

Poli 891
Fall 2011
Prof. Baumgartner

Questions for Week 4, Sept 26. Write a one-page paper on one of the topics below and use these topic questions to prepare for class discussion as you do the readings.

Readings: Kingdon and Cohen, March, and Olsen.

1. The original garbage can theory develops five separate “streams” but in Kingdon’s use of the theory he simplifies this down only to three. Why? Does this have important implications for the model?
2. Review what is meant by “organized anarchy.” The authors talk about unclear goals, unclear technology (means of reaching those goals), and other characteristics which are meant to be contrasted with comprehensive rationality. The theory is *not* supposed to apply to all organizations or decision-making environments, for example where the tasks are clear or where the technology is well understood. What is the range of applicability for this theory?
3. The model asserts an important role for randomness. What are the implications of this? Can the model be tested? How? What standard political science hypothesis testing approaches cannot be used?
4. Are problems really completely disconnected from solutions? That is, is there really *no* constraint between solutions and problems, or is there in fact some moderate constraint in the real world? What are the implications of this? How does it compare to a comprehensively rational approach, no matter what the answer?
5. Review the research and fieldwork that Kingdon undertook. How does he use his evidence? How convincing is it? How else could the topic be addressed?
6. Kingdon says the media play very little role in this process. Discuss.
7. Consider the reasons why Kingdon’s book has been so influential. Consider the reasons why so little research has been done along similar lines to what Kingdon actually did. That is, those who cite Kingdon don’t typically engage in a similar research process; why is that? Compare to Bachrach and Baratz.