

Chapter Seventeen

The Policy-Making Process

Setting the Agenda

- **The political agenda:** deciding what to make policy about
- The current political agenda includes taxes, energy, welfare, and civil rights
- Shared beliefs determine what is legitimate for the government to do

Scope of Government Action

- Government always gets larger
- People generally believe that government should continue to do what it is doing now
- Changes in attitudes and events tend to increase government activities
- Government growth cannot be attributed to one political party

The Influence of Institutions

- The courts make decisions that force action by other branches: e.g. school desegregation, abortion
- The bureaucracy is a source of innovation and forms alliances with senators and staff
- The Senate is a source of presidential candidates with new ideas

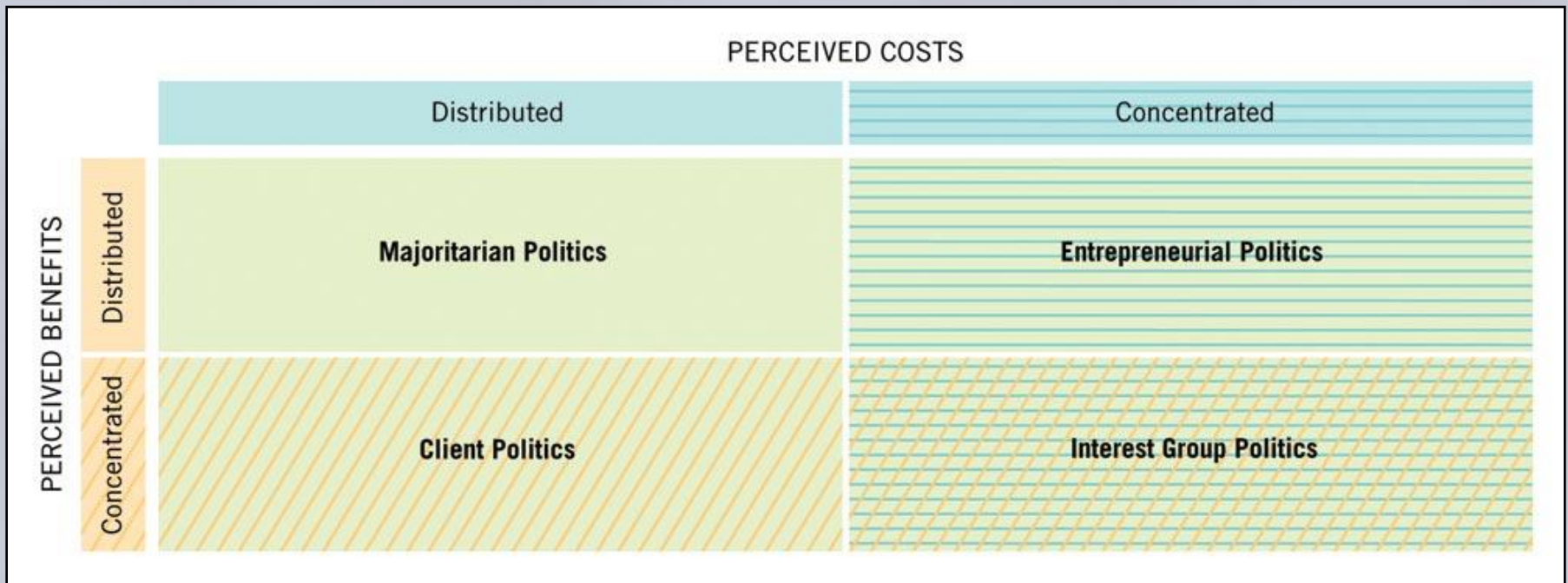
Other Influences

- Groups may react to a sense of relative deprivation
- The media helps place issues on the political agenda
- The national government may later adopt ideas pioneered by the states

Costs, Benefits, and Policy

- **Cost:** any burden, monetary or non-monetary, that some people must, or expect, to bear from the policy
- **Benefit:** any satisfaction, monetary or non-monetary, that some people must, or expect, to receive from the policy
- Politics is a process of settling disputes over who benefits/pays and who ought to benefit/pay

Figure 17.1: A Way of Classifying and Explaining the Politics of Different Policy Issues



Kinds of Politics

- **Majoritarian politics:** distributed benefits, distributed costs
- **Interest group politics:** concentrated benefits, concentrated costs
- **Client politics:** concentrated benefits, distributed costs
- **Entrepreneurial politics:** distributed benefits, concentrated costs

Majoritarian Politics

- Example: Antitrust legislation in 1890s was vague with no specific enforcement agency
- During the reform era, politicians and business leaders committed to a strong antitrust policy
- Enforcement was determined primarily by the ideology and personal convictions of the current presidential administration

Interest Group Politics

- Organized interest groups are powerful when regulatory policies confer benefits on one organized group and costs on another equally organized group
- Example: In 1935 labor unions sought government protection for their rights; business firms were in opposition

Client Politics

- “Agency capture” is likely when benefits are focused and costs are dispersed—an agency is created to serve a group’s needs
- Example: National regulation of milk industry, sugar production, merchant shipping
- The struggle to sustain benefits depends on insider politics

Entrepreneurial Politics

- Relies on entrepreneurs to galvanize public opinion and mobilize congressional support
- Example: In the 1960s and 1970s a large number of consumer and environmental protection statutes passed (e.g., Clean Air Act, Toxic Substance Control Act)

Deregulation

- Example: airline fares, long distance telephoning, trucking
- Deregulation is a challenge to iron triangles and client politics
- It is based on the idea that governmental regulation was bad in industries that could be competitive