Bureaucratic Competition in the Policy Process

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Recent scholarship has emphasized the important role that strategic bureaucratic actors play in the formulation of public policy. This study builds on that research by exploring the ways in which agencies strategically compete with one another over the content and character of public policy. Using insights from the literature that explicitly models bureaucratic competition, the study adapts an existing model of policymaking in subsystems to generate expectations about the causes and consequences of bureaucratic competition in the policy process. Finally, the article explores the utility of these propositions through a case study of a protracted policy battle over the management of natural resources in the western United States.

Introduction

The factors that influence the formulation and design of public policy have long been a topic of interest for students of institutional politics. In the search for parsimonious answers regarding policy outputs, theorists often conceptualize subsystems in which governmental and nongovernmental actors interact in the pursuit of self-interested policy goals. In early conceptions of subsystems politics, the number of actors was carefully circumscribed by mutual agreement, usually including the relevant congressional committee, the bureaucratic agency charged with implementing policy, and an established interest or clientele group (see Freeman, 1965; Lowi, 1969; Maas, 1951).

Although the conception of the subsystem in policy formation has survived in one form or another, continuing research in this area has suggested a remarkable amount of variability in both the number of actors and the complexity of strategy involved in subsystem politics (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1991; Heclo, 1978; Jenkins-Smith, St. Clair, & Woods, 1991; Kingdon, 1984; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Walker, 1983). This literature has produced some general insights about behavior in subsystems, including the notions that system participants interact in a strategic manner and that the policies produced by these subsystems are a direct result of these strategic interactions.

The majority of subsystem theories of public policy accord bureaucratic agencies a role in the policy making process. They do not, however, adequately address the ways in which bureaucratic agencies may act strategically or the consequences
of strategic bureaucratic action for policy outputs. Only very recently have some scholars begun to point out this neglected feature of subsystems and argue that an understanding of bureaucratic strategy is key to an accurate portrayal of policymaking. Krause (1997) demonstrates that bureaucracies strategically adjust their policy demands in response to the actions other actors to remain viable players in the subsystem. In an illustration of a different type of strategic behavior, Carpenter (2000, 2001) suggests that bureaus can create more autonomy for themselves and change the composition of subsystems by actively creating “coalitions of esteem” among interested groups. Though relatively limited in number, these works suggest that bureaucratic strategy is an important component of the subsystem politics that produce public policy.

In an attempt to build on this insight, this work will explore the significance of another type of strategic bureaucratic action in the policy process—the competition between bureaucratic agencies over the composition of public policies. Rational bureaucratic agencies have significant incentive to care about the normative character of public policy, as well as the distribution of resources inherent in policy decisions. Subsystems literature provides ample evidence that other bureaucratic agencies often sit at the heart of coalitions that seek to impose normative or distributional costs on a particular bureau. Thus, this article develops the argument that, in order to minimize those costs, agencies will compete directly with bureaucratic rivals over the content and character of public policy.

Specifically, the article seeks to answer three general questions about bureaucratic competition in the policy process. First, when do bureaucratic agencies come into competition with one another? Second, how do they behave during those competitions? And finally, what are the consequences of competition for policy subsystems? After briefly reviewing the literature on bureaucratic competition, the article adapts and expands the Advocacy Coalition approach to policymaking in order to develop specific expectations about the role of strategic bureaucratic competition. The article then explores the utility of those expectations through an illustrative case study of a protracted policy battle over natural resources in the American West.

Bureaucratic Competition in the Literature

There are two strains of literature that have conscientiously addressed competition between bureaucratic agencies. The first grows out of a public choice tradition and has been dominated by theoretical work on competition over scarce budgetary resources. This literature has primarily taken a legislative perspective on bureaucratic competition and argues that information asymmetries between a monopolistic bureau and the legislative committee allow the former to control the agenda in budget negotiations and achieve larger budgetary allocations. As a result, legislators have incentive to create redundant bureaucratic systems in which competition over scarce resources produces more efficient outcomes by pulling the budget proposals offered by agenda setters toward the committee’s preferred alternative (Migue & Belanger, 1974; Miller & Moe, 1983; Niskanen, 1971, 1975).
Alternatively, Downs (1967) takes a more bureaucentric approach to competition, suggesting that it is directly tied to the struggle for bureaucratic autonomy and authority. The author suggests that the functions performed by bureaucracies occupy a position within a policy space. Multiple agencies typically occupy the same policy space and struggle to maintain autonomy by ensuring that the locations of specific policies fall within their “territory.” Downs defines territory as the area in the policy space that best matches the organization’s policy preferences and where the agency controls a substantial portion of the expertise or resources necessary for implementation. Competition among bureaucracies, he suggests, occurs over the position of policy in the policy space relative to each competitor’s “territory.” The nature and intensity of these territorial disputes are determined in part by the relationship between competing agencies, which include allocational rivalries, where agencies compete primarily over resources in the implementation process, and functional rivalries, where competing bureaus advocate fundamentally different policy solutions for social problems.

A Framework for Understanding Bureaucratic Competition

Although the previously mentioned two strains of literature offer important insights into bureaucratic competition, neither can adequately answer the questions posed at the outset of this essay because neither is explicitly concerned with the policy process. Developing expectations about the role of bureaucratic competition in the formulation of public policy is best accomplished within a framework developed to explain policymaking. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1988, 1993), because of its breadth and widespread application, provides such a framework. This section uses the existing ACF to develop propositions about bureaucratic competition where possible, and adapts the framework using insights from the literature on competition when exploring types of competition that it cannot easily explain.

In its initial versions, the architects of the theory suggest that the ACF best explains those policy changes that occur over an extended period of time, preferably 10 years or more. Over that period, they suggest, individuals “(elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers, etc.) who share a particular belief system—for example a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions” will join together on each side of an issue and attempt to influence policy in accordance with their beliefs (Sabatier, 1988, 138). These individuals cluster into competing coalitions within a policy subsystem and seek to affect policy in a carefully proscribed issue area (Jenkins-Smith, St. Clair, & Woods, 1991). Finally, the ACF suggests that policy analysis, scientific expertise, and learning are key determinants of the relative position of competing coalitions and their success in the policy process.

With only minor adaptations and modifications, the ACF can be used to produce some specific expectations about competition among certain types of bureaucratic rivals. The framework suggests that “policy core beliefs,” defined as basic normative commitments and causal perceptions, are the “glue” that holds policy coalitions
together and the impetus for competition among them. Similarly, we know that bureaucratic agencies have core values that are deeply held and are semi-resistant to change even in the face of intense political pressure (see Weingast & Moran, 1984, Wood & Waterman, 1993), and that they often sit at the center of coalitions pursuing a particular policy goal because they share those core beliefs with the interest groups and legislators who comprise the remainder of the coalition (Jenkins-Smith et al., 1991; Sabatier, 1988).

Thus, in response to the question regarding when agencies will compete, the ACF offers the answer that

_Hypothesis 1: Bureaucratic agencies will compete with one another over public policy when they hold different policy core beliefs and therefore belong to different advocacy coalitions._

In order to put this expectation back in the context of the literature on competition, these types of competitions are similar to those that Downs described as functional rivalries, in which agencies have competing missions and disparate policy preferences and compete over the normative ends of policy. One of the clearest examples of this type of competition can be drawn from the long-running debate over the best policy solution to the problem of illicit drug use. The battle over drug policy in the 1960s was primarily over whether drugs and addiction were best dealt with by police or doctors. The main competitors over the direction of policy were the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), which sat at the hearth of a coalition of liberal legislators and doctors arguing that addiction be treated as disease, and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), which organized a coalition of police organizations and conservative legislators that successfully advocated a law enforcement solution to drug use (Musto, 1973).

Downs (1967) suggests that functional rivals, such as the NIMH and the FBN, offer alternative governmental solutions to social problems that reflect the territories they occupy within the policy space, and these territories rarely shift quickly. Similarly, the ACF argues “policy core” beliefs that provide the normative foundation for those solutions are resistant to change and modified only slowly over an extended period of time through the process of policy-oriented learning. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) explicitly note, “the policy core attributes of a governmental action program are unlikely to be changed in the absence of significant perturbations.” (p. 32)

The normative grounding and relative stability of policy core beliefs produces an additional expectation regarding the behavior of agencies that compete as functional rivals. Namely, it suggests:

_Hypothesis 2: Functional rivals will be unwilling to compromise with one another regarding key aspects of policy because doing so would necessarily represent a rapid change in or an abandonment of core beliefs, both of which are very unlikely._

Thus, the original version of the ACF (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1988, 1993) can easily incorporate reasonable expectations about competition among agencies that disagree on normative issues such as the relative importance of economic devel-
velopment versus environmental protection or the relative merit of military intervention versus diplomacy. It cannot so easily, however, explain competition among bureaucratic agencies that are members of the same coalition or, at least, are not readily identifiable as members of opposing advocacy coalitions. The framework suggests that members of a coalition might disagree over “secondary beliefs,” such as appropriate budget allocations, but assumes these beliefs are easily adjusted if conflict over them interferes with pursuit of the coalition’s larger policy goals. Thus, without disagreement over core policy beliefs, the ACF suggests few causal motivations for bureaucratic agencies to aggressively compete with one another.

Recent work research applying and adapting the ACF has attempted to address this shortcoming by integrating the concept of organizational interdependencies within the framework. Fenger and Klok (2001) suggest that relationships in coalitions are determined by the interaction of belief congruence and resource interdependencies. They identify two key types of interdependence including symbiotic, in which organizational exchange of resources facilitates goal accomplishment for both, and competitive, in which the acquisition of resources by agency A necessarily interferes with the ability of agency B to pursue its goals. The authors provide the example of disputes over reservoir water between fisheries managers within the Department of Fish and Wildlife and power producers within the Bureau of Reclamation to illustrate the latter (see also Zafonte & Sabatier, 1998). Because resource interdependencies exist independently from the belief systems that hold advocacy coalitions together, the authors suggest that it is possible to have organizations with competitive interdependencies that also have a high degree of belief congruence. In their model, these organizations are assumed to be in the same coalition based on their shared beliefs about the normative ends of policy, which is an issue that I will address shortly.

For now, however, we can note that Fenger and Klok’s (2001) notion of competitive interdependencies and shared beliefs is quite similar to the concept of allocational rivals developed by Downs (1967). Allocational rivals, according to the author, agree on the normative elements of policy and pursue similar policy ends but compete over budgetary resources and legal jurisdiction in the implementation process. The territories occupied by allocational rivals sit very close to one another in the available policy space; thus, these agencies will compete not over the normative value of a particular policy’s position but, rather, over who should control the implementation of that policy.

Together, the concepts of competitive interdependencies and allocational rivals produce the expectation that

**Hypothesis 3:** Bureaucracies that share similar core policy beliefs will nonetheless compete over policy that distributes resources needed by both to pursue their goals.

These might be referred to as “jurisdictional” competitions in which agencies seek to gain control over implementation by influencing the formulation of policy. Instances of this type of competition abound. For example, the competition between the Departments of Interior and Energy (formerly the Federal Energy Administra-
tion) over the right to regulate offshore oil and gas development was over technical issues of jurisdiction and the protection of what each agency saw as its territory, rather than the normative value of energy development (Heintz, 1988). Similarly, when the Army tried to convince Congress of the merits of its mobile launcher for the then-nascent Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile program, rather than the fixed base launching scheme envisioned by the Air Force, the competition was for the resources accompanying control of that weapons system and not over the value of strategic weaponry for the national defense (Armacost, 1969).

Here, it is important to add a caveat concerning institutional constraints on bureaucratic behavior in the policy process. Despite the relevance of arguments concerning strategic bureaucratic behavior in subsystems, agencies are subject to the oversight and control of other key players in these subsystems, particularly congressional committees, presidents, and political appointees (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984; Weingast & Moran, 1984; Wood & Waterman, 1994). Although these actors often encourage competition among bureaucratic agencies in order to increase both allocative and productive efficiency (Bendor, 1985; Miller & Moe, 1983), there are also situations where political principals may wish to discourage competition in pursuit of these or other goals.

Examples of this type of scenario abound. Following years of open and hostile competition between the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers over the King and Missouri Rivers, President Dwight D. Eisenhower chastised both agencies for what he called significant waste and duplication of effort (Maas, 1951). Similarly, the director of the National Aeronautical and Space Agency has frequently reprimanded both the manned and unmanned divisions of his agency for overaggressive competition and failure to recognize a shared mission. Although these examples are both drawn from allocation rivalries, we might also imagine situations where the preferences of political principals for a particular policy solution might lead them to discourage competition among functional rivals. Woodward (2003) suggests that the preferences of key members of George W. Bush’s administration may have led to the suppression of open conflict between the Departments of State and Defense in the period prior to the 2004 invasion of Iraq.

Thus I offer the following qualification to Hypotheses 2 and 3:

Hypothesis 3a: The ability of both allocational and functional rivals to compete over policy is constrained by the preferences of political principals for such competition.

Because the competition between allocational rivals is over the resources that accompany control of implementation, rather than over the normative goals of policy, the behavior of these types of competitors should be distinct from the behavior of agencies that have divergent core beliefs. Fenger and Klok (2001) suggest that in the absence of strong belief divergence, conflict among agencies with competitive interdependencies is “weak”; therefore, these organizations have the potential to overcome collective action problems via compromise. Similarly, the public choice literature on competition suggests that compromise is likely when agencies compete over budgetary resources. Maguire, Conier, and Spancake (1979) demonstrate that when negotiating with the legislative committee, rational bureaucratic agencies will
adjust their budget requests to offer the committee a proposal that is greater than
the status quo budget but below the proposal of their rival.

Together, these divergent theoretical approaches suggest the same expectation
regarding competitive bureaucratic behavior in the policy process. Namely they
suggest:

**Hypothesis 4:** Allocational rivals competing in the policy process will be likely to
compromise over policy details when either expects that doing so will result in an
improvement relative to the status quo.\(^9\)

I turn now to the final question posed at the outset of this article regarding the
consequences of bureaucratic competition for policy subsystems. I suggest that both
functional and allocational rivalries have an impact on the short and long-term com-
position of coalitions in the policy process. The relationship between disputes over
core policy values and membership in stable and lasting opposing coalitions is fairly
straightforward. Less obvious, however, are the strategic incentives for short-term
coalition shifts and the ways in which competition can help to transform historically
closed subsystems into more open coalitional environments.

The ACF, including recent work incorporating the additional dimension of
resource interdependencies, does not readily suggest a role for competition in the
formation or stability of coalitions. Fenger and Klok (2001) suggest that, even in the
face of strong competitive interdependencies, organizations with convergent core
beliefs will be members of the same coalition. Thus, even allocational rivals will be
members of the same policy coalition because over the long term it is these norma-
tive concerns, and not more secondary resource issues, that form the glue of advoc-
cacy coalitions.

The argument that bureaucratic agencies are simply slaves to their core beliefs
ignores, however, the potential for strategic action by these organizations. Carpen-
ter (2000, 2001) provides evidence that bureaucratic actors can manipulate coalition
membership to produce more desirable policy outcomes. Even more germane to this
investigation is Krause’s (1997) assertion that agencies strategically shift short-term
goals and expressed preferences when seeking advantage over other subsystem par-
ticipants. Thus, though the ACF dismisses short-term variation in coalition mem-
bership as unimportant when considering the overall impact on policy (Sabatier &
Jenkins-Smith, 1999), there is reason to believe that individual agencies may be able
to gain strategic advantage by shifting coalitions temporarily.

Thus, I offer the expectation that

**Hypothesis 5:** A Bureaucratic agency may temporarily join opposing coalitions
when doing so allows it to gain advantage over other competitors within its own
coalition.

These strategic shifts should be quite short lived, and the subsystem should
eventually return to an equilibrium condition marked by coalitions coalesced
around normative beliefs.

In addition to encouraging short-term shifts of coalition allegiance, bureaucratic
competition may also help to bring new participants into the policy subsystem.
More specifically, competition may facilitate the inclusion of previously excluded or ignored groups in the policy process by expanding the scope of conflict surrounding a particular issue. Schattschneider (1960) notes that the outcome of a political conflict is a function of the number of actors that become involved in the fight and that the weaker party in a conflict always has the incentive to recruit supporters.

Actors in the policy process expand or limit the scope of conflict through the process of issue definition. Those that wish to limit participation will attempt to define issues in narrow technical or procedural terms, whereas those that hope to expand the scope of conflict will tie specific issues to sweeping themes such as justice, freedom, or duty (Nelkin, 1975). In the context of bureaucratic competition, this implies that weaker agencies wishing to encourage greater subsystem participation will frame problems broadly, whereas more dominant bureaucratic actors will attempt to limit new entrants into the subsystem by defining issues as technical matters best left to experts.

This logic should hold for both functional and allocational rivalries. Baumgartner (1989) identifies three types of issue conflict, including disputes over (1) whether a problem exists, (2) what the best solution is, and (3) what the best means of implementation are (see also Rochefort & Cobb, 1994). Weaker agencies in a competition with a functional rival are likely to recruit supporters for their position regarding the appropriate governmental solution to social problems. Alternatively, allocational rivals are more likely to expand or limit the scope of conflict regarding the best implementation strategy for agreed-upon solutions.

Despite the potential importance of bureaucratic competition on conflict regarding policy solutions and the implementation of those solutions, agencies are likely to have little impact on the first type of conflict identified by Baumgartner. Myriad factors influence what issues emerge on the social and institutional agendas and the timing of their appearance (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Cobb & Elder, 1983), and it would be inaccurate to suggest that agency actions have a dominant or even a significant place among these. Instead, it is probably more accurate to suggest that sentiment among citizens and governmental actors regarding the existence and importance of a social problem constrains the ability of bureaucratic agencies to influence the other types of conflict.

Based on the previous discussion, I offer two expectations regarding the relationship between competition and subsystem participation.

**Hypothesis 6:** Bureaucratic competition among both allocational and functional rivals in the policy process will increase the probability of new participants entering the subsystem as weaker agencies attempt to recruit allies for their position.

**Hypothesis 6a:** The impact of competition on the entrance of new participants into the subsystem will be moderated by the scope of conflict surrounding the existence or importance of a problem. If few actors perceive an issue to be an important social problem, the impact of competition on subsystem membership will be reduced.
Bureaucratic Competition and the Battle over Echo Park

This section will offer a brief case study of a policy fight over reclamation in the American West, in order to explore the utility of some of the conditions outlined above. I have chosen the case of Echo Park because it is a well-documented policy struggle, which has been skillfully explained in the past by authors relying heavily on pluralist and interest group theories (see Fox, 1982; Harvey, 1994). As this revisitation of controversy will demonstrate, however, it is also a good place to begin exploring the importance of bureaucratic competition in the policy process.

The case of Echo Park is ideal for exploring the utility of the expectations outlined herein both because of its unique characteristics and because of those that it shares with other policy struggles. For example, the case offers a great place to explore bureaucratic competition because it offers a rather unique opportunity to investigate allocational and functional rivalries within the same case. It is also an attractive case for study because of the variation in the institutional relationships among bureaucratic competitors. Competition over the dam at Echo Park and the larger Colorado River Storage Project took place both within and across department-level organizations.

The battle over Echo Park also shares important characteristics with other policy struggles, which should help to ensure that findings from this exploratory analysis are not context or case specific. First, it matches very closely the myriad policy cases that have been examined using the ACF, in that it took place over a 10-year period, involved two clearly delineated advocacy coalitions of governmental and non-governmental actors, and was influenced by scientific expertise and policy-oriented learning. Echo Park is also an appropriate focus for study because the instances of bureaucratic competition therein are representative of similar struggles between different agencies. For example, the competition between the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation over water projects in the American West has been expressly compared to competitions among branches of the armed services (Bendor, 1985; Maas, 1951).

1946–1950: Competition among Functional Rivals

In 1946, the Bureau of Reclamation’s regional office in Salt Lake City finalized the plans for the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP). In a publication entitled “A Natural Menace Becomes a Natural Resource,” the Bureau argued that the project would convert the dangerously unpredictable Colorado River system into a productive source of hydropower and irrigation. They also suggested that the project would allow upper-basin states (i.e., Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah) to claim their fair share of the Colorado River, rather than simply watching it flow unused into California (Bureau of Reclamation, 1946). The plan consisted of 10 major dams and 12 participating projects. The engineers at the Bureau negotiated extensively with a delegation of Utah legislators and stakeholders and eventually labeled Echo Park, within the borders of Dinosaur National Monument, as a vital component of the project. That dam, along with its overflow companion at Split Mountain, was
to provide 68 percent of the storage and 70 percent of the power generation for the entire project.

The battle that ensued within the reclamation policy subsystem took almost 10 years to reach a resolution. The major players in the struggle included a stable anti-dam coalition made up of the Park Service, eastern politicians opposed to continued spending on western water development, and eventually, the nation’s major conservation-oriented interest groups. The dam’s opponents were also joined temporarily by a surprising ally, which had a significant impact on the controversy. The opposing pro-dam coalition included the Bureau of Reclamation, the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, business interests from the Great Basin states, and two Secretaries of Interior.

The first vocal opposition to the dam at Echo Park came from the National Park Service, another agency within the Department of Interior. The competition between the Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation over Echo Park would have been largely moot if Dinosaur had been designated as a National Park, which carries more protections, formal and informal, from resource development (Runte, 1987). Unfortunately for the opponents of the dam, the area was classified as a National Monument, which did not preclude intrusions by other agencies and left open the question of resource development. The director of the Park Service claimed in his annual report to the Secretary of Interior that, regardless of the status of Dinosaur as a National Monument, the Bureau had violated an informal agreement to consult with the Service before finalizing plans that would affect “any areas within the National Park System” (Harvey, 1994, 47).

In reality, however, the battle that raged between the agencies during the 1940s and 1950s was not fought primarily over compliance with laws or agreements. Instead, it was fought over the very different vision of wildlands held by the two agencies and within the context of their opposing missions and values. The Bureau of Reclamation was founded in 1902 with the explicit mission of “developing and managing water and related resources in the interests of the American public” (Warne, 1985). Alternatively, the enabling legislation for the Park Service, passed in 1916, tasked it with “protecting and providing for the enjoyment of” America’s pristine areas (Runte, 1987). Thus, from the outset, these two agencies were designed to have different values regarding the development of lands in the American West.

Based on his agency’s mission and his own deeply held values about the sanctity of the park system, Park Service Director Newton Drury openly challenged the Bureau’s encroachment into Dinosaur National Monument (Stratton & Sirotkin, 1959). In a publication prepared by Interior for congressional consumption, Drury provided a specific list of ways in which the Bureau’s plan would damage Americans’ ability to enjoy the monument. He pointed out that powerlines would have a widely damaging effect on wilderness and scenic values. . . . Even more unfortunate would be the submersion of the floor of Echo Park, the great reduction the visible height of the nearly vertical sandstone walls of Steamboat Rock, and partial obliteration of the noteworthy faults and folds so strikingly revealed in this area (Stratton & Sirotkin, 1959, 46).
Underlying Drury’s laundry list of concerns was the more fundamental belief that “reservoirs are incompatible with primeval parks” (46). He acknowledged the Bureau’s claim that a dam would actually increase visitation but concluded that a dam within Dinosaur would result in an “entirely different kind of use than was contemplated when the area was set aside” (Stratton & Sirotkin, 1959, 50).

For all of Drury’s passion, the Director of the Bureau of Reclamation Michael Strauss was equally unyielding in his support of Echo Park’s inclusion in the Colorado River Storage Project. Strauss had an unbounded faith in the power of reclamation to transform the American West (Warne, 1985). He viewed the region around Dinosaur National Monument much as Franklin D. Roosevelt had viewed the Tennessee Valley in the 1930s: backward, undeveloped, and poor (Harvey, 1994). Relying on techniques that had profited the Bureau of Reclamation in previous battles, Strauss emphasized the technical details of the project in his defense of the dam to Secretary of Interior Oscar Chapman. He suggested to the Secretary that the Echo Park location was technically superior to alternate sites because of its lower evaporation rates.13

He also insisted that the dam would produce more and cheaper hydroelectric power than would sites outside the monument, and that this cheap power was the key to making the entire CRSP possible. “The returns from the Echo Park and Split Mountain units,” Strauss suggested, “are essential to the payout plan for the Colorado River Storage Project” (quoted in Richardson, 1973). This is a key feature of Strauss’ argument because by tying the fate of the entire project to the intrusion into Dinosaur, he revealed his unwillingness to bargain over the location of the controversial dams.

At this stage in the process, Strauss, Drury, and their respective agencies were competing over the version of the CSRP that the Secretary of Interior would forward to Congress. Although western legislators proposed bills in both houses asking for authorization of the project, Congress was unwilling to approve a mammoth undertaking like the CRSP until the Department of Interior had settled on and endorsed a final plan (Baker, 1985). Thus, over the course of 1949 the directors of the two agencies pursued their cases regarding Echo Park through traditional channels at the Department of Interior. In addition to his testimony in the report cited above, Drury addressed a steady stream of memoranda to Chapman, accusing the Bureau of continuing to ignore alternate sites and expressing his distaste for what he felt was Strauss’ heavy-handedness in dealing with Park Service concerns. For his part, Strauss also launched a paper campaign, reminding the secretary that powerful western congressmen, including Senator Joseph O’Mahoney (DWY) of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, were counting on Interior and the CRSP to help the upper basin states make use of their legally allotted share of the Colorado River.14

By early 1950, it was clear to Secretary Chapman that the agencies were not going to reach a compromise on the subject of Echo Park. By all accounts, he clearly favored the Bureau of Reclamation’s position over that of the Park Service for a variety of reasons. First, the Bureau was easily the most powerful agency in the Department. The Bureau’s budget stood at $205,000,000 in 1950, not including rev-
venues from power production, whereas the Park Service received a total allocation of only $33,000,000 in that same year. More important, perhaps, Chapman was an ardent New Deal liberal, and reclamation had become a vital part of the New Deal tradition, particularly in the face of growing attempts by Republicans to capture the western “water and power vote” (Richardson, 1973). Finally, Chapman supported the position of the Bureau because he was, at heart, a conservationist in the progressive tradition. He believed that stewardship did not mean “the locking up of some resource in order to keep people from touching or using it. It means to develop the resource in a wise way” (quoted in Koppes, 1983, 27).

Recognizing the power of his opponent and his agency’s tenuous position on the eve of the secretary’s decision, Drury decided to adopt a new strategy for the preservation of Dinosaur. He implored Chapman to delay submission of the final version of the CRSP until a public hearing could be held on the merits of the dam at Echo Park. Drury reminded the secretary that the Park Service had been excluded from the planning for upper-basin water development; thus, preservationist groups allied with the agency had not had an opportunity to express their opinions. Chapman acquiesced to the director’s request and scheduled a hearing to be held on April 3, 1950, within the Department of Interior. He invited representatives from the Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation, members from congressional Subcommittees on Reclamation and Irrigation, and most notably, numerous representatives of conservation organizations. Chapman’s invitation opened up what had been an intradepartmental debate, taking place in the context of a classic closed-policy subsystem, to previously excluded interest groups. It is safe to assume that he did not do so because those groups commanded sufficient political resources to demand access to the debate. The notoriety of potential preservationist invitees was growing in 1950, but they were not yet a powerful enough group to command the attention and respect of Washington lawmakers and political appointees (Dunlap, 1988; Fox, 1985; Nash, 1982). At the time, the membership of the two most vocal opponents of the Echo Park dam, the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club, stood at roughly 8000 and 2000 persons respectively (Cohen, 1988).

More important perhaps than sheer numbers was the relative political inexperience of these groups, at least at the national level. The Sierra Club was widely regarded as a regional group concerned primarily with California. The Wilderness Society had been in existence for less than 15 years and was a small and relatively narrowly focused group (Nash, 1982). Neither group had ever testified before Congress (Nash, 1982). Thus, it is reasonable to assert that the preservationists had to be invited to participate meaningfully in the debate over Echo Park.

Representatives from the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, the Izaak Walton League, the Wildlife Management Institute, and the National Parks Advisory Board testified before Secretary Chapman (Harvey, 1994). They attacked the dams in Dinosaur from a variety of vantages but, not surprisingly, focused much of their energy on the scenic beauty of Dinosaur National Monument and the irrevocable damage that a large reservoir would inflict on the landscape. They also, however, leveled general challenges to the efficiency of large federal water projects and spe-
specific attacks on the veracity of the Bureau of Reclamation’s claims that adequate alternative sites were unavailable.19

The opponents of the dam were not, however, making their case in a vacuum. In fact, they were significantly outnumbered by the supporters of Echo Park and the CRSP. The legal counsel for the Upper Colorado River Commission testified that President Roosevelt had intended for the resources of Dinosaur to be open to development when he expanded the size of the monument in 1938.20 Strauss and the engineers from the Bureau of Reclamation presented publicly the argument that they had made privately to Chapman regarding the superiority of the sites inside Dinosaur and their indispensability to the CRSP. And finally, the entire congressional delegation from Utah appeared before Chapman to stress the crucial relationship between the dam at Echo Park and their state’s continued economic development.21

In the end, the case presented by the Bureau and its allies, combined with Chapman’s predisposition toward development, won the day and the secretary formally included Echo Park in the Interior’s plan for the CRSP on June 27, 1950 (Richardson, 1973; Salt Lake Tribune, 1950b). Somewhat unsurprisingly, the fight ended in a victory for one of the nation’s most powerful bureaus over a much smaller agency and a tiny, nascent set of interest groups. As a result of the fight, conservationists not only lost Echo Park but also a staunch ally at the Park Service. Newton Drury, infuriated by Chapman’s decision, resigned as the Director of the Park Service in January 1951 (Richardson, 1973).22

Thus, the impact of the competition between the Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation in the first stage of the fight over the CRSP should not be measured in terms of winners and losers. Instead, it must be measured in terms of the change that it affected in the nature of subsequent battles over the CRSP. The groups that were invited by Chapman to a largely pro forma hearing went on to be, according to historians, some of the key players in the debate over Echo Park when it reached the relevant committees in Congress. These scholars also suggest that these groups’ legitimacy in those debates came, in large part, from their inclusion in the early stages of the battle and their alliance with the Park Service (see Fox, 1985; Harvey, 1994; Nash, 1982). Thus, competition between two bureaucratic agencies expanded the scope of the conflict and changed the essential makeup of the reclamation policy subsystem.

1950–1953: Competition among Allocational Rivals

Following Chapman’s approval of the CRSP, including the dam at Echo Park, the Department of Interior submitted the plan to the interagency review process. Federal law required that the plan be scrutinized by other agencies involved in the development of American natural resources, which were then charged with providing the relevant congressional committees with information regarding the true costs and benefits of the project. No other agency was in a position to review the proposal as closely as the Army Corps of Engineers, because they were the only other agency that had built public water works on the scale of the CRSP. Unfortu-
nately for the Bureau of Reclamation, there was also no other agency in the United States government that had as much to gain from the failure, or delay, of the project. To understand the competition between these two rivals it is important to take both a long- and a short-term perspective on their roles in western water development.

With the passage of the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902, the Bureau of Reclamation became the sole authorized developer of water resources in the American West. The enabling legislation for the agency stressed the irrigation benefits of federally sponsored reclamation and the necessity of such programs if the vision of a west populated by small yeoman farmers was to be realized. By 1905, Congress had authorized five separate reclamation projects. In 1911, the Warren Act greatly expanded the Bureau’s purview by authorizing it to sell surplus water to land owners who had not been granted their land by the federal government and to construct reclamation projects explicitly designed to benefit such lands. By 1936, the Bureau of Reclamation was one of the most well-funded agencies in the federal government (Warne, 1985).

It was in that same year, however, that a competitor for western water development dollars emerged. In 1936, under the aegis of Roosevelt’s New Deal, the U.S. government changed from a single function to a multi-purpose paradigm for water management. New projects on any of the nation’s rivers were to include provisions for flood control as well as irrigation and power production. The 1936 Flood Control Act ended the hegemony over western rivers enjoyed by the Bureau of Reclamation and greatly expanded the geographic reach of the Army Corps of Engineers (Maas, 1951).

Now in a direct competition for both funding and clientele, the Corps and the Bureau clashed numerous times following the 1936 Flood Control Act (Clarke & McCool, 1985; Warne, 1985, 182). The Kings River Project and the Missouri River Basin Project were particularly emblematic of that competition. In the planning and construction phase of each project, the heads of both agencies adopted confrontational, and often openly hostile, positions (Maas, 1951, 1952; Smith, 1966).

Both examples also illustrate the tremendously strategic behavior of each agency in their fight to gain control over the implementation of western water policy. In the case of the Kings River Project, planned during the early years of World War II for the development of central California, the Corps was able to use their position as a branch of the military to gain funding for emergency flood control. Without express authorization, they used those funds to construct two of the minor works in the Kings River Project, which gave them de facto control over the project. The Missouri River Project (MRP) also pitted the Corps, who favored authorization under the 1936 Flood Control Act, against the Bureau of Reclamation, who argued that the project should be authorized under the 1902 Reclamation Act. The Corps eventually won primary control of the project, but the Bureau was able to wrest control of construction on the tributaries of the Missouri River, as well as the marketing of all power produced by the entire project, by convincing western members of Congress to reject key components of the Corps’s proposal (Warne, 1985).

In the context of this long-running competition between bureaucratic rivals, we can turn briefly to the short-term pressures that intensified the level of competition.
between the Corps and the Bureau in the years of the Echo Park controversy. Between the end of World War II and the end of policy battle over dams in Dinosaur, the Corps of Engineers experienced a 34 percent cut in appropriations. It was the largest single drop since the agency’s inception in 1802 and followed five years of essentially flat budgetary numbers after the war. The Bureau of Reclamation endured similar cutbacks, and it was becoming clear to many that the nation’s taste for massive reclamation was waning. Thus, 1951 represented a moment of particular scarcity in the Corps of Engineers’ and the Bureau of Reclamation’s ongoing battle for resources (Richardson, 1973).

It was in this context then of shrinking budgets and long-running competition that the Army Corps of Engineers received the Secretary of Interior’s proposal for the CRSP. To the dismay of Chapman and Straus, General Pick quickly questioned the economic justification of the entire project. He expressed doubts about the enormous “secondary benefits” that the project would supposedly bestow on the region, such as job growth, economic development, and increased agricultural output. Based on research by Corps analysts, he suggested that the Bureau may have overestimated the dollar value of these benefits by as much as 500 percent (Clarke & McCool, 1985; Stratton & Sirotkin, 1959). He also questioned the large subsidy paid indirectly to irrigators through hydropower revenues. Traditionally, those who bought irrigation water from Bureau projects were able to do so at incredibly low prices because of the lucrative sale of electricity produced at the dams. The CSRP, according to Pick, transferred costs away from the real beneficiaries of the project and onto taxpayers to an even greater degree than was normal for Bureau projects.

In addition to work by his own staff on the issue of secondary benefits and water rates, Pick also recruited help from a notable former staff member, General U.S. Grant III, to raise specific concerns about the proposed dams in Dinosaur National Monument. General Pick’s reliance on General Grant was particularly surprising because Grant was an outspoken opponent of the dam at Echo Park and by 1951 had published several articles openly supporting the Park Service’s position on the controversy. Based largely on Grant’s research, Pick argued that a CRSP that included alternate sites outside of the monument could store 1.13 million acre-feet more water, produce 181 million more kilowatts of power annually, and cost 59 million dollars less than the plan supported by Strauss (Grant, 1950). Based on research conducted by his staff and Grant, Pick also questioned the sparse engineering data regarding evaporation rates and geological suitability of the Echo Park site offered by the Bureau of Reclamation (Grant, 1951; Stratton & Sirotkin, 1959).

In an April 1951 letter to both Michael Strauss and Oscar Chapman, General Pick declared that the Corps would not recommend congressional approval of any CRSP plan that included a dam at Echo Park. Specifically, he suggested that the Bureau of Reclamation had not presented convincing evidence that the demonstrated benefits of the project were sufficient to justify the financial costs or the intrusion into a national park (Harvey, 1994). The impact of that decision on the way in which the fight over Echo Park proceeded, as well as on the final outcome, is difficult to overstate. Chapman, confident that the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) would not authorize funding for a plan that had failed the interagency review process,
delayed sending Interior’s report to Congress. He instead directed the Bureau of Reclamation to aggressively pursue alternative sites.

In December 1952, at the twilight of the Truman administration and his tenure as secretary, Chapman put the finishing touches on a compromise proposal regarding the CRSP. With the grudging support of Strauss, Chapman submitted a plan to the BOB that effectively shelved the proposed dam in Dinosaur National Monument in favor of “an alternate site, to serve the purposes intended to be served by the Echo Park unit” (quoted in Harvey, 1994, 146). In addition to the removal of the controversial dam, Interior’s new proposal included a less generous repayment schedule for irrigators and allowed the Corps of Engineers to construct and manage some tributary projects of the CRSP. Thus, after three years of contentious debate between the Park Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, business groups, conservation organizations, and western politicians, it was the pressure exerted by the Army Corps of Engineers that finally spurred compromise on the issue of Echo Park.

1952–1954: Conclusion of the Controversy

The Colorado River Storage Project was eventually built without the controversial dams at Echo Park and Split Mountain. Because the events of the final two years of the controversy are not as germane to this investigation, however, they will not be addressed in depth here. Suffice it to say that the dam in Dinosaur was actually reinserted into the CRSP by President Eisenhower’s Secretary of Interior Douglas McKay before conservationists ultimately defeated it during the Senate hearings on the affair in 1954. Scholars of the controversy suggest that it was the crucial delay created by the negative Corps report that allowed conservation organizations to gain the expertise and mount the publicity campaign that would eventually allow them to win the fight in the Senate. Readers who are interested in the details of the struggle between 1952 and 1954 or the consequences of the battle for the growth and development of the environmental movement in this country should refer to any of the fine historical works that document the controversy (Fox, 1985; Harvey, 1994; Nash, 1982; Richardson, 1973).

Discussion and Conclusions

The case study presented above is intended to illustrate the utility of a focus on bureaucratic competition for understanding the policy process. It is obviously not perfectly illustrative because the propositions outlined above are generally applicable, whereas the case is specific to a single policy. Nonetheless, the Echo Park controversy does offer evidence for several of those propositions and provides some justification for the argument that bureaucratic competition should be incorporated within theories of policymaking in subsystems.

In the case of Echo Park, the Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation competed over policy as functional rivals and members of different advocacy coalitions. Their conflict arose because of differing values regarding the appropriate use of America’s wild lands and neither agency was willing to compromise concerning the outcome because the value-based nature of the competition meant that victory for
one necessarily produced loss for the other. It was eventually an institutional constraint that effectively ended the competition over policy, when the Secretary of Interior endorsed the Bureau of Reclamation’s position and, some suggest, compelled the resignation of Newton Drury because of his outspoken opposition to that decision. Before that happened, however, the competition between the two agencies led to an expansion in the number of subsystem participants. The Park Service, as the weaker of the competitors, successfully expanded the scope of the conflict by recruiting allies from conservation interest groups.

As an alternative to the functional rivalry between Park Service and Bureau of Reclamation, the Army Corps of Engineers competed with the Bureau as an allocational rival. The two organizations were traditionally members of the same pro-reclamation coalition but had significant competitive resource interdependencies. Rather than constraining competitive behavior as in the case of the Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation, institutional structures in the form of the mandated interagency review process actually encouraged competition in this instance. Sensing the opportunity to gain significant advantage in a period of budgetary scarcity, the Corps briefly allied itself with the anti-reclamation coalition in order to erode political support for the Bureau’s position. Thus, for a period of about one year, the Corps dramatically changed the nature of the reclamation subsystem by strategically shifting coalitions. The impact of this strategic behavior on congressional and presidential support for the Colorado River Storage Project forced the Bureau and the Department of Interior to compromise on both the importance of the Echo Park Dam and the role that the Corps should play in the project.

The important role played by bureaucratic competition in the Echo Park debate suggests that it should be considered in studies of the policy process. Because competition is but one component of the process, however, it is best explored within a broader framework designed to explain policymaking more generally. The case of Echo Park demonstrates that the Advocacy Coalition Framework, when augmented with the insights from the relevant literature, can generate accurate expectations about the character and consequence of bureaucratic competition. The case also demonstrates, however, that the ACF may underestimate the potential scope of strategic behavior by bureaucratic agencies attempting to influence policy. Echo Park suggests that the framework may provide an even more accurate picture of the policymaking process if it more fully recognizes the potential for and the substantive impact of such behavior.

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Notes

1. It should be noted that there is also a large literature suggesting that competitive redundancy in operations leads to better service for clients and that legislators have incentive to create redundant systems in order to improve reliability (Bendor, 1985; Savas, 1977). Because this study is concerned with the
formulation, rather than the implementation of policy, however, this literature is not as relevant to the discussion.

2. Downs is insistent that the function and not the bureau occupy this space; therefore, agencies with many functions can simultaneously be in many policy spaces.

3. Although it is important to note that this literature suggests that such pressure can eventually compel a change in agency behavior.

4. See especially Weiss’s (1977) conception of the “enlightenment function.”

5. The authors also identify a condition of independence in which organizations have no resource interdependencies, but these conditions do not play a prominent role in their development of expectations.

6. In a rare example, this competition produced two winners, as both programs were approved.

7. In the context of this literature, allocative efficiency refers to a distribution of resources across programs that most closely matches the preferences of the legislative committee (Niskanen, 1975), whereas productive efficiency refers to the reliability of bureaucratic outcomes (Bendor, 1985).

8. This is a journalistic account and must be interpreted cautiously, but the author is well respected and did gain unrivaled access to the Bush White House during the period in question.

9. In an extreme example of compromise, allocational rivals might actually collude with one another during negotiations over policy if such cooperation was expected to produce the greatest benefit for each. Because functional rivals disagree over the normative ends of policy, rather than simply over the distribution of implementation resources, I expect that these types of agencies will have no incentive to collude. Maguire, Conier, and Spancake (1979) acknowledge the potential for collusion in their model of budgetary competition and suggest that such activity could dramatically reduce the degree to which final budget proposals matched the committees preferred alternative. Because this theoretical model is concerned primarily with bureaucratic behavior, rather than with the alignment of bureaucratic and legislative preferences, the potential existence of collusion does not have significant implications for the model, other than to confirm the expectations presented in Hypothesis 4.

10. Dinosaur National Monument took its modern form by presidential decree in 1938. Echo Park, nestled at the confluence of the Green and Yampa rivers, was considered to be one of the most pristine and isolated wilderness areas within the monument.

11. Specifically, the National Park Service Act of 1916 required that any use of park lands must keep the parks “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

12. See also Hays (1982) and Nash (1967) for studies of emerging American ideals about wilderness and the National Parks during this period.

13. In the debate over dams built in arid western deserts, the amount of water lost to evaporation was always a key part of the decision calculus.

14. The Colorado River Compact of 1922 had divided the waters of the Colorado between the upper-basin states (including Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Nevada) and lower-basin states (including most notably California). Because it had developed much earlier and to a much greater degree than its eastern neighbors, California had for years claimed a right to use water not being used by the undeveloped upper-basin states. As those states began to develop rapidly in the postwar period, however, they also began to claim their allotted share of the river. What they lacked, however, was the capacity to store the water so that it could be diverted for purposes such as power production and irrigation. The Colorado River Storage Project was the solution to that problem.

15. Figures drawn from the appendix of the Budget of the United States of America 1950.

16. Throughout this article conservationist and preservationist are used interchangeably. Though there were clear differences in the meaning of these terms when they were popularized during the Progressive Era, by the 1950s most groups referred to as “conservation organizations” were shifting their missions toward the preservation and protection of scenic landscapes (Hays, 2000).

17. See Maas (1951) for the argument that reclamation policy was, at mid-century, a classic “iron triangle.”

18. The Izaak Walton League was headed by William Voight Jr. and was concerned primarily with the preservation of fish and aquatic resources. The Wildlife Management Institute was founded by Ira
Gabrielson, the former head of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For the most comprehensive review of the missions and development of these and other conservation organizations see Fox (1985).


20. This argument rested on the logic that, if the president had wished to withdraw the resources within Dinosaur from development, he would have converted the area into a national park.

21. For a good review of the arguments presented by the proponents of the dam see Salt Lake Tribune (1950a) and Stratton and Sirotkin (1959).

22. In reality, Chapman forced Drury out of his position as a response to the director’s continued criticism of his decision and the secretary’s suspicion that he had leaked sensitive departmental material to preservationist allies. In December 1950, Chapman informed Drury that he was planning on reassigning him to a position with less responsibility and lower pay. Drury chose instead to resign (Harvey, 1994).

23. This brief review of the history of the Bureau of Reclamation relies very heavily on Warne’s (1985) seminal study of that agency.

24. The 160-acre limit on land grants imposed by the Homestead Act of 1862 was also an important component of the Newlands Act (Federal Reclamation Act). Sales of federally developed irrigation water were originally limited to individually owned tracts of 160 acres or less.

25. These figures are from the appendix of the Budget of the United States Government, 1945–1954.

References


