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THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMAL AND FORMAL SPACES IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY IN WASHINGTON DC: HOW ACTORS IN POLICY
INTERACT TO CREATE LEGISLATION

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMAL AND FORMAL SPACES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
POLICY IN WASHINGTON DC: HOW ACTORS IN POLICY INTERACT TO CREATE
LEGISLATION

Drawing on data from a series of interviews with policy actors, as well as literature on the significance of spaces in policy development, this thesis investigates the relationships between formal and informal spaces in policymaking and their roles in creating laws. By examining evidence of the importance of spaces in policy making both in the United States and globally, this thesis highlights how spaces can have an outsized impact on the legislative process. Specifically, it argues that policy is often shaped and advanced within a limited number of spaces where power extends far beyond elected officials and the republican principle of "The Rule of Many." The implications of these findings are manifold, and it is the civic duty of the general public to gain a deeper understanding of the nation's inner workings.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF POLICY- MAKING

I. Introduction

I was first inspired to explore the topic of my thesis while employed by a lobbying firm in Washington, D.C. during the spring of 2022. My interest in this area was sparked by my previous studies in Public Policy Leadership as an undergraduate, which gave me a theoretical understanding of the policy process. However, my first hand experience of this process in action was far more complex and nuanced than what I had previously learned.

In particular, I was struck by the insular nature of the Washington D.C. policy world, which often seemed disconnected from the rest of the country. Although I had acquired a substantial amount of knowledge about the political process through my coursework, much of what I learned did not come from the formal curriculum. Rather, I gained a deeper understanding of the more personal and interpersonal aspects of politics through my experiences attending social events, fundraisers, happy hours, networking events, and official hearings.

In these various settings, I observed firsthand the ways in which connections were made, relationships were strengthened, and even policy was developed. For example, I witnessed lobbyists and staffers discussing and negotiating policy proposals over drinks in a bar, only to see those same proposals introduced as formal legislation by their bosses several weeks later. This process of policy development, which seemed to me at first to be nebulous and unstructured, was in fact highly concrete and impactful, affecting the lives of millions of Americans. It became clear to me that the numerous

formal and informal spaces and places of D.C. politics, both visible and hidden, play a vital role in shaping policy decisions in our nation's capital.

Upon completing my internship and research for this thesis, I discovered that political geographers have already established the significance of spaces in the policy-making process. This includes both the physical spaces such as buildings, rooms, and informal venues where policymakers convene, as well as the social spaces that are created through the interactions of stakeholders involved in the policy process (Kuus, 2014) (Mountz, 2010). This finding contradicts the common perception of the policy-making process as a neat and abstract concept, which is sometimes reinforced by textbook descriptions (Furlong & Kraft, 2017)

While many educated citizens assume that policymakers simply come together to set goals for policy in a given timeframe and formally introduce their proposals to the respective chamber of Congress, my experience has shown that the actual policy process is much messier and heavily reliant on informal interactions and chance encounters. The research by Kuus and Mountz supports my observation that the actual places and spaces where people involved in policy meet are integral to these interactions, and therefore shape the development of policy and the creation of laws that impact the lives of Americans. Both the formal spaces designated by institutions and the informal spaces where policy is conducted outside of those institutions are crucial to the eventual impact of policy for the American people. Both types of spaces also play an important role in the specific inner workings involved in the creation of policy.

Given that Kuus, Mountz and other political geographers such as Birch and Siemyaticki have mostly worked on the spaces of policy in Europe, focusing on the execution of policies by civil servants and public-private partnerships, this thesis makes two main contributions (Birch & Siemiatycki, 2016). First, it verifies the extent to which their intuitions over spaces and politics apply outside Europe by looking at the United States, especially Washington, DC. Second, it extends their analysis beyond the bureaucracy to include the legislative process. Given the ideologically charged nature of the two-party system in the US, this paper pays attention to the role of spaces in both producing legislation and producing the ideological positions of the parties. Three questions frame the research:

- *What are the spaces relevant for development of legislation in Washington, DC?*
- *Who are the actors involved and how do spaces shape their interactions?*
- *Where, how, and who sets the agenda of policy?*

To contextualize the discussion of spaces in policy, the following section discusses key contributions by political geographers. Much of their work builds on the notion of field theory, developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1998). Geographers have used his notion of field to analyze how officials interact outside preconceived boundaries, such as national borders and the formal processes of their professions. The methodological section, outlining the case studies and interviewees selection, as well as the interview process, will conclude this chapter.

The following three empirical chapters will be dedicated to answering one of the research questions. Lastly, a conclusion will discuss the implications of the research at hand. The closing remarks will also include a discussion on the need for teachings in these areas and the importance of political geography for all Americans.

II. Literature Review

A. Political Geography

Political geography is a sub-discipline of geography that focuses on the spatial aspects of politics and how they interact. It investigates the interplay between political processes and the spaces in which they operate, and how political outcomes are shaped by spatial variations. This field encompasses a wide range of spaces, including those related to policy, nation building, cultural politics, urban development, and governance (Jones et al., 2004). In their 2004 text, Jones et al provide a comprehensive definition of political geography that emphasizes inclusivity. According to the authors, political geography should be understood as the study of the political process with a focus on the spatial dimensions of political outcome (Jones et al., 2004). This definition encompasses all spaces in which political processes operate, including the physical locations of government institutions like the Capitol Building or the Dirksen Senate Building.

One key aspect of political geography is the use of spatial analysis to examine the effects of political processes on different spaces. This approach helps to reveal the complex interplay between politics and space and to identify the ways in which spatial variations shape political outcomes (Jones et al., 2004). Jones et al argues that political geography is best defined when it is an inclusive definition (Jones et al., 2004). The

unity of diverse examples of political geography is that they all in some way involve place, territory, or spatial variation combined with an exceedingly broad definition of politics.

In conclusion, the field of political geography is complex and multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of spaces and issues, which include, but are not limited to, the following discussion of the spaces of policy-making.

B. Application of Political Geography in the Spaces of Policy Making

The spaces in which policy is produced matter for a variety of different reasons. Firstly, space matters for the circulation of knowledge. Policy making is centered around those elected or appointed to positions of power. The power that comes as a result of these positions is varied. Merje Kuus says those who have more power require support, and the location of knowledge circulation is incredibly relevant (Kuus, 2014). The location of that knowledge may have a seemingly endless range, but it is uniformly a part of the policy making process. Merje Kuus sought out this information and came up with her observations as a result of research in transnational bureaucracies (Kuus, 2014).

Political knowledge is typically acquired through formal channels, such as legal codes and institutional frameworks. However, informal spaces also play a crucial role in disseminating political knowledge. Merje Kuus, in her 2011 work on political geographies of knowledge surrounding the European Union in Brussels, says informal spaces are important because they facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information, and allow for the formation of relationships that can influence policy outcomes (Kuus, 2011). Centralized physical government spaces are typically designed to promote the

sharing of knowledge, information, and agreements. This concept is not limited to formal spaces, however, as informal spaces can also facilitate effective communication and collaboration. For instance, government employees may work outside of formal processes and engage with colleagues in more organic settings, which can lead to the formation of stronger relationships and more effective policy outcomes. Political knowledge can be acquired through both formal and informal channels, and informal spaces are important for the sharing of information and the formation of relationships that can influence policy outcomes (Kuus, 2011). It is essential to recognize the value of informal spaces in political processes, as they can contribute to a more open and collaborative approach to governance.

Spaces matter at the location of democracy, and also for understanding fully the magnitude of political issues. Seeing anything first-hand makes it significantly easier to understand. It follows that it is an incredibly important concept when addressing the importance of spaces within policy. This is evidenced by the works of Birch and Siemiatycki. In an investigation about neoliberalism and geographical marketization, they highlight the importance of geography within policy (Birch & Siemiatycki, 2016). Their investigation dives into the federal government allowing the private sector to be involved with public goods through processes such as planning, financing, building and operating of a range of services, facilities, and infrastructure. They looked into contractual relationships and how many different markets where the state and the private sector are intertwined have many different needs. Pricing, competition, and many other important factors are largely decided by geography. The diversity of needs,

marketization, and public good can vary dramatically depending on the circumstances, which makes precedent more difficult to set (Birch & Siemiatycki, 2016).

The debate over the importance of spaces in policy-making should shift from questioning whether spaces matter to understanding just how vital they are for the policy process and stakeholder relationships. Spaces play a critical role in policy-making due to five fundamental principles: speed, communication, growth, flexibility, and mutual benefit. While technological advancements have improved the speed and accessibility of sharing knowledge and ideas, physical spaces remain critical for efficient and effective knowledge-sharing. Communication is more effective within shared spaces, especially in the context of centralized government spaces. Shared spaces allow for relationships, knowledge, and policy to grow exponentially. The flexibility of spaces in policy-making not only facilitates the development of policies but also the relationships between stakeholders. Spaces are crucially important because they benefit all parties involved, including staffers, legislative bodies, lobbyists, and policy beneficiaries. The speed, communication, growth, flexibility, and mutual benefit offered by shared spaces make them indispensable in the policy-making process. Understanding the significance of spaces and how they shape policy-making is critical for stakeholders who seek to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in their endeavors.

C. Contributions of Merje Kuus and Allison Mountz

There is perhaps no one else within the study of policy and spaces whose work is more extensive and relevant than that of Merje Kuus. Kuus, a professor in the department of geography at the University of British Columbia in Canada, has extensive work in the fields of both policy and geography. Her works within Political Geography

and transnational bureaucracies is particularly pertinent for the discourse regarding spaces in policy. Kuus' main contribution lies in her work on transnationalism and how policy making impact societal outcomes and what produces those outcomes Allison Mountz is another important contributor in space. While Kuus' writing is typically more centered around the spaces of policy development, Mountz' research is perhaps more centered around the spaces where policy impacts. Mountz' research relevant to this study is mostly on borders and the implications and results of policy on them.

Starting with Kuus' work on transnational bureaucracies, she found that the bureaucratic process of knowledge acquisition is often unequal, as those with more power tend to require greater support, and the location of knowledge circulation is highly significant (Kuus, 2014). Indeed, knowledge circulation in policy is closely tied to specific spaces, and often fails to extend beyond them (Kuus, 2014). When examining bureaucracies, Kuus' work suggests that it is important to consider the significance of spaces within public policy (Kuus, 2014).

Kuus' also has extensive work that remains increasingly relevant for work within spaces in policy. Some of her reports shed light on the factors that enable and constrain politics. She argues that further investigation is needed into what are referred to as "flex-institutions," which are created by neoliberalism and typically involve agents who serve as connectors responsible for exerting influence both inside and outside of formal structures (Kuus, 2020). According to Kuus, "the mechanisms and patterns of political life transcend the national frameworks in which we habitually discuss them (Kuus, 2020)." This leads me to believe in the importance of what will be called "informal spaces" that impact the policy process. As Kuus' work suggests, these informal spaces

are critical to understanding the dynamics of policy in a contemporary world dominated by American neoliberalism. Indeed, research into flex-institutions may reveal that they play an even greater role than previously thought in shaping policy outcomes.

Kuus' research extends beyond political geography and delves into the global scale of space-making practices. In particular, she examines the practices that establish boundaries at the international level and evaluates the scholarship on region-making and regionalism (Kuus, 2020). Her findings highlight the flexibility of bounding practices and the polymorphic nature of borders, demonstrating that state power remains a dominant force that transcends other factors (Kuus, 2020). Moreover, the ongoing changes in sovereignty are also significant in shaping the geopolitical landscape (Kuus, 2020). An understanding of context and place is crucial for distinguishing geographic accounts from traditional geopolitics. This underscores the importance of spaces within policy and suggests that understanding the history and context of a particular region is essential for comprehending the spaces within it. It is additionally relevant because it exhibits how issues at the border exist outside of both the formal and informal spaces of policy making, and as a result, it is largely not addressed

Mountz's work in the international arena presents a different interpretation of the importance of spaces that is equally relevant. She focuses on the bureaucracy at the border, which is particularly significant for border crossings. States have the power to change the relationships between law and geography to manage border crossings, and Mountz questions the exclusionary practices of the world's leading countries and the lack of rights for refugees (Mountz, 2010). She emphasizes the relevance of geographic borders, their historical significance, the policy makers responsible for border policy, and

the officials who carry out this policy (Mountz, 2010). In many cases, policy developed for the border is written by individuals who have never visited or fully understand the historical and geographic implications of their actions. Moreover, the bureaucracy at the border is often carried out by those with a similar lack of knowledge, who exploit the law beyond its intended scope. This underscores the importance of conceptualizing the role of spaces in the lives of those who wish to cross. Mountz calls for a greater emphasis on the scientific description of the customs and cultures of individual peoples (ethnography) and an ethnographic study of how government and stakeholders within government interact with one another (Mountz, 2010). This highlights the self-enclosed nature of the bureaucratic world and the critical role that spaces play within policy. Albeit the spaces of Washington, DC, are profoundly different from those Mountz focuses on, there is a similar need to understand the interactions between governments formal structures, individuals working in the legislative process, and the broader stakeholder.

D. An expansion of research within spaces where policy is being produced

Kuus' investigation of the policy process of the European Union, specifically in its home of Brussels, is particularly relevant in her body of research and for investigation of spatial policy development. Her research on the EU bureaucracy examines how expert authority is achieved (Kuss, 2011). By examining the political spaces used by different stakeholders in the development of one facet of policy, Kuus shows the ways in which specific places are used in targeted ways (Kuus, 2011). This information is crucial for understanding both the development and failure of relevant knowledge and expertise. "Technologies of expertise" are developed not only through formal channels, but also through informal social networks that operate within political spaces (Kuus, 2011) Kuus

seeks to understand how expert authority is achieved through various tools, using empirical investigation to uncover these mechanisms (Kuus, 2011). Despite the difficulty in generalizing findings from interviewees, Kuus' research highlights the vital role that informal spaces play in shaping policy outcomes, particularly in the case of fostering Russophobia (Kuus, 2011).

The concept of expert authority has far-reaching implications. Within the European Union, there are twenty-seven member countries, many of which do not have equal stakeholder status. As a result, the political spaces in Brussels are of utmost importance in the power struggles that occur within expert authority (Kuus, 2011). Whether formal or informal, the spaces in Brussels play an unequal role in the development of policy, knowledge acquisition, and ultimately, the degree of power attained by associated stakeholders (Kuus, 2011). The evidence and analysis presented by Kuus in the context of Brussels highlights the significance of spaces in policy development. While a place like Brussels, the home of the EU headquarters, may appear insignificant given the powerful associate sovereignties that stand alone and with the EU, its impact can be even greater than the policy development within each respective country.

E. Theoretical use of Bourdieu's Field Theory to understand the space of policy

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, has conducted extensive research in the field of education, as well as in cultural and artistic realms, and higher education. Bourdieu understood fields as "social spaces created around ongoing struggles" in which participants invest their social capital; their repeated interactions create worldviews and dispositions that are then passed along the next generation, thus

establishing the parameters within which participants in the field operate (Kuus, 2015) (Dumais, 2002). Bourdieu's field theory challenges the assumption of traditional political geography that spaces are neatly bounded and politics occurs exclusively within official spaces with specific territorial reach (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). This assumption fails to account for the messy production of politics. To better understand this messiness, some scholars have applied field theory to examine the relationship between people and spaces where policy is produced outside the traditional fixed boundaries of government buildings and official spaces that outline the policy process (Sellar, 2018). Bourdieu's definition of field creates a broader definition of politics, because it allows to include additional stakeholders in the policy process, not only those with formal appointments. It effectively portrays bureaucracies as "messy social processes (Sellar, 2018)." Moreover, Bourdieu's field theory accounts for the power of the state in its symbolic role - because participants in policy both contribute to produce the symbols of state power and use them in their struggles - making it a more comprehensive definition of what constitutes political spaces (Sellar, 2018). This definition of field theory is particularly relevant in the study of spaces in Washington D.C..

III. Methodology

In addition to conducting a literature review, primary research was also undertaken in Washington, DC. As an intern at a lobbying firm, I had the unique opportunity to be on-site in Washington, DC and participate in much of the research firsthand. Being immersed in the spaces where policy was being developed provided me with a valuable perspective that greatly enhanced my understanding of the topic. This experience enabled me to develop connections and utilize various outlets to collect

information that contributed to answering the research questions presented at the outset of the study. As a result, my experience and immersion in the spaces of policy development in Washington, DC were instrumental in shaping the eventual direction of the research.

Initially, I conducted a series of interviews with a diverse group of lobbyists to gather data for the study. The selection of lobbyists was made based on their experiences in both the private sector and legislative offices on Capitol Hill, while also ensuring inclusivity and a diverse pool of participants across partisan lines. As I worked in the same office with all of the lobbyists interviewed, I could easily request 15-20 minutes of their time on a slow work day via email, and schedule a meeting on both of our calendars. During the interviews, I asked the participants to state their name and occupation and requested their consent to attach their names to their answers. All chose anonymity but agreed to have attributing qualities to be shared. The questions posed during the interviews were centered around the research questions, with some tailored specifically to the lobbyists. The appendix contains the interview questions, and Table A lists the participants interviewed.

The ability to find the interviewees lied in my work. All of those interviewed I worked with in some capacity. While some of the interviewees were a part of my firm, others were people that I worked with or met in some connective capacity. These founded relationships made the interview process simple. I also believed it allowed for more candor, as I had relationships with all of them. I think this aided in the research and eventual findings. The interviewees, as previously mentioned, were chosen to

represent a group of both diverse interest and people. Additionally, they were chosen as they represented ample opportunity for the direction of the research.

Next, I conducted a series of interviews with former senators and members of the house of representatives. I made contacts through connections established in Washington, D.C. In this section, all interviewees requested anonymity. Initial contact was made through email and a meeting time was arranged that worked for both parties, which was then scheduled on both calendars. We conducted in-person, during which the interviewees were asked to state their name for the record before being asked to choose anonymity or not. All chose anonymity but agreed to have attributing qualities to be shared. Similarly, I asked general questions around the research theme, followed by targeted questions related to their specific experiences. The targeted questions in this series of interviews were primarily used to gain insight into the research questions directly from legislators and those who had experienced progression of policy over time. The specific questions asked can be found in the appendix. The Interviewees can be found in Table A.

TABLE A

Role	Pseudonym	Age	Party Affiliation	Years of Policy Experience
Former Senator	Senator A	Mid 70s	Republican	30+
Former Senator	Senator B	Mid 70s	Democrat	30+
Lobbyist and Former Staffer	Lobbyist A	30	Republican	8
Lobbyist and Former Staffer	Lobbyist B	28	Republican	6
Lobbyist and Former Staffer	Lobbyist C	44	Democrat	19

Lobbyist CEO	Lobbyist	45	Republican	23
Staffer	Staffer A	25	Republican	4
Staffer	Staffer B	26	Democrat	3
Former Congressional Staffer Current RNC Staffer	Staffer C	24	Republican	2
Staffer	Staffer D	22	Republican	1

(Appendix, Table One)

Lastly, I recorded a set of personal observations during my stay in Washington, DC, both inside and outside of the workplace. These observations were informed by the early research I conducted, which allowed me to identify and learn about many of the important spaces and how they were utilized in the policy process. Subsequently, I visited many of these spaces and recorded my findings, which became a significant part of my research and allowed me to gain a more firsthand experience of the importance of these spaces. Over time, these observations compounded and deepened my understanding of the spaces of policy and their role in shaping political outcomes.

After completing the first draft of the thesis, I edited the text using the AI tool ChatGBT in consultation with my thesis advisor and as approved by the University of Mississippi Graduate Council. The function “edit grammatically” was utilized to ensure a lack of grammatical errors

CHAPTER 2: THE SPACES OF POLICY MAKING IN WASHINGTON, DC

I. A Brief Overview of the Policy Process

The policy process is something that remains an abstract concept for a majority

of the American public. In a survey conducted as recently as September of 2022, less than half of the American population can name all three branches of government, and around a quarter of Americans cannot name any branch (Barnes, 2022). Even the formal processes of policy-making are metaphysical actions for many. It makes it an increasingly cardinal point in research conducted to understand the spaces of policy to also fundamentally understand the process of policy itself.

Furlong et al describes the government as the organization and processes where decisions about public policy are created (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). The government is also the legal authority who controls a collective. The United States government is broken into three branches to most effectively rule its governing body: legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. Each branch contributes to the development of policy in differing ways.

The word legislative means possession of the ability to make laws (Federal Laws & Regulations, n.d.). The legislative branch is made up of a body of officials elected by the voting population who are responsible for creating and passing proposed laws or “bills” into law. Congress, as it is referred to, is separated into two bodies: the House of Representatives and the Senate. For the purpose of our research, we will only be concerned with the spaces within the legislative branch and the connection to the creation and passing of bills. The executive branch, also known as the Executive Office of the President (voted into office), has the ability to then sign those bills into law or veto them. The judicial branch can set legal precedent through the ruling of cases within its courts, so while it cannot individually develop the code or bills that are passed into law, they can decide the constitutionality of laws that may be disputed. Federal judges are

appointed by the president and then confirmed by the Senate (Federal Laws & Regulations, n.d.).

The creation of policy is set out by the Constitution to be done by the legislative branch. This power lies in the hands of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Also known as the upper chamber of Congress, the senate is made up of 100 members, with 2 elected from each state in the union to serve six year terms with no term limits (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). The House of Representatives has 435 elected members, who only serve 2 year terms with no term limits (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). While each state is guaranteed at least one seat (occupying seats one through fifty), the representative number for each state is proportional to populations following that. These population numbers are based on the census which is conducted every ten years, and then from there, the number of seats per state is calculated with the equal propositions method outlined in Article 1, Section 2 of the US Constitution (Bureau, 2021). The states are then in charge of dividing their designated seats into voting districts, and voters then elect the representative to represent that district.

Each biennial election and subsequent swearing in represent a new Congress, the current Congress being the 118th in American history (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). Congress is broken into two one-year long “sessions,” and when Congress is meeting during the session, they are considered in session and that is when bills are attended to. These periods are determined by the Calender of Business, often under the name of “general order (Furlong & Kraft, 2017).” Below is an example of a 2022 Congressional calendar.

2022 CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR

■ House only in session
 ■ House committee work only
 ■ House committee work only / Senate in session
 ■ Both chambers in session
 ■ Senate only in session

January

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1 New Year's Day
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 MLK Day	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

February

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10 House Dems. Conf.	11 House Dems. Conf.	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21 Presidents Day	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

March

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23 House GOP Conf.	24 House GOP Conf.	25 House GOP Conf.	26
27	28	29	30	31		

April

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2 Ramadan (begins)
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15 Good Friday Passover (begins)	16
17 Easter Sunday	18	19	20	21	22	23 Passover (ends)
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

May

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
1 Remembrance (ends) Eid al-Fitr (begins)	2 Eid al-Fitr (ends)	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 Memorial Day	31				

June

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
		1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19 Juneteenth (observed)	20 Juneteenth (observed)	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

July

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2
3	4 Independence Day	5	6	7	8	9 Eid al-Adha (begins)
10 Eid al-Adha (ends)	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

August

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

September

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2	3
4	5 Labor Day	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25 Rosh Hashana (begins)	26	27 Rosh Hashana (ends)	28	29	30	

October

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3	4 Yom Kippur (begins)	5 Yom Kippur (ends)	6	7	8
9	10 Columbus Day	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

November

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8 Election Day	9	10	11 Veterans Day	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 Thanksgiving Day	25	26
27	28	29	30			

December

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 Hanukkah (begins)	20	21	22	23	24
25 Christmas Day	26 Hanukkah (ends)	27	28	29	30	31

Sources: Office of House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer and Office of Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer
Chris Hale/CQ Roll Call

Updated 12/15/21

II. The Formal Process of How a Bill Becomes Law

A bill begins when either a senator or a congressman or congresswoman introduces a bill (How Laws are Made, n.d.). It is then referred to designated policy specific groups in its respective chamber known as committees. Bills can be introduced in either chamber, Except for a revenue bill (House specific). The committees then vote on a bill once it is written into legal language. If this edited version of the bill wins a committee wide majority, it is moved to the floor of the respective chamber for full consideration. The respective chamber then creates the regulations for the forthcoming discussion. There are also rules required regarding amendments, the two biggest being a closed rule or an open rule. A closed rule forbids amendments and an open rule allows them. If it passes a majority vote (238 majority in the House, 51 majority in the Senate) in the receptive chamber, it is sent to the corresponding chamber for consideration- which they do not have to do.

Normally, the other chamber will not pass the exact same bill. Often, a conference committee consisting of members of both chambers is called to create a middle-ground version of the bill, which is then re-voted upon by each chamber. If the bill then passes both chambers, it is sent to the president. The president can sign it into law, or they can veto or in other words reject it. The House can also override the veto with a two thirds majority vote that would then negate the president's veto. The president can, only at the end of a congressional term, also utilize a pocket veto: when a bill is sent to them with less than 10 days left in the congressional term and they neither sign it nor veto it, hence killing the bill. This may happen when a President wants a bill to die, but they are prevented by political reasons from vetoing it.

A bill can die at several other points in this process. One such instance is when the Speaker of the House or the Senate majority leader decides not to refer a bill to committee. A bill also dies if the committee does not vote on it, or if they do vote on it and it does not get a majority vote. In the Senate, bills can die by leadership refusing to schedule a vote, or with a strategy known as the filibuster, when a senator can keep debating on a bill until it is tabled. In the House of Representatives, the body can vote to recommit a bill to committee, meaning the bill should be dropped or significantly altered. The rules committee can also kill a bill by not setting debate rules.

III. The important physical spaces for the formal policy process

An understanding of the formal policy process allows for a better understanding of the spaces important for the formal policy process. The Capitol building is where both the Senate and the House chambers are located, where the full bodies meet and where bills are introduced. After referral, the important buildings are the three Senate office buildings (Russell Building, Dirksen Building, and Hart Building), the three House office buildings (Cannon Building, Longworth Building, and Rayburn Building), and the Capitol. Each elected official has a set of staffers, often young adults, who aid in their work on each respective bill. The overwhelming majority of committee meetings are held in these seven major buildings, along with the majority of the formal work done on a bill. Lastly, the White House plays an important role, as the president typically signs or vetoes a bill in his office.

IV. The important physical spaces for the informal policy process.

It is undoubtedly the instant reaction of those with a background in policy to emphasize the further complexities of the policy process, and they would be absolutely correct. The depth of complexities that is involved in this process cannot be understated. Relationships, back-room agreements, donors, and lobbyists all play outsized roles in how policy gets over the line. All of these factors are not seamlessly developed. They all take tremendous amounts of time, effort, and targeted overtures that often are significant.

Through my research, I aimed to find many of the informal spaces where policy may be developed. While the intricacies of these relationships will be further investigated in the forthcoming chapters, it is important to begin introducing the informal places where the development of policy takes place. Much of the work in these spaces is abstract to a degree. While it may seem insignificant or even appear questionable that policy gets developed in many of these places, its role became unquestionable after my research. The informal spaces I found most important for policy development are restaurants (including pubs and bars specifically in Washington DC), at locations of fundraisers, and through trips. An overview of the specific locations and some brief information about the work done there will aid in understanding the forthcoming chapters.

First, I found that restaurants played perhaps the greatest role in the development of policy in informal spaces. One may think that restaurants play a role simply due to the development and furthering of relationships that aid in policy development within the constraints of the formal places of policy. While it is responsible

for such, fundamental policy ideas, agreements on motions, and proposals that are turned into law are built in these places. The development of policy in these spaces varies greatly. A hierarchy within this network of establishments creates a social stratification amongst those who work in policy. Partly, the system is created by social status, but also it is created by income level. One interviewee, a lobbyist in their mid-30's and former House and Senate staffer, Lobbyist A, said that where they go for both leisure and business has changed through the years (Lobbyist A). This particular interviewee attributed it largely to promotions and the growth of perceived importance. Also, many restaurants and bars are typically associated with one of the two political parties. While they are not limited to this constraint, it holds fast for most of the restaurants I visited.

First, the "higher-ups" meet at a couple of different places. The higher-ups within this system include the elected officials themselves, chief of staffs, high-ranking staffers, and high-achieving lobbyists. The most frequented places these individuals meet are the Capitol Hill Club (Republican-based) and the National Democratic Club. Both social clubs are exclusive establishments that require in most cases becoming a member or being a guest of one to dine. These establishments mostly open exclusively during the day and Mondays through Fridays; the work done here is typically on active legislation. An executive at a lobbying firm, Lobbyist CEO, told me in an interview, "This is where I do my best work... it is critical for me to be here with committee members and their staff who have cosigned a bill a client needs language in (Lobbyist CEO)." When a bill is in committee or conference, language is being modified and is beginning to take shape. The Lobbyists also said the difference between retaining or losing a client could be as

simple as “changing two words in a bill (before it is passed) (Lobbyist CEO).” It is important to remember as well that elected officials respect and share the company of many of these lobbyists because their firms organize many of their campaign fundraisers. The work done in these establishments is typically more finite, active, and amongst those with the power to make immediate change. These spaces allow this group of people exclusivity, while also providing them the opportunity to be amongst fellow party members.

While these clubs are the main places political elites find themselves, they are far from the only restaurants or bars in which they may conduct policy driving actions. This echelon of people will often make reservations elsewhere at sit-down restaurants for dinner to discuss policy or active legislation. Specific restaurants for this type of work on policy is not entirely evident, and upon my review, there seems to be no discernable pattern beyond being high-end, public-respected restaurants. I gathered that the choices are mainly based on each respective politician's dining favorites, after speaking with a former senate scheduler. They said, “Le Diplomate, Old Ebbitt Grill, BLT Steak... (I) feel like I called those places more times than I could count (Lobbyist C)” They intimated those were their Senator’s favorites, as were the answers when I asked other former staffers.

As for the less “powerful” members of the political pyramid, many of them mainly opt for cheaper and younger-oriented establishments. This part of the pyramid includes almost all Congressional staffers, young lobbyists, and even young, non-political professionals. While restaurants are used by this contingent, bars are more often the place of choice. Most if not all of these bars are not directly associated with a political

party. Perhaps the two most important bars in this category are Bullfeathers and Hawk n Dove. From my interviews, these seemed the two most frequented hangouts by Republicans and Democrats respectively. More specifically, they are normally associated with House-side staffers. Also, unlike the member social clubs, there actually is some attendance by Democrats or Republicans at bars historically associated with the opposing party. While they are places for leisure and fun, they serve as a place for work. When speaking with established lobbyists, former senators, and current staffers, this aspect of the policy process made its way into every conversation. Seemingly everyone I interviewed had this experience during their time in Washington D.C. that aided in their careers and also in policy production. When investigating involved actors and their interactions in forthcoming chapters, the policy production aspect of these places will be further explored.

Fundraisers held by lobbyists also serve a role in policy production. The fundraisers are mutually beneficial events. Elected officials raise the funds necessary to effectively run their campaigns, and as a result, lobbyists are able to have relationships with them and their offices that allow them to incorporate their clients' legislative needs. The fundraisers are held at a variety of places including event spaces, the lobbying firm themselves, and hostable locations and homes of donors. The fundraisers in DC are held generally while Congress is in session, which leads towards interactions between involved actors. One interviewed lobbyist said, "People are always working.... Work and play are always hand-in-hand, (and) people are always looking for ways to get ahead (Lobbyist B)" This quote stuck with me as a general rule in the informal spaces. No matter the environment, involved actors take any opportunity to advance their interests.

Fundraisers are interesting because they are one of the few opportunities where lobbyists, elected officials, their staff, and donors all come together. It creates an environment where surprisingly policy is sometimes produced.

Lastly, while spaces in Washington DC and the development of policy are the main focus of this research, I found that trips away from Washington DC play a role in policy development. Trips lend themselves towards relationship development more so than pure policy development, but they play an outsized role in high level cross-party engagement. Without an overwhelming majority within Congress, both parties need at some degree assistance from the other side of the perpetual political aisle to progress legislation. As has been evidenced specifically with informal spaces, there is little cross-party interaction. This makes trips and specifically Congressional Member Delegation trips (CODELs) particularly interesting. CODEL trips are opportunities for congressional members to come together to represent the United States in a variety of ways, mostly as international diplomats. I interviewed two former senators, and both of them highlighted the importance of CODELs. The Democratic former senator and congressional member I interviewed said, “..they (CODELs) were such an interesting time. As a young congressman, it was vital for me in building relationships that allowed me to accomplish much of the legislation I remain the most proud of (Senator B)”

While this particular former senator participated in CODELs many years ago, they remain an important part of the development of policy. Last year, Republican North Carolina Senator Thom Tillis and Democrat Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy were able to come together on perhaps one of the most divisive issues in American politics surrounding gun policy (Desiderio, 2022). They credited this policy production to their

relationship growing from a CODEL trip in the Balkan countries. This leads me to believe that these trips' importance remains at the very highest level of policy production in the political pyramid. Both of the former senators spoke highly of their friendships with members of the respective opposing party. I asked if they felt the pandemic and the resulting lack of CODEL trips has impacted the ever increasing polarization between the two parties. They both believed it was not a main driver, but it certainly did not aid in the reduction of polarization.

Many fundraising associated events also take the form of trips. These trips are a way for elected officials to host Washington and home-based staffers, donors, and lobbyists in places that allow them to show their support in a fun-contriving environment. These trips typically do not produce policy to a great degree, but as previously stated, any time policy actors come together it is hardly entirely leisure.

CHAPTER 3: INVOLVED ACTORS AND THEIR INTERACTIONS

With the knowledge of both formal and informal spaces in policy development, it becomes much easier to follow the actors within policy and the spaces in which they interact. Many of the involved actors have been discussed, and they should be placed in the section of the system in which they work. Involved actors in the legislative process are discussed as internal or external. Internal actors will be all those who are government employed. External actors are all of those who are not government employed.

I. Internal Actors

Internal actors in policy remain fairly straightforward. Internal actors are all elected officials such as senators and their staffers, members of Congress and their staffers, and the president and vice president and their staffers . Elected officials are the people with the allotted power to create policy and legislation that is passed into law. Their power resides in the democratic republican structure of the United States, and the only power they have is the power which the voting citizens of the United States provide them. They also have Constitutional power.

Their importance cannot be understated. They are the vessels for which the code and programs all American citizens abide and use are created. While all of the legislative power in the government resides with Congress, the president has an outsized role in the legislative process that can be significant. Even before the power of the veto, the president still plays a role in the legislative process. The power of the executive in the legislative process lies in their ability to push agendas and policies they

want signed into law (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). When presidents run campaigns, they captivate the American public with their ideas for, ironically, legislative policy. These ideas often shape legislation in the immediate session of Congress. Examples of policy agendas pushed by the executive branch that were passed into law include President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) or President Donald Trump's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Internal actors also include the staffers who work for all of the elected officials. The staffers serve the elected officials in a variety of different ways, including both in legislative and correspondingly. Legislative staffers are tasked with analysis of policy issues, active bills, and other legislative tasks in each office. Many staffers are assigned to specific policy issues in order to most efficiently address their time. They help shape the elected officials' understandings, opinions, and policy actions.

II. External Actors

External actors play perhaps the biggest role in public policy. It is important to distinguish between external influential actors in the spaces of Washington DC and other external actors, especially as it pertains to the importance of spaces in policy. There is significant research and data on the impact of public opinion, epistemic communities and think tanks, among other outlets not or mostly not in Washington DC. While those most certainly play a role in the development of policy, it is not within the scope of this research.

The external actors most relevant for the spaces pertaining to policy making are both the Republican and Democratic National Committees (RNC & DNC respectively), lobbying firms and interest groups, and the business and economic elites. All three of

these major external actors may indeed be those with the greatest ability to dictate policy. The RNC and the DNC influence the policy agendas of their active members in the elected bodies (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). The committees establish principles which each party represents. When elected officials are registered members of the party, it is seen as a commitment to uphold those principles in legislative proceedings. The committees, in coalition with the party leadership in office, meet and create the agendas and goals they set to achieve in a forthcoming election cycle or congressional session.

Lobbying firms and interest groups are the liaison between private interests and public opinion to policy-making officials. Interest groups pay lobbying firms to push their interests. Lobbyists' power lies in their connections and the allocation of their resources (Lobbyist C). Successful lobbyists are always very connected people. They often know elected officials, many of their staffers, as well as other important actors in the policy process. The great majority of lobbyists started their careers working in Congressional offices. Surprisingly, the lobbyist CEO with whom I spoke never worked in a congressional office, and yet, they were the most adamant about the lack of pathways into Lobbying (Lobbyist CEO). They said, "I am far and away the abnormality in the equation. I would even go as far as to say we don't hire inexperienced aspiring lobbyists unless they are coming from (Capitol Hill) (Lobbyist CEO)"

It is that experience in congressional offices that provide lobbyists with the understanding of the inner workings of the legislative process. More importantly, however, it provides them with the network of connections that allows them to be successful. Having a groundwork of relationships with other actors in policy is invaluable. Almost always it is a compounding body of work. A principle true for perhaps

all professions, yet it is true power personified for lobbyists. Lobbyists grow their capital by bringing in more clients, as most firms allocate most if not all funds from a client to the one bringing them in.

The business and economic elites are actors with some of the greatest influence on legislation. They can impact legislation in a variety of different ways. Anyone can give money to political campaigns directly or indirectly through political action committees or PACs (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). There are limits on the amount of money a given person or entity can donate to campaigns. Limits are an attempt to safeguard the integrity of fair democratic elections. The real power for the fiscal elites is the ability to pay for lobbying. Limits do not exist for how much an institution or person may pay for private “legislative representation.” It allows companies to provide seemingly ridiculous amounts of financial backing to the most connected people in policy. Lobbyists aid in organizing fundraisers for lobbyists (inviting willing donors), pay a select number of candidates out of their own pocket, and create continuity for campaign contributions, especially for House side campaigns. Lobbyist B said, “It is a mutually beneficial situation where (political candidates) get the support they need, and (lobbyists) get the ‘in’ necessary to do our work (Lobbyist B).” It appears that this gives an edge to the entities willing to pay the most to lobbyists, who prioritize the clients who pay them the most.

III. How Internal and External Actors combine

One of my first interviewees was Lobbyist A. It was this interview that really began to mold the scope of this research. On the wall behind their desk was a framed bill. This lobbyist had worked in both chambers of Congress as a staffer, so I asked if

this was a bill they contributed to during their time there. Curiously, they responded that it was a bill that they contributed to as a lobbyist. Intrigued, I asked them what made them so proud of the bill, to which they replied, "Because I wrote the whole damn thing."

I was aghast at how this could be possible: a member of Congress "writes" and introduces a bill that would go on to be passed into law by both chambers and signed by the president and it was written by a lobbyist not even thirty years old. While this particular piece of legislation was unifying and even had a unanimous vote in the House of Representatives, the concept broke much of my understanding of civics and policy. As a result, I dove into the process by which this lobbyist and many others work on eventual legislation.

Lobbyist A had a client who was interested in constructing a federally designated museum. For the purpose of anonymity of the firm, lobbyists, and clientele, the specific museum and memorial will remain nameless. The client was one of the lowest paying in the firm. As a result, the lobbyist was less concerned with immediacy of work for the policy. One night not too long after, Lobbyist A was at dinner with the Republican congressman they had previously worked for and mentioned the idea for the museum on a whim. The congressman was immediately on board, and he charged his former staffer to write the bill and send it over to his office as swiftly as possible. Later that week while at Hawk and Dove, Lobbyist C ran into a friend who was a Democratic staffer on the House side at the time. They mentioned the legislation to the staffer, who loved the idea. After discussing with the Democratic Congresswoman, the lobbyists connected the two offices to introduce the bill together in bipartisan fashion. By the end

of the following week it was introduced on the House floor, and by the end of the calendar year, it was signed into law.

Several steps of the process caused a series of incessant hand-raising from myself.

- *Why is the elected official themselves not writing the legislation?*
- *How was the lobbyist/former staffer already versed in how to write a sound bill?*
- *Why were both elected officials so easily convinced of a piece of legislation without being a part of the writing process?*

The answers to these questions remained simple: much of this work is done by the staffers. The idea unsettled me that elected officials that voters put into office can be the face of a piece of legislation despite hardly laying their eyes on it. When interviewing much of the pool, they emphasized the normality of this process, even for much less unifying pieces of legislation.

Staffer B had a captivating response when I asked them about elected officials and the role they play in writing legislation.

“That is an interesting one. In my experience, (the role) depends on a multitude of variables. The biggest thing, I think at least, is what the Congressman (or woman) wants. A lot leave it mostly to (the staffers). Especially many of the freshmen members who all they care about are clips for social media that make them popular. Others are very involved and even don’t want staffer involvement on legislation writing. That relationship is found more often in offices of leadership. I have

worked on bills that have been introduced, with little to none of my wording changing before it is introduced (Staffer B)."

The fact they said "a lot" leave legislation writing to the staffers seemed like a breach of members' responsibility. Surely, much of the legislative writing was not being tasked to the staffers or lobbyists that were not by any means elected to do so. And yet, it was and remains the reality.

At this point, the greater question still persisted. *Where* was this work happening? The aforementioned museum legislation happened at a sit down restaurant and also Hawk and Dove. Certainly, more complex issues require more thought and intersection between the internal and external actors. The ideas for much of policy, however, were many times conceptualized, developed, and agreed upon in a bar. It seems so far from the truth but the fact of the matter is that it was real.

It became my duty to witness policy development in this atmosphere. I visited Bullfeathers bar during a week when both chambers of Congress were in session, merely to observe and take notes in the field. I sat at the end of the bar during 'happy hour' (around 2 PM-6 PM), and I watched, observed, and engaged to a degree. The scene was incredibly busy, as it was almost shoulder to shoulder at some points even in the restaurant area. I watched people in suits walk in and play a variety of different roles. Some walked in as opportunists, coming in to attempt to make connections. Others walked in as a group intent on a short work break. Many, though, walked in to work. I, possibly rudely, listened in on two male staffers from different offices, over an order of beers and 'Teddy's Tots,' discussing what language to change in a bill to get it to pass. I had a discussion with a bartender who talked about lobbyists buying drinks for

staffers, attempting to sway them to their bidding. The same bartender joked about the various inappropriate brazen overtures made by some in efforts to get things they wanted or needed.

Following an intriguing afternoon, I felt I was missing the finite details of this process. Fortunately, one of the interviewed lobbyists invited me to accompany them to Bullfeathers, where they were meeting with two offices' staff over language in a banking regulatory bill. It was fascinating to hear the discussion and agreements made in such an informal and loose environment. By the end of the meeting, the lobbyist had two offices convinced that changing a single sentence of one of their bills would make it passable, with it being exactly what their client needed. It was a mastery of execution and sheer business, and it happened between 6 slightly inebriated people with the power to genuinely impact policy.

The social stratification among places discussed in the previous chapter - i.e. that senators and other leaders in the legislative process do not patronize the same venues as staffers - reflects also in a similar hierarchy in the policies being discussed. In this specific case, the policy being developed at that table was middle to low tier policy. They were not discussing President Biden's Build Back Better plan or other larger policy of the time. The larger work was being reflected in similar ways in different and more exclusionary places. It seemed like Capitol Hill Club, specifically on the Republican side, was most important. Lobbyist CEO provided great insight into this:

"I went to lunch (at the Capitol Hill Club) with a senator today to discuss a bill that was to be talked about this afternoon in a hearing you're

covering for me. You'll hear him motion to change the wording of the bill to..... Because I asked and needed him to (Lobbyist CEO)."

The proposed and passed word change in the hearing I covered later that afternoon was word-for-word what the CEO had told me, leaving my mouth agape. I followed up with a question the next day asking how they did that. The response was unapologetic and charismatic:

" Because of this undeniable gorgeous face and the fifty grand I raised him last month"

The larger legislation is often outlined amongst leadership. This leadership includes elected officials, leaders of the national committees, and sometimes the biggest donors of both. A person I met at a Mississippi Society event who worked at the RNC allowed me to write down a couple of things they told me. This person helped host a small meeting between Republican elected leadership and RNC committee leadership at the RNC where discussion was held over policy agendas for that calendar year (Staffer C). Having helped set up the meeting agenda, the RNC Mississippian worker mentioned efforts both on the policy front and public opinion front they wanted to extend. While there was limited access to finding where these types of discussions take place, a casual conversation led to a small peek inside a small space.

Lobbyists get their clients meetings directly with the elected officials themselves as well. The higher paying the client, the more meeting time the lobbyist can arrange for them. These meetings are often held in the lobbyists office buildings, formal spaces like the elected officials' offices, and also various restaurants.

While the many different internal and external actors interact to produce policy, it is evident that each interacts with another in different spaces. It is only further evidence of the social stratification of both spaces and values in the production of policy in spaces. Even at perceived low levels of policy, actors play a role in policy production that seems unbeknownst to the voting population at large. Further and expansive research is needed to understand the full depth of the spaces each actor interacts with another.

CHAPTER 4: AGENDA SETTING: WHO AND HOW PRODUCES IDEOLOGY

Through the data collection process, it became easy to fixate on the question of which policy actor maintained the most control over the policy process. Many regulations, or otherwise lack thereof, create an environment of policy production that is incredibly non-linear and is in some ways unbecoming of the values the nation was founded upon. It is intriguing to investigate the roots of power, production of ideology, and the true driving forces.

I. Importance of Shared Spaces and Relationships

At the base of policy production by any policy actor is a strength of relationships. By building relationships in both density and quantity in policy spaces, one has the ability to truly impact legislation. Positive relationships amongst policy actors allows one to utilize others to aid in legislation development and writing. In Washington, DC, finances, legislation, agendas, and the success of the rest of policy and policy-adjacent activities are driven entirely by the relationships that hold them afloat. A bill is only as strong as the relationships the driving actors have throughout the entire connected political system.

Conceivably, the most salient function of spaces in policy is for the fostering of relationships amongst the actors in policy. Upon reflection of the findings of intra-actor relations, connections are most often fostered in the informal spaces. Many sprout and grow at the previously identified 'hotbed locations' for policy actors. It only expands the significance of the perceived lower-level political interactions. While young policy actors frequent many of these areas a great deal more, it is the relationships founded then that

matter in policy for years to come. Many elected officials began their careers at that level, and the relationships they developed then matter in the policy making process.

When trying to define true power in the spaces of Washington DC, everything comes back to connections and relationships. A singular entity or person's body of work could be perceived as minuscule or insignificant, but they have a bill they wrote framed in their office. Power, simply put, lies with those who know the most actors in policy. Most often, those are the actors who rise rapidly through the ranks in their respective domains. It leads me to believe that those who receive more constitutionally given powers or positions come as a result of this, meaning both correlation and causation. Further research into the interconnection between those who rise to power and the depth and quantity of their connections in relation to the rest of the sphere is encouraged.

II. Agendas and Production of Political Prioritization

Each of the political parties have political ideologies by which most of the actors in policy abide by and work to progress. It creates an unknown as to whether it is the party members, the public, or others that dictate what policies are priorities and the stances each takes. The ideology within a party is at a much more macro level than most of the policy production itself. Ideology is more of the value bases by which a political party generally abides.

Through observation of involved actors, we know that a variety of different actors have the ability to conjure bills eventually passed. It is mostly guided by the ideology of their parties that influence the agendas they hope to prioritize during a given Congress. The distinct difference between ideology and pure policy production is important. For

the most part, ideologies are influenced the most by public opinion (Furlong & Kraft, 2017). The parties aim to represent a general set of beliefs taken up by those in the public. Contrarily, the agendas are set by those in policy. It is ultimately those policy actors that determine what is introduced and potentially passed into law.

It then begs the question as to which policy actors control agenda-setting. While all the policy actors play a role in the carrying out and influence of an agenda, the biggest policy seems to be particularly set by the leadership within a party both internal and external. Based on the comments of both former senators and the Lobbyist CEO, it became apparent that that circle of influence is incredibly small. One of the senators mentioned the disparity of power between party leadership and non ranking members of the House of Representatives:

“When you're just a little freshman or second term member in the house, you're just focused on small victories and keeping your seat. The real influence in the House could be narrowed down to no more than 30 members (Staffer A).”

The smaller those circles of influence become, the greater democracy can potentially be undermined. It allows for potential variance for individuals who have biases, constituencies, and donors to impact agendas in disproportionate ways. Those elected officials outside of the real influence mostly vote on agendas set by their respective parties.

While issues in the minds of the public generally guide legislation, politicians can drive or orient public opinion to issues of their choosing now more than ever. Through a variety of different outlets including the media, those in power have the ability to dictate

discourse (Staffer A). One of the former senators spoke very briefly about the relationship between the media and that small circle of influence he spoke about. When discussing, they were quite careful about addressing the relationship between the media and that small circle of influence, but they made it clear that these policy actors have personal relationships with most, if not all, of the heads of major media (Senator A).

Based on my findings, I believe that policy prioritization and agenda-setting is the most paradoxical aspect of the policy development process. It is both the most exclusive and inclusive part of policy development. It incorporates the citizenry, but it is still orchestrated by a very select few political elites. The investigative restraints in this study did not allow for a deeper look into the spaces where these policy actors interact and create policy. Further research both into the degree to which these policy actors dominate policy prioritization and the spaces where policy prioritization is created.

III. The Driving Forces

Distinguishing policy development and production from policy prioritization and ideological agenda-setting is necessary to contextualize and understand the policy process and its driving forces. The research appears to back that the driving forces of the two variables are different but connected. The driving forces of more defined policy are the congressional staffers and lobbyists. Comments from both active and former staffers and former senators, emphasized even more that much of legislation is driven by lobbyists and staffers. They often construct the legislation together that is eventually passed. Sometimes, the ideas for bills can even come from staffers or lobbyists. It leads me to believe that lobbyists and staffers are the engine room of the policy process, and

they are responsible for the majority of bills passed. Policy prioritization, agenda setting, and ideology has a completely different set of driving forces. The issues important to the general public play a big role in it, but the driving force is the political elite. Between major lobbyists, the influential congressional elite, and other leaders within each party, there is a clear framework for the political prioritization process. From this group, their ideas and precedence trickles down through the policymaking process and political system out into the public as well.

The two driving forces that cover it all are connections. Connections and the network in Washington DC play maybe the biggest role in policy development. Every aspect of policy development and political prioritization is founded in connections produced in spaces in Washington DC. Money plays a major role in driving political offices, lobbying firms, and the entire political process. Interest groups, corporations, businesses, and any entity with political interest have the ability to use money to impact policy. Most often, money pays for the use of the services of those connections. While money is not and can not be solely responsible for policy, it is certainly a driving force within the American political system.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is clear from studying the spaces relevant for policy development that they uphold Bourdieu's theory of field. Bourdieu defines bureaucracies as messy social processes, one of many fields in which participants struggle, investing their social capital to advance their interests, and in so doing produce ideas and worldviews that establish the rules of the game (Dumais, 2002). The research fully backs this representation (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993) Whether it is youthful staffers meeting over a drink at Bullfeathers, lobbyists having a traditional dinner with a congressman, or elected officials formulating ideas on a trip to the Balkans, policy development is often produced through various informal ways. The network of people and spaces in Washington DC cannot aptly be described, understood, or represented without encapsulating a view of Bourdieu's field theory. The interviewees in this study obviously competed to foster their agenda, investing in relationships to further their position. In so doing, they produced socially stratified communities in specific venues, reflected in a stratification of the places in which more or less important policies are produced.

The findings in this study also gives further validation for Kuus' findings in Brussels. Through her findings, she emphasized that the development of the technologies of expertise happen in official and unofficial ways (Kuus, 2015). An individual actor's knowledge and ability to excel coincided with the exchange of information. The exchange of information and coalition between political actors fosters the development of significant gains in a given policy. Kuus' uses Bourdieu's field theory to explain the importance of those informal spaces. The results validate using much of

the work of Kuus in relation to the United States political system. Furthermore, this study also confirms Kuus observation about the translocal and transnational nature of policy making, as diplomatic travels in CODELs play a key role in fostering cross-party relationships that later legislators and their staffers can use to approve legislation.

Now that it is known that these ideas exist in Washington D.C, the next step would be to first further this research. There were certainly limitations to the spaces and resources I had access to when conducting my research. Ideally, more extensive research would go into party leadership, its interactions, and the spaces where they develop policy. Further research into these spaces would provide a greater idea of the true driving forces of policy. This extension of research would be interesting alongside which issues the public finds the most important. Observation in these spaces would allow researchers to understand whether public opinion or those in power have a greater hand in public discourse that impacts policy prioritization.

Beyond further research, implementation of these findings and data backed by the work of Kuus and others should make its way into curriculum relevant to policy, in order to best educate the American citizenry comprehensively. A majority of the interviewees talked in some capacity about political literacy in relation to friends or family members. They emphasized that even some of the most educated people they know truly do not understand how our government works, with one interviewee describing Washington D.C. as a “bubble (Staffer A)” It should not be necessary for one to be inside of that proverbial bubble to understand it. I think it is essential for literature on the importance of spaces in policy development to be a part of curriculum on the field of public policy.

The implications of the findings vary. This research can serve as a mechanism for understanding how to impact policy in a comprehensive way. The idea of being able to impact policy seems such a large task for most. I think the research evidences the opposite. The policy process is portrayed as an incredibly exclusive process, when significant portions of policy development exist outside of the formal spaces of policy. If a single individual wanted to find a way to impact legislation, it could be as simple as occupying some of these spaces and meeting the right people. For groups invested in policy development, this research could provide a newfound way to approach the policy process.

An interesting interpretation of the work could come as a result of the social stratification system in the spaces of policy. A system of social stratification creates a tiered system. This system is mostly based on perceived power of respective actors; however, the research backs a system where the actual influence on policy development. Many elected officials are not a part of the political elite or the political prioritization process but also not a big part of the legislation produced in their office. Most often, they are role players for their party in voting on legislation with their party identity. Especially outside of big ticket issues, it leaves significant work to be done for the perceptively smaller rolled actors.

Apart from the above implications, these results raise questions for present policy makers. Does this system create an innately unrepresentative democracy? What are the implications of a social stratification system in policy development in one of the most polarizing times in nation history? Does a healthy democracy depend on development of policy in informal spaces? How big of a role do spaces outside of Washington D.C.

have, comparatively? Resulting legislation developed in the spaces of Washington DC, I hold, permit political scientists and researchers- impel them, even- to take such questions seriously.

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Appendix

TABLE A

Role	Pseudonym	Age	Party Affiliation	Years of Policy Experience
Former Senator	Senator A	Mid 70s	Republican	30+
Former Senator	Senator B	Mid 70s	Democrat	30+
Lobbyist and Former Staffer	Lobbyist A	30	Republican	8
Lobbyist and Former Staffer	Lobbyist B	28	Republican	6
Lobbyist and Former Staffer	Lobbyist C	44	Democrat	19
Lobbyist CEO	Lobbyist	45	Republican	23
Staffer	Staffer A	25	Republican	4
Staffer	Staffer B	26	Democrat	3
Former Congressional Staffer Current RNC Staffer	Staffer C	24	Republican	2
Staffer	Staffer D	22	Republican	1

Interview Questions

- *Introductory question for the record and more personal information and their role in legislative process, making people feel comfortable
- When a novel policy issue makes its way to the national political agenda, how do you think political parties decide on their positions?
 - Who specifically forms these issues?
 - How do they form them?
 - Where do they form them?
- What are the most important places for the formation of policy positions in the republican party?
- Who are the actors, in your opinion, that have the most influence on policy?
 - Do the major actors play equal roles?
- In your opinion, elected officials in Congress most driven by what (personal beliefs, constituency beliefs, reelection campaign contributions, lobbyists, or another entity)
- What most drives politicians reconciliation with their policy positions?
- How does policy get from a point as mere ideas to point b as legislation, specifically beyond official correspondence?
- How do you think policy positions are formed?
- Do you believe that it is grounded on core beliefs?
- As a Lobbyist, What external influence do you believe holds the most power on the policy process? Do you think the power lies in the lobbyist or the commissioners?

- Where are the most important “non-official” and informal places in Washington DC where some of the policy heavy lifting gets done?