

How Solutions Chase Problems: Instrument Constituencies in the Policy Process

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Public policies are composed of complex arrangements of policy goals and policy means matched through some decision-making process. Exactly how this process works and which comes first—problem or solution—is an outstanding research question in the policy sciences. This article argues the emerging concept of an “instrument constituency”—a subsystem component dedicated to the articulation and promotion of particular kinds of solutions regardless of problem context—can help policy scholars answer this critical question and better understand policymaking. At present, however, there is only limited empirical evidence of the existence, accuracy, and relevance of the instrument constituency concept. This article clarifies and refines the concept through cross-sectoral and cross-national case studies, demonstrating its utility in aiding our understanding of policy processes and their dynamics, including the issue of how problems and solutions are proposed and matched in the course of policy adoption.

Introduction

In his path-breaking 1984 work on agenda setting in public policy, John Kingdon noted a distinct tendency in many instances for “solutions to chase problems.” As Kingdon (1984, 215) observed, “advocacy of solutions often precedes the highlighting of problems to which they are attached.” Kingdon (1984) was neither the first nor the last student of policymaking to witness this phenomenon but, like the others who preceded and followed him, did not fully explain it (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1979; Mehta 2011; Zahariadis 2003).

The idea that solution consideration should *follow* problem diagnosis is one of the foundational aspects of the policy sciences stemming from the earliest work of scholars such as Harold Lasswell in the 1950s and 1960s (Garson 1986; Mintrom 2007; Torgerson 1990). Although this view has been challenged by those who observed a much closer temporal correspondence between the consideration of goals and means (Braybrooke and Lindblom 1963; Lindblom 1959), it remains the essence of positivistic notions of rationality in policy analytical theory, practice, and pedagogy (MacRae and Wilde 1976; Stokey and Zeckhauser 1978).¹

Better understanding exactly how problems and solutions are matched in the actual processes of policymaking, therefore, is not a trivial issue in the policy sciences. Despite efforts in this direction by scholars such as Kingdon (1984), Sabatier (1987), and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), however, the fact that solutions sometimes chase problems remains an anomalous observation upsetting the prevailing orthodoxy

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in the field, requiring explanation and potentially a rethinking of many fundamental attributes of current views about the nature of policymaking and policy processes.

This article marshals evidence from case studies of social policymaking to examine and find support for the argument put forward recently by Voss and Simons (2014) and Mann and Simons (2014) that a key collective actor in the policy process—what they label an “instrument constituency”—concerned exclusively with the articulation and promotion of policy solutions holds the answer to this puzzle.

As shall be argued below, this particular grouping of policy actors has been improperly and confusingly juxtaposed in most existing studies of policymaking with other similar but distinct policy-related collective actors, obscuring their importance and activities in policy processes. The article suggests rethinking fundamental notions of policy subsystems used in present day policy frameworks utilizing the instrument constituency concept as Simons and his colleagues have proposed it, in combination with those of an epistemic community (Haas 1992, 2001) and an advocacy coalition (Weible and Sabatier 2009; Weible et al. 2011) to capture other important actors involved in designating and defining policy problems and moving them forward through political processes, helps scholars explain exactly why and how solutions can precede problems on a very frequent basis. This rethinking is needed to help deal with anomalies such as solutions chasing problems which undermine existing thinking in the field.

Dividing policymaking into these three separate sets of actors as Kingdon (1984) originally suggested allows for the possibility of separate deliberations on policy tools, deliberations conducted independently of considerations of their political or problem context, both spatially and temporally. The use of such a trifold conceptualization of independent policy actors and activities, among other things, suggests that it may well be the norm that solution considerations will very often precede problem definitions. The essence of policymaking in this view consists less in identifying new solutions once problems have been defined, as many existing studies and textbooks would have it, but rather matching those definitions to previously existing solutions already being advocated independently elsewhere in the policy subsystem (Howlett, McConnell, and Perl 2014).

Policy Subsystems and the Policy Process: Current Thinking and Problems

Exactly how the processes of articulating problems and solutions unfolds and how they come to be matched in the policy process are subjects that have occupied policy scholars since the first systematic studies of policymaking appeared in the early 1950s (Garson 1986; Torgerson 1990). At the time, it was very common to view policymaking as an exercise in rational problem solving writ large, that is, one in which problems were defined and then solutions devised to them. In this sense, problems preceded solutions and matching processes dealt with issues such as the elimination or refinement of options based on criteria such as efficiency, effectiveness, legitimacy, or feasibility.

This view remains the current orthodoxy. Although it has been challenged from time to time on either theoretical or empirical grounds, most notably by critics of overly rational conceptions of decision making such as Herbert Simon (1957) or Charles Lindblom (1959) in the 1960s and 1970s, it has withstood those challenges that focused for the most part on criticisms of the possibility of maximizing or optimal matches rather than their temporal sequence (Howlett and Migone 2011; Migone and Howlett 2015). It was only in the early 1980s that the academic enquiry into the design and articulation of policy tools expected to address ongoing problems emerged to

make the question of the linkage between policy problem and solutions a more central focus of attention in policy studies (Salamon 1981, 1989, 2002).

As McCool (1998) noted, a distinct class of policy theories purporting to explain policymaking emerged in the 1970s and 1980s which has dominated thinking in the field for several decades and reinforced the logic of problem preceding solution as a standard process norm. These theories or frameworks all centered on the idea of a policy "subsystem" that organized disparate groups of actors with both ideas about social problems and their solution together in the process of policy problem articulation and solution deliberation. Subsystem theories include, for example, the work of Kingdon (1984) and Sabatier (1987) mentioned above, both of whom featured particular types of subsystems in their work: "policy communities" in Kingdon's case and "advocacy coalitions" in Sabatier's.

Subsystem approaches to policymaking assume that, over the course of their interaction with other actors and as policy goals and policy means are articulated and developed, subsystem actors galvanized by common ideas or beliefs about policy problems and goals often amend or abandon certain objectives in return for concessions from other actors in a process leading to the creation of stronger or weaker coalitions supporting or opposing specific definitions of policy problems and favoring certain kinds of solutions to them (Freeman and Stevens 1987). These interactions occur in the context of particular institutional arrangements surrounding a policy process, from federal systems to divided legislatures, which affect both how and where actors pursue their preferences and coalition activity and which can affect the extent of their success in terms of having their interpretations of problems and favored solutions adopted by governments, but which remain somewhat epi-phenomenal compared with the structure and composition of the subsystem and the kinds of ideas it contains (Knoke 1993; Laumann and Knoke 1987; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993).

This is a powerful argument and has a number of important corollaries and implications. Thus, for instance, in addition to institutional constraint and opportunity structures, the number and type of actors found in a subsystem are often thought to determine many deliberative outcomes. For example, in the oldest conception of a subsystem, developed in the United States by early critics of the kind of pluralism associated with Robert Dahl's (1961) work on U.S. democracy, the concept of the iron triangle or "subgovernment," understood as small grouping of social and state actors with routinized patterns of interactions and interests, emerged in order to help explain the general tendency for policy content to remain the same or quite similar over multiyear periods (Cater 1964; de Haven-Smith and Van Horn 1984).

This concept fitted nicely with the image of policymaking as problem driven, in that subgovernments were thought to be organized sectorally by problem area and were argued to carry a clear idea of policy problems into their deliberations and actions in pressing for the formal incorporation into policy of these problem definitions. These actors were also thought to have preferred solutions to particular problems—such as the provision of farm subsidies to deal with shifts in market conditions in the agricultural sector—but these solutions followed consideration and definitions of problems, not the other way around.

In the 1970s, however, further research into the U.S. case revealed that many so-called "subgovernments" were not as all powerful as originally thought, or at least had become less so, and that their influence on policymaking varied across issues and over time (Hayes 1978; Ripley and Franklin 1980). Hugh Hecló (1978), for example, argued while some areas of U.S. political life might be organized in an institutionalized system of interest representation amounting to a subgovernment, others were less formal and more open to new ideas and actors and more susceptible to change (Hecló 1974).²

The insight that a policy subsystem might consist of a number of different subcomponents or groupings of actors whose interactions affected its activities and outcomes was developed at length in the 1980s, most notably by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993). In their work on advocacy coalitions, for example, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith used evidence from a variety of case studies of policymaking in the environment and water and energy sectors at the state level and above in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s to argue that actors from a variety of public and private institutions at all levels of government who share a set of basic beliefs about policy areas formed informal coalitions within subsystems in order to better prevail over others in defining and advocating policies related to their core policy beliefs and preferences.

Although more subtle than the subgovernment concept, this framework still retained the idea that definitions of policy problems preceded deliberations on solutions and that all the actors in policy subsystems were engaged in the definition of policy problems, the articulation of specific solutions, and their enactment. However, this view also raised the possibility of these specific sets of tasks being undertaken independently by distinct groups of actors (Freeman and Stevens 1987), and other studies of subsystem behavior developed at the same time strongly suggested this was the case.

For example, Haas (1992) claimed that, especially at the international level, what he termed “epistemic communities” constituted distinguishable sets of actors engaged almost exclusively in problem definition separate from other sets of actors engaged in other activities such as political maneuvering or debate or consideration of policy solutions themselves. These epistemic communities were networks of “professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (Haas 1992, 3). These actors shared common notions of validity (i.e., intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise) and a common policy enterprise to which their professional competence was directed (Haas 1992; Miller and Fox 2001; Zito 2001).

Similarly, in his own work from the same period, Kingdon (1984) went even further and suggested at least three distinct sets of activities (or “streams”) existed in issue definition and solution articulation activities related not only to problem specification and the politics of policymaking, but also to defining and refining solutions. This work broke new ground not only in its considerations of key policy process issues such as the timing of issue entrance onto government agendas (Zahariadis 2003) but also, as noted above, due to its observation that in many instances solution consideration preceded problem definition. Although Kingdon did not follow up on the logic of this analysis, instead choosing to situate each actor within a more orthodox policy subsystem construct, as is argued below, clearly distinguishing between these three activities and the groups of actors who undertake them provides a much more robust model of policymaking than an undifferentiated subsystem one and, at the same time, helps to resolve the otherwise anomalous observation of solutions preceding problems that Kingdon observed and that has bedeviled orthodox policy studies since his work first appeared.

Filling in the Missing Role of Solution Articulation in Subsystem Models: Instrument Constituencies and Independent Consideration of Policy Tools

Until recently, the missing link in subsystem analyses of policymaking has been understanding who has been involved in solution articulation and what this task entails. That is, while the epistemic communities discussed above can be thought of as distinct

elements of subsystems involved in problem definition and advocacy coalitions as sets of actors engaged in the political struggle over policy adoption, in order to better grasp the policymaking process, the third aspect of subsystem structure and behavior—solution articulation—also needs to be isolated and related to the others (Howlett, Mukherjee, and Woo 2015).

Policy solutions are composed of sets of policy tools or instruments that rely on the existence of specific kinds of governing resources and target group receptiveness for their successful implementation (Hood 1986; Hood and Margetts 2007; Howlett 2011). While the literature on policy tools is far from recent (Howlett 2011), it is only recently that scholars have begun to grapple systematically with policy instrument choices and definitions and how they are part of larger policy design issues and processes associated with policy formulation (Capano 2011; Howlett 2011; Howlett and Lejano 2013; Jordan, Wurzel, and Zito 2013; Koch 2013; Lascomes and Le Gales 2007).

This work has recently begun to deal in more detail with important subjects of policy formulation and instrument choices and selections including the behavioral characteristics of policy advisors (Considine 2012) and those of policy formulators more generally (Craft and Howlett 2012). A very promising initiative in this area has been the recent formulation by Voss and Simons and their colleagues of the concept of an “instrument constituency” as a subsystem component centered exclusively on the development of policy solutions or instruments (Mann and Simons 2014; Palier 2007; Voss and Simons 2014).

In a series of studies on the emergence of various trading schemes in the area of environmental policy (Mann and Simons 2014; Voss and Simons 2014), Voss and Simons observed that, just as is the case of the political beliefs of advocacy coalition members and the ideas about policy problems held by epistemic communities, the members of instrument constituencies were distinct and stayed united because of their common “fidelity” not to a political agenda or problem definition but rather to their advocacy of a particular instrument or a particular combination of instruments as a superior technique of public governance.

Instrument constituencies are defined in this work as “networks of heterogeneous actors”

from across the worlds of academia, policy consulting, public policy and administration, business, and civil society. Connections between these practices evolve from interactions in articulating, developing, disseminating, and implementing a particular policy instrument. As actors reflexively pursue the management of interdependencies emerging from their joint engagement with an instrument, they mutually enroll each other for the realization of particular versions of the instrument according to the specific expectations that they attach to it. . . . Webs of interlocking practices may solidify during innovation processes, giving rise to new research fields and knowledge actors, specialized service industries, public agencies, policy networks, and other actors and institutions that form around instruments in the making. (Voss and Simons 2014 p. 16)

Marking these constituencies as being important agents of policy evolution, Voss and Simons (2014) argued “what unites [these actors] is the fact that they play some part in the development and provision of an instrument’s infrastructure, by which we mean the set of stories, knowledge, practice and tools needed to keep an instrument alive both as model and implemented practice.”

The concept of an instrument constituency is thus one in which a specific kind of collective actor is involved in the formulation and configuration of policy instruments, just as epistemic communities are involved in problem definition and advocacy coalitions in policy alternative adoption.

This idea of a third set of actors involved in policy formulation and adoption potentially forms an important foundation and refinement of the subsystem concept of

policymaking. Significantly for the present article, however, it also provides a route to the better integration of policy theories with empirical studies that have highlighted the otherwise anomalous activity of “solutions chasing problems” (May, Jochim, and Pump 2013). Detaching consideration of the merits of policy means from goal definition, that is, helps explain the pursuit of specific kinds of tools and designs in policymaking, regardless of their feasibility or political viability at any specific point in time (Bock 2014; Gunter, Hall, and Mills 2014; Larner and Laurie 2010; Palier 2007; Stavins 1996) allowing, at least in theory, for the possibility of solutions preceding problems, as Kingdon (1984) observed in his work.

The Dynamics of Constituencies and Their Interactions in Policymaking: Evidence from Two Social Policy Case Studies

The idea of an instrument constituency thus contributes to the novel view, although one very closely linked to Kingdon’s (1984) way of thinking—that within the policy subsystem of actors defining a particular policy arena (e.g., national climate change policy), specific kinds of subcommunities develop around different aspects of policy formulation, and specifically around particular instruments, problem definitions, and political processes. The differences among these three major components of a policy subsystem and their distinct roles in policy formulation and other activities are set out in Table 1 below.

While alluring, however, it must be noted that to date, the concept has received only limited empirical study, notably in the studies of the emergence of European carbon and emissions trading systems (Voss and Simons 2014) and conservation credit trading (Mann and Simons 2014), both conducted by Simons and his colleagues. Although both studies have found evidence of such constituencies and the central role they played in promoting the adoption of these measures in Europe, it remains an open question how robust are these findings and whether these results can be replicated in other sectors and jurisdictions.

Additional case studies outside the environmental policy area are especially needed. That is, exactly how the concept can be applied to cases outside of the energy and environmental fields studied by Voss and Simons and their colleagues, and how it relates in practice to other important subsystem actors such as epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions, requires further empirical research. In what follows below, two cases of social policymaking, social insurance and pension reform, are examined to illustrate the effectiveness of the concept and its utility as part of a larger scheme to better describe and explain policymaking activities than do existing policy subsystem models.

TABLE 1
Types of Subsystem Components

Name	Source	Role	Characteristics	Composition	Activities
Epistemic communities	Haas (1992)	Problem stream	Knowledge based	Scientists and experts	Developing conceptions of problems/goals
Instrument constituencies	Voss and Simons (2014)	Policy (solutions) stream	Tool based	Consultants, administrators, and technicians	Developing suites of tools and techniques
Advocacy coalitions	Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993)	Politics stream	Interest/legislative/electorally based	Politicians, parties, and legislators	Developing beliefs and ideologies and matching goals and tools to them

Through additional case study research along the lines of that presented below, the concept of an instrument constituency can be clarified and its role solidified as an equally important collective policy actor along with others such as epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions. In this sense, it is important to establish that as an actor, the instrument constituency is solely oriented toward defining and promoting particular solutions while remaining conceptually and empirically separate and distinct from those other sets of actors dealing with defining policy problems and broad political goals.

The main goal of the short social policy case studies that follow is simply to illustrate the existence of instrument constituencies outside the policy areas Voss and Simons (2014) have explored. Consequently, these case studies do not feature strict causal arguments or detailed policy discussions, as the focus is on proving the very existence of instrument coalitions in the social policy areas under investigation. Further research is required to deal with other aspects of the concept and its implications for policy theory, as is discussed in the concluding section below.

Social Insurance

Social insurance, which first emerged in Germany in the last three decades of the nineteenth century under the leadership of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (Hennock 2007), is a policy instrument where cash benefits, as well as health and social services, are derived at least in part from payroll contributions made by workers and/or employers (although additional state contributions have helped finance social insurance schemes in a number of countries). The existence of a relationship between payroll contributions and social benefits is at the heart of modern social insurance as a distinct policy instrument (Howlett 2011).

At the time when it first emerged, Germany was the leading industrial power in Continental Europe, and Bismarck's decision to implement the first social insurance programs generated much attention around the world. In this context, soon after the advent of the first social insurance schemes, numerous scholars and public officials from other European countries, as well as from North America, began to monitor Germany's experiment with social insurance and propose revisions and amendments to this tool. Over time, a large international literature on social insurance in Germany developed and, in a growing number of countries, public officials and social reformers began to advocate the creation of social insurance programs within their own jurisdictions. For example, in countries as different as France and the United States, social insurance advocacy became a central element of social policy debates in the decades immediately following the enactment of the first social insurance programs in Germany (Dumons and Pollet 1994; Skocpol 1992). In this context, it is possible to talk about the emergence of a transnational instrument constituency devoted to the promotion of social insurance as a policy instrument.

Gradually, social insurance schemes started to multiply in Europe, with countries like France and the United Kingdom enacting their first programs before World War I. During and after the war, it became much harder in many countries to openly praise the German model, but nevertheless, the constituencies studying and promoting social insurance gained more ground over time as the number of countries adopting social insurance as a prominent policy instrument in their social policy mix increased rapidly (Bode 2006). In the United States, most reform attempts failed, but members of the American Association for Labor Legislation, an organization created in 1905, continuously advocated for social insurance as a policy instrument, regardless of the nature of

the problem to which it might be applied, which ranged from offsetting the risks of illness to those of unemployment (Moss 1996).

At the same time, social insurance as a policy tool became an item on “the agendas of the newly-established international organizations, including the ILO [International Labor Organization] and the International Conference of National Unions of Mutual Benefit Societies and Sickness Insurance Funds which was launched in Brussels in October 1927 and later became the International Social Security Association (ISSA)” (International Labor Organization 2009). The ILO rapidly became a central component of the instrument constituency, which was devoted to the promotion of social insurance as a policy tool around the globe, at both the transnational and national levels (Kott and Droux 2013), as a potential remedy for a wide range of potential and actual social ills.

Organizations such as the ILO have continued to remain attached to social insurance as a policy tool since its inception and have continued to promote this policy instrument around the world to this day in regions as diverse as Europe, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Kpessa and Béland 2012). From Voss and Simons’s (2014) perspective, this means they are part of a large instrument constituency that crystalized over the years around the social insurance tool, having in this case a clear and enduring transnational component, much as Voss and Simons found in the case of the more recent emission trading situation.

Pension Privatization

The second case study from the social policy realm is pension privatization or the development of personal retirement savings accounts (Orenstein 2008). This is a tool that has emerged in the more recent past in the field of public retirement pensions, whereby traditional defined-benefit schemes providing guaranteed, socialized pensions have been replaced by defined-contribution schemes. This usually takes the form of personal savings accounts that, in contrast to defined-benefit schemes, do not generate guaranteed levels of future benefits, as these depend partly on the average financial returns of each account. Such accounts involve a direct reliance on financial investment as well as a transfer of social and economic risks from the state onto workers, who contribute to these accounts, typically alongside employers (Blackburn 2002; Orenstein 2008).

Pension privatization is not a new idea; it was heavily debated within policy and economic circles as early as in the 1970s. Its first major adoption, however, was in Chile in the early 1980s, when the Pinochet military regime created what remains the best known and most widely debated experiment in pension privatization, which saw the complete replacement of existing, public defined-benefit pensions by a set of privately managed defined-contribution savings accounts (Ewig and Kay 2008).

A number of neoliberal economists supported what became known as the Chilean model and advocated similar reforms elsewhere around the world, creating an instrument constituency dedicated to its promotion and implementation as an alternative to traditional public pensions, often regardless of the nature of the problems, or success, a country or jurisdiction might be having with existing public pension plans. A strong instrument constituency coalesced around the idea in 1994 when the World Bank put its weight behind this tool (Merrien 2001), and subsequent World Bank reports promoted the diffusion of a multipillar pension approach that left room for the development of personal savings accounts as a part of all national pension systems (World Bank 1994). Simultaneously, national think tanks, such as the Cato Institute in the United States, stepped up their existing campaign in favor of pension privatization and

the shifting of much of the U.S. system from defined-benefit pensions to defined-contribution personal savings accounts without ever considering the nature of the problem(s) such schemes were intended to cure (Béland and Orenstein 2013). Some constituency members in the financial industry support the use of pension contributions to fuel financial investment (Naczyk 2013) rather than to address fiscal and actuarial issues with existing public schemes.

Individual experts working for a variety of organizations and traveling from one country to the next as consultants to promote pension privatization populated what gradually became an increasingly broad and influential instrument constituency in favor of the use of private retirement plans and defined contribution tools. One of these experts, who has actively promoted this policy instrument for decades, is U.S.-trained Chilean economist and former Pinochet Labor and Social Security minister, José Piñera. Piñera has lobbied experts and officials in favor of this instrument in countries as different as Kazakhstan and the United States (Orenstein 2008). This means that, regarding social insurance, the instrument constituency in this case is composed of both large organizations and individual experts that both participate in the diffusion and promotion of “their” chosen instrument at the national and transnational level. This constituency sought out opportunities to link this tool with existing problem concerns, and in a classic case of a solution preceding a problem, moved quickly to associate their preferred tool with concerns about the growing costs of population aging and traditional, defined-benefit public pension policies (Blackburn 2002).

In the case of pension privatization, as with social insurance, there is strong evidence that the transnational campaign developed by a well-defined and self-referential instrument constituency directly impacted the diffusion of personal savings accounts as a policy tool around the world (Orenstein 2008). This is true because the number of countries that embraced pension privatization increased rapidly in the mid-1990s, as the World Bank and various experts and think tanks promoted personal savings accounts as a legitimate and appropriate tool for efficiency in pension reform (Merrien 2001). Importantly, this campaign proved more successful in Latin America and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe and North America, where entrenched interests and institutions made it harder for actors to promote privatization (Orenstein 2008). Yet even in an advanced industrial country like Sweden, personal savings accounts were incorporated into the country’s 1994–1998 pension reform, while in the United States, these accounts became a key part of the debate on public pension reform (Marier 2008; Weaver 2005).

Although the fortunes of pension privatization advocacy in terms of subsequent successful government adoptions have declined worldwide since the mid-2000s, a situation exacerbated by the 2008 global financial crisis (Orenstein 2013), policy experts belonging to the privation constituency kept promoting the instrument regardless of the favorability of the political context. The instrument constituency in this case remains active through the work of individual experts and think tanks committed to the cause, despite the new context. For example, Tanner (2014), a social policy expert working for the CATO Institute, has continued to promote pension privatization in the United States during the Obama years, when the issue remained off the federal policy agenda.

Analysis: Moving Beyond the Voss and Simons Framework

Prima facie, these two short case studies provide *additional* evidence of the robustness of the concept of an instrument constituency put forward by Voss and Simons (2014), and show how it helps to resolve the otherwise anomalous observation for existing undifferentiated subsystem-based policy theory of the phenomenon of “policy solu-

tions preceding policy problems." The cases, however, also help advance thinking on the subject in other ways, namely, with respect to questions such as how and when such constituencies prove influential and when they lose influence, and also how such constituencies interact with other key collective actors in the policy process in the course of their activities.

With respect to the first issue, although the pension privatization instrument constituency remains influential to this day, it lost some of its support when the World Bank began to adopt a more critical stand on the benefits of personal savings accounts starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when new experts less sympathetic to pension privatization joined the organization's leadership (Orenstein 2008). This example shows how the membership of instrument constituencies can change quite rapidly over time, especially in the case of large international organizations that are "open systems," susceptible to the influence of a great variety of individual actors, as well as the significance of constituency leadership in defining its activities and actions (Béland and Orenstein 2013).

Many international organizations now belong to different and sometimes competing instrument constituencies struggling for power both in and outside of these organizations, which themselves can also compete against one another in order to promote their favored policy instrument. For instance, in the field of pension reform, the ILO and the World Bank clashed directly, as the former promoted old-age insurance, which is based on the defined-benefit model, and the latter advocated personal savings accounts, which are based on the defined-contribution model (Kpessa and Béland 2012). In the same way, in the United States, think tanks like the CATO Institute and individual experts like José Piñera have long fought organizations and experts defending the current federal old-age insurance system. This type of clash between two instrument constituencies was exemplified in 2005, when then President George W. Bush launched what turned out to be a failed attempt to implement pension privatization in the United States (Altman 2005; Béland and Waddan 2012; Laursen 2012). Although such conflicts were not noted by Voss and Simons (2014), the two cases cited here suggest the phenomenon of dueling instrument constituencies may be quite common.

Actors central to an instrument can also rise and fall, over time. In the case of social insurance, this remark applies to U.S. labor unions, strong advocates of social insurance that have lost much clout since the 1960s. Yet, at the same time, the rise of the "gray lobby" and, particularly of the AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), which has long publicly defended old-age insurance and Medicare, are key players within the U.S. social insurance instrument constituency. The AARP's central role became clear in 2005, when the organization strongly opposed the push by Republican President George W. Bush to "reform" old-age insurance in a way that would have moved the program at least in part away from the logic of social insurance, which the AARP unilaterally supports. Considering the fact that the AARP is one of the largest and wealthiest lobbying organizations in the United States (Lynch 2011), its rise as a strong voice for social insurance more than compensates for the relative political decline of labor unions.

As for the second issue of constituency behavior vis-à-vis other policy actors, in order to understand who instrument constituencies work with in the policy formulation process, it is necessary to look at domestic actors, without whom most policies cannot be adopted on the ground. The social insurance constituency in the United States offers a good example of how an instrument constituency emerged in a particular country, in connection with broader international trends but due to the intersecting interests and views of instrument advocates, epistemic communities, and advocacy coalitions.

In the United States, although reformers began discussing the merits of social insurance in the Progressive Era, it was only during the New Deal that this policy instrument became a central feature of U.S. public policy. The personal support of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) for social insurance as a policy instrument was one of the factors leading to the 1935 adoption of old-age insurance, the first federal social insurance program in the United States. FDR supported this policy instrument because he believed the direct link between payroll contributions and social benefits would make this social program more politically resilient, as workers would feel entitled to benefits as a matter of “earned right,” making it much harder for future conservative politicians to take these benefits away (Schlesinger 1959, 308–309).

Under attack by Republicans, old-age insurance soon developed support in the community of experts both in and outside of government. On the one hand, federal bureaucrats working for the Social Security Board and, later, the Social Security Administration, worked tirelessly to defend and promote old-age poverty reduction and, more generally, social insurance as a policy instrument that could address this problem. This social insurance crusade transformed federal officials into prosocial insurance lobbyists within government, a situation documented extensively by Cates (1983) in his book, *Insuring Inequality*. On the other hand, powerful supporters of social insurance working outside of government, such as academics and labor officials, collaborated with federal officials to promote the expansion of social insurance as a policy instrument for dealing with the same problem during the postwar era. For instance, academic experts and labor representatives of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations regularly participated in the postwar advisory councils tasked with planning the development of old-age insurance in the United States and consistently advocated for the use of this mechanism.

Because federal bureaucrats and their allies controlled the staffing of these advisory councils, they ensured the councils’ support for their expansionary views of the future of social insurance in the country. This part of the story is well captured in Martha Derthick’s (1979) seminal book, *Policymaking for Social Security*. As a result of their mobilization both in and outside of government, members of this epistemic community helped convince successive presidents and congressional leaders to support the expansion of the federal Social Security system through the adoption of insurance mechanisms. This support led to the creation in 1965 of a federal hospitalization program known as Medicare, and in the early 1970s, to a massive expansion of insurance benefits and the advent of an automatic benefit indexation system (Oberlander 2003; Weaver 1988).

During the Reagan years, the continued use of social insurance faced a challenge from the right, which brought members of its instrument constituency back to the forefront of policy activity once more. One of the most influential representatives of this instrument constituency was former federal civil servant and Social Security Commissioner Robert Ball, who played an instrumental role in the negotiations between top-ranked Democrats and Republicans, leading to the enactment of the 1983 amendments to the Social Security Act. These amendments preserved the basic structure of old-age insurance in the United States while tackling the short- and long-term fiscal challenges the program faced at the time (Ball 2010; Berkowitz 2003). Only three years later, in 1986, Ball cofounded the National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI), “a non-profit, non-partisan organization made up of the nation’s leading experts on social insurance. Its mission is to advance solutions to challenges facing the nation by increasing public understanding of how social insurance contributes to economic security.”³ Again, significantly, this emphasis on a particular tool was detached from any articulation of any specific problem to which it might be best suited.⁴

Conclusions

This article provides additional evidence that, as Simons and his colleagues suggested, instrument constituencies are an important and distinct type of policy actor, one that is separate from both epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions in its exclusive orientation toward policy solutions. This is a situation that has important implications for theories about the policy process, including the resolution of the “solutions chasing problems” observation made by Kingdon (1984) and others over three decades ago.

Examination of the two cases of social insurance and pension privatization here revealed two policy instruments, one old and one more recent, that both have been advocated and promoted by well-organized constituencies, much as Voss and Simons (2014) discovered in their own work on emissions trading in Europe. As suggested above, these constituencies do not focus primarily on a shared problem (like an epistemic community) or the promotion of political agendas (like an advocacy coalition), but on the study and advocacy of the specific policy instrument promoted.

An “instrument constituency” thus signifies an important new kind of policy actor within a subsystem of policy actors, and studying the active role of such instrument constituencies and their interaction with other such actors is essential to grasp the mechanics and workings of the policy process. In this context, it is important to underline that such constituencies are solely oriented toward defining and forwarding particular policy solutions, while remaining conceptually separate from, yet collaborating with, those actors dealing with defining policy problems and broad policy goals (Duhaney et al. 2014; Lerner and Laurie 2010). Understanding and describing these relationships in terms of content and outcome are important agenda items for future public policy research (Howlett, Mukherjee, and Rayner 2014).

The example of pension privatization is particularly important in this regard because it points to the fact that, just like advocacy coalitions, instrument constituencies can and do compete against one another for policy influence. Yet in contrast to advocacy coalitions, what makes an instrument constituency hold together is the policy instrument it promotes, rather than a set of core beliefs and values or the matching of tools and goals, as is the case with the advocacy coalition. In other words, instrument constituencies and advocacy coalitions refer to two distinct levels of policy reality, with problem-focused epistemic communities existing as a third level.

This insight is important not only for the additional clarity it provides into the nature of policy development dynamics but also for the resolution of the solution–problem conundrum set out at the outset of this article. Both case studies show, as Voss and Simons (2014) surmised, how the deliberations and activities of such constituencies do not require prior problem definition in order to begin their work. Rather, deliberations on policy tools, their composition and requirements, can and do proceed in the absence of any specific problem and often are only linked up to specific problems later. Thus, for example, the promotion of market-based permit trading observed by Voss and Simons precedes its application in fields ranging from transferable quota fisheries systems to the emissions trading system they studied (Tisdell and Iftekhar 2013; Voss and Simons 2014). And similarly, the use of insurance schemes precedes their application to fields ranging from health to social security (Béland and Hacker 2004).

These solutions preceded “their” problems, which were sought out by entrepreneurs in instrument constituencies such as policy consultants and organizations that attempted to match preexisting and previously defined and articulated solutions, interacting with epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions in so doing. This helps to explain the otherwise anomalous finding of “solutions chasing problems”

noted by Kingdon (1984) and others and suggests this phenomenon should not at all be considered extraordinary and exceptional, but rather, in fact, can commonly be the norm.

Notes

1. Even the founders of “postpositivist” policy analysis tended to share this view with orthodox policy studies. Fischer (1987, 1990), and Hajer (1993), for example, were more concerned about the (in)ability of policy actors to “objectively” construct policy problems free of class, epistemic, and other biases, than about the temporal ordering of deliberations over problems and solutions (Yanow 1996, 1999). And this logic remains at the core of more recent efforts to develop or enhance “evidence-based” policymaking (Packwood 2002; Sanderson 2002; Young et al. 2002).
2. Heclo conceived of policy subsystems existing less as ideal types and more on a spectrum with small, rigid, or “closed” iron triangles at one end and larger, more flexible or “open” “issue networks” at the other, with a key item and research agenda being why one type existed at one moment in one area and how this changed or evolved over time.
3. <http://www.nasi.org/about/mission>.
4. NASI has been increasingly involved in various policy debates since its inception and has gathered a growing number of experts on insurance schemes into its fold. The organization exists strictly in order to study and promote social insurance and to help further organize and structure the U.S. social insurance instrument constituency (which has lost power within government since the 1980s due to the decline of the political influence of the Social Security Administration; Béland 2005; Berkowitz 2003).

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