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The Multiple Streams Framework: Foundations, Refinements, and Empirical Applications

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With rising ambiguity and turbulence in global affairs, the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) is fast becoming a major tool with which to analyze the policy process. In their recent literature review, Jones et al. (2016) report that no fewer than 311 English-language peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2013 have empirically applied the framework—with an increasing trend over time. Moreover, in these articles, the MSF is applied to a wide variety of issue areas, countries, and levels of government. In addition, the academic debate of MSF's theoretical refinement has recently broadened, signified by recent special issues of the *European Journal of Political Research* (issue 3/2015), the *Policy Studies Journal* (issue 1/2016), *Policy Sciences* (issue 1/2016), and the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* (issue 3/2016) as well as an edited volume on the framework (Zohlnhöfer and Rüb 2016a).

One of the reasons for the high number of MSF applications could be that the conditions under which policies are made increasingly resemble the framework's assumptions—particularly in contexts for which the MSF originally had not been developed. Problems, from global warming and nuclear energy to migration and trade agreements, have become ever more contested, and even experts disagree fundamentally. Ambiguity has increasingly become (or has come to be realized as) a fact of political life. The same could be said about what the MSF conceptualizes as the political stream. Particularly in the parliamentary systems of Western Europe, things have become much less orderly, with more fragmented party systems, a decreasing relevance of party ideologies, and

voting behavior growing ever more volatile. Nonetheless, MSF's success comes at a price. As Jones et al. (2016) as well as Cairney and Jones (2016) show, many of the empirical applications remain superficial; theoretical innovations in the literature are often ignored, and key concepts more often than not lack clear specification.

In this chapter, we present the current state of MSF thinking, including many innovations that have been suggested in the recent surge of MSF literature. We aim to provide an up-to-date presentation and discussion of the framework from which scholars may begin MSF empirical applications or theoretical refinements. We begin by outlining the main assumptions of the MSF before presenting the five structural elements of the framework. Because the MSF was originally developed for the analysis of agenda setting processes, we discuss how it is, or can be, applied to other stages of the policy process (decision making, implementation, etc.) next. We then turn to the question of how the framework is applied empirically in different contexts and how it has to be adapted accordingly. Finally, we deal with the (alleged and real) limitations of the framework and its future prospects.

ASSUMPTIONS

Kingdon (2011), who originally put forth the MSF, was inspired by Cohen, March, and Olsen's (1972) garbage can model of organizational choice. Consequently, the MSF's basic assumptions deal with ambiguity, time constraints, problematic preferences, unclear technology, fluid participation, and stream independence. These terms characterize what Cohen et al. have called organized anarchies, such as universities, national governments, and international organizations. In the following sections, we summarize the meaning of each of these basic assumptions.

Ambiguity

Instead of assuming that policymaking is an exercise in rational problem solving, the MSF negates the existence of a rational solution to a given problem. In contrast, the MSF assumes that because of ambiguity, a multitude of solutions to a given problem exists. Ambiguity refers to "a state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena" (Feldman 1989, 5). In contrast with uncertainty, which may be reduced by collecting more information (Wilson 1989), more information does not reduce ambiguity. For instance, more information can tell us how AIDS is spread, but it will not tell us whether AIDS is a health, educational, political, or moral issue. Therefore, we often do not know what the problem is. Because problem definition is vague and shifting, in principle, many solutions for the same circumstance are possible.

Time Constraints

Policymakers operate under significant time constraints and often do not have the luxury of taking their time to make a decision. Basically, time constraints arise because attending to or processing events and circumstances in political systems can occur in parallel, whereas individuals' ability to give attention to or to process information is serial. Owing to biological and cognitive limitations, individuals can attend to only one issue at a time. In contrast, organizations and governments can attend to many (though not infinite) issues simultaneously (March and Simon 1958; Jones 2001) thanks to division of labor. Policymakers, for instance, can actively consider only a relatively small number of issues, whereas the US government can simultaneously put out fires in California, conduct trade negotiations with the European Union (EU), investigate mail fraud, and mourn the loss of soldiers killed in action. Thus, because many issues vie for attention, policymakers sense an urgency to address them and to "strike while the iron is hot." Consequently, time constraints limit the range and number of alternatives to which attention is given.

Problematic Policy Preferences

Problematic policy preferences emerge in the presence of ambiguity and time constraints. How actors think about an issue depends on its overarching label (like health, education, politics, or morality) and on the information that has been taken into account. Consequently, actors' policy preferences are not fixed and exogenously given but emerge during (inter)action. To use economic terms, ambiguity and time constraints result in intransitive and incomplete policy preferences.

The assumption of problematic policy preferences only means, however, that policymakers do not have clear preferences with regard to specific policies. It does not imply that they have no preferences at all. With regard to the outcome of the next election or the question of who will be the next president, they take an unequivocal stand: policymakers want to win elections, and they want their candidate to get elected as the next president.

Unclear Technology

In organizational theory, technology refers to work processes that turn inputs into products. If members of an organized anarchy are aware of only their individual responsibilities and exhibit only rudimentary knowledge of how their job fits into the overall mission of the organization, we speak of unclear technology. In political systems, for instance, jurisdictional boundaries are unclear, and turf battles between different departments or agencies are common.

Members of the legislature often complain of unaccountable officials, who, in turn, frequently express their frustration with overburdening reporting rules and independent-minded public managers.

Fluid Participation

Unclear technology is complicated by fluid participation. Fluid participation means that the composition of decision making bodies is subject to constant change—either because it varies with the concrete decision to be made or because turnover is high. Legislators come and go, and bureaucrats, especially high-level civil servants, often move from public service to private practice. In addition, the time and effort that participants are willing and able to devote to any one decision vary considerably.

Stream Independence

In line with the garbage can model, the MSF assumes that independent processes or streams flow through the political system. In a nutshell, the MSF assumes that political problems, policy solutions, and politics—referred to as problem stream, policy stream, and political stream—develop mostly independently of each other. Problems, most obviously in the case of unpredictable problems like those caused by natural disasters, occur regardless of political developments or available policy solutions. Because consensus building in the political stream and in the policy stream takes different forms, these streams also have their own dynamic (Kingdon 2011). In the political stream, the mode of interaction is bargaining; in the policy stream, it is persuasion. More precisely, actors in the policy stream aim to gain acceptance for a policy solution, whereas participants in the political stream build on lobbying and group mobilization.

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

The MSF's starting point is the notion of stream independence. Nonetheless, if an issue is to gain agenda prominence, and is ultimately to be decided on, these independent streams need to come together at some point. The opportunity to bring these streams together arises if a "policy window" (sometimes called "window of opportunity") opens. Moreover, because there is no natural or inevitable connection between a problem and a solution, according to MSF thinking, the two often have to be coupled together by a policy entrepreneur and presented to receptive policymakers. We discuss the five structural elements of the MSF in turn—the three streams, the policy or, as we will call it, agenda window, and the policy entrepreneur.

Problem Stream

Policymakers will almost always argue that a policy responds to some problem. But what is a problem? According to the MSF, problems are conditions that deviate from policymakers' or citizens' ideal states and that "are seen as public in the sense that government action is needed to resolve them" (Béland and Howlett 2016, 222). Thus, problems contain a "perceptual, interpretive element" (Kingdon 2011, 110) because people's ideals and reality vary significantly. Moreover, we might come to see a condition that we previously perceived as acceptable as a problem once we learn that other countries are doing better in this regard. Or we start seeing a condition in a different context that turns the condition into a problem. Take the level of unemployment benefits as an example. From a social policy perspective, the relevant problem could be whether the benefits are high enough to provide an acceptable standard of living for recipients. In contrast, from an economic policy perspective, the problem could be that benefits are so high that recipients do not have incentives to look for a new job. As we switch from one perspective to the other, an acceptable condition (benefits are high enough for a decent standard of living) can become a problem (benefits are so high that recipients have no incentives to look for a job).

Nonetheless, many conditions deviate from citizens' or policymakers' ideal states, and not all of them receive political attention. Rather, indicators, focusing events, and feedback bring specific conditions to policymakers' attention. Numerous *indicators* are in principle relevant for policymakers or the public, for instance, unemployment figures, budget balances, and crime statistics. Some of these indicators are published regularly, and in other cases they are collected for a specific occasion. It is important to keep in mind, however, that all of these indicators only inform about conditions until an actor defines them as problems. It will be easier to do so if an indicator changes for the worse because, if people did not worry about a condition previously and the condition has not changed, it is very difficult to frame the condition as a problem now.

According to Tom Birkland's (1997) definition, *focusing events* are sudden and relatively rare, are at least potentially harmful, and are known to policymakers and the public at the same time. Although it is far from certain whether events like natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes), severe technical accidents (airplane crashes, nuclear accidents), and particularly serious forms of violent crimes (terrorist attacks, school shootings) will lead to agenda change, they at least increase the probability of agenda change. Moreover, there are different forms of focusing events. Whereas some are so grave that they "simply bowl over everything standing in the way of prominence on the agenda" (Kingdon 2011, 96), others are more subtle, including powerful symbols or personal experiences of policymakers (for an overview, see Birkland and Warnement

2016). Finally, *feedback* about existing programs may direct attention to specific conditions. If it becomes known to policymakers or the public that a program does not attain its goals, that costs are skyrocketing, or that unwanted side effects occurred, this might also be framed as a problem.

Nevertheless, policymakers are made aware of numerous problems on a daily basis, and it is impossible to pay attention to all of them because policymakers can attend to only a limited number of issues at any given time (Kingdon 2011, 184–186; Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer 2015). Thus, whether a problem receives policymakers' attention also depends upon which other problems are currently discussed. In the aftermath of terrorist attacks or in a deep recession, other problems have a difficult time receiving attention. More generally, the more politically relevant a condition becomes, the more likely it is that it will be dealt with. However, what exactly political relevance means is not entirely clear. Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer (2015) suggest that political relevance is strongly related to the electoral relevance of a condition: if a problem jeopardizes a policymaker's reelection, it will probably be defined as a relevant problem the policymaker needs to attend to.

Thus, MSF does not see problems (and their severity) as objective facts but rather as social constructs. That implies that agency becomes relevant in the problem stream because someone then has to frame a problem in a specific way if it is to receive policymakers' attention. Moreover, the framing of a problem is of utter importance because how a problem is defined substantially affects the solutions that can be coupled to it.

Recent research suggests different ways of introducing agency into the problem stream (cf. Mukherjee and Howlett 2015; Knaggård 2015, 2016). Knaggård (2015, 452), for example, argues that problem brokers are actors who "frame conditions as public problems and work to make policymakers accept these frames. Problem brokers thus define conditions as problems." Problem brokers can also be the policy entrepreneurs, but not necessarily. The key analytical difference between the two roles is that the problem broker only argues that something must be done about a specific condition, whereas the policy entrepreneur suggests solutions to the problem. For empirical applications, it is necessary to define when the streams are ready for coupling. The problem stream should not pose difficulties in this regard because policy entrepreneurs are always able to frame a condition as a problem that can be coupled with their favored policy proposal.

Policy Stream

In the policy stream, policy alternatives are generated in policy communities. A policy community "is mainly a loose connection of civil servants, interest-groups, academics, researchers and consultants (the so-called hidden participants), who engage in working out alternatives to the policy problems of a specific policy field" (Herweg 2016a, 132). The overwhelming majority of

members of a policy community are policy experts who advocate and discuss policy ideas. Thus, various ideas float around in what Kingdon (2011, 116) called a policy "primeval soup." During the process known as "softening up" (Kingdon 2011, 127), members of the policy community discuss, modify, and recombine these ideas. This process is very much characterized by arguing. Although the number of ideas floating around in the primeval soup originally is quite large, the process of softening up filters out many of them until a limited number of viable policy alternatives emerges, each backed by a substantial part of the policy community. Only these alternatives will receive serious consideration.

This process is heavily influenced by the structure of the policy community. Where policymakers search for solutions and how ideas germinate in the primeval soup depend on the degree of integration of the policy community—that is, the linkages among its members. The gestation period of ideas in the policy stream varies from rapid to gradual. The content ranges from totally new to a minor extension of the old. The typology that emerges from these criteria yields four categories: quantum (rapid propulsion of new ideas); emergent (gradual gestation of new ideas); convergent (rapid gestation of old ideas); and gradualist (slow gestation of marginal extensions of existing policies) (Durant and Diehl, 1989). Integration encourages one type of evolution rather than another. Less integrated policy communities, those that are larger in size and interact in a competitive mode, are more likely to facilitate a quantum to gradualist evolution of ideas. More integrated, that is, smaller and consensual policy communities, are likely to follow an emergent to convergent pattern. This is not to say that other combinations are not possible but rather that integration renders such evolutionary trajectories more likely. The hypothesis helps explain the ease with which ideas such as privatization have been gaining prominence among specialists in the United Kingdom but have had relative difficulty doing the same in Germany (Zahariadis 2003).

External influences on the policy stream should also be considered. For example, Lovell (2016) finds that MSF must be supplemented with theoretical insights from policy mobility as ideas move across national boundaries. This point makes policy communities more porous than previously conceived because ideas may not take time to soften up domestically because they acquire "legitimacy" through success in other countries. Whereas originally Zahariadis (1995) conceptualized this phenomenon as part of externally imposed spillover across sectors, in technical policy sectors where innovation is highly prized Lovell (2016) finds external nonstate actors may actually be thought of as regular members of an international network in a more broadly conceived domestic policy community.

Regardless of the structure of the policy community, it is by no means random which proposals survive in the primeval soup. To the extent that proposals fulfill certain criteria, they are more likely to become viable policy alternatives. Kingdon (2011, 131–139) discussed various "criteria for survival": technical

feasibility, value acceptability, public acquiescence, and financial viability. Thus, when policy experts doubt an idea can be implemented smoothly, when a proposal contradicts the values of many members of the policy community, when it is perceived as unlikely that an idea can find a majority in the political stream, or when costs are high, it is unlikely that the idea will survive the softening-up process. More recently, other criteria of survival have been suggested (Zohlnhöfer and Huß 2016). In EU member states, for example, ideas that do not conform to EU law have a smaller chance of surviving in the primeval soup. Similarly, if an idea's conformity with constitutional regulations is doubted, the likelihood that this idea is pursued further decreases, particularly in countries with strong judicial review. Finally, path dependence can be incorporated in the selection criteria. If an idea strongly deviates from a previous policy path that is characterized by increasing returns, its chances of becoming a viable alternative are very low—consider the idea to turn a pay-as-you-go pension system into a funded system. Although path dependence could be subsumed under the criterion of technical feasibility, it is important to remind scholars that path dependence can be modeled within the MSF (see also Spohr 2016).

The policy stream can be defined as ready for coupling when at least one viable policy alternative exists that meets the criteria of survival. If no such alternative is available, the MSF leads us to expect that coupling is unlikely.

Political Stream

The policy stream is located at the level of the policy subsystem, and the political stream is located at the level of the political system. Whereas arguing is the dominant mode of interaction in the policy stream, bargaining and powering dominate in the political, as majorities for proposals are sought here. Kingdon identified three core elements in the political stream: the national mood, interest groups, and government.

The *national mood* is certainly the most empirically elusive of these elements. This elusiveness has led some researchers to dismiss it as an analytical category (Zahariadis 1995). The national mood refers to the notion that a fairly large number of individuals in a given country tend to think along common lines and that the mood swings from time to time. Kingdon suggested that government officials sense changes in this mood and act to promote certain items on the agenda according to the national mood. Thus, the national mood is characterized by a strong element of perception on the part of policymakers. Accordingly, Kingdon advises not to confound the national mood with the results of opinion polls because the latter lack the perceptual element. Nonetheless, given the immense professionalization of politics, which includes a proliferation of opinion polls many of which are actually commissioned by policymakers themselves, it seems plausible to follow more recent research (e.g.,

Zahariadis 2015) and rely on opinion poll results for the operationalization of the national mood—preferably in addition to more direct sources of policymakers' perceptions.

Interest group campaigns are the second element of the political stream. Quite evidently, the more interest groups are opposed to an idea and the more powerful these interest groups are, the less likely it is that that idea will make it on the agenda. It is important to keep in mind, however, that there is more to the activities of interest groups than just campaigns—and that the MSF is able to accommodate this fact. As discussed earlier, interest group representatives can be members of the policy community and thus propose ideas and participate in the softening-up process. But these activities take place in the policy stream and need to be kept distinct from the campaigns interest groups might launch against proposals.

Governments and legislatures, in particular, changes in their composition, constitute the third element of the political stream. For example, some ministers or members of parliament might be more open-minded with regard to some policy proposals, or certain ideas match better with the ideology of one party than with that of another one, and therefore turnover may make a difference for which items enter the agenda. But this element of the political stream is not entirely about elected officials and political parties. Bureaucratic turf battles and important administrators are also highly relevant here.

When is the political stream ready for coupling? For two reasons it is slightly more difficult to answer this question regarding the political stream than for the problem and policy streams—at least as far as agenda setting is concerned. First, the three elements of the political stream do not need to point in the same direction for a given policy proposal. For example, although the government might be receptive to a proposal and policymakers might sense a supportive national mood, interest groups could at the same time be rather negative. How does this constellation affect the possibility of agenda change? Though it is clear from Kingdon's work and other applications that it is not necessary that all elements of the political stream are favorable to a proposal, the MSF literature has not been very explicit about the conditions under which individual elements of the political stream take precedence over others. Building on the work of Zahariadis (1995, 2003), who suggested collapsing all three elements of the political stream (government, national mood, and interest group campaigns) into the variable "party politics," Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer (2015) argue that government and legislatures are the most relevant actors in the political stream—because ultimately these are the actors who have to adopt a policy change. At the same time, their position may well be influenced, but not determined, by the national mood and interest group campaigns. Thus, it is possible under certain conditions that a government is willing to ignore interest group campaigns and even a reluctant national mood.

Second, it is not yet necessary at the agenda setting stage to build political majorities that may eventually be needed to adopt legislation. Indeed, in many cases legislative majorities are only gathered after an issue is on the agenda. Nonetheless, the political stream is certainly also important during agenda setting. The minimum that is needed to make the political stream ready for coupling is for a key policymaker, such as the relevant minister or an influential member of legislature, to actively support the idea in question and be willing to stitch together a majority for it (Zohlnhöfer 2016). Following Roberts and King (1991, 152), Herweg Huß, and Zohlnhöfer (2015, 446) have suggested calling these actors "political entrepreneurs." In contrast to policy entrepreneurs, political entrepreneurs are neither necessarily members of the policy community nor do they have to be involved in the development of the policy proposal at an early stage. Rather, once a policy entrepreneur has convinced a political entrepreneur of the project, the political entrepreneur, because of the individual's formal leadership position, can further the idea from inside the formal governmental system and work for its adoption.

Agenda (Policy) Window

Even when all three streams are ready for coupling agenda change may not come about automatically. Rather, a coupling of the three streams, and eventually agenda change, becomes much more likely at specific points in time, which Kingdon has called policy windows. A policy window is defined as a fleeting "opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems" (Kingdon 2011, 165). Although policy window is a generic term widely used in the literature, it has been proposed recently to refine this term to capture important nuances. To distinguish opportunities to get an issue on the agenda from opportunities to get policies adopted, Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer (2015) have suggested calling the former "agenda window" and the latter "decision window." We follow this suggestion but keep the term policy window for more generic use.

Agenda windows are rare (at least with regard to a particular policy proposal) and ephemeral; they can be predictable (elections, budgets) or unpredictable (disasters). They can open in two of the three streams: the problem or the political stream. A window in the political stream opens if the partisan composition of government changes or new members enter legislature. The incoming actors are interested in new ideas and are therefore open to novel policy proposals. Similarly, a significant shift in the national mood can open an agenda window. In contrast, an agenda window opens in the problem stream when indicators deteriorate dramatically—for example, unemployment or the budget deficit skyrockets in a very brief period. Alternatively, focusing events like natural disasters or terrorist attacks can open an agenda window.

Depending on the stream in which the window opens, coupling differs. In the case of a window that opens in the political stream, we should expect "doctrinal coupling" (Zahariadis 2003, 72) or "problem-focused advocacy" (Boscarino 2009, 429). The main task is finding a problem to a given solution. Take a change of government, for example. The new government is likely to argue that it was elected to adopt new policies and will be eager to prove that it delivers. Thus, although the solution is already in the manifesto, the government looks for problems that these solutions can solve. Because many conditions could be framed as problems, it should not be difficult to find a problem that suits the solution.

Coupling in response to windows opening in the problem stream is called "consequential coupling" (Zahariadis 2003, 72) or "problem surfing" (Boscarino 2009, 429). It differs from coupling in windows that open in the political stream in at least two ways. First, the duration during which the window is open is shorter in the former than in the latter case because response to a problem must be more or less immediate (Keeler 1993). Second, in the case of a window that opens in the problem stream, a solution needs to be found that fits the problem that is on the agenda. Remember, however, that the window is open only for a limited period of time, which in most instances is insufficient to work out a solution after the problem has risen to prominence. Rather, even in the case of consequential coupling the problem will be coupled to a preexisting solution that is somehow linked to the problem. Thus, in both cases, under doctrinal and consequential coupling, the relationship between problem and solution is not particularly tight.

Ackrill and Kay (2011) introduce a third coupling mechanism: commissioning. In contrast to doctrinal and consequential coupling, where policy entrepreneurs sell their pet proposals to policymakers, commissioning captures policymakers' active reaction to the opening of a policy window. The opening of a policy window signals to policymakers that an issue needs to be addressed. Instead of waiting for a policy entrepreneur to sell a solution, policymakers actively select the solution they deem appropriate (and thus the policy entrepreneur who advocates it) as a reaction to changes in the problem or political streams.

The main analytical problem with the concept of the agenda window in empirical applications is that it is usually only identified ex post. Certainly, some agenda windows are predictable, such as elections or budget negotiations. When the three streams are ready for coupling and issue competition is low, the likelihood is high that these kinds of windows can be used for coupling. Many other windows are less predictable, however—think of accidents, high school shootings, and a swing in the national mood. The main problem is not only that these events are very difficult (if not impossible) to predict. Rather, the issue is that it is often hard to decide ex ante whether these events constitute

an agenda window for a given policy at all (cf. Béland 2016, 234). Certainly, agenda windows are to an extent construed by problem brokers and are a function of how crowded the agenda is. Nonetheless, according to Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer (2015), the chances that an event can be utilized as an agenda window increase as the electoral relevance of an issue increases. Take labor market policy under the social democratic chancellor Schröder in Germany as an example (Zohlnhöfer 2016). Although the unemployment rate had more or less stagnated at a high level for almost the entire term of office, the government had failed to do anything about it for three and a half years because it believed that unemployment figures would go down as a result of demographic change. When this hope evaporated and high unemployment rates endangered the government's reelection, even a minor scandal regarding placement statistics by the Federal Labor Office sufficed to initiate the largest labor market reform in living memory. As the government's struggle for reelection critically depended on employment policy, Schröder used the scandal to prove his willingness and ability to introduce a major reform. Thus, less dramatic events can open agenda windows in electorally salient issue areas. Conversely, severe focusing events are indispensable conditions that may open windows in the problem stream in electorally less salient fields.

Policy Entrepreneur

Policy entrepreneurs, that is, "advocates who are willing to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, money—to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain in the form of material, purposive, or solidary benefits" (Kingdon 2011, 179), are key actors in the MSF. They can be individuals or corporate actors and are not defined by a specific formal position. Essentially, any policy-relevant actor—policymaker, bureaucrat, academic, journalist, representative of an interest group, or member of parliament—can become a policy entrepreneur. Policy entrepreneurs push their proposals ("pet projects," in MSF parlance) in the policy stream and adapt them in order to find broad support among the members of the policy community and make them viable alternatives.

Once that has been achieved, they attempt to couple their pet project with the other two streams. When agenda windows open, policy entrepreneurs must immediately seize the opportunity to initiate action. Otherwise, the opportunity is lost and the policy entrepreneurs must wait for the next one to come along. Policy entrepreneurs are thus more than mere advocates of particular solutions; they are also manipulators of problematic preferences and unclear technology (Mintrom and Norman 2009). Entrepreneurs must be not only persistent but also skilled at coupling. They must be able to attach problems to their solutions and find politicians who are receptive to their ideas, that is,

political entrepreneurs. An issue's chances of gaining agenda status dramatically increase when all three streams—problems, policies, and politics—are coupled in a single package.

Not all entrepreneurs are successful at all times. More successful entrepreneurs are those who have greater access to policymakers. For example, the Adam Smith Institute had greater access to the government during Margaret Thatcher's tenure in power in Britain because its ideologies matched more closely than those of other groups. Hence, options put forth by individuals associated with the institute had a greater receptivity among policymakers. Entrepreneurs with more resources, that is, the ability to spend more time, money, and energy, to push their proposals have greater rates of success. Entrepreneurs have a variety of instruments at their disposal, including framing of a problem, affect priming, "salami tactics," and the use of symbols (Zahariadis 2003, 14; 2015).

The MSF argues that agenda setting is not primarily an exercise in rational problem solving. Rather, sometimes a problem comes up that is coupled with a preexisting policy that somewhat "fits" it, whereas at other times a political opportunity arises—with the advent of a new government, for instance—to get a policy on the agenda and that policy then needs to be coupled to some problem. Nonetheless, this does not exclude the possibility of formulating hypotheses for each of the MSF's key elements as well as for the framework as a whole. We present a number of testable, probabilistic hypotheses in Table 1.1.

APPLICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS TO STAGES OF THE POLICY CYCLE

Originally, Kingdon developed his framework to explain agenda setting in health, transport, and fiscal policy at the federal level of the United States. The subsequent literature, however, has also applied the MSF to different policy domains, further stages of the policy cycle, and different political systems. The policy domains covered range from gender equality policy (Béland 2009) to foreign policy (Travis and Zahariadis 2002). In their literature review, Jones et al. (2016) report that twenty-two policy domains were explored using the MSF, with health, environment, governance, education, and welfare covering almost 80 percent of the MSF applications analyzed (see also Rawat and Morris 2016, 614).

Although applying the framework in various policy domains does not automatically require adaptations, such a need arises when the MSF is applied to different policy stages and political systems. The MSF has mostly been applied to the policy stages of agenda setting and decision making. But it has also been applied to policy implementation and policy termination, though only rarely (e.g., Geva-May 2004). We discuss below some of the adaptations that have been suggested in the literature for decision making and implementation.

TABLE 1.1 MSF Hypotheses on Agenda Setting

HYPOTHESIS FOR THE FRAMEWORK AS A WHOLE	
Agenda change becomes more likely if (a) a policy window opens, (b) the streams are ready for coupling, and (c) a policy entrepreneur promotes the agenda change.	
HYPOTHESES FOR THE FRAMEWORK'S KEY ELEMENTS	
Problem stream	• A problem broker is likely to be more successful framing a condition as a problem the more an indicator changes to the negative, the more harmful a focusing event is, and the more definitely a government program does not work as expected.
Political stream	• Policy proposals that fit the general ideology of a government or the majority in a legislature have a better chance of gaining agenda status.
Policy stream	• If a policy proposal does not fulfill the selection criteria, the likelihood of gaining agenda status, and thus being coupled, decreases significantly. • As the integration of policy communities decreases, it becomes more likely that entirely new ideas can become viable policy alternatives.
Policy window	• The policy window opens in the problem stream as a result of at least one of the following changes: change of indicators, focusing events, or feedback. • The more a condition puts a policymaker's reelection at risk, the more likely it is to open a policy window in the problem stream. • The policy window opens in the political stream as a result of at least one of the following changes: changes in legislature, election of a new government, interest group campaigns, or a change in the national mood.
Policy entrepreneur	• Policy entrepreneurs are more likely to couple the streams successfully during an open policy window if (a) they have more access to core policymakers and (b) they are more persistent.

Decision Making

To understand how the MSF needs to be adapted to apply to decision making, it is necessary to explicate the differences between agenda setting and decision making (see, for example, Knill and Tosun 2012). During agenda setting, a large number of actors compete for attention for various proposals, whereas decision making is about obtaining a majority for a specific proposal. Thus, the number of actors tends to decrease during decision making. At the same time, the relevance of the institutional setting increases as we move from agenda setting

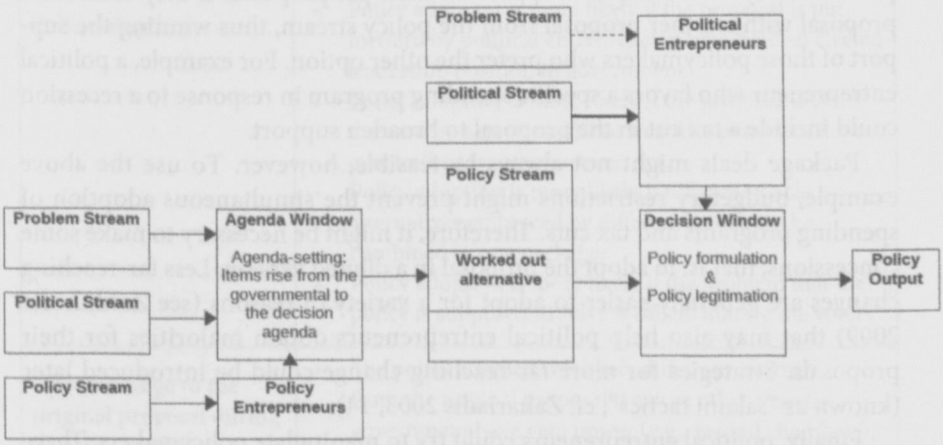
to decision making (Baumgartner et al. 2009). This implies that the decision making process is more structured and orderly and that institutions need to be taken into account much more thoroughly. Because the original formulation of MSF essentially failed to integrate institutions (see Zohlnhöfer, Herweg, and Huß 2016 for an overview), this fact alone makes adaptation of the framework necessary.

Several authors have suggested how the MSF can be adapted to explain decision making (see Zahariadis 1992, 2003 as classics, and Howlett, McConnell, and Perl 2015 and Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer 2015 as elaborate recent attempts). We discuss Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer's (2015) concept because it leaves the operating structure of the MSF untouched and still explains decision making.

Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer's (2015) main idea is to distinguish two windows, and consequently two coupling processes (see Figure 1.1): one for agenda setting, which they label agenda window, with its associated agenda coupling (see above); and one for decision making, called decision window, with the related decision coupling. We discussed agenda windows and agenda coupling above, so we concentrate here on decision windows and decision coupling. According to Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer (2015), a decision window opens once agenda coupling succeeds. The result of successful decision coupling is the adoption of a bill.

The main question during decision coupling is how to build the necessary majorities to adopt a proposal that has already been coupled to a specific problem during agenda setting. Political entrepreneurs, that is, those who hold an

FIGURE 1.1 A Modified MSF



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elected leadership position and who actively support a proposal (see above), are the key actors in this process. They try to obtain majority support for their projects and bargain over the specific details of the policy.

On the one hand, it is clear that the political stream dominates during decision coupling. As we will see, that is not to say that the problem and policy streams are irrelevant at this stage, but their importance is reduced compared to the agenda setting stage. On the other hand, it should be noted that institutional settings circumscribe whose support is needed. Therefore, there exist differences across countries and sometimes across issue areas and over time. The chances of a political entrepreneur getting a pet proposal adopted once it is on the agenda increase if the entrepreneur is a cabinet member in a Westminster kind of political system. Thus, in systems with few or no veto actors, decision coupling will be smoother in most instances because the adoption of a policy that is supported by the responsible minister is almost certain. The analytical value-added of the concept of decision coupling becomes clearer in situations in which the political entrepreneur does not command a majority for policy adoption—think of divided government, coalition governments, minority governments, or cases in which supermajorities are required. In all these cases, the political entrepreneur must organize the necessary majority during decision coupling; in these cases the concept substantially increases the framework's leverage.

What can a political entrepreneur do to win over enough support to secure a majority for adoption of a proposal? The literature (Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer 2015; Zohlnhöfer, Herweg, and Huß 2016) suggests three instruments: package deals, concessions, and manipulation.

The basic idea of package deals in an MSF context is that more than one policy proposal can be coupled to any given problem. Therefore, political entrepreneurs may win additional support for their pet proposals if they combine a proposal with another proposal from the policy stream, thus winning the support of those policymakers who prefer the other option. For example, a political entrepreneur who favors a specific spending program in response to a recession could include a tax cut in the proposal to broaden support.

Package deals might not always be feasible, however. To use the above example, budgetary restrictions might prevent the simultaneous adoption of spending programs and tax cuts. Therefore, it might be necessary to make some concessions, that is, to adopt the proposal in a diluted version. Less far-reaching changes are generally easier to adopt for a variety of reasons (see Zohlnhöfer 2009) that may also help political entrepreneurs obtain majorities for their proposals. Strategies for more far-reaching change could be introduced later (known as "salami tactics"; cf. Zahariadis 2003, 14).

Finally, political entrepreneurs could try to manipulate policymakers. There are numerous ways to do so. For example, political entrepreneurs can resort to the problem stream and present the problem that the proposal under discussion is supposed to deal with as growing ever more severe. This way, they can

pressure policymakers, particularly if they succeed in presenting the problem as a threat to policymakers' reelection. Another way of manipulating is to centralize policymaking processes. Indeed, case studies (Zohlnhöfer 2016; Herweg 2017) have shown that sometimes policymakers circumvent other relevant actors in the decision making process. For example, German chancellor Gerhard Schröder threatened to resign should his reluctant party not follow his course in labor market policy. The European Commission likewise threatened to take certain member states to court should they not support its liberalization plans. In both (and many other) cases, this allowed political entrepreneurs to get their proposals adopted despite the resistance of veto actors.

The distinction between the two coupling processes thus makes it possible to analyze decision making from an MSF perspective. It allows formulating hypotheses on the likelihood of policy adoption as well as on how much a policy is altered during decision coupling (see Table 1.2). Moreover, by distinguishing agenda coupling and decision coupling we can integrate formal political institutions into the framework. In doing so, MSF sheds a novel light on the well-known effect of political institutions on public policies by bringing back into the debate political entrepreneurs and the possibility that veto actors can be circumvented and majorities built.

Implementation

Clearly, the notion of ambiguity has made its way to implementation studies (e.g., Baier, March, and Sætren 1986). But MSF has not been widely used in

TABLE 1.2 MSF Hypotheses on Decision Making

Policy adoption	• Policy adoption is more likely if the proposal is put forward by political entrepreneurs who hold an elected leadership position in government. • Policy adoption is more likely if the proposal is put forward by a government or majority party that is not constrained by other veto actors. • Policy adoption is more likely if different viable alternatives embraced by different actors can be combined in one package. • Policy adoption is more likely if the problem that the policy is supposed to solve is salient among the voters.
Size of change to the original proposal during decision making	• The policy adopted will likely differ significantly from the original proposal if actors other than the government have veto power (e.g., second chambers). • The more powerful the interest groups' campaign against the original proposal, the more different the adopted policy is likely to be.

implementation research largely because ambiguity raises the specter of purposeless laws and symbolic practices that can be very expensive and conflict prone (Zahariadis 2008b; Matland 1995). Nevertheless, the few implementation studies that have taken MSF seriously agree on the importance of policy entrepreneurs coupling three streams during open policy windows (Sætren 2016). Some (e.g., Zahariadis and Exadaktylos 2016) begin by conceptualizing a nested policy system (Howlett, McConnell, and Perl 2015) and proceed to explain how transitions among phases affect coupling strategies. Others (e.g., Ridde 2009; Boswell and Rodrigues 2016) focus primarily on changes within the stage of implementation. The implication in both cases is that coalitions that support policy during the policy formation phase may be different from the ones that implement it (Aberbach and Christensen 2014, 8). Nevertheless, all view decision outputs as constituting implementation windows (Ridde 2009).

Zahariadis and Exadaktylos (2016) estimate two phases (formation and implementation) with multiple rounds of deliberation. Each phase is marked by continuities with previous actions and by additions of new actors, potentially new resources, or both. They argue the process of reducing ambiguity inherent in many laws involves mechanisms organically linking actors, resources, and strategies in interactive ways. Focusing only on coupling strategies, they maintain that what leads to success in decision making increases the chances of failure in implementation. When policies adversely affect the status quo, successful entrepreneurial strategies of issue linkage and framing, side payments, and institutional rule manipulation are more likely to lead to implementation failure under conditions of crisis, centralized monopoly, and inconsistent political communication. In MSF terms, the mechanisms linking strategy to failure involve decoupling problems from solutions, undermining support in the political stream, and altering estimates of equity and efficiency in the policy stream. Take the example of Greek higher education (Zahariadis and Exadaktylos 2016). The authors argue that the activation of a new set of actors during implementation—university administration, professors, and students (and through them political parties)—likely undermined the successful entrepreneurial coupling strategies of issue linking and framing during policy implementation.

Boswell and Rodrigues (2016) focus on the department or ministry level, arguing that organizations rather than political parties are more important because implementation needs to take into account mainly those who execute policy. They also adapt the dynamics of the political and problem streams to include central commitment to the policy and solution fit to the organization's problem perception. Doing so enables them to construct a two-by-two matrix of likely implementation outcomes and track switches in modes of implementation in the same issue (climate change, defense, and asylum policy) over time.

Ridde (2009) moves in the adaptation direction as well. Although he still finds coupling to be the main ingredient of implementation success, he adds

some interesting twists to the MSF logic without adding new concepts. Applying MSF to health policy at the local level in Burkina Faso, he suggests two amendments to the framework. First, following Exworthy and Powell (2004), he differentiates between big and small windows. The former refers to policy windows opening at the federal/national level, and the latter at the local level. Ridde (2009, 948) maintains that the chances of implementation at the local level in a centralized system are higher when solutions are coupled to problems during open big windows, that is, when they originate at the center. Second, international organizations play a big role in two ways. In one way, when agenda setting and decision making are international in origin, international organizations play a critical role in implementation largely through the political stream. In the other way, the more countries rely on external funds for implementation, the greater will be the number of policy windows to facilitate implementation coupling of the streams.

INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE APPLICATIONS

The MSF has also been employed to explain policy processes in political systems that differ substantially from the original system in which the MSF was devised, namely, the political system of the United States. For instance, MSF has been applied to parliamentary systems, ranging from Australia (Beeson and Stone 2013; Tiernan and Burke 2002; Lovell 2016), Belgium (Vanhercke 2009), Canada (Blankenau 2001), Germany (Storch and Winkel 2013; Zohlnhöfer 2016) and Italy (Natali 2004) to India (Liu and Jayakar 2012; Sharma 2008). We also find a limited number of contributions applying MSF to policymaking processes in autocracies: for instance, Iran (Jafari et al. 2017) and China (Liu and Jayakar 2012; Zhou and Feng 2014; Zhu 2008). But the framework's applicability is not confined to politics at the level of the nation-state. Rather, MSF has proved to be applicable to subnational (Dudley 2013; Lieberman 2002; Liu et al. 2010; Oborn, Barrett, and Exworthy 2011; Ridde 2009; Robinson and Eller 2010) and, increasingly, to international (EU) levels (see Bache 2013; Cairney 2009; Copeland and James 2014; Saurugger and Terpan 2016).

Depending on how much the political system analyzed differs from the US presidential one, it is necessary to adapt the framework to different degrees. Parliamentary systems necessitate fewer adaptations, whereas policymaking in autocracies requires more encompassing modifications. The adaptations necessary to make the MSF applicable to EU policymaking is somewhere in between these extremes. Nonetheless, these adaptation requirements have scarcely been addressed explicitly and systematically. Focusing on the political systems that have gained most scientific attention in non-US MSF applications (i.e., parliamentary systems and the EU), we discuss some promising adaptations that have been suggested.