

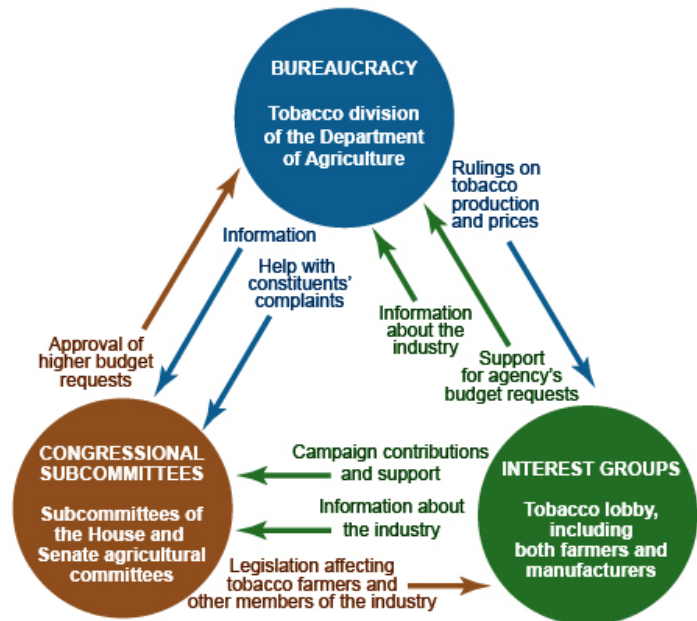
APGoPo Unit 6

IRON TRIANGLES vs. ISSUE NETWORKS

IRON TRIANGLES

Definition: Alliances among bureaucrats, interest groups, and congressional subcommittee members and staff sometimes form to promote their common causes. Also known as subgovernments.

Example: An important issue that government has recently addressed is the effect of tobacco on health and the government's role in regulating it. The tobacco farmers and industry have numerous interest groups, a "tobacco lobby" that provide information to the tobacco division of the Department of Agriculture and to subcommittees of the House and Senate agricultural committees. They support the agency's budget requests and make contributions to the election campaigns of the subcommittee members. The subcommittees pass legislation affecting tobacco farmers and other members of the industry and approval higher budget requests from the agency. The agency gives the subcommittees information, help with constituents' complaints, and develop rules on tobacco production and prices. They all have a common interest - the promotion of tobacco farming and industry, and they can help one another achieve their goals. As a result, the president and Congress beyond the subcommittee have little decision-making power.



ISSUE NETWORKS

Definition: Network that consists of people in interest groups, on congressional staffs, in bureaucratic agencies, in universities, and in the mass media who regularly debate an issue.

The iron triangle may be criticized because interest groups today are so prolific that they are bound to create cross-demands on subcommittees and the bureaucracy. In the tobacco issue discussed above, interest groups have formed demanding that tobacco products be banned or heavily restricted by the federal government. With these counter-demands, the policymaking process would not run so smoothly and would broaden the number of people involved in the system. The issue is discussed on many levels, both inside and outside government. An agency, then, can be described as being embedded, not in an iron triangle, but in an issue network. The networks are contentious, with arguments and disagreements occurring along partisan, ideological, and economic lines. When a president appoints a new agency head, he will often choose someone from the issue network who agrees with his views.

