Policy Regime Perspectives:
Policies and Governing

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Abstract

We call on policy scholars to take seriously the role of policies as governing instruments and to consider more fully the factors that shape their political impacts. We suggest the lens provided by regime perspectives is a useful way for advancing the understanding of these considerations. As a descriptive undertaking, the regime lens can be used to construct a conceptual map that considers the forces that are involved in addressing policy problems—the contours of a given policy regime. As an analytic lens, regime perspectives can be used to understand how and with what effect policies set in place feedback processes that shape policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability. Together, these provide new insights into policy implementation and the interplay of policy and politics in governing.

Introduction

Public policies do more than provide benefits, regulate harms, or deliver services. They shape politics by allocating winners and losers, by sending signals about who is deserving and undeserving, and by setting in place feedback processes that affect political participation and future policy demands. Policies also contain a set of political commitments that reify the majority enactors' view of the purposes of government. In serving both substantive and political purposes, public policies are key components of governing.

The role of policies in governing has long been recognized as important for the study of public policy. Consideration of this was central to Lasswell's (1951) vision of the policy sciences in improving democratic governance (see DeLeon, 2008). The received wisdom of an august group of American political scientists, convened in the mid-1960s under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council, was that the "improved understanding of policy outcomes" should include attention to "the impact of public policies on the political system's environment and on the system itself" (Ranney, 1968, p. 14). In keeping with Lowi's (1972) precept that policies beget politics, scholars have long sought to identify how the content of different policies shapes political dynamics. Those efforts, including typologies developed by Froman (1968), Lowi (1964, 1972), Salisbury (1968), and Wilson (1995, pp. 327-337), have provided important insights regarding the role public policies play in governing.

More recent scholarship has extended theorizing about the policy-politics connection through considerations of policy feedback effects on citizens and interest groups (see Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Mettler & Soss, 2004). These feedback effects, in turn, affect the durability of policies (see Patashnik, 2008). The study of public policy in the American political development tradition provides additional considerations of how "public policies can reconfigure politics" (Pierson, 2005, p. 37) with an emphasis on the broader realignment of social and political power after critical junctures in policy development.

These considerations remind us that policymaking is a political enterprise and that policies provide the currency for governing in democratic systems. Looking at policies in this way underscores the point that governing entails far more than enacting policies and watching the chips fall as they may. Much rests after policy enactment on how policymakers and others advance the ideas that are central to a given policy approach, how institutional arrangements reinforce policy cohesion, and whether the approach engenders support or opposition among concerned interests. All of this calls attention to the need for improved understanding of the role of policies as governing instruments and the political impact of policies.

We argue the lens provided by regime perspectives provides a basis for garnering these understandings and advances theorizing about policy processes. Although the specifics differ, regime perspectives have fruitfully been used to examine governing arrangements in cities (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001; Stone, 1989), nations (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Kitschelt, 1992), and international arenas (Krasner, 1983; Kratowhil & Ruggie, 1986; Martin & Simmons, 1998). In broad terms, regime perspectives provide a lens for considering the interplay of ideas, interests and institutions. As a descriptive lens, regime perspectives enable a backward mapping of governing arrangements for a given policy problem—identifying the contours a policy regime. As an analytic lens, regime perspectives reveal how public policies set in place feedback processes that reshape the political environment.

In helping to illuminate these feedback processes, the regime lens contributes to an expanded notion of policy implementation. Central to this is the role of politics in shaping how policies evolve during implementation. Most of the literature views politics as an obstacle for implementation. In constrast, the regime lens reveals how politics can improve implementation prospects by enhancing policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability. This interplay of policy and politics reinvigorates the notion of policy implementation as policy evolution.

We develop our arguments about the value of the policy regime lens in several stages. We first offer a conceptualization of a policy regime. We then turn to consideration of policy

regimes and governing. This leads to consideration of feedback effects and the role of policy

regimes in mediating policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability. We next turn to consideration

of practical issues in studying policy regimes and examples of the governance of complex

problems. We conclude by addressing the relevance of the regime lens to policy theory and a set

of issues for future research. Our primary focus is national-level policymaking in the United

States for which we discuss implications for other settings as issues for further research.

Policy Regimes as Governing Arrangements

The label policy regime has been widely employed in the policy literature, but the

concept remains under-conceptualized. The term has been mainly used to depict the approach

that is being used to address a problem or set of problems. Thus, for example, the label policy

regime has been used to depict particular policy strategies (see McGuinn, 2006; Rodgers, Beamer

& Payne, 2008; Sheingate, 2009, C. Wilson, 2000; Weaver, 2010), different forms of regulation

(see Eisner, 2000; Harris & Milkis, 1989), different implementation approaches (see Stoker,

1991), and different logics for policy design (Howlett, 2009). These uses suggest the notion of

addressing problems is central to the concept, but what that constitutes is elusive.

We conceptualize policy regimes as the governing arrangements for addressing policy

problems. As suggested by others who have written about international regimes (see Martin &

Simmons, 1998, pp. 752-53), governing arrangements can be broadly construed to include

authoritative actions (executive orders, statues, rules), institutional arrangements, interest

alignments, and shared ideas. As with other constructs in the policy literature such as action

arenas, subsystems, and policy windows, one does not directly observe a policy regime. Instead,

one observes its components. These are the ideas, institutional arrangements, and interest

alignments that constitute a given policy regime.

The value of the construct is both descriptive and analytic. As a descriptive construct, the

notion of a policy regime is useful in providing a conceptual map of the governing arrangements

for addressing a given problem or set of problems. This is akin to an urban scholar describing the

makeup of an urban regime for a city with respect to economic interests, institutional structures, and goals in governing the city (see Stone, 1989). The analytic contributions of regime perspectives reveal how public policies set in place feedback processes that reshape the political environment and, in turn, affect the efficacy of public policy. These considerations parallel the use of notions about urban regime theory to analyze the strength and durability of an urban regime.

The policy regime lens can be applied to different levels, mixes, and boundaries of problems. This includes "boundary spanning regimes" that we have discussed as a "governing arrangement that spans multiple subsystems and fosters integrative policies" (Jochim & May, 2010, p. 303). As well, the policy regime lens is applicable to the analysis of major policy reforms comprised of policies that build upon each other over time. For example, the pollution abatement regime of the 1970s entailed several reinforcing laws dealing with pollution problems—the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Clean Water Act of 1972, the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976.

The policy regime lens can also be applied in analyzing governing arrangements for dispersed problems that lack comprehensive efforts to address them. Numerous examples exist that take on different contours in their governing arrangements. One is the bifurcated approach to food safety that has been resulted from incremental and disjointed policymaking by legislation and Presidential executive orders (see Becker & Porter, 2007). A second example is the problem of childhood obesity and the responses of states and localities to the issue, which together constitute a loosely-connected policy regime that shares common policy ideas but no binding institutional structure (see Kersh, 2009). For each of these examples, the policy regime lens provides greater traction for analyzing governing arrangements than existing policy theory.

The policy regime lens entails different thinking about the unit of analysis for studying policies. Rather than starting with a policy, one starts with a particular set of problems—crime,

environmental harms, illegal immigration, terrorism, and so on—and seeks to depict the ideas, institutions, and interests that constitute the governing arrangements for dealing with the problem. In this manner, the breadth of the policy regime is largely determined by the boundaries that one establishes in conceptualizing the problem or set of problems. Just as problems are nested and inter-linked, so are policy regimes (see Keohane & Victor, 2011). As a consequence, policy regimes can be narrowly or broadly construed.

Policy regimes can be envisioned for any set of problems for which there has been authoritative actions at some level of government. The policies that address a given problem set forth the course of intended actions. In addition, policies specify a set of intentions or goals, specify a mix of instruments for accomplishing the intentions, and structure implementation. The important point from a regime perspective is the multiplicity of policies that typically impinge on a given set of problems. Starting with problems, rather than policies per se, allows for consideration of the various combination of multiple laws, rules, and administrative actions that together constitute relevant governing arrangements. Those arrangements may be highly disjointed across states or localities, piecemeal in addressing only part of the problem, or a layering of new provisions on top of old ones. In many such instances the policy regimes will be nascent or otherwise ill formed. Nonetheless, a regime exists if only in an anemic form.

Only when no authoritative actions to address a problem have been taken do we suggest the concept of a policy regime is inappropriate. Although regime perspectives are generally applicable to private actions that address collective problems, we do not explicitly consider here such things as voluntary regulatory regimes under which commitments with collective benefits are enforced through industry accords (see Prakash & Potoski, 2012).

Given the broad applicability of the policy regime lens, there is potential for variation in how scholars depict and analyze different policy regimes. Because of different depictions of problem boundaries and governing arrangements, some will depict a given regime as narrowly bounded while others will depict more expansive boundaries. We do not see this as a problem

per se with the concept of a policy regime or with employing regime perspectives. This variation is no different than different depictions of subsystems boundaries, the opening of policy windows, the contours of an action arena, or other constructs employed in theorizing about policy processes. As noted by Nohrstedt and Weible (2010, p. 7) in considering this issue for subsystems: "Subsystem boundaries are artificial constructs and do not represent firm demarcations like jurisdictional lines on a map." The test of the value of the depiction of a policy regime, as with other constructs in the policy literature, is not the particular construction but the insights provided by that construction.

Policy Regimes and Feedback

Public policies deliver benefits, regulate activities, redistribute resources, and impose burdens. These outcomes engender short-term political feedback in terms of target group responses to policy effects (see Schneider and Ingram, 1997, pp. 140-145) and longer-term political impacts with respect to the empowerment of groups (see Mettler & Soss, 2004). These reactions are mediated by the perceptions of the core ideas behind the policies, the experience with the institutions that deliver the policies, and the images put forth by the interests that support or oppose the policies. In other words, policy regimes can profoundly shape how and to what extent policies have political impacts.

Sometimes, policy feedback enhances policymaking and implementation by reducing conflict over policy ideas by mobilizing key supporters and undermining potential opponents. This was certainly the case with the Social Security program, which went from being strongly contested on ideological terms to being embraced by ideologues across the spectrum (see Campbell, 2005). Other times, policy feedback makes policymaking and implementation more difficult by activating turf wars and putting competing political interests into conflict. This has been the case in energy policy where efforts to form comprehensive energy policy have been frustrated repeatedly, even in the wake of crises that usually serve as powerful focusing events (see Ostrander & Lowry, 2012).

Considering how elements of a given policy regime work more or less in accord brings new insights into how feedback effects take shape and influence the political environment from which they originated. We suggest these influences depend on the strength of a given regime. This can be conceptualized as the degree to which a regime reinforces the political commitments made by policymakers in addressing a given problem. Regime strength is particularly relevant because governing is about securing and sustaining political commitments. Strong regimes reinforce political commitments by advancing a shared sense of purpose, establishing institutional arrangements that focus attention on relevant policy goals, and engaging a supportive constituency. These aspects of regimes give political life to policies and shape whether a given approach to addressing a set of problems is perceived as legitimate (or not), advances a coherent set of ideas (or is fragmented), and is durable and able to sustain commitments beyond that of the initial policy enactments (or fleeting). These feedback effects have the potential to profoundly shape politics. As well, they have important implications for implementation prospects and the efficacy of public policies.

All of this is to suggest that the lens provided by regime perspectives is useful for theorizing about key political impacts of policies. The propositions that follow suggest how the strength of a regime affects policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability. Given that the strength of a regime cannot be directly observed, we develop the propositions with respect to the role of different elements of regimes. Further development of the propositions requires greater specification of the underlying causal mechanisms for each element.

Policy Legitimacy

Policy legitimacy can be though of as the acceptance by the governed of the goals and approach for resolving problems, recognizing that there is virtually never full agreement. At a basic level, as summarized by Tyler (2006, pg. 375), "legitimacy is a psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just." Central to policy legitimacy is that the commitments made by

political actors are appropriate and just. The perception of these is based on the evaluation of policymaking authority (their political legitimacy and of the process of policymaking) and of the need for and viability of the designated courses of action.

P1. Stronger policy regimes foster greater levels of policy legitimacy.

Perceptions of the degree of policy legitimacy are shaped by assessments of the strength of the ideas behind a regime, the authority of the institutions that are involved, and the interest support for a regime. Stronger regimes enhance policy legitimacy with ideas that are widely accepted, institutional arrangements that embody those ideas, and interest support that outweighs opposition. Because these are not necessary uniformly present, a regime may have contentious legitimacy.

Consider the continued debate over the social safety net and welfare reform. The idea of personal responsibility proved to be a politically powerful notion that formed the center-point of major reform of welfare under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (see Hacker, 2004; Schram & Soss, 2001). The grand bargain struck at that time and the political commitments it entailed have been reinforced in the decade and a half that has followed. This is because of self-reinforcing feedback processes around the reform that, following Hacker (2004, p. 247), established a seductively simple and powerful set of principles for welfare programs, put in place a more or less stable constituency that continued to support the reform, and established operating procedures that institutionalized the basic principles while marginalizing competing perspectives and interests.

Policy Coherence

Policy coherence can be thought of as the consistency of actions in addressing a given set of policy problems or target groups. As pointed out by Schneider and Ingram (1997, pp. 140-145), a lack of policy coherence sends confusing messages to potential targets—children, the elderly, women, and so on—about the importance of their concerns. Given the fragmentation of policymaking in the United States, disjointed efforts are the norm rather than the exception. As a

consequence, discussions of policy topics almost inevitably engender complaints about inconsistencies within a given policy area.

P2. Stronger policy regimes foster greater policy coherence.

Policy coherence is strengthened with a common sense of purpose that is propelled by a powerful rationale, institutional structures that work together toward that purpose, and interest support that provides a constituency that helps to provide energy for consistent actions in addressing a given set of problems. The key issues are the strength of the ideas that propel shared understanding of a problem, the degree to which supportive interests share and embrace those ideas as a common purpose, and the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements and implementing structures at reinforcing this focus. A common purpose serves as a key mechanism for propelling consistent actions by key policy implementors. When they are "on the same page," they will by definition be more likely to pursue actions that work toward common ends. Recognition of this leaves open the possibilities for regimes enhancing the "coordination problem" that is posed by disjointed implementation.

Although much of the public management literature prescribes remedies for this problem that involves organizational reforms such as policy czars or governmental reorganizations, there are other routes for enhancing coordination. In particular, policy coherence can be engendered by policy regimes that that bind interests and institutions to shared goals and actions. May, Sapotichne and Workman (2006) empirically show this for a number of issue areas that at first glance would appear to have fragmented solutions. In studying how coordination can be achieved despite fragmented implementation structures, Chisholm (1989) shows that consistent actions are less likely to come from formal coordination mechanisms than from relevant actors' sense of a shared fate and commitment to common policy goals.

Vague ideas defeat policy coherence and undermine implementation success as relevant implementers reinterpret fuzzy mandates to meet their goals (see Bardach, 1977, pp. 85-97). Daniel Moynihan's (1969) study of the War on Poverty shows the central motivating concept of

community action was not well understood even among those who crafted the idea. The title of his landmark book, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, encapsulates the uncertainties that surrounded the core notion of community action. The War on Poverty and community action was held together by the flow of funds, rather than the integrative power of a strong sense of shared purpose.

Policy Durability

The durability of policy can be thought of as the sustainability of political commitments over time. As noted by Patashnik (2008, p. 4), the concept is more basic than whether a law is amended at some future point. It reflects the longevity of political commitments for addressing a given set of problems. Policies clearly evolve over time as more is learned about improving administrative arrangements and as new demands arise to expand or modify benefits. As long as the basic objectives and means remain unaltered, keeping the principal commitments in place, policies can be said to be durable. It is the "strategic retreat on objectives," to use the phrase coined by Aaron Wildavsky (1979), involving altered preferences and political commitments that signals a loss of policy durability.

P3. Stronger policy regimes are (generally) more durable, but few are invariant to disruptive forces.

Almost by definition stronger policy regimes are more durable than weaker regimes. After all, they have greater political legitimacy and stronger bases of support. Key components of durability are the path dependence of institutional structures and funding that are put in place, and the interest support that works to hold overseers accountable and resist efforts to weaken policy implementation. Consider, for example, the "hidden army" of disability rights advocates who proved to be critical to the enactment and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (see Griffin, 1991). Or, the set of interlocking federal, state and local enforcement agencies supported by federal funding and asset seizures that have been critical to sustaining the War on Drugs (Meier & Smith, 1994).

Policies that fail to achieve their public purpose or that have negative, unintended side effects can undermine the regime by turning supporters into opponents. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 fundamentally reshaped federal education policy resulting in more testing for students, more accountability for schools and teachers, and more choice for parents. Yet, rather than empowering reform-minded advocates in education, the feedback effects were largely negative with many of the policy's chief supporters later advocating a federal retreat from the education reform. The political falling out over education reform has many sources. Sunderman and Kim (2007) cite inadequate funding and weak state capacity for implementation. Howell, Peterson, and Hess (2008) note the lack of public support for accountability systems. The changing politics of education illustrates how policy regimes and the durability of policy commitments are intertwined.

Sometimes, policy regimes fail to generate positive feedback effects. As discussed by Patashnik and Zelizer (2010), this occurs when weak policy designs distribute benefits and costs in an unobservable fashion and institutional supports for implementation are inadequate or conflicting. Without concentrated benefits, policies fail to generate strong advocates and at best become hinged on the support of broad governing coalitions. This was the case with the Tax Reform Act of 1986 (see Patashnik, 2008, pp. 50-52).

The durability of policy regimes is as much dependent on the broader political context as it is on the forces that shape their emergence and strength. Orren and Skowronek (1998) observe that the existence of some regimes may be threatened as new political alignments take shape. These shifts may come from the larger political environment or sometimes the seeds of destruction are sown within the regime itself. New coalitions may emerge that no longer support existing policy regimes or coalitions that support regimes may fracture. Such changes have real consequences for the composition of interests who have privileged access to American political institutions and, as a result, shape the support for specific policy regimes.

Depicting and Analyzing Policy Regimes

We have suggested regime perspectives can be used to depict governing arrangements and analyze the political effects of policies. The contours of a given regime can be depicted with respect to constellation of the three forces that comprise a regime: ideas, institutional arrangements, and interests. The relevance of each of these to policy regimes is summarized in Table 1 along with questions to consider when analyzing the strength of each factor.

Ideas: The Glue of a Policy Regime

Ideas—"affordable care," "economic security," "personal responsibility," "zero tolerance," and the like—matter in fashioning a common understanding of policy purpose (see Blyth, 2003; Lieberman, 2002; Menahem, 2008). These serve as the currency for debate about political commitments as policymakers embrace particular ideas as foundations for policy. In terms of governing arrangements, ideas are important because they provide direction for governing and serve as organizing principles. The shared commitments and understandings that are represented by powerful ideas serve as integrative forces—the glue of a policy regime. If the ideas are not understood due to their vagueness, or are not endorsed, the glue for holding the regime together is weak.

The identification of a core idea, as a governing principle, is an important element in depicting a given policy regime. Analysis of policy ideas entails consideration of whether the core idea of a regime has the support of key participants, how meaningful it is, and if political leaders, interest groups and others have reinforced it.

Table 1. Regime Perspectives

Regime Perspectives		
Concepts	**Relevance**	**Analytic questions**
Ideas "Affordable Care" "Economic Security" "Personal Responsibility"	Shared commitments concerning policy purpose. Provides the glue of a regime.	What is the core idea? How meaningful is it? Is it endorsed by key actors who must carry out policies? Has it been reinforced it through statements and actions of policymakers and policy entrepreneurs?
Institutional Arrangements Policy implementation structures Institutional collective action mechanisms Collaborative governance mechanisms	Institutional design that structures authority, attention, information, and organizational relationships. Fosters structure-induced cohesion for a regime.	What is the institutional design? Does the institutional design channel attention, information, and relationships in support of policy goals? Does the institutional design establish linkages among relevant implementing authorities? Does bureaucratic competition undermine structure-induced cohesion?
Interests Interest organizations, advocacy coalitions, identity groups, citizens	Constituencies that provide interest support and opposition. Establishes the governing capacity of a regime.	What are the on-going sources of interest support and opposition to the regime? How do these differ in their power for supporting or opposing the regime? Is there substantial backlash against the regime? Does the policy regime engender feedback mechanisms that have the potential to reshape interest alignments?

Institutional Arrangements: Structure-induced Cohesion

Institutional arrangements structure authority, attention, information flows, and relationships in addressing policy problems. Policies set forth implementation structures and institutional designs for addressing a given set of problems. These may consist of the designation of governmental or non-governmental entities that are charged with implementing a policy, or the creation of new entities. The institutional design may rely on various mechanisms for addressing institutional collective action problems such as coordinating authorities, intergovernmental and other partnerships, networks of private and public entities, and contractual relationships. As well, the institutional design may establish related mechanisms for collaborative governance such as oversight entities, designated categories of representation of interests for oversight, specified public engagement mechanisms, and shared management structures.

A key challenge for depicting policy regimes is capturing both the formal and informal aspects (e.g., power relationships, bureaucratic barriers) of the institutional arrangements. In this respect, one can think of the regime as it looks "on paper" and as it works in practice. As has been documented in the literature on organizational attention (see Arrow, 1974, pp. 33-43; March & Olsen, 1983; May, Workman & Jones, 2008), the mere designation of roles and responsibilities is insufficient for focusing attention, establishing desired information flows, and building organizational relationships in support of a policy.

The analytic issue from a regime perspective is the degree to which the institutional arrangements induce cohesion. Two key issues loom for assessing cohesion. One is the extent to which the institutional design channels attention, information, and organizational relationships in support of policy goals. The second is the extent to which the institutional design establishes meaningful linkages among relevant implementing authorities.

The creation of policy czars for the War on Poverty, drug wars, and energy crises is an effort to unify policy responses across multiple agencies. However, the limits of coordinating mechanisms and policy czars are well documented (see J. Wilson, 1989, pp. 268-274). A

dominant agency, sometimes crafted through reorganization, can be a mechanism for inducing

cohesion. The creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, for example, acted as an

integrative force in both molding a new agency and in getting players in different governmental

agencies to attend to pollution abatement. As discussed by Guy Peters (1998), attaining cohesion

is more challenging, given the coordination issues involved, for network-based governing

structures. Much, as summarized by O'Toole (2003), rests on the networks of actors that

comprise the regime and their willingness and ability to attend to shared commitments.

Also relevant is the degree of bureaucratic competition and the exercise of veto points,

both of which can undermine institutionally-induced cohesion. Addressing a given set of

problems becomes a shared undertaking as the fate of institutional actors are linked as a result of

their common connections and shared sense of purpose (see Grant & MacNamara, 1995).

Institutional conflict is more likely to arise when attention to problems is parceled out among less

interdependent organizations. This is because actors in competing organizations attempt to

redefine the solutions to fit their purview (see Bardach, 1977, pp. 85-97). In this way,

jurisdictional competition within the bureaucracy acts as a disintegrative force for a policy regime

as loosely-linked organizations pull in different directions (see Nicholson-Crotty, 2005).

Interests: Governing Capacity

Scholars who study urban regimes argue that interest support helps to establish the

governing capacity of a regime (see G. Stoker, 1995, p. 6; Stone, 1989, p. 21). American political

development scholars argue that new regimes are sustained 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."

From these perspectives, a basic issue in characterizing a policy regime is depicting the source and degree of interest support for and opposition to the relevant policies after policy enactment. The bases of support are in principle derived from the affected beneficiaries. But, relevant stakeholders may or may not have the same sense of urgency and the same degree of "buy in" to the purpose of a policy regime as the case of health care reform under the Obama administration so vividly illustrates. As documented by scholars who study policy feedback (see Patashnik, 2008, 29-33), experience with policies can lead to interest-based backlash that dissipates or destroys the energy behind a regime.

In some instances policy options are fashioned in what appears to be apolitical environments for which publics surrounding issues are neither extensive nor a source of major conflict (see May, 1991). This typically arises for public goods or bads such as addressing the problems of declining ocean health and dealing with potential catastrophic disasters. For such situations, a key issue in depicting the relevant regime is whether the policies have been effective in mobilizing and engaging constituencies. Steps to accomplish this are sometimes explicit elements of the policy approach. The federal government's planning-partnership approach to protecting the nation's critical infrastructures is an example. The national federal planning-partnership efforts seek to foster communities of interest that will pursue common sets of solutions for risk reduction among hundreds of thousands of organizations across 18 different industry sectors (see May & Koski, 2013).

Identifying and Studying Regimes—Two Examples

As we suggest above, the regime lens entails different thinking about the unit of analysis for studying policies. Rather than starting with a policy, one starts with a particular set of problems and seeks to depict ideas, institutional arrangements, and interests that constitute the governing arrangements for dealing with the problem. Analysis of these provides a basis for evaluating the strength of a regime and the implications for policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability. The approach to depicting a given regime rests on characterizing the elements that

comprise a regime —the central idea that constitutes its purpose, the institutional arrangements that structure the regime, and the interests that comprise the bases of support and opposition. As depicted in the last column of Table 1, the key analytic questions for depicting and analyzing a given regime revolve around the characterization and strength of each of these elements.

One clearly needs to have a firm understanding of the issues and relevant policies for depicting the governing arrangements for addressing a given problem. As we note above, the breadth of a policy regime is largely determined by the boundaries that one establishes in conceptualizing the problem or set of problems. This is a choice that rests on how broadly one wants to consider the problem. Given the designation of the problem, one considers the relevant policies—as specified in laws, rules, and administrative actions—at the scale (national, state and local, or both) that one chooses for bounding the problem. These policies, in turn, provide the basis for teasing out the key ideas and institutional arrangements that come into play. Designation of the relevant interests and their stances requires a close reading of the relevant debates at the time of policy enactment and consideration of those groups that are impacted by a given set of policies.

Although the approach to depicting and analyzing policy regimes is relatively easy to specify (as we have done in Table 1), the information sources for filling in the details are less clear. Much rests on the analyst's access to information about the different components of a policy regime. We view these tasks as a "backward mapping" of the governing arrangements, much as Richard Elmore (1980) conceptualized the backward mapping of implementation problems. This requires creativity in thinking about information sources. In what follows, we illustrate the use of two very different sets of information sources for depicting the homeland security regime and the critical infrastructure protection regime.

Homeland Security Regime

Our research on homeland security illustrates one approach for studying the contours and strength of a policy regime (see May, Jochim & Sapotichne, 2011). The focus for the research

was the governing arrangements for dealing with the threat that is posed by terrorism and other extreme events to our nation's economic, political, and social fabric. In considering the contours of the relevant regime, we began with a basic question: What constitutes homeland security? We thought of this broadly as the constellation of legislative enactments aimed at addressing the threats and presidential policy directives that set forth national strategies for homeland security.

Our choice to frame this shifted our perspective from studying a particular legislative enactment and its implementation to studying the regime contours for a broader collection of policies. The legislation and executive orders that were enacted after the 2001 terrorist attacks include the Aviation Transportation and Security Act of 2001, the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Response Act of 2001, the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, and the multi-faceted Homeland Security Act of 2002. We conceivably could have narrowed the focus to sub-problems such as aviation security, bioterrorism, border security, critical infrastructure, information security, or natural disasters. Each of these, which we consider as part of the larger regime, has associated authoritative actions for which more-or-less distinctive policy regimes can be identified. This illustrates how the larger regime that comprises homeland security has nested within it a set of more bounded regimes.

Our depiction of the homeland security regime considered the key motivating idea, the basic notion of "homeland security," that took on different definitions over time. Our tracing of the differing notions helped to demonstrate the limits to this as an organizing principle for the regime. We also considered the institutional frameworks for channeling attention to the homeland security goal comprised of the Department of Homeland Security and dozens of other federal agencies. And, we considered the interests that were mobilized in support of the broad goal of homeland security at federal, state and local levels.

In assessing the strength of the homeland security regime, we evaluated each of the components of the regime. One was the strength of the idea of homeland security as revealed by analyzing the degree to which agency leaders and interest groups bought into the concept through

analysis of their testimony in Congress. The second component was the degree to which the institutional design served to focus attention of policymakers in different agencies on the goals of homeland security. We gauged this by assessing the change in the composition of different federal agencies in different policy debates in Congress with particular attention to the fragmentation of attention across different federal agencies. The third component was the degree to which a viable constituency was formed around homeland security. We gauged this by tracing interest mobilization in the post-9/11 period as reflected in changes in the makeup of interests at relevant congressional hearings. Our empirical analyses suggested an anemic homeland security regime marked by a poor understanding and not widely shared commitment to homeland security as a policy goal, an institutional locus—the Department of Homeland Security—that is a weak force for inducing policy cohesion, and the failure to foster a strong constituency among state and local interests.

Although we did not draw inferences about feedback effects as part of our study, several seem to logically follow from our analyses of the different components of the homeland security regime. The legitimacy of "homeland security" as a policy goal has been propelled by the dramatic events of 2001 and the specter of another massive terrorism attack or other extreme event. Yet, as discussed by John Muller (2004), the legitimacy of this is arguable given the receding perception among many citizens of a terrorism threat and the realization of the costs and intrusions that are involved in sustaining the homeland security regime. We show limited coherence to the homeland security regime given that many of the key agency players do not buy into the broad notion (as opposed to more specific foci) and many appear to be pursuing separate goals. Greater coherence has not been brought about by agencies being "on the same page" and has arguably not been achieved through institutional cohesion with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. To the contrary, we show the Department of Homeland Security has been an especially weak integrative force given that other agencies have actively resisted encroachment on their turf.

The durability of the homeland security regime remains a puzzle. Our characterization of an anemic regime suggests a fragile situation given lack of a clear sense of purpose, bureaucratic competition, and lack of a strong constituency. Yet, the continuing existence of the homeland security regime has not been widely questioned. Though the terrorism threat has been raised in presidential elections and has been a key litmus test for the national security credentials of presidential candidates, the nature of the policy regime—the basic idea of homeland security and the institutional structure for achieving it—has not garnered much attention in electoral debates. This suggests how regimes can be highly durable despite apparent weaknesses in the governing arrangements. Homeland security encapsulates a highly salient issue that has been resistant to displacement. One reason for this is that partisan coalitions in Congress who benefit from fermenting these concerns have provided patrician support for homeland security efforts. Furthermore, the business of homeland security has become well ingrained in the American system through the provision of technology contracts, intergovernmental grants, and governmental activity. It remains to be seen whether homeland security constitutes the kind of lasting reform that Patashnik (2008, pp. 25-26) writes about, as with Social Security, that has become "so deeply rooted in political practice and culture over time that its dismantlement becomes all but unthinkable."

Critical Infrastructure Protection Regime

The depiction of the public and private sector approach in the United States to protecting the nation's critical infrastructures provides a second illustration of how one might depict a policy regime. This depiction draws from May and Koski's (2013) study of non-coercive means for harnessing the efforts of the private sector as partners with public authorities for addressing potential harms from widely dispersed risks. The basic problem is the vulnerability of the nation's critical infrastructures to natural disasters, terrorism, and catastrophic technological failures. From a regime perspective, this problem is interesting because it is very diffuse, largely outside of the mindset of most citizens, and very costly to address.

Governmental efforts to address this problem date to the 1996 report of the President's

Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection that examined both physical and cyber

vulnerabilities (see Moteff, 2010). Since then, and especially after the 9/11 terrorist and

subsequent anthrax attacks, there have been a number of federal documents that establish

different policies and strategies for enhancing critical infrastructure protection. The most recent

blueprints for the national Critical Infrastructure Protection efforts are found in President Bush's

National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Key Assets (US Office

of the President, 2003) and the Department of Homeland Security's National Infrastructure

Protection Plan (2006, updated 2009). These documents together lay out a dispersed regime for

enhancing protective actions among different industry sectors based on the creation of planning-

partnerships.

Our depiction of this regime entailed consideration of the key idea that undergirds critical

infrastructure protection—the definition of critical infrastructure; analysis of the reality of the

planning-partnership institutional design; and consideration of the mobilization of different

interests in support of the regime. To get at the definition of critical infrastructure and the

traction it provided as a key organizing principle, we reviewed different governmental documents

and statements that defined this term along with planning documents that attempted to flesh out

the vision for critical infrastructure protection. The broad aspirations of the federal government

for critical infrastructure protection are quite vague and have been subject to variation over time

(see Brown, 2006). There is evident confusion across these various documents as to what really

constitutes "critical infrastructure" and what needs to be done by those entities that are central

players. The vision statements we examined provide little sense of shared vision or direction.

Our depiction and analysis of the planning-partnership institutional design focused on the

membership of the partnership coordinating councils for the 18 industry sectors that are

designated by governmental documents. To get at this, we categorized the makeup of the sector

coordinating councils with respect to different types of participants (industry or trade

associations, individual firms, other associations, and other entities) and we considered the degree of engagement of trade and professional associations in these councils. The latter were of interest because they formed the basis for broader industry and other interest support for different aspects of the critical infrastructure protection regime. Not surprisingly, we found the memberships of the various councils to be highly varied in numbers and representation of different interests.

We considered the main goal of the partnership design to be the mobilization and engagement of different communities of interest in addressing threats to critical infrastructures. Such engagement is important for providing a hidden-hand coordination mechanism that is animated by shared purpose and common interests among affected entities. Stronger communities have a clear sense of their common interests, an institutional arrangements for sharing information, and interdependencies that reinforce their shared fate. We paid particular attention to the engagement of trade and professional groups as the nuclei and information conduits for communities of interest. We had research assistants search the relevant websites of trade and professional associations that we identified as participants in one or more of the sector coordinating councils. We then had the research assistants code the extent of engagement that was evident for each association's website with reference to issue listings, annual conference agendas, and annual reports. We found greater engagement in sectors for which their association members have specific interests related to critical infrastructure protection in that they have hitherto been attending to it or stand to gain from it. We show that it is difficult to mobilize or engage interests with limited inherent links to issues that are perceived to be of little immediate consequence to their broader agenda.

Though the case of critical infrastructure protection is a fairly arcane one that does not garner much scholarly attention, it provides a very good example of the challenges of creating a regime for addressing dispersed risks that relies heavily on private-sector actions. The policy legitimacy of the critical infrastructure protection regime is undermined by the lack of clarity of what constitutes critical infrastructure and by vague visions about desired actions to which

different entities could ascribe. The coherence of the intended actions is undermined by a process that left open the designation of those actions (the partnership planning) and limited "buy in" to the planning process in many sectors as evidenced by uneven participation of industry and other groups. The creation of a constituency for the regime and the communities of interest is uneven as the result of differences in starting points in creating such communities, in the ability to mobilize and focus attention within them, and in the likelihood of sustaining efforts to address threats to critical infrastructures.

Broader Lessons for Studying Regimes

Our approaches to characterizing and analyzing the homeland security and critical infrastructure protection regimes are, of course, not the only ways for applying regime perspectives for these problems. One could imagine a more bottom-up approach that sought through survey research the perspectives of potential private-sector stakeholders, of state and local governmental officials, and of federal agency officials. The results could be used to depict the degree of acceptance of the basic ideas of "homeland security" and "critical infrastructure protection" and for characterizing the degree to which private entities, different levels of government, and various governmental agencies are working toward similar ends. In the case of homeland security, secondary sources about opinion support for homeland security efforts could be employed in gauging other aspects of interest support and opposition. The more grounded view of such research approaches would have overcome the basic limitations that we encountered in relying on congressional testimony as the primary source of information for the homeland security study and documents and websites as the basis for the critical infrastructure protection study.

It is interesting in particular to contrast the regime approach to studying homeland security with more traditional approaches to studying policy implementation. The latter would have begun with identification of a policy for the implementation study. That choice would establish the foci for subsequent analysis. For example, choosing the Homeland Security Act of

2002 would have focused attention on the organizational challenges of creating the Department of Homeland Security and the administrative challenges of putting in place the various intergovernmental grant programs and planning processes. The focus on organizational challenges would, as undertaken by Waugh and Sylves (2002), have called attention to different cultures and priorities of the constituent units making up the Department of Homeland Security and the bureaucratic conflicts with other federal agencies. The focus on intergovernmental grants and planning processes would have called attention, as undertaken by Roberts (2005), to the responses to the shift in priorities to foster greater emphasis on anti-terrorism efforts.

Taking Regime Perspectives Seriously

We argue policy scholarship can benefit from applying regime perspectives. These perspectives provide new insights for thinking about policy implementation and about the governing role of policies. We turn in this section to consideration of how regime perspectives advance policy scholarship and to future research directions.

The Regime Lens and Policy Theory

Perhaps the most important point to underscore about regime perspectives for policy theorizing is a simple one. The lens provided by regime perspectives is merely a way of characterizing and analyzing governing arrangements. It is not a theory that helps explain a particular phenomena such as policy change or learning. Rather, the regime lens helps to illuminate the realities of how a given set of problems is addressed and the political dynamics that are engendered by those realities. Remember, policy regimes are constructs that are short-hand ways of depicting the constellation of ideas, institutions, and interests that make up the governing arrangements for addressing particular problems.

The main contribution to policy theorizing is an expanded notion of policy implementation that adds politics back into perspectives about implementation. As illustrated by the homeland security example, the use of the regime lens does not supplant more traditional implementation perspectives. The two get at different aspects of governing. Regime perspectives

emphasize the constellation of political and institutional forces that work to address a given problem. The traditional implementation approach emphasizes how particular policies are carried out in studying their translation into practice by intermediaries and street-level bureaucrats. The regime perspective more explicitly incorporates the interplay of policy and politics in shaping the realities of responses to problems and the feedback effects on the political environment of citizens' perceptions of those realities. Although recent scholarship about policy implementation has lost sight of the original emphasis on policy and politics (see Brodkin, 1990), these considerations are as relevant today as forty years ago (more generally, see Robichau & Lynn, 2009; Saetren, 2005).

Much of the implementation literature considers the politics of implementation as obstacles to effective governing. The literature is replete with case studies of failures that resulted from misunderstandings over policy purpose or the dissolution of agreement among relevant actors over time. The regime lens offers a more positive view of implementation politics in considering how policy regimes can serve as the political and institutional means for securing policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability. This invokes an expanded notion of implementation that resonates well with what Majone and Wildavsky (1979) characterized as "implementation as evolution" in discussing how policies evolve and take new forms during their implementation. Their comment that "implementation is worth studying precisely because it is a struggle over the realization of ideas" (p. 180) is very much in keeping with the notion of regimes as the political and institutional embodiments of policy ideas.

Regime perspectives do not supplant existing theorizing about policy processes. Indeed, these offer much complementary theorizing. The Advocacy Coalition Framework tells us a lot about the support for policies and their ease of implementation (see Sabatier & Weible, 2007). The Institutional Analysis and Design framework provides essential insights for the analysis of institutional design and the commitments of different actors (see Ostrom, 2007). Social Construction theory provides an important window into the ways that policy design shapes

feedback processes and the eventual support for those policies (see Ingram, Schneider & deLeon, 2007). Although these frameworks complement the use of regime theory, each is an incomplete basis for characterizing and analyzing the political realities of governing or the feedback effects engendered by public policies. As we have discussed here, notions about policy regimes fill gaps in this understanding while also providing the foundations for testable propositions about political impacts.

Our conceptualization of a policy regime can be usefully distinguished from a policy subsystem. As a core concept for much theorizing about policy processes, subsystems are typically characterized as established coalitions of interests who interact regularly over long periods to influence policy (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 16). Whereas subsystems are conceptualized as established areas of policymaking, policy regimes are governing arrangements. The distinction between policymaking and governing is highlighted by the lifecycles commonly used by scholars in each tradition. Understanding the dynamics of governing necessitates attention to political processes that extend beyond policy enactments.

To the extent that policy regimes draw on the interests and institutions that make up subsystems, regimes can be though of as embedded within or across subsystems. In addition, a given subsystem may have multiple regimes that intersect it. Consider the environmental policy subsystem comprised of the key environmental committees in Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency, state and local government environment agencies, and the varied industry and environmental interest groups. A focus on pollution abatement defined the policy regime created in the 1970s. As discussed by Fiorino (2001), that regime changed when new ideas emphasizing prevention over abatement came to the fore. Both regimes were spawned by the same environmental policy subsystem albeit with changing issue dynamics and interest alignments. Each regime embodies very different ideas, different sets of institutional structures and roles for policy implementation, and different sources of constituency support and opposition.

Our discussion of boundary-spanning policy regimes explicitly de-coupled regimes and subsystems (see Jochim & May, 2010). Some problems like climate change, immigration, poverty, and terrorism crosscut multiple subsystems. As such they require solutions that integrate the actions of actors in the multiple subsystems. We suggest boundary-spanning regimes provide the basis for such integrative policy responses without requiring comprehensive solutions. Such regimes foster integrative action among subsystems by putting pressure on players within those elements that are relevant to a given, messy problem to work more or less in accord toward similar ends. We illustrated this with a number of examples that include the Community Empowerment Regime of the late 1960s, the Disability Rights Regime of the 1990s onward, the Welfare Responsibility Regime of the mid-1990s to the present, and the Homeland Security Regime that came about after the 2001 terrorism attacks.

Future Research Directions

Our discussion suggests a number of avenues for theorizing and testing notions about policy regimes. Our examples of regimes and discussion of them has primarily addressed the national level in the United States. But, many problems and policies designed to ameliorate them span governmental levels and in so doing invoke intergovernmental conflict and cooperation (see Stoker, 1991). Notions about regimes are highly adaptable to multi-level governance. Paul Manna (2006) highlights how the experience at the state level with testing helped to foster the accountability regime in K-12 education policy, while also underscoring the importance of securing state commitments for implementation. Applying the regime lens to the achievement gap in K-12 education and related reforms would focus on the multi-level governing arrangements and the associated interest alignments in shaping implementation of an accountability regime. In getting at policy feedback, the regime lens would draw attention to the largely negative effects that we note above that led many of the policy's chief supporters later advocating a federal retreat from federal education reform.

Though our examples and discussion draw from American politics, the regime lens also has value for thinking about governing and governing impacts in other settings. This is obvious from the extensive literature about policy regimes that concerns such things as cross-national differences in biotechnology regulation (Sheingate, 2009), pension provisions (Weaver, 2010), and welfare regimes (Esping-Anderson, 1993). Basic theoretical issues remain about differences in policies and governing in presidential versus parliamentary or other governmental forms. The tighter integration of policymaking and implementation in parliamentary systems might suggest stronger bases for policy legitimacy, coherence and durability. Yet, the instability of coalition governments also points to greater possibilities for reversals in policy regimes. All of this is ripe for theorizing and investigation.

We do not consider problems that are solely addressed by non-governmental actors as fitting our conceptualization of policy regimes. This is based on a conceptualization of public policies as authoritative (governmental) actions to address matters of public concern. Yet, in principle the elements that comprise policy regimes—ideas, institutions, and interests—are relevant in studying what some have labeled as private regimes (see Grabosky, 2012) and others have labeled voluntary regimes (see Prakash & Potoski, 2012). The main difference between these and policy regimes is the nature of the commitments that undergird a regime. These are inherently public ones for policy regimes made by elected or other authorized officials. The commitments for private and voluntary regimes are by definition private ones. These differences have clear implications for thinking about policy legitimacy and durability. Nonetheless, the relationship between public, private and voluntary regimes and the implications of it for governing are fruitful areas for further research.

Our discussion raises additional theoretical issues. One basic issue for policy theorizing is the interplay of subsystems and regimes. We suggested regimes can be though of as embedded within or across subsystems. How the elements of subsystems work to support or undermine the common purpose underlying a given policy regime is worth considering. Though we did not

think of policy regimes as conscious efforts to alter policy equilibria across subsystems, Worsham and Stores (2012, p. 171) suggest this possibility: "Quite simply, for some policy entrepreneurs, the ultimate goal is the construction of a policy regime that supports new policy equilibria across a wide array of subsystems." As well, it is useful to consider how the feedback processes that policy regimes engender reshape the alignment of interests in subsystems. This is illustrated by Worsham and Stores (2012) consideration of the effect of the civil rights regime on the initial resistance then slow transformation of the agriculture subsystem in incorporating issues of relevance to African American farmers.

A second set of issues concerns the measurement of the strength of a policy regime. Our conceptualization of regime strength as the degree to which a regime reinforces the political commitments made by policymakers in addressing a given problem sought to clearly separate the concept of regime strength from the political impacts on legitimacy, coherence, and durability. The challenge, however, is that one cannot directly observe the reinforcement of political commitments. What one observes is the actions that constitute the reinforcement—the words of policymakers and others, the realities of institutional arrangements, and the support of various interests. How one quantifies these and combines that quantification into a metric of regime strength are subjects for further conceptualization and measurement.

A third set of related issues concerns tighter theorizing about the factors that affect the strength and durability of regimes. What remains unclear is how different combinations of ideas, interests, and institutions 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? Better measurement of the strength and durability of regimes will provide a foundation for answering these questions.

Policy regimes also raise normative issues. We have suggested that strong policy regimes are important bases for legitimizing policies. Yet, these qualities do not necessarily constitute "good" policy in normative terms. Strong regimes can be ill-founded in the sense that they embrace bad ideas or have undesirable outcomes. The zero-tolerance drug enforcement regime is arguably one that has been both relative strong and enduring, but also one that has had limited policy success and arguably undesirable health and crime-related side effects (see Scherlen, 2012). An interesting set of research questions concerns the degree to which and circumstances that the degree of policy success conditions the political success and legitimacy of a regime.

Conclusions

Policy regimes are constructs that are short-hand ways of depicting the constellation of ideas, institutional arrangements, and interests that make up the governing arrangements for addressing particular problems. As a descriptive undertaking, the regime lens can be used to construct a conceptual map that considers the relevant political forces that are involved in addressing a given problem—the contours of a policy regime. In doing so, one starts with a particular set of problems and works to identify the components of the policy regime. One appeal of this lens is that it can be applied to different levels, mixes, and boundaries of problems.

The test of the value of the depiction of a policy regime is not the particular construction but the insights provided by that construction. In this respect, we argue that regime perspectives are valuable for thinking about the political impacts of policies. Of prime importance are the feedback processes that policies engender as mediated by the perceptions of the ideas behind the policies, the experience with the institutions that deliver the policies, and the images put forth by the interests that support or oppose the policies. We suggest these feedback processes can either strengthen or weaken policy legitimacy, coherence, and durability.

The main contribution of policy regime perspectives to policy theorizing is an expanded notion of policy implementation. In emphasizing the constellation of political and institutional

forces that work to address a given problem, regime perspectives provide a backward mapping of governing arrangements. In contrast, traditional implementation perspectives emphasize how particular policies are carried out. The regime lens more explicitly incorporates the interplay of policy and politics in shaping the realities of responses to problems and in propelling responses to those realities. In so doing, use of the regime lens reinvigorates an expanded notion of implementation as policy evolution in theorizing how policies evolve and take new forms after policy enactment.

Some may say there is nothing new here given that the concept of a regime is well established. We fully acknowledge the widespread use of the concept and the development of it as a central feature in scholarship about international relations, urban politics, and aspects of policy scholarship. Yet, the concept of a policy regime remains under-conceptualized. In many instances the term is little more than a label used to characterize a policy approach. We have attempted to move beyond the label to suggest why regime perspectives are useful to think about for policy scholarship and how theorizing about policy regimes can be advanced.

In making the case for considering regime perspectives, we call on policy scholars to take seriously the role of policies as governing instruments. The latter, as we note at the outset of this contribution, were viewed as important elements of the newly evolving field of policy studies by leading scholars in the 1960s. Highlighting these considerations also underscores the importance of increasing attention to the interplay of policy and implementation. This interplay is central to governing as illustrated by Jacob Hacker's characterization of governing as fights over the "exercise government authority toward what ends" (2010, p. 872) and Hugh Heclo's notion of governing as "collective puzzlement on society's behalf" (1974, p. 305). We suggest the use of regime perspectives provide a fruitful avenue for advancing the understanding of the interplay of policy and politics in governing.

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