

# Political Science 17.20

## Introduction to American Politics

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**Politics and Policy**  
Lecture 19 (April 23, 2013)

# Outline

- 1 Politics and Policy as a System
- 2 Negative Feedback
- 3 Positive Feedback

**1** Politics and Policy as a System

2 Negative Feedback

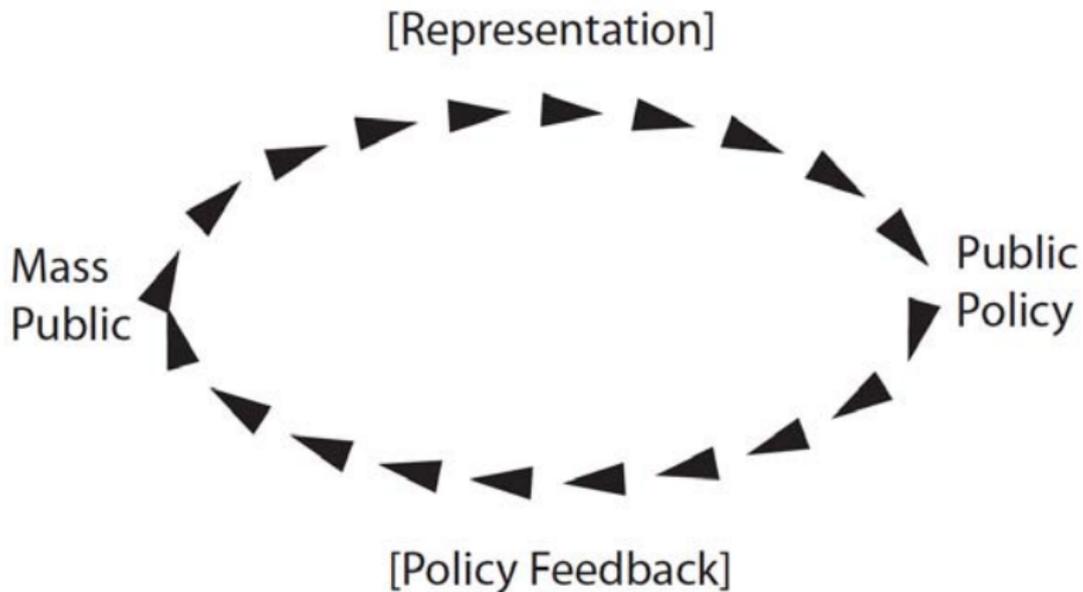
3 Positive Feedback

# Policy Feedback

- Not only does politics make policy, but **policy makes politics**, influencing the preferences, ideas, opportunities, and resources of political actors.
- Different kinds of policy lead to different kinds of politics

	Concentrated Benefits	Diffuse Benefits
Concentrated Costs	redistributive (interest group)	entrepreneurial
Diffuse Costs	distributive (logrolling)	majoritarian

# Politics and Policy as a System



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# The Public as Thermostat

- Simple choice for complex policies: “more” or “less”
- Two factors affect public’s (median voter’s) preferences:
  - 1 Most-preferred policy (*ideal point*)
  - 2 Location of *status quo*
- (Note similarity with pivotal politics model.)
- **Thermostat**: As policy moves to the left (e.g., when Democrats control the government), the median voter’s demand for “more” liberal policies should decrease.
- **Example**: Defense spending in Reagan years

# Other Forms of Negative Feedback

**Half-measures** may satisfy public enough to demobilize

→ Medicare Part D

Policies may also **stigmatize** and **demobilize** their target populations

→ Means-tested welfare programs

→ Penal system

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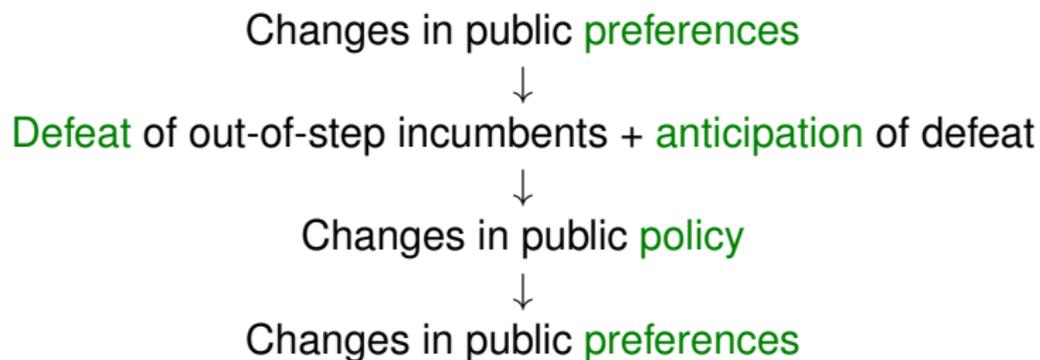
# Resources

- Public policies can create and empower new constituencies, giving them with resources to defend the benefits they obtain from government.
- Examples:
  - Financial firms
  - Physicians
  - Social Security

# Investment in Status Quo; Subjective Understandings

- Public policies lead citizens to invest in the status quo in a way that is costly to switch from (path dependence)
  - Mortgage interest tax deduction (tax expenditure)
- Policies can also influence citizens' subjective understandings on themselves as citizens
  - GI Bill:
    - engaged, public-spirited citizens
    - “affirmative action for whites”

# Dynamic Representation



- Presumes a largely thermostatic view of policy feedback

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