galvanizing those interests around the pursuit of a common goal. How the contours of subsystems and their attendant interests affect all of this is ripe for examination.

A final consideration that has important implications for studying the dynamics of policymaking more generally is how issues, ideas, interests, and institutions interact to produce change or reinforce the status quo. Our theorizing about policy regimes suggests that these four forces are the basic building blocks of policymaking and governing. What remains unclear is how different combinations of these attributes impact the strength and durability of policy regimes. Can powerful ideas overcome institutional fragmentation, in the absence of reorganizations, as the case of disability rights seem to illustrate? Does a high degree of conflict among interests destabilize policy regimes, making them less durable and more susceptible to lurches in focus? Can weak institutions borrow strength from established interests to build capacity? These questions merit further attention.

Throughout our discussion, we have portrayed the emergence, strength and durability of policy regimes as driven by a set of organic forces. This focus necessarily underplays the extent to which agency—the conscious decisions of political actors to institute reforms—has for these dynamics. We do not see policy regimes as tightly-constructed arrangements that are cast at a single point in time by policymakers. Nonetheless, political actors clearly play a role in the formation and evolution of policy regimes. Policymakers promote the key ideas behind regimes, establish institutional frameworks in support of coordinated activity, and help shape the forces that propel interest mobilization. Politics is the “art of arranging” (Stone 1989, p. xii) and decisions by policymakers and affected interests have real consequences for the prospects of governing beyond the boundaries of subsystems.

Notes

¹ The material in this section concerning policy regimes is based in part upon May, Jochim, and Sapotichne (2009).

² In particular, the ACF addresses the interplay of coalitions within particular subsystems (see Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, pp. 24-25).

³ We do not think of a policy regime as an institution per se. Instead, we think of institutions as either facilitating or hindering the formation and evolution of policy regimes.

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