

A Further Comment on Public Policy Model Choices

1. The Classical Democratic Model
2. Group Equilibrium Model
3. The Official Elite Model
4. Business as a Dominant Interest Group Model
5. Other Special Interest Group Models
6. Rational Models

Some models emphasize the power of political actors, others emphasize the importance of data, science and rationality. **Visualize these models as along a spectrum from power dominated decision-making to data, science and rationality-dominated decision making.**

The key for the enterprise is to understand where on this spectrum the government decision makers lie and to formulate a strategy to influence the public policy process based on that assessment. Here is some advice, based on the shortcomings of model choices by previous students.

1. To argue the **group equilibrium model**, you must cite opposing forces that form a potential equilibrium, even though you may conclude one side may dominate
2. To argue a **rational model**, you must argue that the decision making is science- and data-driven, and the various actors trying to influence the decision maker do so by submitting their best science-based and data-driven arguments, NOT by trying to exercise political power.
3. The argument for an interest group elite model means you are arguing that particular interest group dominates the public policy making process:
 - a. Business
 - b. NGOs
 - c. Experts (this is close to the purely rational model as the experts bring data and scientific expertise and presumed rationality to the decision making process (these experts could be independent (the most persuasive) or within the government, or from business or NGOs. Often competing interests will bring their experts and data to a policy decision, arguing my expert and data are better than your expert and data!
4. To argue an **official elite model** is very difficult, as you must cite evidence that the governmental decision maker is relatively immune from efforts of external actors to exert power pressures on it. This can be a good model choice, but it is not very frequent.
5. We rarely see public policy formulation that fits the **classical democratic model**.

My evaluation of your model choice will focus on your rationale for that choice. My view is that it is possible to make an argument for any model choice (or at least I could, even the democratic and official elite models!), but the question is how persuasive is the argument. Given the facts of a case and the nature of the government entity, it is simply easier and more persuasive to choose one model rather than others! So be sure you make a clear argument for your model choice.

Finally, your strategy must be consistent with your model choice (as well as with your scenario and power summary), i.e., do not argue a science-based, data-driven strategy if your model choice and power analysis suggests the political environment is power-driven! And do not argue a power-driven strategy if your model choice is data and science driven.

Characteristics of Various Public Policy Makers

You might ask, “How can I make an informed assessment of public policy models?” As always, you will find a partial answer in the facts and events of the case. But there are some generalizations which are useful as starting points:

1. **Legislative bodies** are usually best described by the group equilibrium model, because of the multiple actors around an issue and their access to legislative decision makers.
2. **Chief executives**, i.e., presidents, prime ministers, governors, mayors, etc., are highly political and rarely fit a purely rational model.
3. **Ministries** are the hardest to generalize about; a lot depends on the nature of the ministry.
4. **Regulatory commissions and agencies** are also difficult to generalize about, but there are some guides:
 - a. If the nature of their mandate is highly scientific and requires data and scientific experts, they will tend toward rational or expert elites models.
 - b. If the nature of their mandate is focused on issues which are easily politicized and subject to pressure by actors seeking a self-interested outcome, or an outcome for a group for whom they are speaking, e.g., an NGO representing endangered animals or forests, the power of actors is prominent in determining how decisions will be made in these agencies.

